

# Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Trail Guide



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## Mountain Bikers

Please be courteous of other users and always yield to foot traffic. Uphill traffic always has the right of way. Please avoid cross cutting switchbacks, be sure to stay on trails and avoid widening present trails. Trail erosion problems could lead to trail closures in the park, so please avoid riding wet trails and dismount if you are unable to properly ride a switchback. Please keep bike speeds under 10 mph on trails and the campground area and 30 mph on the main park road. Due to conflicts with heavy downhill mountain bikes, mountain bikers may not access the park trails from the Cave Visitor Center area in the upper park. The Greer Gulch Trail and Nature Loop are closed to biking. Please respect the solitude of other users.

## Flora and Fauna along the park trails

There are several ecosystems encountered along these trails giving you the chance to see many different kinds of animals, with great birding opportunities and the chance to see some of the over 200 different species of wildflowers found in the park. The lower trails feature riparian and prairie habitats and as you move higher you encounter an open juniper/limber pine forest as well as denser douglas fir forest. Much of the upper south-facing slopes are borderline desert with mountain mahogany and skunkbush sumac mixing in with the junipers. Mule deer are common and black bears are present in the park, but the birding is the best wildlife viewing the park has to offer. Hiking the park trails gives a good



chance to see everything from raptors and the beautiful mountain bluebirds to the limber pine tree loving Clark's nutcracker.

## The Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Trail System

The trails of Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park allow the visitor to enjoy and experience many aspects of the park above and beyond the caverns themselves. There is over 3000 acres of terrain in this park and almost 1600 vertical feet. The trail system covers about 10 miles and over 1000 feet in elevation change. The two main trails are rather strenuous with considerable elevation gain or loss, but there are others that provide a more relaxing walk through the park.

### Easy Trails

For those looking for a less challenging hike, the short Nature Loop Trail located at the upper picnic area is a pleasant quarter mile walk with signs to identify some of the flora. This short trail offers some of the best wildflower viewing in the park. From the campground the Fishing Access Trail can take you a leisurely 1.3 miles down to the riverside for fishing, swimming or just a reflective moment by the historic Jefferson River. The trail picks up less than 100 feet.

### Moderate Trails

The Greer Gulch Loop Trail extends the Nature Loop to a 2 mile trail with over 400 ft of elevation gain and loss. It offers a broad panorama from a ridge top with a great view of the nearby peaks in the Tobacco Root Mountains and a chance to see bitterroot flowers in June. From the campground you can take a wonderful short side trip on the historic Danmore Gypsum Mine Trail. The mine can still be viewed from the trailside with an interpretive sign on hand providing historical and geological information. The Danmore Mine Trail is accessed off of the Cave Gulch Trail. This rolling hike covers nearly 2 miles round trip.

## Safety Tips

- There is virtually no water along the park's trail system, this is a near desert area and it is advised to carry at least a half gallon of water with each hiker for longer hikes and 32 ounces for shorter ones.
- Good footwear is important due to steep rocky terrain.
- The weather can change by 30 degrees in minutes here, dress appropriately and pack a couple extra layers for emergencies; waterproof clothing is always good to have along.
- Pets are to be kept leashed and under control at all times to avoid conflicts with wildlife and other users.
- Stay on established trails to avoid hazards and private land bordering the park.
- Be aware of park wildlife. There are often black bears and mountain lions in the park, please be aware of safety procedures regarding these animals. Hiking in groups is advised and always be careful with small children.
- Rattlesnakes are common in the park, watch your step and keep pets under control.
- April and May are active times for ticks, be sure to check yourself carefully after a hike during the spring.
- There are other hazards as well due to the ever changing conditions of natural park setting. Please be prepared for a variety of circumstances.



## Strenuous Trails

The Cave Gulch Trail offers something for those a little more adventurous. It gains nearly 1000 ft elevation in 1.9 miles from the campground up to the Cave Visitor Center. Cave Gulch Trail is the steepest trail and offers the closest route to the hike taken by Dan Morrison and early cave visitors. The East Side Trail has the same start and destination as the Cave Gulch Trail with over twice the distance traveled and 350 extra feet of elevation loss and gain along the way. This trail winds along 4 miles of the east side of the park before reaching the Cave Visitor Center. This trail features much of the Douglas Fir forest that covers the north facing slopes of the park, providing a much more shaded route. The Middle View Trail is our newest addition to the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park trail system. It runs between the Cave Gulch and East Side trail around and down a large dolomite knob. It connects with the danmor mine trail .8 miles from the campground for a 2.7 mile hike from the Cave Visitor Center to the campground. It offers some of the best views of all the park trails.

An entire day can be spent on the "Grand Loop", a 5.9 mile hike that starts and finishes at either visitor center or the campground and includes the entire Cave Gulch and East Side Trails or 7 miles to do the East Side and Middle View Trail version. For those with less time the Cave Gulch and Middle View Loop is under 3 miles and starts and ends at the Cave Visitor Center.



## Leave No Trace

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is a partner in Leave No Trace outdoor ethics

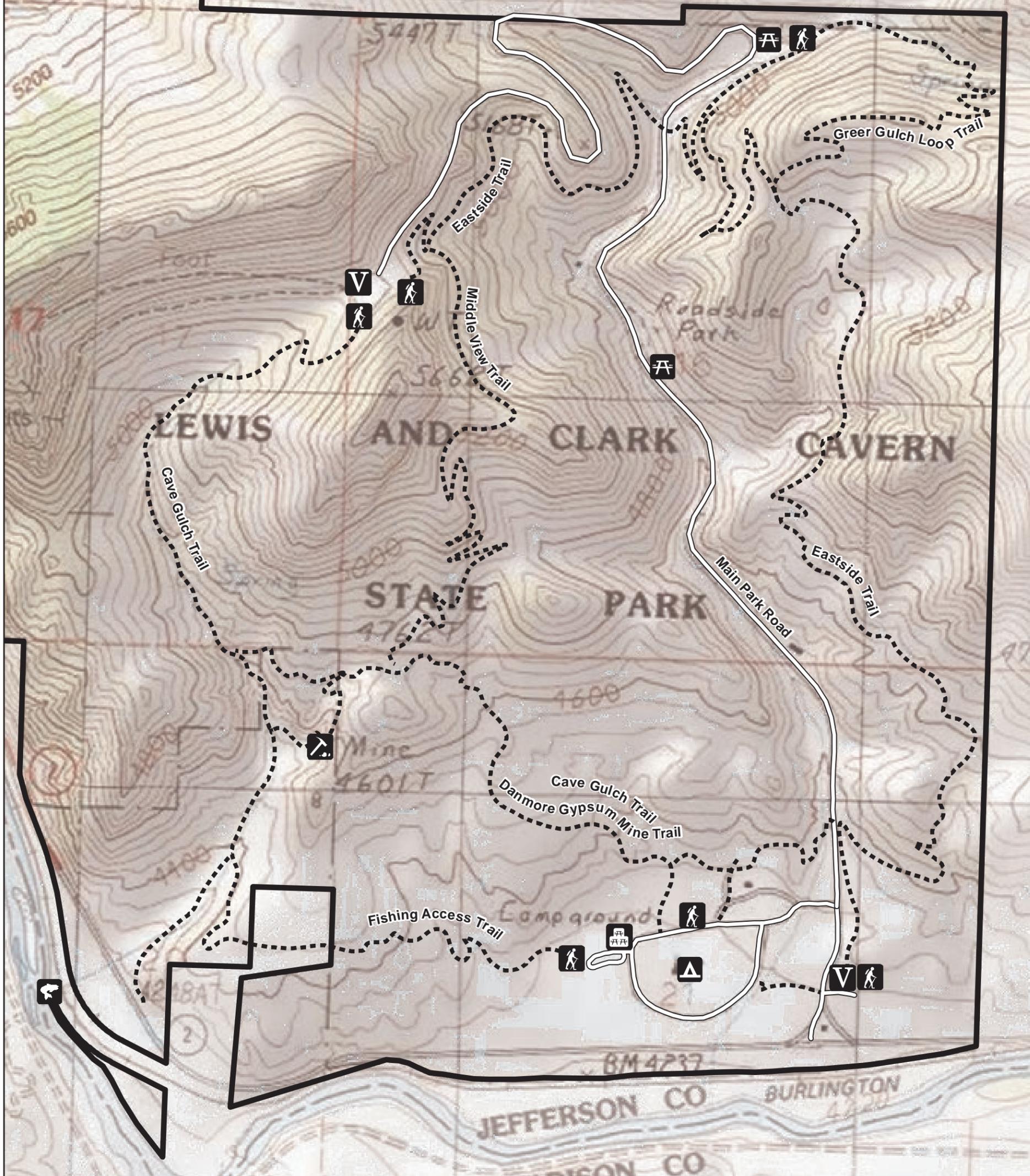


- Plan ahead and prepare before traveling these trails
- Limit travel to the developed trails and do not cross-cut switchbacks.
- Dispose of waste properly. There are no trash cans along the trails so please be sure to pack trash out with you.
- Leave what you find. Leave all plants, animals, rocks and other natural or historic features undisturbed.
- Respect Wildlife. If you come in contact with wildlife while hiking please do not approach or attempt to feed them. Observe them from a distance.
- Be considerate of other Visitors. Please take the experience of other visitors into consideration in regards to your actions on the trail.

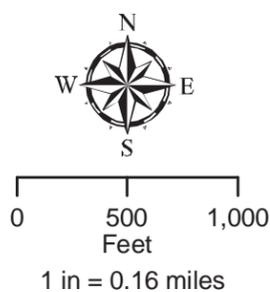


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# Lewis & Clark Caverns Trail Map



- |  |                |  |                |
|--|----------------|--|----------------|
|  | Campground     |  | Main Park Road |
|  | Fishing Access |  | Trail          |
|  | Group Use Area |  |                |
|  | Gypsum Mine    |  |                |
|  | Picnic Area    |  |                |
|  | Trail Head     |  |                |
|  | Visitor Center |  |                |



Map produced by:  
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State Park data from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, MT.