

Salt Springs State Park

The 405-acre Salt Springs State Park is in northeastern Pennsylvania, seven miles north of Montrose in Susquehanna County. Focal points of the park are the towering old growth Eastern hemlock trees, many estimated to be over 300 years old, and the rocky gorge cut by Fall Brook with its three waterfalls. The Friends of Salt Springs Park, a non-profit volunteer support group who operates the park, owns an additional 437 acres adjacent to the park’s southern border. This property is also open for public access.

Directions

GPS DD: Lat. 41.9119 Long. -75.86553

Salt Springs State Park is easily reached from Montrose by following PA 29 north for six miles to the town of Franklin Forks. Turn left onto Silver Creek Road and continue for one mile to the park entrance.

From New York, take NY 7 to PA 29. At Franklin Forks, turn right onto Silver Creek Road and continue for one mile to the park entrance.

Friends of Salt Springs Park

The Friends of Salt Springs Park, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, formed in 1994 and managed by local volunteers. Operating at the park through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of State Parks, the Friends’ mission is to preserve and improve the facilities of Salt Springs State Park and to develop its potential for recreational activities, and environmental and historical education programs.



Photo by Marty Straub

Support from numerous grants, the Bureau of State Parks, and the Pennsylvania Conservation Corps program allowed the Friends to renovate historic structures, upgrade the facilities, and improve recreation areas. In 2000, the Friends purchased 300 acres of land adjacent to the park’s southern border. Easily reached from Buckley Road or from several connecting trails, this property offers a variety of natural habitats not found in the park and expands the recreational opportunities available to visitors. In 2004, a conservation easement was placed on this land, ensuring its permanent protection as open space and natural habitat. In 2006, the Friends purchased another adjoining tract of 137 acres, bringing the total size of the public space to 842 acres.

The Friends publish a seasonal newsletter (The Salt Springs Messenger), a monthly electronic newsletter, and a quarterly listing of events. All programs are open to the public and free of charge, unless otherwise indicated. On Labor Day weekend, the Friends host the annual “Salt Springs Celebration,” a one-day festival featuring exhibits, programs, activities, entertainment, and family fun.

Support for the Friends’ work comes through memberships, camping revenue, public and private agency grants, business donations, in-kind donations of materials and services, special fundraising events, and program fees for educational services.

Friends of Salt Springs Park
P.O. Box 541
Montrose, PA 18801
570-967-7275
info@friendsofsaltsspringspark.org
www.friendsofsaltsspringspark.org

Access for People with Disabilities

This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible for people with disabilities. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the park you plan to visit.

In an Emergency Dial 911

Call 911. Directions to the nearest hospital are posted at the office and the information kiosks.

NEAREST HOSPITAL

Endless Mountains Health System
100 Hospital Drive
Montrose, PA 18801
570-278-3801



Hemlock Trail

Photo by Marty Straub

Recreational Opportunities



PICNICKING: Picnic tables and grills are available throughout the day use area. A restroom is located by the barn across from the Wheaton House parking area. The Williams Pavilion is located west of the Wheaton House parking lot. The pavilion may be reserved in advance for a fee from the Friends or may be used for free on a first-come, first-served basis.

CAMPING: Rustic camping sites are privately situated along the banks of Silver Creek. All sites include a fire ring and picnic table. Four sites are large enough to accommodate RVs, but no hookups are available. The campground has a restroom with non-flush toilets. Water is available from a spigot in front of the restrooms in the parking lot. Group camping is available in a large mowed field in the main campground. The maximum camping period is 14 consecutive days. Reservations may be made in advance by calling the Friends and are confirmed when full payment is received.

CAMPING COTTAGES: Three cottages have wooden walls and floors, electric lights, outlets, and a porch. Two cottages sleep five people and one cottage sleeps seven people in single bunks and a single/double bunk. Non-flush restrooms are nearby.

FISHING: Sections of Silver Creek and Fall Brook traverse the park for almost two miles, providing ample fishing opportunities for both novice and experienced anglers. A favorite area is where Fall Brook flows into Silver Creek. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission stocks both streams with trout in early spring.

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply.

Learn, Experience, Connect

The Friends of Salt Springs Park offer a variety of environmental, historical, and educational programs year round. Through hands-on activities, guided walks, interactive workshops, and programs, participants gain an appreciation and understanding of park natural and historic resources. Programs are listed on the Friends’ website, and a printed brochure is available at the Wheaton House.

Environmental education programs and historical programs can, upon request, be designed to fit individual group needs. Programs can be arranged in advance by calling the Friends’ office.

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 800 acres, including adjoining lands owned by the Friends of Salt Springs Park, are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. Common game species are deer, turkeys, squirrels, and grouse.

Hunting woodchucks, also known as groundhogs, is prohibited. Dog training is only permitted from the day following Labor Day through March 31 in designated hunting areas. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission rules and regulations apply. Contact the Lackawanna State Park Office for ADA accessible hunting information.

Use **extreme caution** with firearms at all times. Other visitors use the park during hunting seasons. Firearms and archery equipment used for hunting may be uncased and ready for use only in authorized hunting areas during hunting seasons. In areas not open to hunting or during non-hunting seasons, firearms and archery equipment shall be kept in the owner’s vehicle or enclosed trailer. Exceptions include: law enforcement officers and individuals with a valid *Pennsylvania License to Carry Firearms* are authorized to carry a firearm concealed on their person while they are within a state park.



ENJOY THE WINTER: Most of the trails in the park are well suited for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and pastures and hay fields provide wide open areas for sledding and tobogganing. In winter, Fall Brook Gorge is transformed into a wonderland of massive ice columns and cascades. Use extreme caution when hiking in the gorge as stream ice and nearby rocks can be unstable and dangerous.

History

In the 1790s, when the first European settlers arrived at what would become Salt Springs State Park, the area was an unbroken forest of old growth trees, dominated by eastern hemlock. The immediate concern was to clear the land. For decades the trees were cut, piled up, and burned. The better logs were used to build the first homes. Sawmills were soon built along Silver Creek and other nearby streams, and local tanneries began consuming hemlock bark at increasing rates. The hemlocks lining Fall Brook Gorge were probably spared since this area was a popular recreational destination, even by the early 1800s.

In 1858, a mill and woolen manufactory were built below the first waterfall on Fall Brook, the remains of which can still be seen behind the Wheaton House. A flume channeled water from the first waterfall down the west side of the gorge and over a 16-foot overshot wheel. The building also had a lath machine, likely producing much of the lath used in the area’s first farmhouses.

The salt spring on the south side of Fall Brook is one of the salt springs for which the park is named. The first people to extract salt from the spring water were Indigenous peoples who traveled through the area during hunting expeditions. They attempted to keep the location of the spring secret from the European settlers, but eventually for a large enough sum of money, it was revealed.

Numerous attempts were made by different entrepreneurs to develop the spring for commercial gain between 1795 and 1870. The brine obtained produced a high-quality salt, but not enough could be coaxed out of the ground to yield a profit. The water was noted to be more sulfurous than salty. Bubbles would rise to the surface and when touched with fire would flash like black powder. Efforts to strike oil at or near Salt Springs were also pursued but with no success. In 1902, the North Penn Oil and Gas Company sunk a new test well just behind the Wheaton House, but plugged it after several months and left without explanation. When methane gas continued to seep up through the plug, a simple container was built at the top of the well to gather the escaping gas, which was then piped into the Wheaton home where it was used for cooking and lighting. These pipes still run through the house.

On November 9, 1813, a circuit rider wrote in his diary that he had “dined with four gentlemen from Philadelphia on a visit. . . . They had stayed the night before at the Salt Springs where they had been for amusement, they dealt in extraordinaries about it, as though they had been on a voyage around the world.” This is the earliest recorded documentation of the impact of the area’s natural beauty on human visitors.

Today, as in 1813, the 400-plus acres that make up Salt Springs State Park continue to attract visitors who appreciate the extraordinary natural beauty of the area.

Geology

The park lies in a glacially altered, hilly terrain referred to since the 1750s as “the Endless Mountains.” The varying layers of Devonian age sandstone and shale of the Catskill Formation are exposed in the 80-foot-deep Fall Brook gorge. The crystal waters of Fall Brook tumble over three picturesque waterfalls, each about ten feet in height, before joining the waters of Silver Creek near the eastern border of the park. Thriving in the cool, moist conditions of the gorge are mosses, liverworts, and ferns.

About 300 feet from the mouth of the gorge on the south side of Fall Brook is the bubbling salt spring which is the

Fall Brook Natural Area

Fall Brook Natural Area encompasses the gorge and the old growth eastern hemlock forest on both the east and west rims. The area was established “to provide locations for scientific observation of natural systems, to protect examples of typical and unique plant and animal communities, and to protect outstanding examples of natural interest and beauty.”

Visitors can experience what Pennsylvania’s forests were like 300 years ago. Towering 100 feet and more above the gorge is one of the last old growth hemlock forest



HISTORIC WHEATON FARM

From 1840 until 1973, the Salt Springs area was a dairy farm privately owned and operated by succeeding generations of the Wheaton family. During their stewardship, the Wheatons welcomed hundreds of visitors to the legendary land of waterfalls and other natural wonders.

At the northeast entrance of the park is the historic homestead of the Wheaton family. Four buildings of the original homestead remain, as well as the foundation of the mill and woolen manufactory. The original home, built in the early 1840s by Nathan Philip Wheaton, is now the Wheaton House. This post and beam structure is timber framed with eastern hemlock. The hand-hewn beams are 40 feet long, and the posts are two stories high. These timbers originated from trees similar to the impressive stands of old growth hemlock that line both sides of Fall Brook Gorge.



Teamster Earnest Palmer, of Franklin Forks, in front of the derrick where the methane gas well was dug behind the Wheaton House. The boiler and forge were powered by burning wood. Photo courtesy of Palmer's grand-daughter, Elsie Hackbart.

The sister home, built around 1870 by Nathan’s eldest son, James, is of balloon frame construction and features a Georgian style roof. This home is still a private residence.

Adjacent to the Wheaton House, the carriage barn, circa 1865, is also made entirely of hemlock. The building is timber framed with hand-hewn beams and sawed posts. The foundation is of native stone laid without mortar.

Inside the dairy barn is an old 30-by-40-foot timber-framed structure that may have originally been a threshing barn. Moved and altered over the years, this barn reflects the changes in agriculture and building from the past 165 years.

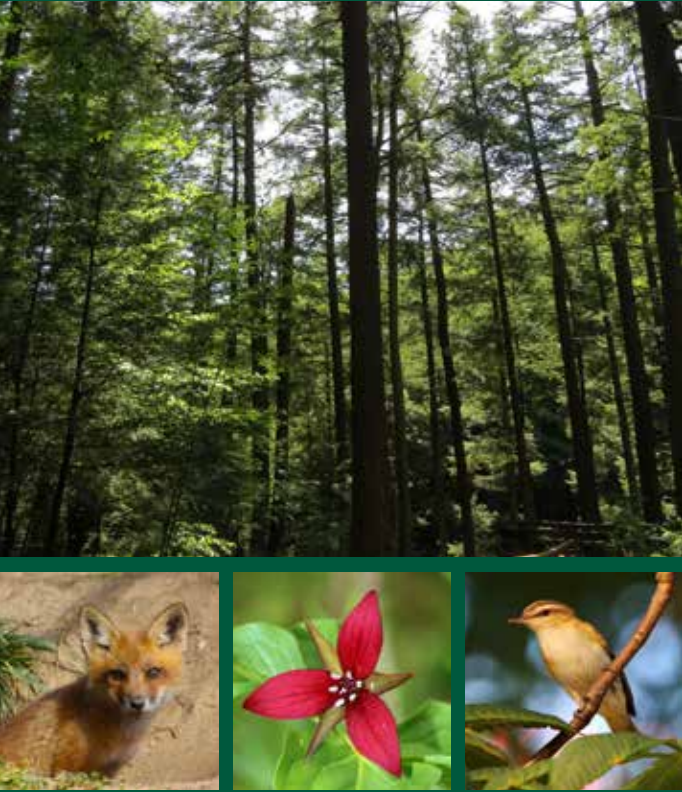
park’s namesake. The water from the spring is very high in chloride, sodium, and dissolved solids, revealing the marine origin of the sediments. The spring bubbles due to methane gas created by the breakdown of organic matter in the ancient sedimentary rock. The commercial extraction of both salt and oil was attempted in the late 18th century, throughout the 19th, and into the early 20th centuries but did not prove profitable and was discontinued.

The landscape was drastically changed in August 2018 when a massive flood cut a new channel and rerouted Fall Brook into Silver Creek, permanently changing its path.

tracts remaining in the commonwealth. Old growth forests exhibit complex ecosystems that differ greatly from younger forests. At one time, Pennsylvania was largely covered by old growth forest, but most have fallen prey to the pressures of commercial and industrial activities. The old growth hemlocks that remain now face the threat of infestation from hemlock woolly adelgid, a non-native insect killing many of Pennsylvania’s hemlock trees.

The rich diversity of natural habitats, including old growth forest, mixed hardwood forests, grasslands, early successional meadows, streams, and wetlands attract a wide variety of birds and wildlife. Over 150 species of birds have been recorded at the park. The combination of Susquehanna County’s cool climate, the park’s deep gorge, and coniferous habitat provide ideal conditions for some species of birds more commonly observed further north, such as common ravens, hermit thrushes, magnolia warblers, Blackburnian warblers, winter wrens, and white-throated sparrows. A “Birds of Salt Springs State Park” checklist is available at the office. Other wildlife at the park includes white-tailed deer, black bears, bobcats, eastern coyotes, red foxes, porcupines, beavers, striped skunks, raccoons, red squirrels, and flying squirrels. A wide variety of plants can also be found, with spring providing the best time for wildflower viewing.

A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for Salt Springs State Park



Salt Springs State Park
c/o Lackawanna State Park
1839 Abington Road
North Abington Township, PA 18414-9785
570-945-3239
LackawannaSP@pa.gov

Friends of Salt Springs Park
P.O. Box 541
Montrose, PA 18801
570-967-7275
info@friendsofsaltsspringspark.org
To make a reservation, contact the Friends at 570-967-7275 or email: info@friendsofsaltsspringspark.org

www.visitPAparks.com



An Equal Opportunity Employer
Printed on recycled paper

2021

Protect and Preserve Our Parks

Please make your visit safe and enjoyable. Obey all posted rules and regulations and respect fellow visitors and the resources of the park.

• Be prepared and bring the proper equipment. Natural areas may possess hazards. Your personal safety and that of your family are your responsibility.

• Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

• Please camp only in designated areas and try to minimize your impact on the campsites.

• Firewood Advisory: Firewood may contain non-native insects and plant diseases. Bringing firewood into the park from other areas may accidentally spread pest insects and diseases that threaten park resources and the health of our forests. Campers should use local firewood. Do not take wood home and do not leave firewood. Burn It!

• Prevent forest fires by having a fire in proper facilities and properly disposing of hot coals. Do not leave a fire unattended.

Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau, 800-769-8999. www.endlessmountains.org

Hiking 14.2 miles of trails

Border Trail: 1.9 miles, blue blazes, more difficult hiking

Because of its elevation changes, this is a challenging hike. From the north, it is accessed from the West Meadow. Together with Silver Creek Trail, it runs parallel to a ridge while overlooking Silver Creek. It splits from Silver Creek Trail, proceeds up a steep climb through the western part of the park, crosses Buckley Road, goes up another steep climb, then descends to Salt Springs Road.

Bunny Trail: 1.5 miles, orange blazes, more difficult hiking

This loop is best accessed from a small parking lot on Buckley Road, east of where Fall Brook crosses the road. The trail ascends gently along Fall Brook to a small clearing which was once a log landing. It then climbs steeply for a short distance and continues through hardwood forest and old fields with some excellent views. It briefly joins and leaves Cliff Trail, passes a delightful spring, and then descends through a forest back to the parking lot.

Cliff Trail: 1.5 miles, blue blazes, more difficult hiking
This trail starts at the Friends Land Parking Lot and climbs steadily up an old logging road, briefly joins then leaves Bunny Trail, and heads toward the southwest corner of the property. After joining Summit Trail, it reaches an interesting spring area and Frog Pond. At the pond, the trail turns northeast and follows the contours of the land, descending to where it ends at Bunny Trail. All along this section are boulders and cliffs worth exploring for ferns and wildflowers.

Fall Brook Trail: 0.8 mile, red blazes, more difficult hiking
Access this trail from the end of Hemlock Trail above the waterfalls. It follows Fall Brook south across Buckley Road, joining and then leaving Bunny Trail until it ends at another intersection with Bunny Trail.

Friends Trail: 1.7 miles, white blazes, more difficult hiking
The trail starts at Hardwood Trail and heads south out of the forest and through a meadow to cross Buckley Road. From there, it meanders through another meadow before reentering the forest. It eventually heads west and ends at Summit Trail near the highest point in the park. It can also be accessed from the Friends Lands Parking Lot on Buckley Road.

Gorge Trail Spur: 0.2 mile, blue blazes, easiest hiking
This trail allows hikers to avoid the steep ascent at the start of the Gorge Trail. It begins on Salt Springs Road just west of the Wheaton House and heads southwest up a moderate hill to the edge of a meadow. There it turns east and runs along the edge of a grassy swale until entering the woods and ending at the Gorge Trail.

Gorge Trail: 0.4 mile, blue blazes, more difficult hiking
The trail runs south from the Wheaton House. After a steep but short ascent, it levels out and parallels the gorge. It goes through remnants of an old flagstone quarry and along a meadow's edge before returning to the woods and ending at Buckley Road. To avoid the steep ascent, an alternative starting point is located a short distance up Salt Springs Road.

Hardwood Trail: 0.5 mile, yellow blazes, more difficult hiking
Access this trail at the northeast end of the picnic area, past the salt spring. After ascending the moderate slope along the edge of the hill, the trail swings south and climbs through mixed hardwoods before leveling out and turning west to intersect Overlook Trail.

Hemlock Trail: 0.4 mile, white blazes, more difficult hiking
Access this trail at the northeast end of the picnic area, past the salt spring. Follow right, and climb steeply up the hill into the old growth hemlock forest. Just past the intersection with Woodland Trail, Hemlock Trail becomes a raised boardwalk. It follows the east rim of the gorge past Penny Rock to where a right spur leads to an observation platform overlooking the falls. Use extreme caution near cliffs and steep drop-offs. The trail continues, passing Overlook Trail and eventually ending at Fall Brook Trail.

Meadow Trail: 1 mile, yellow blazes, easiest hiking
Accessed from either Buckley Road or Silver Creek Trail, this largely flat trail passes by meadows, old foundations, stone walls, and an interesting shale outcropping. Picnicking is encouraged at a mid-point rock formation that resembles chairs and tables.

North Creek Trail: 0.6 mile, red blazes, easiest hiking
The trail begins behind the Williams Picnic Pavilion, crosses Silver Creek (no bridge), and runs west through meadows and wild apple trees along the meandering creek, which creates scenic views. On the north side of the creek, the trail is marked with metal posts. After re-crossing Silver Creek (no bridge), it joins Silver Creek Trail and Border Trail.

Overlook Trail: 0.2 mile, blue blazes, easiest hiking
Designed specifically for ADA accessibility, this short, wide trail begins at the parking lot on the north side of Buckley Road. The trail winds through light and dense forest on level land and connects to Hemlock Trail near the falls observation platform.

Silver Creek Trail: 1 mile, red blazes, more difficult hiking
This trail is accessed from behind the barn or from Meadow Trail, near where it meets Border Trail Spur. From the barn access point, it follows the creek, climbing gradually through mixed hardwoods, then continues up a steep climb before joining Meadow Trail. Two old stone walls along the path provide interesting rest stops.

Spruce Trail: 0.4 mile, white blazes, easiest hiking
This trail begins on Border Trail at the far western edge of the park, south of where Border Trail crosses Buckley Road. The trail follows an easy grade through a magnificent grove of towering spruce trees planted during a reforestation project. It ends at Border Trail just north of Salt Springs Road. The trail can also be accessed from Salt Springs Road or via the Spruce Trail Spur on Buckley Road.

Summit Trail: 1 mile, red blazes, more difficult hiking
This loop starts with a short climb of about 0.3 mile from Frog Pond to the highest point on the Friends of Salt Springs' property. The summit is a relatively flat area, with large, widely spaced trees. Here the trail turns north to intersect Cliff Trail. It then turns southwest, along with Cliff Trail, returning to Frog Pond.

Upland Trail: 0.5 mile, red blazes, more difficult hiking
This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back down.

Wetland Trail: 0.6 mile, blue blazes, easiest hiking
This trail starts just west of the Buckley Road bridge and traverses the wetlands on the northwest bank of Fall Brook. Signs of beaver activity and wetland plants and shrubs can be seen along this trail. It ends at Salt Springs Road just after passing an old homestead foundation.

Woodland Trail: 0.2 mile, blue blazes, easiest hiking
Reached from Hemlock Trail, this trail circles around the east side of the old growth stand. Explore an Eastern hemlock almost 300 years old that has fallen across the path. The trail ends at Hardwood Trail.

