



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.



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COWANS GAP STATE PARK

Cowans Gap State Park is a 1,085-acre park in the beautiful Allens Valley of Fulton County. A 42-acre lake, two campgrounds, rustic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) cabins, and many trails are prime attractions. State forest land surrounds the park, providing additional options for recreation and natural beauty in all seasons.

Directions

GPS DD: Lat. 39.99478 Long. -77.9249

The park is north of US 30 and Fort Loudon.

FROM I-76 WEST: Take Exit 180, Fort Littleton, turn right onto US 522 north to Burnt Cabins, and follow signs to the park.

FROM I-76 EAST: Take Exit 189, Willow Hill, then PA 75 south to Richmond Furnace, and follow signs to the park.

FROM US 30: At Fort Loudon take PA 75 north to Richmond Furnace, and follow signs to the park.

Reservations

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

LEARN, EXPERIENCE, CONNECT

Cowans Gap State Park offers a wide variety of programs April through November. Programs like kayaking, bats, bears, and history focus on the natural and historic resources of the park and surrounding landscape. 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 history of Cowans Gap State Park is one of war, forbidden love, and hard work.

Famous Roads

The French and Indian War began in 1754 as the French and British fought for the Ohio River Valley, which included western Pennsylvania. Key to the control of the area was the Forks of the Ohio (Pittsburgh), which was held by the French. In 1755, British Major General Edward Braddock carved a new road from Cumberland, Maryland, toward the Forks.

To carry additional supplies to Braddock's army, Colonel James Burd began a road from Shippensburg that was planned to reach Braddock's forces at Turkey Foot (Confluence, Pa.). Burd's Road climbed Tuscarora Mountain by passing through an unnamed gap that was eventually named Cowans Gap. Braddock's army was defeated and Burd's Road was never completed past Berlin, Somerset County.

In 1758, the British again sent a campaign toward the Forks of the Ohio. General John Forbes, along with his aide Lieutenant Colonel George Washington and second in command Lieutenant Colonel Henry Bouquet, carved a new road (Forbes Road) that followed Burd's Road through Bedford County then headed due west to the Forks of the Ohio. General Forbes drove the French out of Pennsylvania. In 1763, Colonel Henry Bouquet again used Forbes Road to break the siege of Fort Pitt during Pontiac's War.

Names

In 1775, Loyalist John Samuel Cowan met Patriot Mary Mueller in Boston. Although from opposite political parties, the couple eloped several years later and headed for Kentucky. The family story relates that while crossing the Conococheague Creek near Fort Loudon, their wagon broke down. John traded their horses and wagon to a Tuscarora Indian chief for the land that now is known as Cowans Gap.

John secured peace pipe and tomahawk rights from the tribe, marking a big chestnut tree with three slashes, a sign of peace. In 1785, John secured a warrant for the land from the Proprietors of Pennsylvania. John and Mary built their house along Forbes Road, near what is now the junction of Stumpy Lane and Aughwick Road.

Most of Cowans Gap State Park is in Allens Valley, named for neighbors of the Cowans.

Industrial Times

Nearby, Mount Pleasant Iron Furnace operated from 1783 to 1835. Richmond Iron Furnace operated from 1865 to 1885. The furnaces mined iron ore along the face of Tuscarora Mountain and in the gap. The furnaces' demand for charcoal led to clear-cutting portions of the forests in the gap and the valley every 20 to 25 years.

Beginning in 1893, Harrison Kalbach, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, began purchasing land and timbering rights amounting to 4,800 acres around Cowans Gap. Kalbach and Company constructed a railroad of wooden rails from Richmond Furnace up the mountain and into the gap to move the lumber to market. Today's Richmond Furnace Road follows the old railroad right-of-way. Kalbach and his partner Charles Spangler,

of McConnellsburg, operated a portable sawmill in the valley, cutting mainly pine and oak. The final cut was completed in 1907, leaving a landscape of over-cut forests and erosion.

Recovery

In 1933, to relieve the rampant unemployment of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. The young men in the CCC received food, clothes, and a small paycheck.

The CCC boys built roads, trails, and recreational facilities, fought fires, planted trees, and many other conservation activities.

Richmond Furnace Camp S-54 was built next to the new forestry station at Cowans Gap. The camp was locally called Camp Fox for an enrollee killed in an accident while stationed there.

The first enrollees to the camp lived in tents while they built more permanent facilities. From 1933 to 1941, the CCC built 30 miles of road, four bridges, 32 miles of fire trails, and 11 miles of telephone lines. In Cowans Gap State Park, the CCC built 10 cabins, 4 picnic pavilions, and spent three years building the dam. The Cowans Gap rustic cabins are on the National Register of Historic Places.



CCC boys making a telephone pole

THE GEOLOGY OF COWANS GAP

Cowans Gap State Park is in Allens Valley, a narrow highland valley between Tuscarora Mountain to the east and Cove Mountain to the west. Allens Valley runs from south of Cowans Gap State Park north to the town of Burnt Cabins.

A gap is a notch or pass in a mountain. Cowans Gap is an east-west pass in the north-south oriented Tuscarora Mountain, connecting Allens and Path valleys. The gap can be seen from the west side of Cowans Lake, looking east, or from PA 75, looking west.

Millions of years ago, the Allens Valley area likely had two small valleys. In the south, a stream flowed north through the park

area, then turned east and flowed out through Cowans Gap. In the north, the ancestral South Branch Little Aughwick Creek drained north toward Burnt Cabins.

The Cowans Gap stream slowly eroded the hard sandstone bedrock of the gap. The ancestral South Branch Little Aughwick Creek more easily eroded the softer shale bedrock of the north valley. Through headward erosion, the stream's head (its beginning) advanced south, lengthening the north valley. In a process called stream piracy, the headwaters of the ancestral South Branch Little Aughwick Creek breached the stream that flowed through Cowans Gap, rerouting it north into its own bed. This created one long

stream and valley the length of Allens Valley, bypassing Cowans Gap.

Today, South Branch Little Aughwick Creek continues to carve Allens Valley deeper, leaving behind the wind gap called Cowans Gap.



RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Spend the Day

PICNICKING: Picnic areas along the eastern side of Cowans Gap Lake are mostly shaded with several CCC-era stone fireplaces and charcoal grills scattered throughout. Some picnic tables are ADA accessible and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Visitors can enjoy a playground, sand volleyball court, and horseshoe pits.

Four picnic pavilions may be reserved up to 11 months in advance for a fee. Unreserved picnic pavilions are free on a first-come, first-served basis. Pavilions 2 and 4 have electricity. Pavilions 2, 3, and 4 are stone and have a fireplace. Pavilion 1 is ADA accessible.

SWIMMING: The 500-foot sand beach is open from late May through September, 8:00 AM to sunset. Please read and follow posted rules for swimming. Swim at your own risk.

FOOD AND REFRESHMENT CONCESSION: The concession in the day use area serves many snacks and hot foods. It also has ice, charcoal, firewood, and other camping supplies. The concession is open Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day.

HORSEBACK RIDING: 3 miles

Lot 7 on the west side of the lake has parking for horse trailers. Horse Trail begins there and leads to Knobsville Road Trail, which leads to additional trails in Buchanan State Forest.

Stay the Night



CABINS: Ten rustic cabins are open mid-April through mid-December. The three-room cabins have a four-person overnight capacity and contain a refrigerator, stove, microwave, fireplace, ceiling fan, and two single bunk beds. Up to two dogs are permitted in designated cabins for an additional fee.

Enjoy the Winter

For ice and snow conditions, visit www.visitPAparks.com.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: Closed park roads and some hiking trails are suitable for cross-country skiing.

ICE SAFETY: For your safety, make sure ice is at least 4" thick for a single user and 7" thick for a small group. Always carry safety equipment.

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 630 acres are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. Common game species are deer, turkeys, and squirrels. The park borders Buchanan State Forest, which is open to hunting, trapping, and dog training.

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 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.

HIKING: See reverse side.

FISHING: Cowans Gap Lake offers excellent fishing for trouts, basses, perch, catfishes, and panfishes. There are two ADA accessible fishing piers. South Branch Little Aughwick Creek offers good trout fishing. The stream and lake are stocked periodically throughout the year. Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply.

BOATING: electric motors only

There are two boat launches with reservable mooring areas on Cowans Gap Lake. A concession in the day use area rents rowboats, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards, and paddle boats and is open daily in the summer.

Motorboats must display a boat registration from any state. Non-powered boats must display one of the following: boat registration from any state; launch permit or mooring permit from Pennsylvania State Parks, available at most state park offices; launch use permit from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

BIKING: 1.5 miles

Lakeside Trail is flat and excellent for casual bikers.

MOUNTAIN BIKING: 2 miles

North and South Logging Road trails are the primary mountain biking trails in the park. Knobsville Trail provides access to many miles of mountain biking trails in Buchanan State Forest.

CAMPING: flush toilets, warm showers Cowans Gap has about 200 campsites in two areas. The camping areas have modern shower houses with flush toilets and warm showers. A sanitary dump station is in Camping Area A.

The campsites can accommodate a small tent to a large motor home. Seven walk-to tent sites are adjacent to Camping Area B. Pets are permitted on designated campsites. An overnight courtesy boat mooring area is provided for registered campers during their stay at the park. The camping area is open from the second Friday of April until the day following rifle deer season in December.

ORGANIZED GROUP TENTING: This camping area accommodates organized groups of up to forty people. The restroom has flush toilets but no showers and is open from the second Friday of April to the third Sunday in October.



There is no indoor plumbing in the cabins. A water faucet is outside. A central comfort station has showers and flush toilets. The cabins were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and are on the National Register of Historic Places.

ICE FISHING: The 42-acre Cowans Gap Lake is open for ice fishing except within the ice skating area. **Ice thickness is not monitored.**

ICE SKATING: A section of the lake by the beach is available exclusively for ice skating. **Ice thickness is monitored only in the ice skating area.**

WILDLIFE WATCHING

Cowans Gap State Park is in Allens Valley, a narrow, highland valley between Tuscarora and Cove mountains. The valley floor is over seven hundred feet lower than Tuscarora and Cove mountains, yet Allens Valley is still several hundred feet higher than the surrounding valleys. The highland nature of Cowans Gap State Park makes the park an interesting place to see wildlife in all seasons.

Lush vegetation and warm days are hallmarks of summer. Early June is the best time to see the grand displays of mountain laurel along the trails and forestry roads. Watch for deer, bears, and even box turtles raiding berry patches. While walking, listen for the ovenbird's *teacher-teacher-teacher* call and the *drink-your-tea* call of eastern towhees as they move about in the brush. As evening approaches, enjoy the flute-like calls of veeries and wood thrushes. Listen for the whip-poor-wills in the mid-summer evenings. These very active nocturnal birds can be heard calling their name *whip-poor-will* hundreds of times each night.

Warm summer evenings bring out the bats to feast on night-flying insects. Watch the park's bat boxes for the evening emergence, and then enjoy the bats as they dance in the night air catching insects and swooping low over the lake to drink. At the lake, the *jug-o-rum* call of bullfrogs and the twanging call of the green frogs can be heard.

Fall offers warm, breezy days with tree leaves turning to shades of red, golden yellows, and orange. Many species of woodland birds make their return visits as they migrate southward. This is a great time to view migrating raptors as they use the updrafts of the mountainsides to conserve energy on their long migration journey. Watch for squirrels, chipmunks, and turkeys as they compete with the deer and bears for acorns. As you sit around a warm evening campfire, take time to listen for the far-off calls of swans and geese in their V-shaped formations high in the dark sky.

Winter is a great time to view the ruggedness of the mountains with their steep, rock-strewn slopes interspersed with the evergreen mountain laurels and rhododendrons. Look for deer and winter birds, like chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers as they spend their waking hours hunting for food.

Spring brings renewal to the natural environment as spring wildflowers, such as spring beauties and sweet white violets, bloom in the warm spring sunlight before the tree canopy blocks the sun from striking the forest floor. Animals come out of hibernation and many species of migrating birds return or stop at the park on their northward journey. Before the trees get their leaves is a great time to observe warblers as they migrate through or set up their breeding territories. In the mornings, listen for the courtship songs of birds. Listen in the evenings for the courtship calls of frogs and toads along the lakeshore and wetlands.

Access for People with Disabilities

Park facilities available for use by people with disabilities include picnic areas, campground, cabins, parking, restrooms, shower houses, and a fishing pier. A special vehicle permit is issued at the park office to give access to areas of the park not open to vehicles.

This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities

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.

• Please camp only in designated areas and minimize your impact on the campsite.

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

• Please park only in designated areas and obey all traffic regulations.

• Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from the Fulton County Tourist Promotion Agency. www.FultonCountyPA.com

Buchanan's Birthplace State Park is in the foothills of Tuscarora Mountain on the western side of Cumberland Valley, seven miles north of US 30. The park commemorates James Buchanan, 15th President of the United States. 717-485-3948

The 75,000-acre **Buchanan State Forest** is adjacent to Cowans Gap and has hiking, fishing, hunting, and general recreation. 717-485-3148

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. An emergency phone is near the park office and near the north end of Lot 3.

NEAREST HOSPITAL

Fulton County Medical Center
214 Peach Orchard Road
McConnellsburg, PA 17233

HIKING: 13 miles

Cameron Trail: 0.5 mile, more difficult hiking
This very steep, boundary trail on the south end of the park ends atop Cove Mountain. The CCC built this trail for firefighting access to Buchanan State Forest.

Doe Trail: 0.2 mile, easiest hiking
This short spur trail connects Parking Lot 7 with North Logging Road Trail above Camping Area B.

Geyer Trail: 0.5 mile, most difficult hiking
A rather steep boundary trail that passes through areas of mountain laurel, Geyer Trail starts along Aughwick Road then climbs Tuscarora Mountain to Tuscarora Trail.

North and South Logging Road Trails: 1.7 miles, easiest hiking
This old logging road can be walked from one end of the park to the other and is a good trail to use to make loop hikes with other trails on

the side of Cove Mountain. Steep trails must be hiked to reach these trails.

Horseshoe Trail: 0.5 mile, most difficult hiking
A very steep and rugged trail, Horseshoe Trail passes over loose stones on steep slopes. The trail starts at the intersection of Tuscarora Trail below the park dam and climbs to the top of Cove Mountain ending on Knobsville Road Trail. Experienced hikers only!

Knobsville Road Trail: 1.3 miles, more difficult hiking
Beginning just south of the lake, this old road climbs up and over Cove Mountain to the park boundary. Knobsville Road Trail passes a CCC-era incinerator, a landslide wayside, and an overlook of the park. At the park boundary, there are many trail options to extend the hike or loop back to the trailhead south of the lake.

Lakeside Trail: 1.5 miles, easiest hiking
This very pleasant, nearly level, scenic trail encircles Cowans Gap Lake. The most popular trail in the park, it can be accessed from many areas and trails.

One Mile Trail: 0.4 mile, easiest hiking
Shaded by mountain laurel, this trail begins along Aughwick Road just above the park office, then winds along the bottom of Tuscarora Mountain to join Three Mile Trail. For a one-mile hike, hikers can follow Three Mile Trail to the left, returning to Aughwick Road across from Parking Lot 3, then follow Aughwick Road back to the beginning of One Mile Trail.

Plessinger Trail: 1.1 miles, more difficult hiking
A rocky, streamside trail that meanders alongside Aughwick Creek, Plessinger Trail provides access for anglers and is a pleasant

walk for wildlife watchers. The south end of the trail can be muddy.

Three Mile Trail: 1.1 miles, more difficult hiking
This trail begins along Aughwick Road across from the upper end of Camping Area A. The trail wanders through mountain laurel on the side of Tuscarora Mountain and is a nice trail to walk in June when the mountain laurel is in bloom. Be aware; a short, 200-foot section of the trail is very steep.

Standing Stone Hiking Trail: 84 miles (2.4 miles in the park), orange blazes, most difficult hiking
Starting at the Cowans Gap Lake spillway, this trail goes north to Greenwood Furnace State Park. Part of the Great Eastern Trail system, Standing Stone Trail offers beautiful vistas and a challenging experience to the seasoned hiker. This trail connects to

Mid State Trail, Tuscarora Trail, and the Appalachian Trail. Overnight parking is only permitted at the park office, and backpackers must fill out an overnight parking permit, which is available at the park office.

Tuscarora Trail: 110 miles (2 miles in the park), blue blazes, more difficult hiking
The more popular section to walk is a 1.5-mile section beginning across Aughwick Road from Parking Lot 3, climbing along Tuscarora Mountain to the junction with Geyer Trail. Once at the junction with Geyer Trail, hikers have several options to continue their hike. They can return to the day use area by retracing their steps or by following Geyer Trail to Cameron Trail then to Plessinger Trail. They can also take Tuscarora Trail another 2.4 miles south to the top of Big Mountain to see a spectacular overlook of the Path Valley and Franklin County. From the Big Mountain Overlook, hikers will have

a 3.9-mile return hike back to the park. The Cowans Gap section of the trail is renowned for its unusual rock outcroppings and rock fields.

Tell us about your hike at: www.ExplorePATrails.com.

CAUTION: Hikers should be in good physical condition, wear sturdy boots, and use caution due to slippery/wet conditions and steep trail sections.

The following guidelines will help ensure a safe and enjoyable hiking experience while at the park:

- Always wear sturdy boots. Wearing sneakers, sandals, “water shoes,” or “street shoes” can lead to serious accidents in this park.
- Give yourself plenty of time for your hike. The weather changes quickly in the park. Plan to be off the trails well before dark.

