

# Custer State Park Trail Guide



[www.custerstatepark.com](http://www.custerstatepark.com)

# RULES, ETIQUETTE & SAFETY

To ensure you have a safe and pleasant hike, please review the following etiquette and safety tips:

- Trails within Custer State Park are marked with blue diamonds. The Centennial Trail is marked with gray diamonds and brown fiberglass posts. Trails in the Black Hills National Forest are marked with tree blazes.
- Water is not available along the trails. Always carry water with you.
- Camping within Custer State Park is only allowed in designated campgrounds and in the French Creek Natural Area.
- Open fires in Custer State Park are only allowed in established campgrounds and day use areas.
- Leave what you find: Removing plants, rocks, antlers and other items from Custer State Park is prohibited.
- Pets must be leashed.
- Trail courtesy: Bikers yield to hikers, and both yield to horses. Stay on the trail, do not cut switchbacks.
- Pack out what you pack in. Collect litter along trails and dispose of it when you return to camp.
- Let someone know where you are going, what trails you are hiking, and an estimated time of return.
- Always be aware of weather conditions. Afternoon thunderstorms are common. Dress appropriately.
- Poison ivy is often found along trails near streams and is abundant in the French Creek Natural Area.
- Custer State Park is home to one of the largest publicly owned bison herds in the world. These are wild animals and are dangerous. Keep your distance.
- Rattlesnakes are sometimes seen in Custer State Park. Be aware of your surroundings.
- Horseback riding is allowed except in those areas posted closed. Closed areas include the Sylvan Lake watershed and the Grace Coolidge Walk-In Fishing Area.
- In addition to the designated trails, hiking is allowed anywhere in Custer State Park.
- Some areas may be posted closed to recreational activities due to resource management concerns.
- Black Hills National Forest maps and other sources of information about hiking, mountain biking and horse trails may be obtained at either of the park's visitor centers and at local bookstores.

## Badger Clark Historic Trail

**Location of Trailhead:** 0.5 miles south of US 16A on Badger Clark Road (CSP 9)

**Length:** 1 mile (loop)

**Time:** 1 hour

**Difficulty:** Moderate

Located behind the historic Badger Hole, this trail winds through a mixed pine and hardwood forest and along rocky hillsides. A portion of the rock-lined trail was built by poet laureate Badger Clark.



## TRAIL RATINGS

**EASY:** The trail mainly follows level ground.

**MODERATE:** Parts of the trail follow steep slopes and rocky areas.

**STRENUOUS:** Much of the trail follows very steep slopes and rocky areas.

## Creekside Trail

**Location of Trailhead:** Parallel to US 16A. Runs from Game Lodge Campground to Grace Coolidge Campground. Trail may be accessed at various points along Highway 16A.

**Length:** 2 miles (one way)

**Time:** 1 hour

**Difficulty:** Easy (handicap accessible)

This hard-surfaced trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek and passes the State Game Lodge, Peter Norbeck Visitor Center, Coolidge General Store and the park office.

Users may park at any of these locations to access the trail. Several bridge crossings are bike and rollerblade friendly. The trail is fairly level except for a section near the park office where bicyclists should walk their bikes.

## Grace Coolidge Walk-In Fishing Area

**Location of Trailhead:** South end - Parking area along Hwy 16A, across from Grace Coolidge Campground; North end - Adjacent to swimming beach at Center Lake

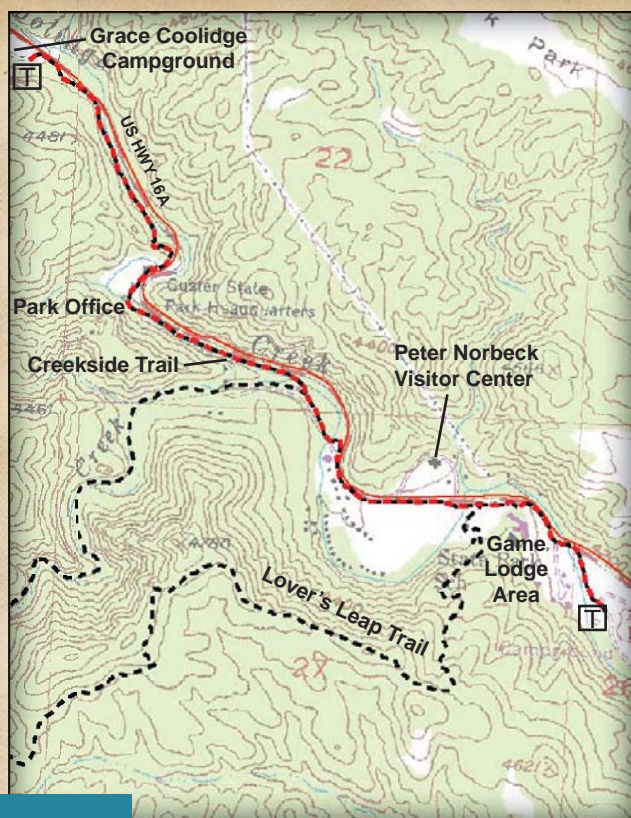
**Length:** 3 miles (one way)

**Time:** 2-3 hours

**Difficulty:** Easy to moderate

This nearly-level trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek, crossing it many times as it meanders through the valley. Crossings may be difficult any time of the year, and you will get wet.

Flowing gently from the spillway of Center Lake, the creek contains six lowhead dams. The ponds and creeksides offer excellent trout fishing and provide habitat for the variety of plants and wildlife found in this unique area.



## Legion Lake Trail

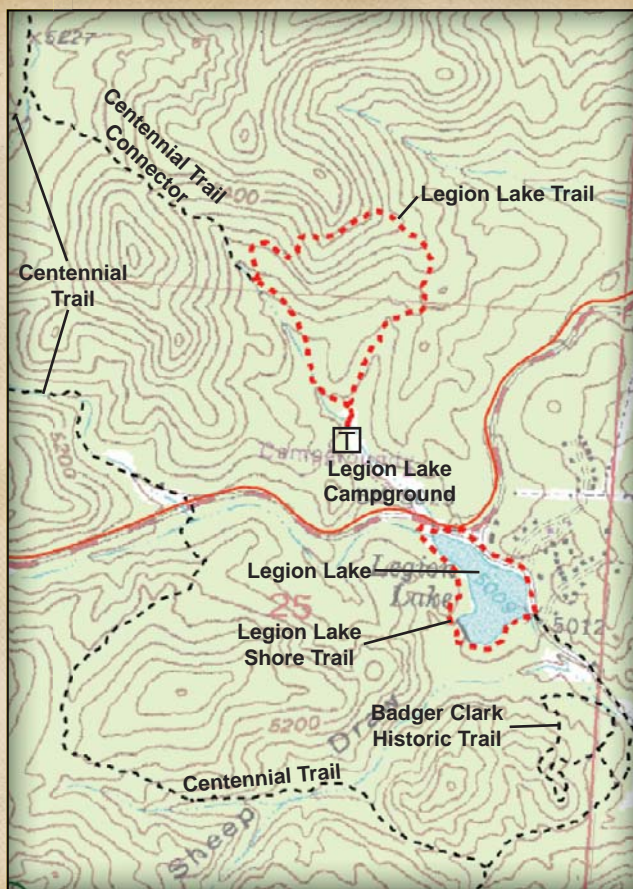
**Location of Trailhead:** Within Legion Lake Campground

**Length:** 1 mile (loop)

**Time:** 1-2 hours

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous

This trail winds through the ponderosa pine forest and offers views of Legion Lake and the surrounding area. Parking is located at Legion Lake Resort. Hikers must walk across Highway 16A and all the way into Legion Lake Campground to access the trail. The trailhead is located near campsite 11E.



## Lover's Leap Trail

**Location of Trailhead:** Across Highway 16A from the Peter Norbeck Visitor Center, behind the schoolhouse

**Length:** 3 miles (loop)

**Time:** 2-3 hours

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous

This trail begins with a steep ascent through a mature ponderosa pine forest with views of the State Game Lodge and the surrounding area. The trail follows the top of a ridgeline. At the highest point on this ridge is a rocky outcrop named Lover's Leap. According to legend, it is on that outcrop that two Native American lovers leaped to their deaths. Mount Coolidge, Harney Peak and the Cathedral Spires can be viewed from this high point. West of the trail is an area that was burned in the 1988 Galena Fire.

The trail continues down the side of the ridge into the Galena Creek Drainage. Once in the creek bottom, the trail crosses the creek many times.

The final portion of the trail passes a residential area and follows a gravel road back to the Coolidge Store. From there, a paved footpack leads past the chapel and back to the trailhead.



# Harney Peak Trails

Two of the most popular trailheads to Harney Peak (7,242 ft) start within Custer State Park and continue across the boundary to the Black Hills National Forest and Black Elk Wilderness. There are different regulations within the state park system and within the national forest and wilderness areas.

*Open fires in Custer State Park and Black Hills National Forest Service are only allowed in designated fire grates in established campground and day use areas.*

## Custer State Park Regulations

- Trails are marked with blue diamonds
- Stock is prohibited on the Harney Range trails within the park
- Camping is allowed only in designated campgrounds
- Pets must be leashed

## Black Elk Wilderness Regulations

- Trails are marked with tree blazes and signs at intersections
- Stock are allowed on trails, unless otherwise noted
- Camping is allowed anywhere EXCEPT within ¼ mile of Harney Peak and Trail 9, and at least 100 feet from water sources
- Pets must be leashed or under strict control
- Visitors must register at any of the major trailhead portals into the wilderness and carry registration form with them
- Groups are limited to 25 beating hearts (stock, pets and hikers combined) - groups of 10 or less are recommended
- Only non-mechanized, non-motorized transportation; no bikes, strollers, etc.

## Tips for Hiking in the Harney Range

- Wear shoes suitable for rugged terrain
- Take extra clothes; it will likely be windy and cooler at Harney Peak; be prepared for rain
- Take at least one quart of water per person
- NO RESTROOMS located along the trails

## Sylvan Lake Trailheads to Harney Peak

**Location of Trailhead:** Sylvan Lake Day Use Area north of Needles Highway (Hwy 87)

Two trailheads are located at the Sylvan Lake Day Use Area. **Trail 9** begins across the footbridge leading to the swimming beach. **Trail 4** begins at the southeast corner of the day use area.

### Harney Peak Trail #9

**Length:** To Harney Peak, 3.3 miles (one way)

**Difficulty:** Moderate

This trail is the most traveled and shortest route to Harney Peak.

### Trail #4

**Length:** To Harney Peak, 3.5 miles (one way)

**Difficulty:** Moderate

This trail connects to the Little Devil's Tower trailhead, and continues on to Harney Peak. Trail 4 ends at the intersection of Norbeck Trail 3. Norbeck Trail 3 continues past Grizzly Creek Trail 7 and intersects with Harney Peak Trail 9. Harney Peak Trail 9 will take hikers to Harney Peak. *Watch for the intersections with Norbeck Trail 3, Grizzly Creek Trail 7 and Harney Peak Trail 9 in the Black Elk Wilderness. These are easy to miss especially on the return trip.*

### Little Devil's Tower Trail #4

**Location of Trailhead:** 1 mile east of Sylvan Lake on Needles Highway (Hwy 87)

**Length:** 1.25 miles (one way)

**Difficulty:** Strenuous

A spur trail branches off Trail 4 and ascends to the unique rock formation known as Little Devil's Tower. Views of the Cathedral Spires, Harney Peak and the southern Black Hills can be seen from this summit. The spur ends at Little Devil's Tower.

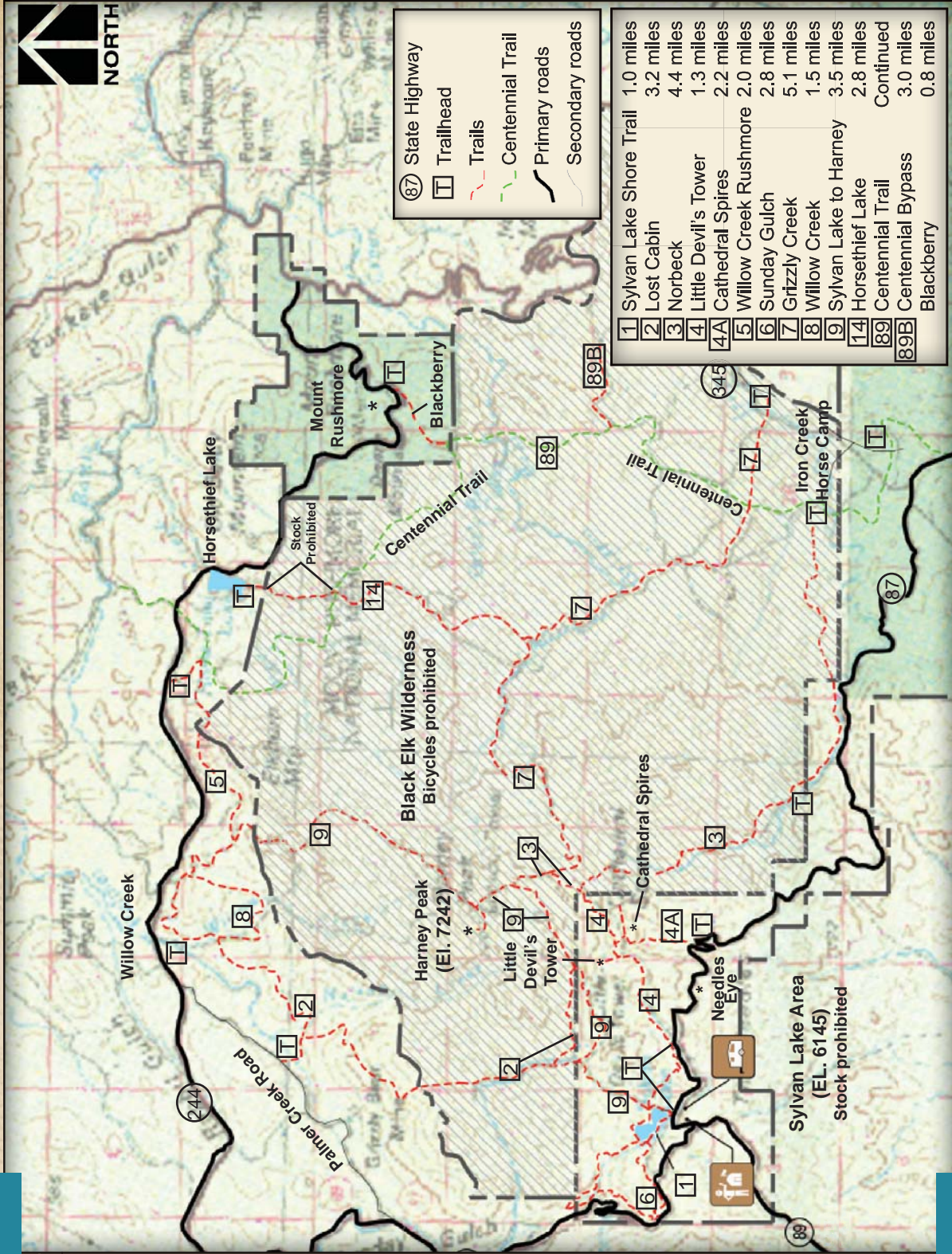
### Cathedral Spires Trail #4A

**Location of Trailhead:** 2.5 miles east of Sylvan Lake on Needles Hwy (Hwy 87)

**Length:** 1.5 miles to Cathedral Spires (one way)

**Difficulty:** Strenuous

Features the Cathedral Spires/Limber Pine Area, a Registered National Natural Landmark. Trail intersects with Trail #4 and can provide access to Harney Peak; however, Cathedral Spires Trail itself is a one-way trail.



**Sunday Gulch Trail** *(Closed during winter season)*

**Location of Trailhead:** Reach the trailhead by following the Sylvan Lake Trail behind the dam to Sunday Gulch

**Length:** 2.8 miles (loop)

**Time:** 2-3 hours

**Difficulty:** Strenuous (ice may be present along trail into early June)

This trail offers perhaps the most unique scenery of all the park's hiking trails.

Descending into Sunday Gulch, the trail crosses a stream several times while passing over large boulders and near magnificent granite walls. Spruce, pine and a mixture of hardwoods line the trail.

**Sylvan Lake Shore Trail**

**Location of Trailhead:** Sylvan Lake. The trail may be accessed at various points along the lakeshore.

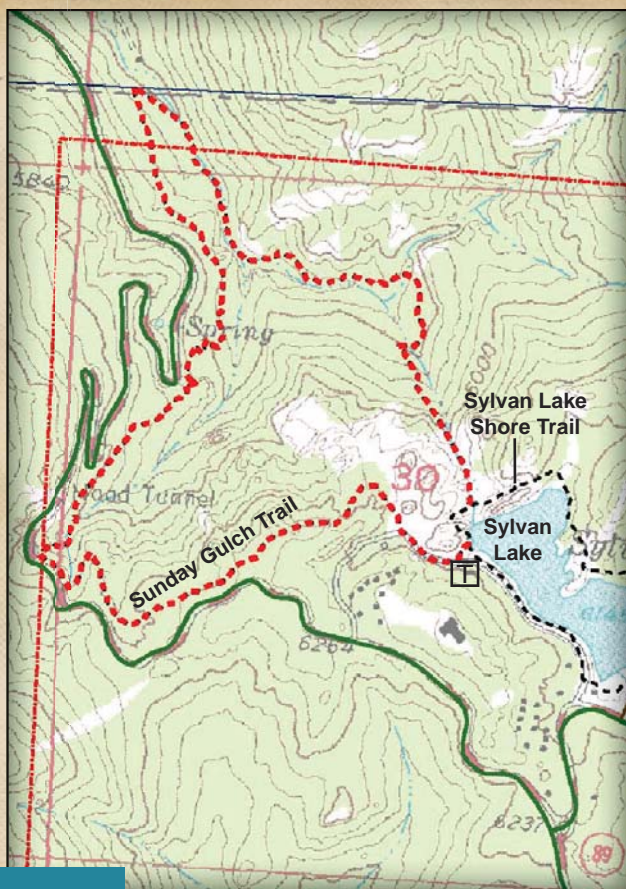
**Length:** 1 mile (loop)

**Time:** 1 hour

**Difficulty:** Easy

While most of this trail is relatively flat, a portion contains steps and crosses exposed rocky areas. Sections of the trail may not be suitable for strollers.

This trail, one of the easiest in the park, makes a complete loop around Sylvan Lake. Granite formations line portions of the lake.



### Prairie Trail

**Location of Trailhead:** Along Wildlife Loop Road, 13 miles from the State Game Lodge OR 5 miles from the Blue Bell Entrance Station

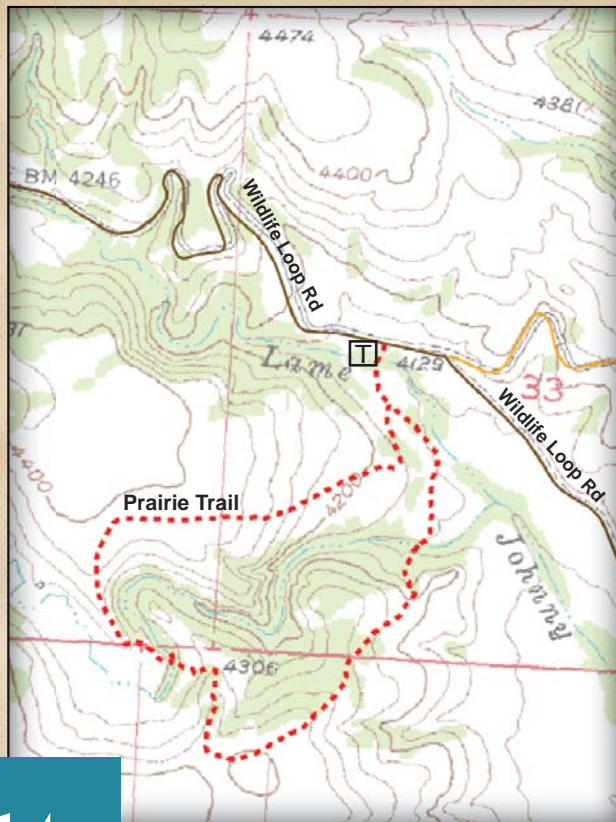
**Length:** 3 miles (loop)

**Time:** 2-3 hours

**Difficulty:** Moderate

This trail explores a portion of the park's rolling prairie grasslands and hosts one of the most spectacular summer wildflower displays in the area. This trail has a few stream crossings, which are usually dry in late summer. Near the end, a portion of the trail follows a small stream through stands of mixed hardwoods. The trail is marked with brown fiberglass posts and rock cairns.

Buffalo are often near this trail and are dangerous; keep your distance!



### Stockade Lake Trail

**Location of Trailhead:** 0.3 mile south of US Highway 16A on Stockade Lake Drive

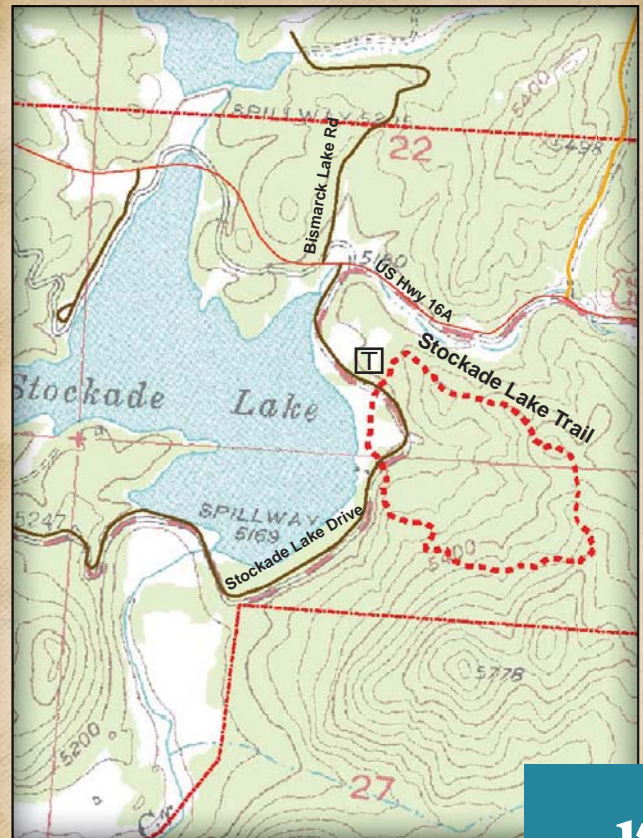
**Length:** 1.5 miles (loop)

**Time:** 1-2 hours

**Difficulty:** Moderate

Beginning at the trailhead located on the southeast side of Stockade Lake, the trail ascends through a ponderosa pine forest to a ridgeline.

From the ridge top, excellent views of Stockade Lake, Harney Peak and the surrounding area can be seen. Near the end, this trail crosses over Stockade Lake Drive and follows the gravel road past the boat ramp and back to the trailhead.





## French Creek Natural Area

**Locations of Trailheads:** West end - 3 miles from Blue Bell Lodge on North Lame Johnny Road (CSP 4); East end - 4 miles south of the State Game Lodge on Wildlife Loop Road

**Length:** 12 miles (one way)

**Time:** 10-12 hours for leisurely hike

**Difficulty:** Moderate

French Creek gently meanders through Custer State Park and into the 2,200-acre French Creek Natural Area. The stream flows beneath sheer canyon walls, past mixed stands of pine and hardwood forest and lush native vegetation.

Although there is no marked trail through the natural area, hikers make their own way along the creek or follow paths of previous users. The trail crosses the creek many times. In dry months, the

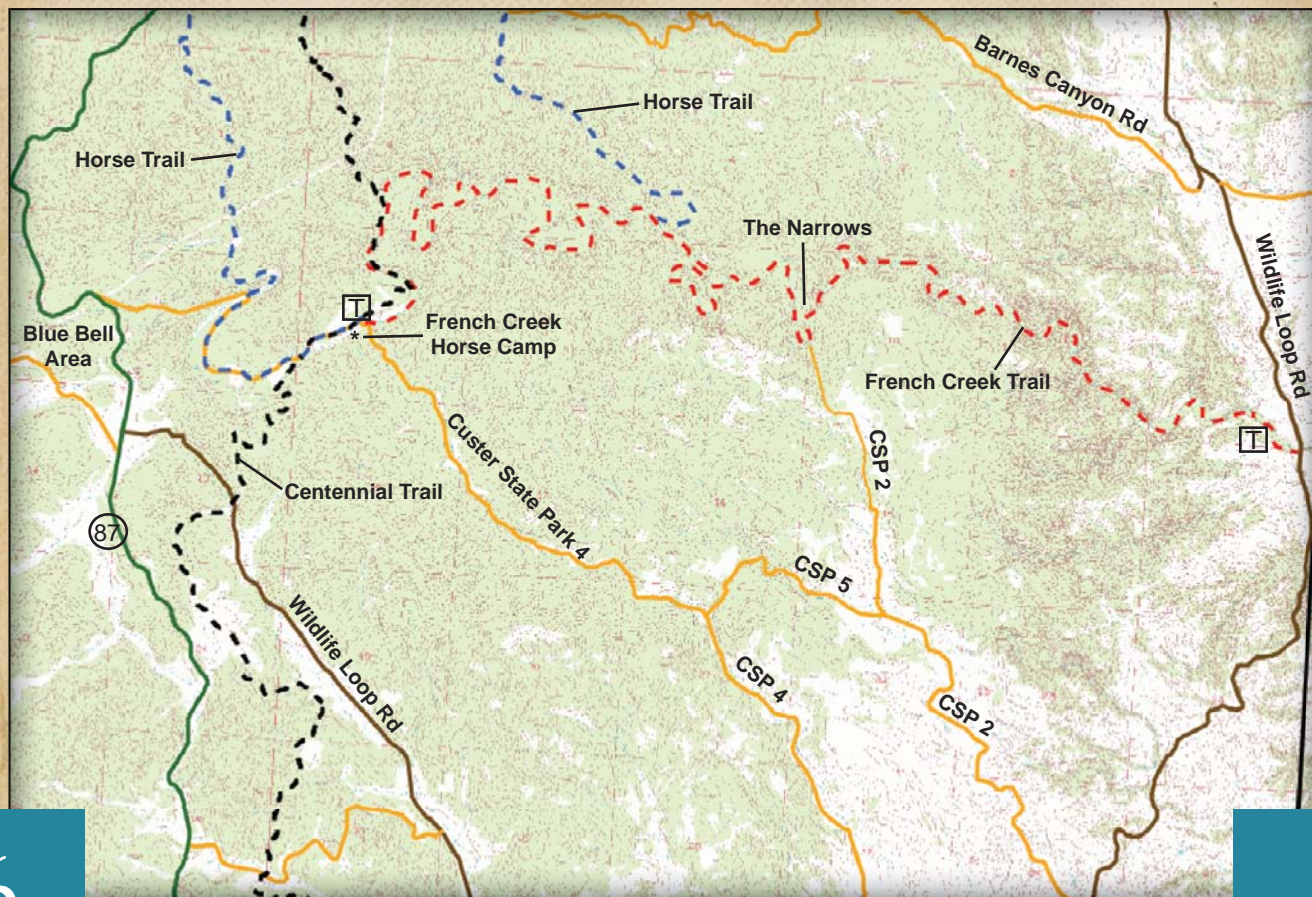
first mile of creek from the east trailhead flows underground leaving a dry streambed.

The Narrows is where the creek pinches together and access is limited to climbing over the cliff (a steep embankment of 60 feet) or swimming (100 feet) through the creek.

This area is known for the abundance of wildflowers, wildlife-watching opportunities and outstanding trout fishing. Poison ivy is abundant all along the trail.

Primitive, overnight camping is allowed along the trail. Open fires are prohibited in the area. Campers must self-register at the trailhead sign at either end of the area.

Stop by the Peter Norbeck Visitor Center for more information on the French Creek Natural Area.



# SD Centennial Trail

The Centennial Trail was officially opened in June 1989 to commemorate South Dakota's 100-year statehood. The 111-mile trail spans the length of the Black Hills from Bear Butte State Park in the north to Wind Cave National Park in the south.

Approximately 22 miles of the trail are located within Custer State Park. Three trailheads provide access points to the park's portion of the trail.

The trail is marked with a combination of brown fiberglass posts marked "89" and gray diamonds fastened to trees. This trail is also used by horseback riders and mountain bikes. Please be aware of and respect all users.

## Iron Creek Trailhead

**Location of Trailhead:** North of SD Hwy 87, Needles Hwy on Camp Remington Road (CSP 345)

**Length:** 7.3 miles to Badger Clark Hole Trailhead

**Difficulty:** Moderate

## Badger Clark Trailhead

**Location of Trailhead:** 1/2 mile south of US Hwy 16A on Badger Clark Road (CSP 9)

**Length:** 4.2 miles to French Creek Trailhead

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous

## French Creek Trailhead

**Location of Trailhead:** 3 miles from Blue Bell Lodge on North Lame Johnny Road (CSP 4)

**Length:** 10.3 miles

**Difficulty:** Moderate

## Highland Creek Trailhead

**Location of Trailhead:** South boundary of CSP and Wind Cave National Park

**Length:** Provides access to either Wind Cave National Park or Custer State Park



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON  
 CUSTER STATE PARK'S TRAILS,  
 CONTACT THE PARK OFFICE AT 605.255.4515

