

Hiking



Forest Service
Lewis and Clark National Forest
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center



For more trail information call the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center: 406-727-8733 or visit the website for a calendar of activities at www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/lcic.htm

Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center Trails

Trail Beginning: 3320 ft. elev. (1012 m)

Routes begin at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center

Trail Ending: elevations vary, but typically do not deviate more than 100 ft.

Routes end various locations around the Interpretive Center

Access: Follow River Drive along the south shore of the Missouri River until reaching the large entry sign for Giant Springs State Park and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center. Turn onto Giant Springs Road and follow it for less than a mile to the Interpretive Center entry. Trails depart from the sidewalk paths outside the Interpretive Center and a trail system map is located on an interpretive sign at the top of the staircase on the east side of the building.

Attractions and Considerations: Visitors to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center are invited on an outdoor exploration of Missouri Breaks geology, prairie vegetation and scenic views of wildlife and historic sites. A 1.25 mile trail system within the 29-acre site offers specific access for wheelchairs, pedestrians and bicycles. Wayside interpretive signs supplement the experience. A paved wheelchair-accessible path links the Center to the Missouri River and a nature trail leading to adjoining historic Giant Springs State Park. A paved multiple-use bicycle route connects to the River's Edge Trail, a network of 25 miles of trail in the Great Falls area. A pedestrian-only, graveled path along the bluff surrounding the Center offers a stroll through prairie vegetation to scenic river overlooks. A second pedestrian-only trail sharply descends a typical Missouri Breaks coulee or ravine to the riverside nature trail.

Cliff Trails: Two trails descend from the bluff at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center to the Giant Springs Trail along the river. Wheelchair users can use an elevator to access an ADA trail midway down the bluff and gradually descend the paved path to the river level. Another steeper pedestrian-only trail descends to the river through a narrow coulee; this trail is unpaved and not ADA accessible. Enroute on either trail, note the dark fossilized rock, evidence of a time when trees may have dominated today's drier hillside. The cannonball-like rock formations were created when small organic particles were spun by water, attracting other material, eventually hardening in the softer sandstone rock face. These "concretions" occasionally dislodge from their perch, leaving half-round holes on the cliffs. Flanking the trails, thickets of skunkbush sumac, rosehip, and chokecherry create nesting protected against predators. Finches, warblers, and catbirds fill the quiet with their song, and wildflowers dot the landscape.

Bluff Trail: These pedestrian-only trails extend about one tenth of a mile from either side of the Interpretive Center. The grassland trail loop on the east side of the building is flanked by plants native to the Montana prairie—blue gramma, needle and thread, wheat grass and prickly pear. The bluff trail on the west side of the building affords scenic views of the river below, the historic Black Eagle Falls, the steep cliffs and the rocky islands. From either side of the building, enjoy the sounds of teeming bird life from the river and the call of the Western Meadowlark, Montana's state bird. In early spring and summer, hikers may catch a glimpse of yellow belly marmots sunning themselves on the rock outcroppings. Keep your camera ready!

River's Edge Trail Connector: This multi-use trail provides bicycle access from the Interpretive Center to the River's Edge Trail, a 25-mile network of pedestrian/bicycle trails in the Great Falls area. The quarter-mile connector descends through a tunnel under Giant Springs Road, passing a geologic formation of layered sandstone. Bicyclists, hikers and dog-walkers may proceed east beyond the Interpretive Center property about two miles to historic Rainbow and Crooked Falls or west past Black Eagle Falls to the riverside surrounding the City of Great Falls.

Giant Springs Trail: This paved nature trail, a spur of the River's Edge Trail, transects the Center's property along the river, continuing downstream to historic Giant Springs State Park. Waterfowl paddle and fish in the river as bird life abounds in the wetter, riparian vegetation. Mud cliff swallow nests grip the rock cliffs below the high bluffs. Pedestrian access is accomplished by either of the Cliff Trails; bicycle access is restricted to Giant Springs or the River's Edge Trail spur

Length of Hike: 1.25 mile trail system, but individual trail lengths vary

USGS Map(s): Northeast Great Falls

