

TRAIL TIPS
Saint Louis County Department of Parks
Trail Guide

Introduction

Hiking and biking are excellent ways to get out and enjoy the great outdoors regardless of the time of year. It is also a good excuse or an opportunity to get out and explore a new County Park or a new trail. Saint Louis County Department of Parks has over 100 miles of trails just waiting for you. And let's don't forget the equestrian trails that are found throughout the park system. This guide will provide you with information about some of the lesser and better-known hiking trails in the Saint Louis County Park system. We will cover mileage, degree of difficulty, and interesting tid bits of information about the park, its history, or about the natural surroundings.

It is always a good idea before tackling one of the trails to go to the Parks web site at www.stlouisco.com/parks and download one of the park maps. In case you are going out to one of the larger parks you might want to pick up a topo map just to make sure you can find your way. Topo maps can be purchased at some of the sporting or outdoor retail stores in the area.

In this day and age safety is a major concern for all park and trail users. It is always a good idea to hike with another person. Let someone know which park and trail you are hiking. Never leave valuables in your vehicle. Pack a daypack to assist with any unexpected occurrences that might come up. Some of the items to include in the daypack are listed below:

Water	snack	hat	sunscreen	insect repellent
First aid kit	rain gear	binoculars	cell phone	whistle

Some of the trails within the Park system are steep, rocky, rugged and in very remote areas. The key to a successful outing is to know your trail, know your resource, and be prepared. Hiking, biking and horseback riding are great ways to get exercise but you must be prepared. We want everyone to have a fun and safe experience on our trails.

Rules of the Trail

Some of the trails within the park system are multi-use trails and accommodate hikers, bikers, and equestrians. Perhaps the most popular multi-purpose trail is the Chubb Trail in West County. This 7.2-mile trail provides the user with steep climbs, rocky terrain, flat ground and is used by all 3 primary use groups. Seldom are there problems with compatibility unless someone does not use the proper protocol. All horses have the right of way. Not all horses recognize a bike. Bikers should slow down on blind curves and expect the unexpected. Most of the multi-purpose trails are very narrow and bikers should slow down and move off of the trail when approaching equestrians. The only exception would be if the biker were overcoming an equestrian. Then it is the equestrian that gives way to the biker. Hikers should move off of the trail for bikers. And bikers should announce their approach to both equestrians and hikers. If everyone is courteous and follow some simple rules and common sense everyone will have an enjoyable outing.

What Clothes to Wear:

With our ever-changing weather sometimes this is one of the most difficult things to figure out, what clothes do you wear? What if it is cold in the morning and warming by noon? What if you do not get an early start but start out at noon when it is warm and finish at 4pm when it is drastically cooler. Shorts or pants? Does it make a difference if you are out on a natural trail or gravel or asphalt? Hiking boots vs. tennis shoes? Wool vs. cotton? And of course regardless of the choices you have to make sure you look good.

When the temperatures of the day are to have a major fluctuation then it is always best to dress in layers. Multiple layers of clothing are always better than one bulky coat. The multi-layer system creates pockets of air that insulate the body holding the warm air in between the layers of clothing. It is always a good idea to bring along a daypack so you can carry additional clothes that you might want to put on or have room in the daypack to place clothes that you need to peel off. Daypacks are always great for all of the items that you need to take on an extended hike, such as, water, snack, first aid kit, rain gear, etc.

In this day and age there are many choices and selections for clothing materials. Without getting into a lengthy session the following can be said:

- Wool is great in the wintertime and if you get caught out in the rain it still maintains some of its insulation capabilities.
- Cotton is great in the summer time providing a breathing material. Cotton is not the best material in the wintertime for it has minimal warming properties especially when it becomes wet.
- Natural materials such as down are great in the wintertime. But if they become wet they lose their insulation properties.
- Depending upon which synthetic materials they can be both great in the summer or the winter months. Synthetic materials in the summer months wick heat and moisture away from the body with a cooling sensation. In the winter months items made of fleece are extremely warm and durable. However if wet they retain little heat.

Weather Concerns:

There is an old saying around these parts if you do not like the weather wait 20 minutes. Although it's not that bad, the weather can change very abruptly and with little warning. Most of the time you can get a fairly accurate forecast just from watching the television weather or listening to the radio or going on line to one of the weather web sites. But every once and a while the winds pick up, the temperatures drop or the thunderheads appear and it just wasn't in the forecast. When these sudden weather changes blow through the area they can be life threatening. The best prevention from getting caught in one of these sudden storms is to be prepared for all kinds of conditions depending upon the season, catch the latest most updated weather forecast before hitting the trail and keep an eye to the sky. Scanning the horizon for approaching clouds or conditions that may be hidden by trees or surrounding hills is truly the best way to predict what is in store and what is approaching. Make sure you have a plan of action if conditions become threatening.

There are a number of different cloud types that traditionally bring snowstorms or thunderstorms depending upon the time of the year. Although this is a watered down

session on meteorology it can be used to quickly help determine if there is a change in store when venturing out.

Severe weather with accompanying thunderstorms can be life threatening. Knowing what to do and where to go or where not to go can save your life. Pop-up thunderstorms are more prevalent in the spring and summer months. High temperatures, with accompanying high humidity triggered by an on-coming cold front can quickly develop into thunderstorms. Torrents of rain with lightening can quickly change a nice pleasant hike into a life-threatening situation. If you get caught in a severe thunderstorm here are some things to remember:

- Avoid being the tallest object around. If you are caught out in the open with no shelter get as low as you can but don't lie down on the ground rather get into a squat position.
- Do not seek shelter near the tallest object. Lightening can certainly travel through the ground.
- There is no "warning sign" that will tell you *reliably* that lightning is about to strike.
- The time from the flash to the thunder is a rough measure of how distant the lightning is. If you see a flash and count the seconds, five seconds corresponds to about a mile. However, there is no distance from a thunderstorm that is *absolutely* safe! If you can *see* the lightning, then you are under some threat.
- You do not have to be *directly* hit by the lightning to be affected. Lightning can travel along the ground from a nearby strike to you. It can also jump from nearby objects that are struck.
- Avoid being near fence lines and power lines that lead into areas where lightning is occurring. A flash can travel along the wires and jump to you.

Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is one of those plants that can be found along any trail throughout the County. The plant can occur as a small plant knee high; it can appear as a small shrub or it can occur as a vine growing up a tree. There is an old saying "leaflets of three, let it be." But be aware there are many plants with 3 leaves that are not harmful. Not everyone has a reaction when they have contacted poison ivy. The entire plant, leaf and stem or vine is covered with invisible plant oil and it is that oil that causes us to have a reaction. This oil is active in the wintertime and can persist for as long as 6 months after the plant or vine has been cut. When encountered make sure you wash the exposed area as soon as possible. Soap and water is best but if need be use whatever water source is available to wash the oil from your skin.



Snakes

Although they are rarely encountered you should know that there are two venomous snakes in St. Louis County the timber rattlesnake and the copperhead. The copperhead is more likely to be encountered than the timber rattlesnake. The timber rattlesnake is more or less confined to the rocky wooded hills of West County or the bluff areas of the major riverways.

During the hot days of summer both snake species are nocturnal to avoid the heat of the day. But during the spring and autumn months the snakes are active during the day light hours. Both snakes are found predominantly in West County and prefer the woody, rocky, hills. Neither snake is aggressive; however, if cornered, stepped on or threatened they will strike back.

Certainly one of the best ways to identify these snakes is the color pattern. Take a little time prior to going hiking and look at the pattern on the snake and its color. Another excellent way to identify the snake is by the shape of the head. All venomous snakes have a triangular shaped head; while non-venomous have a circular shaped head. Certainly the timber rattlesnake will most likely have rattles at the end of its tail. But other non-venomous snakes shake their tail to imitate the rattlesnake for protection and as a warning to on-comers.

All snakes are beneficial in the wild and have a very important purpose. If encountered keep in mind the snakes just want to be left alone. If seen from a distance enjoy the coloration and patterns. If you see a snake and it is way too close move quickly away from the snake but, know where you are quickly going. If the snake is on the trail give plenty of room to the critter by getting off of the trail and then continue your hike. Snakes are creatures of habit and habitat, know your surroundings. Be aware of where you place your hands and feet. Check the trail up ahead to lessen any encounters. Be aware that snakes may climb under fallen logs and it is best to step on a log crossing the trail, glance down under the log, and then step off the log. If encountered do not panic, it will be fine. If bitten seek medical attention immediately.

Copperhead



Timber Rattlesnake



Ticks

More and more studies are being conducted to determine what viruses and bacteria ticks carry. If you do much hiking in Missouri or the County it will not be long before you encounter a tick(s). These critters prefer the woods and tall grass habitats. Ticks are usually found in two sizes the nymph and the adult size tick. It is the nymph or as called locally a seed tick that is difficult to feel and can go unnoticed for a couple of days. Seed ticks are the size of a pinhead. The adult size tick can quickly move to that favorite spot and begin to feed. Generally, it will be felt more readily than a seed tick.

If you know you are hiking in an area that may harbor ticks it is good idea to stop and occasionally look down your legs or pants to do a quick once over for any itsey bitsey little critters that might be looking for a meal. If found they can easily be removed by hand or if they are in a greater quantity take out a roll of duct tape. Wrap the tape around your hand sticky side out, and pat down the area that is infested. The ticks will be picked up by the tape and the tape can be disposed of properly.

If a tick has become imbedded there are a couple of ways to remove the tick without creating any greater risk or injury. Avoid the finger nail polish, a hot match or anything else that might cause greater harm. The main thing is to remove the tick body intact with

its head. Jerking the tick or twisting the tick can separate the head from the body leaving the head imbedded. This can lead to infection and additional problems. So the best way to remove a tick is treat the area with antiseptic and with steady firm pressure pull the tick body upward and outward.

Once removed there is always the tendency to squish the little fellow with your fingernails. This will only release any of the bacteria that are in the tick's body. A safer and better way would be to crush the tick between two rocks or to drive the body into the ground with the heel of a boot.

After the removal of the tick treat the area with an antiseptic and watch the area for the next couple of days and weeks. It is not uncommon to have swelling and redness appear after a tick bite. If the conditions persist then by all means seek medical attention. If a bulls-eye pattern develops, along with flu like conditions and they are accompanied with a fever seek immediate medical attention.

How do you avoid these little nasty critters? There are a number of insecticides directed specifically just for ticks. These sprays work quite well, but read the directions and the warnings very carefully. Some of the sprays will bind with the cloth of the clothing and provide protection for up to two weeks at a time.

Some County Parks just because of their habitats will have more ticks than other parks. Keep in mind the terrain, the type of trail encountered, the vegetation encountered and the time of the year. But whatever the reason ticks are not something to keep you off of the trail or out of the woods.



Chiggers

Chiggers are those invisible critters that make us itch only after they have left our bodies. They love our ankles, the back of knees and other places. If it is itching and a chigger, the chigger is long gone. So using some of the home remedies such as nail polish, bleach or anything else will not work. Because of their small size chiggers are virtually invisible. Once the chigger is finished feeding it simple drops off to continue its life cycle. It is its first and last meal of the larva; from this stage the larva develops into an adult mite that is strictly a vegetarian.

A full feeding frenzy if the chigger had its way would last about 3 to 4 days. Seldom is the chigger so lucky. A simple scratching or the rubbing of the hand can knock the chigger off of its feeding host. And once this is done the chigger is doomed and cannot feed again. I know you feel sorry for the chigger.

Chiggers prefer grassy areas that have not been mowed and have high vegetation. Some of the best prevention to avoid ticks can also be used to avoid chiggers. Proper dress and the use of repellants may be all that is needed to discourage chiggers. Perhaps one of the best repellents is the use of sulphur. Sulphur can be purchased at pharmacies as a powdered dust. Sprinkle the dust around the inside of your waist, over your socks and boots. Or any other place where you think the chiggers may accumulate. But before you douse yourself with sulphur there are a couple of things you need to know. One; sulphur smells and combined with perspiration you may find yourself hiking alone even if you started with a group. And secondly, for some people the use of sulphur can cause an irritation to the skin.

Winter Activities:

Not known for its terrible long, cruel, cold winters the St. Louis area does however usually get at least a couple of snows during the course of the winter months. Some energetic folks trade in their hiking boots for a pair of cross-country skis. Freshly fallen snow is one of the best reasons to get out in the cold winter months. Beautiful scenery awaits the individual who wants to challenge the elements and head out into the great outdoors. Frozen waterfalls, glistening trees, and a landscape of pure white awaits the hiker. Many of the trails mentioned in the text listed below are very suitable for cross-country skiing. While other trails would not be conducive to skiing because of the type of treadway, narrowness or steepness of the trail. We will denote such trails but remember a lot of what a cross-country skier can handle depends upon the skier's individual skill level.

Winter weather brings another series of concerns and safety precautions. Icy trails, cold conditions, crossing frozen creeks all of these conditions provide different challenges for the winter hiker. When walking on ice bend the knees to lower your center of gravity and take smaller strides. Remember asphalt trails will not be cleared of ice and snow.

Flooding:

Many of the Department's trails can be found in the valleys parallel to one of the major riverways or creeks. It is always a good idea to check out our web site (www.stlouisco.com/parks) for the latest trail and park closings due to high water or other

concerns. During times of high water trails can be inundated for days. It is never a good idea to continue on a trail when high water is encountered. Some of the more vulnerable trails would include: Cliff Cave's Mississippi River Trail; Lower Meramec's Tall Timbers and Meramec Greenway Trails; West Tyson's Chubb Trail; Winter's Meramec Greenway Trail; Sherman Beach's Stinging Nettle Trail; Simpson's Meramec Greenway Trail; Unger's Meramec Greenway Trail; and Buder's Meramec Trail.

Saint Louis County Parks Trails

All right now that we have covered all of the dangers, hazards, and all of the things that can turn a walk in the park to a nightmare do you still want to go hiking? Saint Louis County Department of Parks offers a wide variety of hikes and walks. One can find an urban path or a nearly wilderness experience seemingly far removed from civilization. Stepping out onto the trails one can step back into history in the footpaths of Lewis and Clark; trace the footsteps of the second governor of Missouri as he heads for the St. Charles ferry or come across the mines of ancient people digging for chert to make tools and weapons.

Tall grass prairies, wetlands, savannas, and woodlands, St. Louis County was the crossroads of many natural communities at the time of European settlement. Today, many of these natural gems are being enhanced, created, or restored. It is easy to find a trail that will take you through one of these landscapes. But if you go on one of the nature trails make sure you take a pair of binoculars and then pack along your flower guide, bird guide, butterfly guide, tree guide; you get the idea. Over 100 miles of trail exist in the Saint Louis County Park system, with more trails coming in the future.