

50 BIG BONE LICK STATE PARK



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 6.4 miles

CONFIGURATION: Loops

DIFFICULTY: Easy–moderate

SCENERY: Woods, sulfur springs, buffalo herd, and lake

EXPOSURE: Sun and shaded

TRAFFIC: Moderate

TRAIL SURFACE: Paved, soil, and gravel

HIKING TIME: 3.5–4.5 hours

DRIVING DISTANCE: 45 minutes south of Cincinnati

SEASON: Year-round

ACCESS: Dawn–dusk

MAPS: USGS Rising Sun and Union; Big Bone Lick State Park Facilities map

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE: Big Bone Creek Trail

FACILITIES: Restrooms and water in office and museum area

FOR MORE INFORMATION: (859) 384-3522 or www.parks.ky.gov

SPECIAL COMMENTS: The museum has a few fossils, but unfortunately much of the fossil wealth of this area has been lost over time. Includes: Bison, Gobbler's Trace, Cedar, Coralberry, and Big Bone Creek hikes.

IN BRIEF

Once tread upon by mastodons, ground sloths, mammoths, and bison, Big Bone Lick offers a chance to take a trip back in time. The museum, outdoor museum, nature center, buffalo herd, and trails at Big Bone Lick State Park provide glimpses into the unique history of this area.

DESCRIPTION

Once you enter Big Bone Lick State Park, follow the signs to the office and nature center, and park in the lot. Follow the trail signs to the buffalo herd area, which is down the service road to the southwest of the nature center.

As you walk, look to the right of the service road for a boardwalk. It leads to an observation deck overlooking a valley. After you take in the view, return to the road, and at 0.1 mile, turn left and head uphill.

At 0.25 miles is a kiosk to the right of the trail, and straight ahead of you is the enclosed area for the buffalo herd. Bison once were common in the Big Bone Lick area because the minerals, salts, and grasses provided vital nutrients.

After taking your time to watch the buffalo herd, retrace your steps to the nature center. Follow the concrete ramp to the large kiosk

GPS Trailhead Coordinates

UTM Zone (WGS84) 16S

Easting 0694918.9

Northing 4306289.4

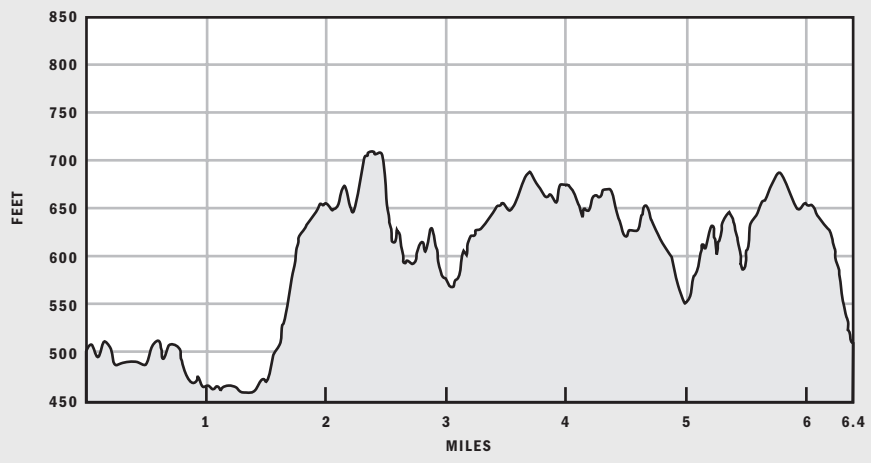
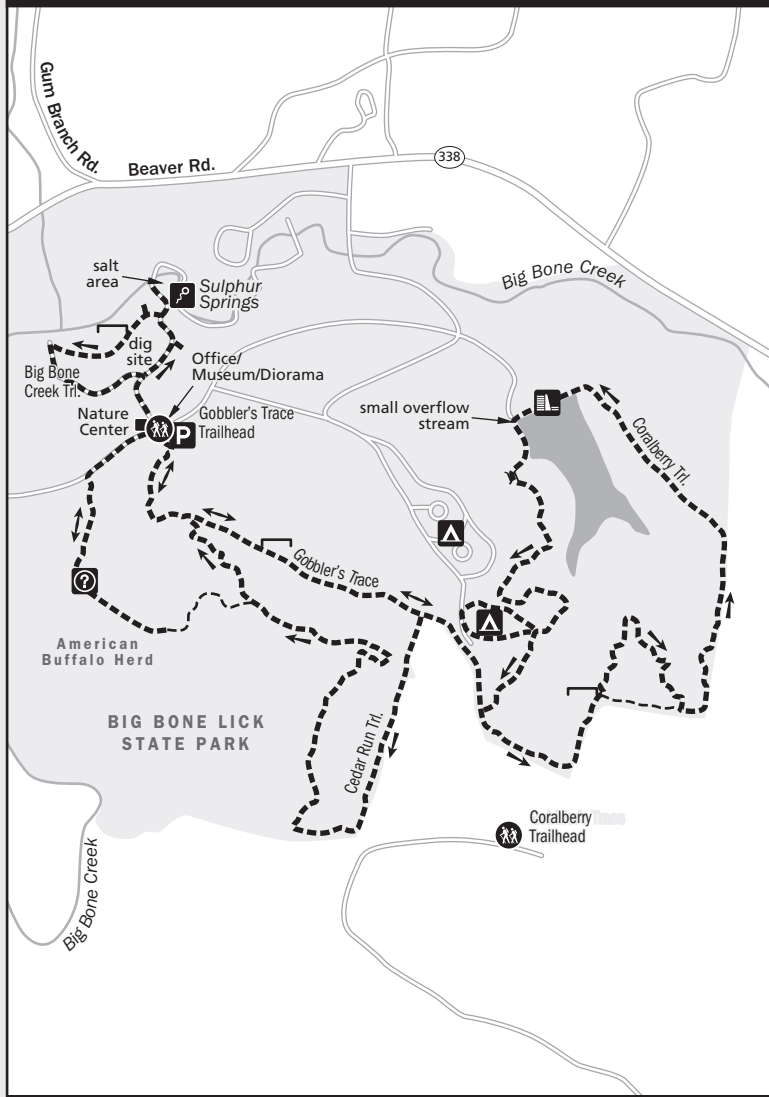
Latitude N 38° 53' 1.92"

Longitude W 84° 45' 10.02"

Directions

From Cincinnati, take Interstate 75 south to Exit 175/KY 338. Turn right onto KY 338, go 1.7 miles, and turn left onto Richwood Pike. Continue 2.5 miles and turn left onto US 127/US 42. Travel 0.5 miles and turn right onto Beaver Road. The entrance to the park is 2.8 miles ahead on the left.

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A good hiking stick is as essential as a good hiking buddy.

and take the paved trail down to the loop-shaped Big Bone Lick Creek Trail. When the trail splits, take the trail to the right.

This was known as the land of big bones due to the skeletal remains of mammoths, mastodons, and ground sloths that visited here for the rich mineral springs and swamps, then subsequently perished.

Beginning in the 1700s, as news spread around the world about the enormous fossil discoveries in the Land of Big Bones, fossils were removed by the wagonload and the area was slowly picked clean of its unique past. Over a period of 200 years, its history was lost.

People also used this place to collect salt, with early accounts placing Native Americans here in the 1600s. In the late 1790s, commercialization of salt manufacturing resulted in as much as 60 bushels of salt per day being manufactured by collecting the water from the springs and boiling it down.

At 0.8 miles from the beginning of the hike, several side trails lead to the springs. In the 1830s to 1850s, when epidemics of yellow fever and cholera swept through the Southern states, wealthy Southern families visited and bathed in the foul-smelling sulfur springs for its purported medicinal benefits, making this area a popular tourist attraction.

Cross the bridge over a small stream. This area was affected by vast glacial meltwaters that pushed through the area, creating new waterways.

The paved trail ends and a gravel trail begins at 1.3 miles. In the springtime, this portion of the trail is flooded, making it perfect spot to look for tadpoles.

Continue following the trail until you return to the split. Retrace your steps up the hill and toward the nature center. Directly across from the nature center and up the grassy hillside is the trailhead for Gobbler's Trace.

The rock-covered path leads uphill over some erosion. Continue on this trail to a bench in the shade at 1.8 miles. Allow yourself a moment to enjoy the surrounding woods while taking a break. After the bench, continue to the trail intersection at 2 miles; turn right and follow Cedar Run Trail.

This single-person-wide trail parallels the property line as it leads down a steep hill with several large stones, crosses a creek, and then heads back uphill. The trail meanders through the woods, crossing several streams before reconnecting with the Gobbler's Trace Trail at 3.1 miles.

Take Gobbler Trace Trail to the right until it reaches the Cedar Run Trail intersection again. This time, take a left and follow Gobbler's Trace trail to the campground and the Coralberry Trail.

When you enter the campground, follow along the fence line to the right, pass the water tower, and continue to the Coralberry trailhead. On Coralberry Trail, keep following the fence line. This forest hosts several species of migratory songbirds; take a few moments to quietly listen to the birdsongs. Practice your pishing skills.

At 4 miles you'll reach a bench where the trail splits. Take the trail to the left. It meanders through the forest and offers several fallen trees as good rest spots.

Continue for 0.3 miles, until you reconnect with the main Coralberry Trail that parallels the fence. Stay on the Coralberry Trail to the left and within 0.1 mile, it turns and heads north. Several portions of this trail are eroded, so be careful not to twist an ankle—you still have a ways to go.

At 4.7 miles is the dam. Turn left and cross the dam. Cross the small footbridge at 4.9 miles and enter the upland woods on a small footpath. In springtime, be on the lookout for wildflowers; in summer and fall, poison ivy.

Stay on this trail until it intersects with itself. Take the trail to the right, which will lead you to the campground. Follow the trail along the fence line and retrace your steps along Gobbler's Trace Trail to the nature center.

NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Boone County Cliffs State Nature Preserve and Curtis Gates Lloyd and Mullins wildlife management areas offer more hiking. The Florence Mall has plenty of shops, plus restaurants to tempt your taste buds.