



Area State Parks, Historic Sites Worth the Trip

JEFFERSON CITY — With summer here and families looking for fun things to do, there are plenty of state parks and historic sites close to home that you may want to consider as you plan vacations, day trips or just something different to do. Missouri has lots of great places to visit, including several attractions in our own back yard.

One of my favorite places is the First Missouri State Capitol State Historic Site, located at 200-216 S. Main Street in St. Charles. Visitors can take a guided tour through the restored rooms where Missouri state government was created and first practiced. From June 4, 1821, to Oct. 1, 1826, our state's first legislators debated slavery and our state's rights in the rooms of the temporary capitol.

When you visit the historic site, you'll tour four unique Federal-style brick buildings. One includes an interpretive center that highlights the history of the area. The other adjoining buildings feature the former Senate and House chambers and governor's office — each housed on the second floor of separate buildings — plus a general store, family residence, and carpenter shop, all restored to depict the early 1800s.

A visit here is very affordable. Admission is free to the historic site's interpretive center, which includes two floors of exhibits and an orientation video. To tour the first capitol, there is a nominal fee (\$2.50 for adults, \$1.50 for children 7-12; and kids under six, free. There are also family discounts.)

If you plan to visit the former state capitol, you'll also want to take in the rest of St. Charles' famous historic downtown, which features shops, restaurants and other historic attractions, many of which are housed in original 18th and 19th century buildings and are located just steps away from the Missouri River.

For outdoor enthusiasts, Cuivre River State Park, located at 678 State Route 147 in Troy, is a fun and adventurous getaway. This is one of our state's largest parks — 6,000 acres — and is considered a nature lover's paradise. High-quality ecosystems feature native prairie, sinkhole ponds, woodlands and a clear, rock-bottomed stream. Big Sugar Creek is one of the finest undisturbed streams left in northeastern Missouri.

At the park, there are also lots of recreational activities for families to check out, including both primitive and modern camping, equestrian trails, and swimming and fishing at Lake Lincoln. There are also several nature trails that highlight the area's unique natural features.

I also recommend visiting other nearby state sites, including:

- Graham Cave State Park (217 Hwy. TT, Montgomery City) – features an unusual sandstone cave, 369 acres of naturally diverse land, wooded camping area, playground areas, picnic sites, and boating and fishing along the Loutre River.

- Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park (800 Guy Park Dr., Wildwood) – includes a Visitors’ Center, 13 miles of hiking trails, and a barrier-free outdoor recreational center resident camp.
- Scott Joplin House State Historic Site (2658A Delmar, St. Louis) – turn-of-the-century home of the ragtime musical genius, with museum and café.
- Castlewood State Park (1401 Kiefer Creek Road, Ballwin) – walking, equestrian and mountain biking trails near limestone bluffs and fishing along the Meramec River (some areas affected by flooding).
- Route 66 State Park (97 North Outer Road, Suite 1, Eureka) – historical displays showcasing Route 66 — the former Main Street of America — picnicking, and walking, biking and equestrian trails.

The Edward “Ted” and Pat Jones-Confluence Point State Park in West Alton is also a great place to visit, but is currently closed to the recent Mississippi River flooding. If you want to make a trek a little farther, I also recommend Mark Twain’s birthplace and associated sites in Monroe County.

As you make your summer plans, I do hope you plan to visit at least one of Missouri’s state parks, natural areas or historic sites and will also consider them throughout the rest of the year. Not only do they inform us about Missouri’s rich history and its cultural and natural diversity, they provide lots of good family fun at little or no cost.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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