



A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for Little Buffalo

Little Buffalo
State Park



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Pennsylvania State Parks Mission

The primary purpose of Pennsylvania state parks is to provide opportunities for enjoying healthful outdoor recreation and serve as outdoor classrooms for environmental education. In meeting these purposes, the conservation of the natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values of parks should be given first consideration. Stewardship responsibilities should be carried out in a way that protects the natural outdoor experience for the enjoyment of current and future generations.



2023



LITTLE BUFFALO STATE PARK

The cool, clear water of Little Buffalo Creek has been attracting people for centuries. Native Americans frequented Little Buffalo Creek on hunting trips. Farmers and merchants passed along news while the grain was ground at Shoaff's Mill. Nearby, merchants, local people, and travelers met at Blue Ball Tavern. Today, thousands of people meet at Little Buffalo State Park to picnic, swim, fish, hike, experience nature, and be immersed in history.



Reservations

Make online reservations at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks or call toll-free 888-PA-PARKS (888-727-2757), 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Saturday.

Directions

GPS DD: Lat. 40.4585 Long. -77.1682

From PA 322, take the Newport exit and follow PA 34 south through the town of Newport. One mile from town, turn right onto Little Buffalo Road, which passes through the park. Continue for 1.8 miles to the park entrance.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Spend the Day



SWIMMING: A large swimming pool varies in depth from zero to five feet and has 17-foot and 11-foot waterslides. The pool and spray ground are staffed by certified lifeguards. The pool complex and food concession are open daily from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day, 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM, unless otherwise posted. A fee is charged for pool use (cash only). Swimming is prohibited in Holman Lake.

GPS DD: Lat. 40.4519 Long. -77.1851

PICNICKING: Many picnic tables offer nice views of the lake and most are shaded. Charcoal grills are scattered throughout the picnic areas. All picnic areas are open from 8:00 AM to sunset. Picnic pavilions can be reserved up to 11 months in advance for a fee. Unreserved picnic pavilions are free on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Swimming Pool Area has a large, shaded lawn surrounding the swimming pool. There are showers, first-aid station, play field, seasonal food concession, ADA accessible playground equipment, boat rental, two picnic pavilions that each seat 80 people, horseshoe pits, and restrooms. Swimming Pool Area parking is closed November through March.

Shoaff's Mill Area, which includes a portion of the Little Buffalo Historic District, is open year round and features picnic tables, restrooms, horseshoe pits, the Environmental Classroom, a picnic pavilion that seats 50 people, playground, and the Entertainment Pavilion.

FISHING: The 83-acre Holman Lake offers year-round fishing opportunities. This warmwater fishery offers largemouth and smallmouth bass, tiger muskellunge, yellow perch, and several species of catfish and panfish. The lake is designated as a "Big Bass Lake," meaning that bass must be at least 15 inches long with a daily limit of four. Brook, brown, and rainbow trout species are stocked several times per year, as well as occasional muskellunge. Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply. An ADA accessible fishing pier is by the Main Boat Launch. See **Enjoy the Winter** for information on ice fishing.

Stay the Night

CAMPING COTTAGES: In the campground, three cottages sleep five people in bunk beds. Each cottage has electricity, a table, chairs, ceiling fan, electric heat, fire ring, and picnic table. Smoking is prohibited. Dogs are permitted in one of the cottages.

MODERN CABIN: Near the campground, the ADA accessible cabin sleeps 12 people in three bedrooms. Amenities include heat, air conditioning, stove, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, picnic table, and fire ring. There are two full bathrooms, including one with an ADA accessible walk-in shower. Pets and smoking are prohibited. Renters should bring their own bed linens, towels, dishes, cookware, and dinnerware.

CAMPING: modern shower house, some full-hookup sites
The modern campground is open from the day before trout season to the third Sunday in October. Each of the 47 campsites (non-electric, electric/ water hookup, full-hookup, and walk-to sites) have a picnic table and fire ring. Two campsites are ADA accessible, and pets are permitted on all sites. The campground has a modern shower house, a sanitary dump station, and a small playground. Firewood is available for purchase near the campground entrance.



SPECIAL EVENTS

APPLE FESTIVAL: Held in October, visitors can see, sample, and purchase apple butter cooked in a large copper kettle. Historical demonstrations include pressing apple cider and grinding cornmeal. Visitors can taste freshly made cornbread and experience various other educational displays throughout the Shoaff's Mill area.

LIGHT UP LITTLE BUFFALO: This family-oriented activity has become a popular holiday event in the county. Colorful lights and displays dot Shoaff's Mill Area and provide the perfect holiday atmosphere. Local school choirs sing carols most nights, and children can visit with Santa. The program is held annually, December 17 to 23 from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

LEARN, EXPERIENCE, CONNECT

Little Buffalo State Park offers a wide variety of programs year round, including stream studies, kayaking, and historical resources. Many programs feature tours of Shoaff's Mill and the mill race.

Curriculum-based environmental education programs are available to schools and organized groups. Call the park office to schedule a group program. A variety of professional development workshops are also offered for teachers.

Contact the park office or explore the online calendar of events, <https://events.dcnr.pa.gov>, for more information on programs and other learning experiences.

HISTORY

The land that became Little Buffalo State Park was occupied by Native Americans for short periods of time as they migrated westward from the increasing European population. The area was part of the massive Albany Purchase of 1754, which acquired the land from the Haudenosaunee. Shortly after, several European families moved into the Little Buffalo Valley. Little Buffalo Creek and Buffalo Ridge were supposedly named by eastern woodland bison hunters in this area.

THE IRON FURNACE ERA: In 1808, Capt. William Power and David Watts built a charcoal burning iron furnace south of the present-day park along what is now Furnace Run. The need for charcoal brought colliers to the area of Little Buffalo Creek. Working year round, colliers cut and stacked wood into mounds 20-25 feet in diameter and burned it slowly for ten days to create charcoal. The wood from one acre of land would make enough charcoal to run the furnace for 24 hours.

Little Buffalo Historic District: National Register of Historic Places

Metal detecting is prohibited within the historic district.

SHOAFS MILL: About 1835, as part of the iron works community, Juniata Iron Furnace owners built a water powered gristmill to replace a smaller one. When the iron works closed over a decade later, its lands, remaining buildings, and equipment were divided up for sale. In 1861, William Shoaff purchased 63 acres of land which included the gristmill and a log cabin. The cabin was dismantled and sold. William built the brick house across from the mill and continued milling wheat flour, buckwheat, cornmeal, and livestock feed.

William died in 1888. His wife, Catherine, took over operation of the mill until their son, Ellis Shoaff, bought and took possession of the mill in 1900. To increase the speed and power of the mill, Ellis purchased a 32-foot steel overshot waterwheel. The wheel has been refurbished and is still operable today. Shoaff's Mill continued to operate until around 1944. The mill was renovated in the 1960s and is back in operation milling cornmeal, cracked corn, and grinding apples for cider during educational programs and demonstrations.

A brochure about Shoaff's Mill is available at the park office.

BLUE BALL TAVERN MUSEUM: The earliest record we have for the tavern's operation comes from 1773 when it was owned and operated by Isaac Sammis. It was later owned by several other individuals, including Peter Kough, and later his son John Koch. A blue ball hung outside to identify the tavern. During the War of 1812, Blue Ball Tavern and nearby White Ball Tavern signaled to one another via horn to help prepare meals and other necessities for soldiers traveling the main route between the Carlisle and Sunbury military posts.



Blue Ball Tavern

Over the years, the tavern offered food, drink, entertainment, and a sleeping loft for travelers. Local people met at the tavern to exchange news. It is rumored that in 1821, the Blue Ball Tavern was the meeting place where plans were laid to create the new county of Perry.

The tavern closed around 1841. In 1844, John Koch transferred the land to the Sulfur Springs Church, which established the cemetery. In 1855, storms destroyed most surrounding buildings and heavily damaged the tavern. Much of the wood was re-used to build the current farmhouse on the existing tavern foundation, but the building now faces the re-routed road.

Today, the Perry County Historical Society operates and maintains a museum and a library in the farmhouse. The basement is restored to look as it did in the 1800s. The tavern museum is open on Sundays in the summer and is run by volunteers with the historical society.

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

Information on nearby attractions is available from the Perry County Chamber of Commerce. 717-582-4523

Just south of New Bloomfield on Huckleberry Road is **Box Huckleberry Natural Area**, a 10-acre plot managed by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry. Visitors can hike a self-guided loop trail and see the rare box huckleberry which grows here and in only one other location in Pennsylvania. This is also a good place to see wildflowers like trailing arbutus and mayapples. Limited parking is available. 717-536-3191

INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS

Little Buffalo State Park

1579 State Park Road
Newport, PA 17074-9428
717-567-9255
LittleBuffSP@pa.gov

An Equal Opportunity Employer

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Electric Vehicle Charging Station

A 2-plug, electric vehicle charging station is available for public use in the Shoaff's Mill parking lot. Please move to another parking space once your vehicle has been charged.

@LittleBuffaloStatePark

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.

Near the current-day park, the Juniata Iron Furnace produced raw "pig iron" at first, but later owners added a forge to the property to make ten-plate stoves, plows, decorative fencing, and various other tools. Later, a larger furnace was also added, likely to keep up with demand.

The iron furnace smelted iron until the prized hardwoods used in charcoaling were depleted around the late 1840s. Shortly afterwards, the furnace permanently closed. In 1855, a strong windstorm destroyed many of the buildings associated with the furnace.

THE PARK: During the late 1960s, the state legislature and Secretary Maurice K. Goddard of the Department of Forests and Waters (now the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) instituted the goal of providing a state park within 25 miles of every citizen in Pennsylvania. State funding allowed land to be purchased and construction of park facilities for the new state park. Little Buffalo State Park officially opened to the public on June 11, 1972.

SULPHUR SPRINGS CEMETERY: The Sulfur Springs Church operated from the early 1820s into the early 1900s and was eventually torn down in the 1920s. The church cemetery had its first burial in 1845 and continued to be used until the last interment in 1944. Also known as Rudolph Cemetery, Sulfur Springs Cemetery is the final resting place for several families that lived in this valley, as well as several war veterans.



CLAYS COVERED BRIDGE: Clays Covered Bridge originally crossed Little Buffalo Creek about one mile west of its present location on the farm of John B. Clay. Built in 1890 by George Harting, the 82-foot bridge sat near where the lake narrows on the western side of the park.

The bridge architecture is a Burr Truss, patented by Theodore Burr of Connecticut. One large arch extends from one side of the bridge to the other. The roof and floor are attached to this arch, as are many king posts. The Burr Truss allowed longer distances to be bridged.

The bridge was refurbished three times: once in 1959, again when it moved to its present location in 1971 due to construction of Holman Lake, and after winter storm damage in 1993. This bridge is part of the Perry County Historical Society's Covered Bridge Tour.

NEWPORT & SHERMAN'S VALLEY RAILROAD: In 1890, railroad owner David Gring moved his narrow gauge railroad (36 inches wide) from Huntingdon County to the western half of Perry County to harvest the valuable timber. In the beginning, the railroad hauled mostly logs and tanbark, then eventually passengers and merchandise. Gring faced fierce competition from the Perry County Railroad, a standard gauge railroad (56 ½ inches wide). After 44 years, the narrow gauge railroad lost out to its larger competitor and went bankrupt in 1937. A large part of the rail bed is still visible today along Covered Bridge Trail and Creek Trail. At the foot of the dam on the rail bed sits Way Car 12, one of the last surviving cars of the Newport & Sherman's Valley Railroad, which was used during the dismantling of the railroad.



Located 20 minutes southeast of the park is **Hawk Rock Overlook** in Duncannon. This moderately challenging hike climbs to the top of Cove Mountain on the Appalachian Trail and provides a beautiful overlook of the Susquehanna River. The hike to the top is just over a mile in length but climbs over 700 feet. The best times to complete this hike are spring and fall.

In an Emergency

Call 911 and contact a park employee. Directions to the nearest hospital are posted on bulletin boards and at the park office.

NEAREST HOSPITALS

**Penn State Health
Hampden Medical Center**
2200 Good Hope Road
Enola, PA 17025
717-981-9000

UPMC Pinnacle Harrisburg
111 South Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-782-3131

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 minimize your impact on the campsite.

WILDLIFE WATCHING

Holman Lake provides habitat for many animals, including green herons, blue herons, and waterfowl. The west end of the lake is home to wood ducks and painted turtles. Bald eagles and ospreys are often seen fishing in Holman Lake. Many waterfowl use the lake as a rest stop during migration, including Canada geese, mallards, mergansers, buffleheads, and common loons.

A wide variety of birds and mammals inhabit the park's forest, field and riparian habitats. White-tailed deer and warblers can often be seen near the forest edges. Muskrats and minks often visit areas near Little

Buffalo Creek. Cavity nest boxes are scattered throughout the park and are monitored by volunteers. Please enjoy watching the bluebirds, but do not disturb nest boxes.



Great egret

Geology

The Little Buffalo Valley is underlain by interbedded shales, siltstones, and some very fine-grained sandstone. These rocks were laid down during the Devonian period between 380 and 390 million years ago in a shallow sea. The sea was teeming with life, and much fossil evidence remains to prove this including trilobites, crinoids, and brachiopods. Several shale pits allow visitors to look for evidence of the past. Contact the park office for rules regarding fossil hunting.

HIKING: 10 miles

Blue Ball Trail
0.25 mile | Easiest hiking | Out-and-back
trail | No blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms,
 potable water, benches

This path connects the historic Blue Ball Tavern to the Covered Bridge Trail and Shoaffs Mill Area. Follow the trail along the stream and through a patch of old ash trees beloved by the park's woodpeckers.

Buffalo Ridge Trail
1.5 miles | Most difficult hiking | Out-and-back trail | White blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms, picnic tables

Traveling along a ridge that was once logged to fuel the nearby Juniata Furnace, this trail winds up to the top of Buffalo Ridge. Look closely when hiking for flat, rounded areas with no trees; these are charcoal hearths.

Campground Spur Trail
0.5 mile | More difficult hiking | Out-and-back trail | Yellow blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking

Starting at the campground, the trail passes by a pond inhabited by panfish, bass, and pickerel frogs. Enjoy lots of spring wildflowers as the trail gently descends toward the bottom of the ridge and connects with Middle Ridge Trail.

Covered Bridge Trail
0.35 mile | Easiest hiking | Loop trail |
No blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms,
 potable water, picnic tables, benches

Covered Bridge Trail is a gravel trail that connects the historic Clays Covered Bridge, Blue Ball Trail, and Way Car 12, the historic railway car. The trail passes directly through the East Day Use Area where you can find a playground, entertainment pavilion, and picnic tables. Additionally, it travels along and over Little Buffalo Creek and provides access to many areas to see aquatic wildlife.

Exercise Trail
1.2 miles | Easiest hiking | Loop trail |
No blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms,
benches

Along the trail, 18 stations feature exercise equipment and instructional signage. Additionally, the trail includes a section that runs along a trout creek and travels through an area of open habitat, home to Eastern bluebirds.

Fishermans Trail
1.0 mile | Easiest hiking | Out-and-back
trail | Yellow blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms,
 potable water, picnic tables, benches

Fishermen's Trail is a gravel trail that travels along the lake and connects the Swimming Pool Area to the Shoaff's Mill Area via the Dam Breast or Mill Race Trail. Situated in a dense stand of hemlocks, the mostly shaded trail is usually cooler than surrounding areas and ideal for observing wildlife or finding a fishing spot.

Gantt Trail
0.32 mile | More difficult hiking | Connector
trail | Yellow blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking

Connecting Mill Race and Fishermans trails, this rocky trail is along the eastern end of the lake. Winding through a hemlock forest, the trail climbs and descends Buffalo Ridge.

Little Buffalo Creek Trail
1.9 miles | More difficult hiking | Loop trail |
Blue blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking, cross-country
 skiing recommended
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms,
 potable water, picnic tables

Little Buffalo Creek Trail runs from pavilions 1 and 2 to the far west end of the park, traveling along the creek where there are plenty of fishing spots. It passes through habitats that include forest, wetland, shrubland, and meadows.

Natural springs cause the trail to be wet and muddy in places throughout the year, but it is a good area to hear warblers calling from the trees that line the creek. In the winter, enjoy cross-country skiing on the flat trail.

Middle Ridge Trail
2.5 miles | Most difficult hiking | Out-and-back trail | Red blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking

This trail runs from the Exercise Trail in the east end of the park to the Creek Trail in the west, crossing over Little Buffalo Road at both ends. Throughout the trail you will experience both change in elevation and the various habitats that accompany it, including some open field environments that offer scenic views of Holman Lake.

Mill Race Trail
0.5 mile | More difficult hiking | Connector
trail | Orange blazes
Recreations permitted: hiking

This trail follows the mill race from Shoaff's Mill to the mill dam where water is directed from Juniata Furnace Run down to the waterwheel. After crossing the mill dam, look for amphibians and other wildlife in the wet areas surrounding the stream as it meets with Little Buffalo Creek.

