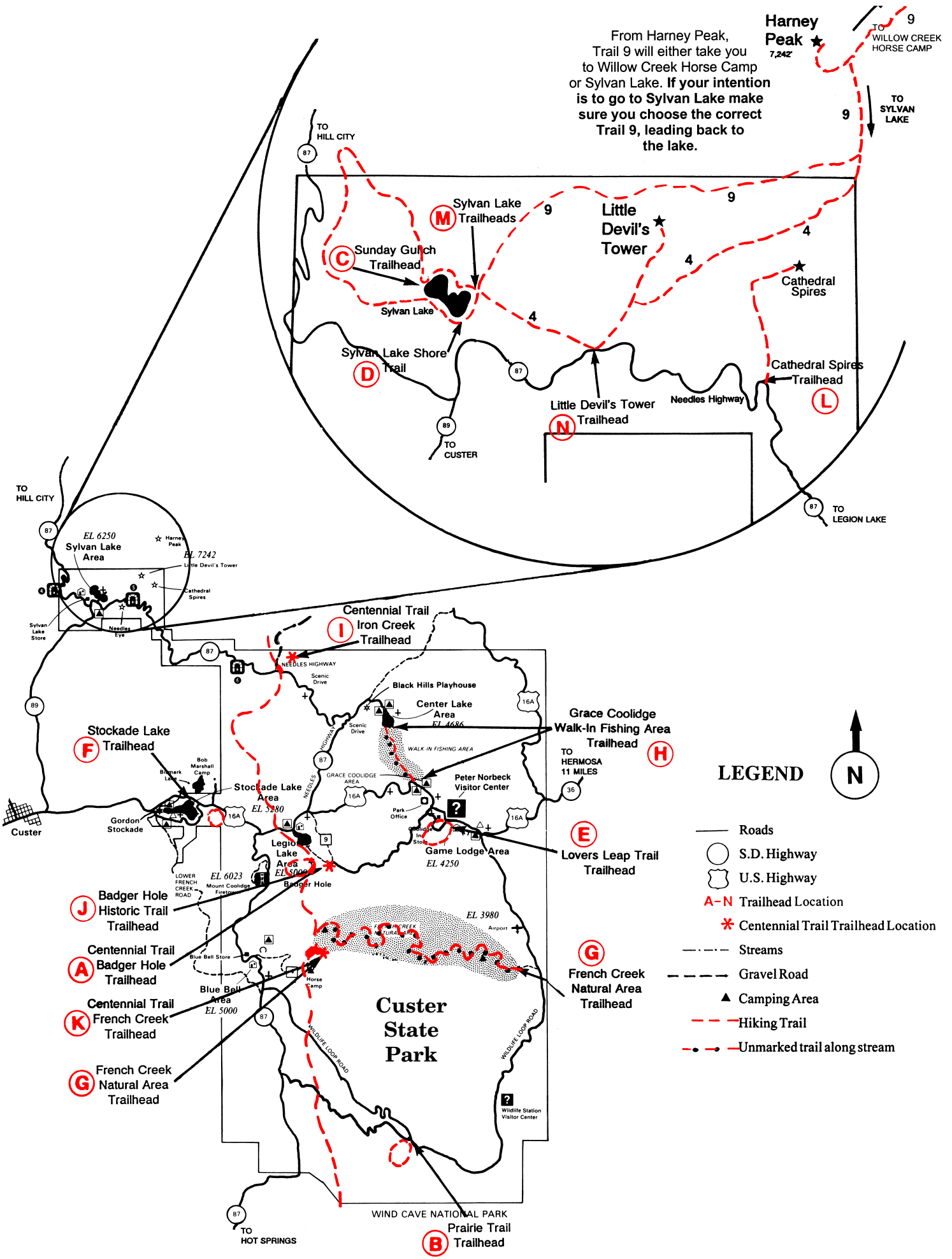
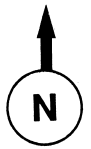


From Harney Peak, Trail 9 will either take you to Willow Creek Horse Camp or Sylvan Lake. If your intention is to go to Sylvan Lake make sure you choose the correct Trail 9, leading back to the lake.



LEGEND



- Roads
- S.D. Highway
- ⬢ U.S. Highway
- A-N Trailhead Location
- * Centennial Trail Trailhead Location
- Streams
- Gravel Road
- ▲ Camping Area
- - - Hiking Trail
- . - Unmarked trail along stream

Custer State Park

Custer State Park's 73,000 acres offer a lifetime of hiking opportunities. Besides the designated trails described in this brochure, hiking is allowed anywhere in Custer State Park. Some areas may be posted closed due to resource management concerns.

Maps and other sources of information about hiking trails may be obtained at Park Visitor Centers and local bookstores.

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

Other Trail Activities:

Mountain biking is allowed in Custer State Park, some areas may be posted closed for resource management concerns. A brochure describing [mountain biking trails](#) may be found at the Visitor Centers.

Horseback riding is allowed in most areas of Custer State Park, except in those areas posted which include the Sylvan Lake watershed and the Grace Coolidge Walk-in Fishing Area. Other areas may be posted closed due to resource management concerns. A [map of marked horse trails](#) may be found at the Visitor Centers.

Be Prepared

- Carry your own drinking water. None is available along the trails.
- Camping within Custer State Park is only allowed in designated campgrounds.
- Open fires are allowed only in designated picnic areas and campgrounds.
- Pack out what you pack in.
- Afternoon thunderstorms are common in the summer months.
- Leave a message with someone about the trails you will be hiking, with an estimated time of your return.
- Trails are marked by blue diamonds fastened to trees; in addition the Centennial Trail is marked by gray diamonds and brown fiberglass posts.
- Poison ivy is often found along trails, especially near streams.
- Do not feed the wildlife.
- Custer State Park is home to large bison herds. Please keep your distance.
- Rattlesnakes are sometimes seen in Custer State Park.
- Mountain lions live in the Black Hills. Be alert for wildlife at all times. If you encounter a mountain lion up close – DO NOT RUN, maintain eye contact with the lion, talk and yell at it, gather children close to you, make yourself appear as large as possible and become aggressive by throwing objects or waving sticks. For more information read the Game, Fish and Park brochure *Yes, Mountain Lions Live in South Dakota*.

A. Badger Clark Historic Trail

Location: .5 miles south of US 16A on CSP#8

Length: 1 mile (loop)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: ½ - 1 hour

The trail is located behind the historic Badger Hole, home of Charles Badger Clark, South Dakota's first Poet Laureate. The country behind his cabin was very special to Badger and became the inspiration for some of his poetry. The trail winds through a mixed pine, hardwood forest and along rocky hillsides. A portion of the rock-lined trail was built by the poet himself.

B. Prairie Trail

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

Length: 3 miles (loop)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 2 - 3 hours

This trail explores a portion of the park's rolling prairie grasslands. The native plants and grasses of this area make prime habitat for bison, pronghorn and deer. Vantage points from the flat-topped hills offer panoramic views of the vast prairie surrounding the Black Hills. This trail hosts one of the most spectacular summer wildflower displays in the area. This trail has a few stream crossings (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.

C. Sunday Gulch Trail (Closed During the Winter Season)

Location: The trailhead is reached by following the Sylvan Lake Trail behind the dam to the top of Sunday Gulch

Length: 2.8 miles (loop)

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous (ice may be present along trail into early June)

Time: 2 - 3 hours

This trail offers perhaps the most unique scenery of all the park's hiking trails. Descending into Sunday Gulch the trail crosses the stream several times while passing over large boulders and by magnificent granite walls. Throughout the trail, is the opportunity to view a variety of unique plants rarely seen in other areas of the park? Spruce, pine and a mixture of hardwoods line the trail.

D. Sylvan Lake Shore Trail

Location: Sylvan Lake, the trail may be started at various points along the lakeshore

Length: 1 mile (loop)

Difficulty: Easy, while most of this trail is relatively flat, a portion of this trail contains steps and crosses exposed rocky areas. A portion of the trail may be suitable for strollers

Time: ½ - 1 hour

This trail makes a complete loop around Sylvan Lake, and is one of the easiest trails in Custer State Park. Enormous granite formations line portions of the lake making it one of the most picturesque in the Black

Hills. This trail offers passing motorists an opportunity to stretch their legs on a leisurely walk the whole family will enjoy.

E. Lovers Leap Trail

Location: Behind schoolhouse (across the highway from the Peter Norbeck Visitor Center)

Length: 3 mile (loop)

Difficulty: Strenuous

Time: 2 - 3 hours

This popular trail begins with a steep ascent through mature ponderosa pine forest, with views of the State Game Lodge and surrounding area. The trail follows the top of a ridgeline. At the highest point on this ridge is a rocky outcrop named Lovers Leap, legend has it 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. Some of the creek crossings are challenging even when the water is low (no bridges are provided). The final portion of the trail passes a residential area and follows a gravel road back to the Coolidge Inn. From there a paved footpath leads past the chapel and back to the trailhead.

F. Stockade Lake Trail

Location: .3 miles south of US Highway 16A on Stockade Lake Drive

Length: 1.5 miles (loop)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 1 - 2 hours

Beginning at the trailhead located on the southeast side of Stockade Lake the trail ascends through a ponderosa pine forest to a ridgeline. In this area the forest has been actively managed to promote wildlife habitat, increased timber growth and improved watersheds. 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.

Hard Surfaced Trails (Handicapped Accessible)

Creekside Trail

Location: Parallel to US 16A, Runs from Game Lodge Campground to Grace Coolidge Campground

Length: 2 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Time: Variable, depending upon walking, roller blading or biking

This newly-established paved trail follows Grace Coolidge Creek and offers a variety of scenery. The trail passes by the State Game Lodge, the Peter Norbeck Visitor Center, Coolidge General Store, and the Park Office. Users may park at any of these locations to access the trail. There are several bridge crossings that are roller blade friendly. The trail is fairly level except for a walkway near the Park Office where bikers are asked to walk their bikes. This is a trail the entire family can enjoy.

Natural Area Hiking Trails

There are two designated natural areas in Custer State Park, French Creek and the Grace Coolidge Walk-in Fishing Area. These are areas set aside with the goals of providing scientific, educational and recreational opportunities in a setting that is as pristine as possible.

G. French Creek Natural Area

Location: West End - 3 miles from Blue Bell Lodge on CSP#4

East End - 4 miles south of the State Game Lodge on the Wildlife Loop Road

Length: 12 miles (one way)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 6 - 10 hours

French Creek gently meanders through Custer State Park and into the French Creek gorge. The stream flows beneath sheer canyon walls, past mixed stands of pine and hardwood forest and lush native vegetation. Because of the uniqueness and diversity of this area, 2,200 acres surrounding the gorge has been set-aside as the French Creek Natural Area. Although there is no marked trail through the natural area, hikers make their own way along the creek or follow paths of previous hikers. Hikers must cross the creek many times and wet feet are almost assured. During the drier months, the first mile of creek from the east trailhead flows underground leaving a dry streambed. This is known as karst topography. Bighorn sheep are frequently seen throughout the gorge. This area is also known for its excellent bird watching opportunities and an abundance of wildflowers. The adventuresome will find outstanding trout fishing along the creek. Overnight camping is allowed in the two designated camping areas approximately 1 mile from each trailhead and campers must self-register at the trailhead sign.

H. Grace Coolidge Walk-In Fishing Area

Location: South End - Parking area along Hwy. 16A, opposite from Grace Coolidge Campground

North End - Adjacent to swimming beach at Center Lake

Length: 3 miles (one way)

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Time: 2 - 3 hours

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 wet feet are almost assured. The creek was named in honor of First Lady Grace Coolidge, wife of President Calvin Coolidge. Flowing gently from the spillway of Center Lake the creek contains several ponds where water is held back by six lowhead dams. The ponds and creeksides offer excellent trout fishing as well as adding to the variety of plants and wildlife found in this unique area. In the spring and summer, wildflowers abound.

South Dakota Centennial Trail

This 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 Custer State Park's portion of the trail. The entire trail offers opportunities to view the natural and cultural resources of the Black Hills. The Centennial Trail was officially opened in June 1989, in commemoration of the South Dakota centennial. The trail is marked with a combination of brown fiberglass posts and gray diamonds fastened to trees. This trail is also used by horse riders and mountain bikers.

Custer State Park Trailheads (north to south)

I. Iron Creek Trailhead

Location: North of SD Highway 87 (Needles Highway) on CSP#359

Length: 7.3 miles to Badger Hole Trailhead

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 3 - 5 hours

The trail leaves the trailhead and leads south, crossing SD Highway 87, and traverses a small hill. It continues to follow the trail markers through this gently rolling section of the park. Throughout this area is evidence of past logging activity. There are several small stream crossings. About 6-miles from the trailhead, the trail crosses US Highway 16A near the Legion Lake Resort and campground. Continue south from the highway across a small stream and follow the trail markers up the hill to the right. This section of the trail enters an area burned in the 1988 Galena Fire. The trail continues to the Badger Hole, home of South Dakota's first Poet Laureate, and the Centennial Trail's Badger Hole Trailhead.

J. Badger Hole Trailhead

Location: .5 miles south of US Hwy. 16A on CSP Rd #8

Length: 4.2 miles to French Creek Trailhead

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Time: 4 -5 hours

The trail parallels CSP Road #8 for approximately one mile before turning south and climbing a steep rocky hill. From the top of this hill the trail descends into the French Creek Natural Area. The trail is steep and rocky, passing through areas of creeks and bottomlands. At the bottom, the trail turns right and follows French Creek, crossing the creek several times before reaching the Centennial Trail's French Creek Trailhead. This is the most strenuous section of the Centennial Trail within Custer State Park.

K. French Creek Trailhead

Location: 3 miles from Blue Bell Lodge on CSP #4

Length: 10.3 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 5 - 6 hours

Follow the trail markers west through Horse Camp and across French Creek. Just before crossing the creek a second time, the trail turns left and goes uphill. After descending the other side the trail crosses the Wildlife Loop Road and continues to the south. This section of the trail enters the open grasslands and is home to large herds of bison. Bison are dangerous any time of the year but especially in the spring when there are new calves and in the late summer when the bulls are in rut. The trail passes through a self-closing gate and continues south to the border of Wind Cave National Park and the Centennial Trail's Highland Creek Trailhead. Please ensure that the park gates are closed after passing through the border fence.

L. Cathedral Spires Trail

Location: 2.5 miles east of Sylvan Lake on Needles Hwy

Length: 1.5 miles to Cathedral Spires, one way

Difficulty: Strenuous

Time: 2 hours

This is a one-way trail. This trail does not connect to the Harney Peak Trail System Features unique to the Black Hills area are found along this section of trail, such as the Cathedral Spires/Limber Pine Area, a Registered National Natural Landmark.

Harney Range Trails

Within Custer State Park there are three trailheads to mark the beginning of trails leading to Harney Peak and into the Harney Range Trail System. Although these trails begin in Custer State Park, they enter the Black Hills National Forest and Black Elk Wilderness on their way to the summit. Trail maps can be obtained at the Peter Norbeck Visitor Center or from the U.S. Forest Service. While most people travel these trails to get to Harney Peak, the entire system offers many more hiking opportunities for those seeking solitude.

M. Sylvan Lake Trailheads

Location: Sylvan Lake Day Use Area north of SD Hwy. 87 (Needles Hwy.).

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

Trail #9

Length: To Harney Peak, 3 miles (one way), 6 miles (round trip)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 4 - 5 hours (round trip)

This is the most traveled and easiest route to Harney Peak. The trail is marked with blue diamonds.

Trail #4

Length: To Harney Peak, 3.25 miles (one way), 6.5 miles (round trip)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 4 - 5 hours (round trip)

This is one of two trailheads along trail #4. The trail starts at the Sylvan Lake Day Use Area and goes to the Little Devils Tower trailhead, then on toward Harney Peak. The trail is marked with blue diamonds.

N. Little Devil's Tower Trailhead (Trail #4)

Location: 1 mile east of Sylvan Lake on SD Hwy. 87 (Needles Hwy.)

Length: To Harney Peak, 3 miles (one way) 6 miles (round trip)

Difficulty: Moderate

Time: 4 - 5 hours (round trip)

This is one of two trailheads located along trail #4. This trail connects with trail #9 for the final one mile to the summit of Harney Peak. The trail is marked with blue diamonds. A spur trail branching off trail #4 ascends to the unique rock formation known as Little Devils Tower. Spectacular views of the Cathedral Spires, Harney Peak and entire southern hills can be seen from the summit. This spur trail ends at the summit of Little Devil's Tower and is considered a strenuous hike.

Important Contacts

Custer State Park

HC 83, Box 70
Custer, SD 57730

www.CusterStatePark.info

Park Headquarters	(605) 255-4515
Visitor Center	(605) 255-4464
Camping Reservations	1-800-710-2267
Resort Company	1-800-658-3530

Black Hills National Forest

Forest Supervisors Office	(605) 673-9200
Custer Ranger District	(605) 673-4853