

Historical Hiking in the Black Hills

Preservation Adventures

Archaeology & Historic
Preservation Month 2024



south dakota
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Choose hiking adventures that fit your group's capacity. Be prepared with the right footwear, clothing, etc. Have enough water with you, bring trail maps, and be aware how weather and environmental conditions may impact the trails. Abide by any guidance or signage put out by the land managers. State parks require entrance fees; Mount Rushmore has parking fees.



Black Elk Peak Lookout

Lookout Tower sits on the highest peak in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, at an elevation of 7,242 ft. above sea level. Black Elk Peak holds significance to Plains tribes and served as a geographical landmark during 19th century federal government military expeditions. The Black Hills National Forest established a forest fire lookout here in 1911, one of many forest fire protection measures. In 1938, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built this stone tower. The CCC were established in 1933 as a New Deal Program to create jobs doing projects conservation and public works. The tower ceased use in 1967. Built with local stone, the tower blends in with the surrounding geology and geography and serves as a great example of architectural workmanship, while also holding significance in the areas of conservation and recreation. Don't forget to "lookout" for history!

Public trails to Black Elk Peak start from multiple points, including Custer State Park. Round-trip, the hikes vary from 7 to 14 miles and have 'moderate' to 'difficult' ratings.

Find information from Custer State Park at:
gfp.sd.gov/csp-trails

and Travel South Dakota:
travelsouthdakota.com/trip-ideas/photo-essay/black-elk-peak



Presidential Trail, Mount Rushmore National Monument

The Presidential Trail is nestled beneath the massive Mount Rushmore sculpture of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, which was completed in 1941. The trail winds through granite outcroppings and ponderosa pine trees giving the hiker different views of the Memorial from the Grand View Terrace at the Lincoln Borglum Visitor Center. The National Monument has historic resources related to indigenous tribes on the land dating back to 3,500 B.P. After the sculpture was built, there are significant historic resources also from the "Mission 66" era of park development in the 1960s. People say the Black Hills are an island in a sea of prairie—the Presidential Trail provides a boardwalk!

Mount Rushmore is located at 13000 SD Highway 244, Keystone. The Presidential Trail is 0.6 miles long and can take 20-45 minutes. The first 0.2 mi. to viewing areas is mobility accessible, the remaining trail includes 422 stairs. Info at:
nps.gov/places/presidential-trail.htm



Stratobowl Rim Trail

From the parking area, a one-mile hike on a wide dirt road leads to an overlook with a great view of a place significant to the exploration of our planet's stratosphere. In 1935, Explorer II, a gondola/capsule suspended to a helium-filled balloon, was launched from the cleared valley and reached a record height of 72,395 ft. The photo that the crew took from the Explorer showed the curvature of the Earth. The gondola is now at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. This hike also crosses stacked stone culverts built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. The hike is toward history, and over history!

Stratobowl Rim Trailhead is off of S. Highway 16, northeast of Rockerville. Parking available in a small lot on the north side of the highway.

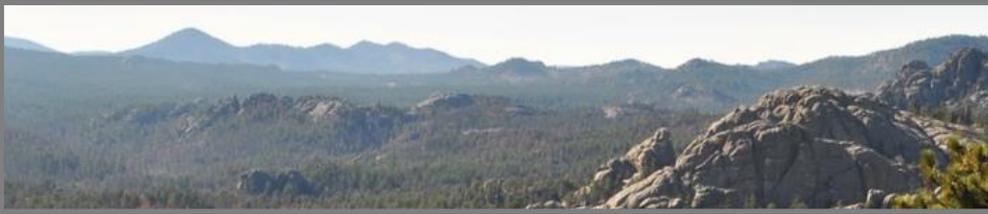
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Jewel Cave Historic Area

The Canyons Trail at Jewel Cave National Monument takes hikers through canyons, meadows, and ponderosa pine forest with viewing opportunities for birds, mammals, and wildflowers. The trail goes through the historic original Jewel Cave area with the original log-built 1935 Ranger Station, historic cave entrance, and the historic stone trail from 1937. The Ranger Station and Trail were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). This is the historic Jewel of the monument!

Canyons Trail is a 3.5-mile loop that takes anywhere from 2 to 4 hours depending on the pace and conditions, with an 'easy' to 'moderate' rating. From Mount Rushmore Rd., find parking and the trailheads at the Visitor Center. (Visitors can also drive to the Historic Area off Mount Rushmore Rd.) The 1,000 ft. historic trail has a section of steep stone steps and a section along the cliff.

Find information at:
nps.gov/jeca/planyourvisit/trails.



Mount Roosevelt Friendship Tower, Deadwood

Built in 1919, this 31-ft. tall free standing round observation tower sits atop Mount Roosevelt (5680 ft. elevation) northwest of Deadwood. Seth Bullock (1849-1919), a politician, sheriff, businessman, and famous in Western lore, also was a supervisor for the Black Hills National Forest. A close friend of Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), Bullock built and dedicated this monument to Roosevelt's memory and their friendship that started in 1892. The Black Hills National Forest maintains the tower today. Make or meet a friend here, or just be friends with history!

The trail starts at the Mount Roosevelt Picnic Area, along Mt. Roosevelt Rd., accessible by Forest Service Road 133 off U.S. Highway 85.

The hike is around 1 mi. round-trip, easy to follow, with a consistent 'moderate' uphill slope.



Bear Butte (Mato Paha / Noahvose)

The Summit / Centennial Trail at Bear Butte State Park in Meade County leads up to the top of Bear Butte (Mato Paha / Noahvose) a natural landform reaching over 1,200 ft. and of tremendous cultural and spiritual significance to indigenous tribes around the region, especially the Lakota and Cheyenne (their place names above). There will be times of the year when the trail is closed to general visitors and please respect prayer offerings left in the trees. Bear Butte became a state park in 1961 and a National Historic Landmark in 1981.

The park entrance is off S.D. Highway 79. The trail starts at the Education Center and is a moderate, hilly hike with a dirt and rock surface. The hike is 1.85 miles one-way.

Find details at
gfp.sd.gov/parks/detail/bear-butte-state-park