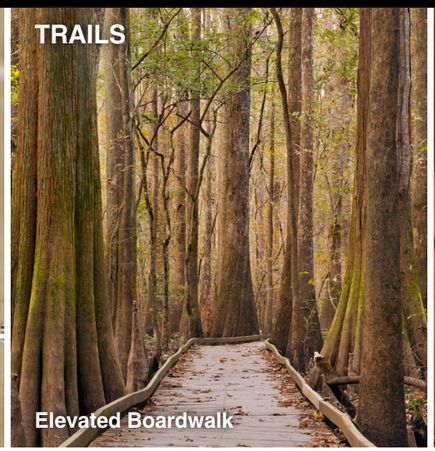
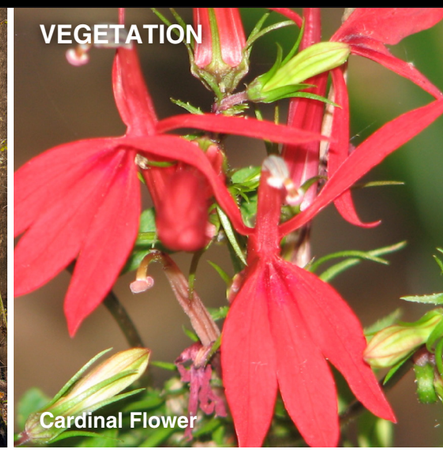
Congaree National Park Trail Guide

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Congaree National Park, the largest remaining tract of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest is home to a diversity of plants and animals that are protected for future generations. Disturbing wildlife, picking plants, digging bait, and removing resources from the park is prohibited. Please do not litter.

Fishing is permitted with a valid SC fishing license.

Pets are allowed on all trails and must be on a leash no longer than six feet in length. Please pick up after your pet.

The park is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Harry Hampton Visitor Center houses a museum, exhibits and an auditorium which features a park film. For hours of operation please call (803)776-4396 or visit the park website at www.nps.gov/cong.

Trail markers are affixed to trees about six feet above ground. They are brown markers with white reflective sheeting and a number indicating the trail designation.

WILDERNESS AND LEAVE NO TRACE INFORMATION

The backcountry of the park is protected under the Wilderness Act of 1964, preserving this land in its natural condition and providing opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Camping by hiking or paddling is permitted in the backcountry. Backcountry is defined as the area south of Cedar Creek between Bannister Bridge canoe access and Cedar Creek Landing. Permits can be obtained through self-registration at the Longleaf Campground. Campfires are prohibited.

Recreation in wilderness areas requires awareness of water levels, weather conditions, and park regulations. Please check the park website for detailed information. Leave No Trace ethics dictate that visitors leave no trace of their visit in an effort to preserve the park's unique values for current and future visitors.

Bicycles, motorized vehicles, and watercraft are not permitted in wilderness areas. Cell phone service is not reliable.

Camping is permitted in the Longleaf and Bluff campgrounds. Each site has a picnic table and a fire ring. Reservations can be made by calling (877) 444-6777 or visiting www.Recreation.gov.

CANOE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Canoeing and kayaking provide opportunities for exploration of the old-growth forest at various water levels. Check water levels on Cedar Creek and Congaree River before paddling. The floodplain may be in a flood stage, making navigation difficult and paddling in swift currents challenging and potentially dangerous.

Cedar Creek can be accessed on the western boundary of the park at Bannister Bridge Canoe Access for a six mile paddle downstream to the Cedar Creek Canoe Access. This paddle takes approximately four to six hours depending on the water level of Cedar Creek and skill level of the paddler.

Paddling up or downstream from Cedar Creek Landing is a great way to experience Cedar Creek for various lengths of time.

Paddling from the Cedar Creek Landing to Bates Bridge Landing is 20 miles and should be done as an overnight camping trip. A camping permit is required.

The Congaree River Blue Trail is a 50-mile designated recreational paddling trail, extending from Columbia to Congaree National Park. Once in the park, paddlers have the opportunity to explore the hiking trails. A camping permit is required.

Paddlers must carry a whistle and a PFD. As an additional precaution, we recommend carrying extra water and food, first aid kid, emergency supplies, map, and compass.

TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS

Boardwalk (2.4 Miles) –

The boardwalk begins on a bluff at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center with an elevated section that leads down into the old-growth bottomland hardwood forest. A variety of different tree species can be observed including bald cypress and tupelo trees in the lowest elevations. Loblolly pines, oaks, holly trees and maples can also be observed. The boardwalk has benches along the way and is wheelchair and stroller accessible.

Bluff Trail #1 (1.7 Miles) –

This upland trail loops north of the visitor center and connects to the elevated boardwalk for a short distance. The Bluff Trail passes through a young forest of loblolly and longleaf pines. Evidence of prescribed fires can be found along the Bluff Trail.

Sims Trail #2 (3 Miles) –

The Sims trail, an old gravel road, runs from the Bluff Trail on its northern end to Cedar Creek on its southern end, crossing the boardwalk twice. The clearing at the intersection with the Weston Lake Loop Trail was once the site of a hunt club where Harry Hampton was a member.

Weston Lake Loop Trail #3 (4.4 Miles) –

This loop provides great views of Cedar Creek where otters and wading birds may be observed. The eastern portion of the trail follows a cypress-tupelo slough (dried-up river bed) where many cypress knees can be seen sticking out of water.

Oakridge Trail #4 (6.6 Miles) –

Passing through a rich stretch of old-growth forest, the Oakridge Trail traverses a subtle ridge where a variety of large oaks grow. The number of low-lying sloughs (dried-up river beds) makes this trail great for viewing wildlife.

River Trail #5 (10.0 Miles) –

This trail leads to the Congaree River, the lifeblood of the park's great natural diversity. Approximately ten times a year, the river overflows its banks and pulses water throughout the bottomland forest. When the river is low, a large sandbar may be visible. Much of the forest along the river was logged prior to the park's establishment and vegetation here is notably denser than that of other trails.

Kingsnake Trail #6 (11.7 Miles) –

The Kingsnake trail, which is not a loop, is a favorite trail for birders because of the diverse vegetation and proximity to Cedar Creek. When the sloughs (dried-up river beds) are full of water, beautiful views are around every bend.

Bates Ferry Trail #7 (2 miles) –

Starting from Route 601, this trail follows a 1920's ferry road south to the Congaree. It is a remnant of the area's rich history, which includes colonial-era ferries that once crossed near here. While at the river, please be aware that the bank is steep and could potentially be slippery. It is best to stay on the marked path, as old side trails are unmarked and not maintained.

Longleaf Trail #8 (.6 miles) –

This trail branches off the Bluff trail, providing access to the Longleaf Campground.