

Rapid City and Black Hills Winter Sports

The winter climate in Rapid City can be mystifying to residents as well as to visitors. Outdoor tennis in the dead of winter is often possible as well as picnics in the park with Alpine or Nordic skiing or snowmobiling just minutes away.

Rapid City even has one of its major golf tournaments each January called the "Banana Belt Classic."

There are times in a Rapid City winter when our bananas are served chilled, but balmy days suitable for outdoor recreation are common because of the city's protection from nearby mountains which intercept and trap moving storm systems which, in turn, create outstanding snow sports available on a few miles away. Chinook winds are also commonplace raising temperatures into the 70's and even 80's.

Our area has long been one of the nation's favorite summer vacation areas, and it is now beginning to be one of its winter favorites as well. While Rapid City stays relatively mild and dry in the winter, just 35 miles away and some 4,000 feet higher, Mother Nature has been known to give us up to 220 inches of beautiful powder snow annually. This is all just a short drive from your residence, and you can rent about everything you need to enjoy it.



We have two challenging Alpine areas and our cross-country and snowmobiling is unsurpassed anywhere in the United States, according to the experts. In fact, our over 200 miles of groomed snowmobile trails (and over one million acres of national forest lands), make this a testing area for many of the world's snowmobile manufacturers and a favorite location for advertising agencies filming commercials for snowmobiling equipment.

Maybe you'd enjoy something a little less strenuous. While summer scenic tours are almost always part of vacations here, winter scenic tours are equally spectacular and perhaps even more beautiful. Most scenic routes are open and maintained throughout the winter, and the mantle of virgin snow on pine-clad mountains give the Hills a Christmas-card look that will have you diving for your camera.



In the winter, there's a peace and serenity in the Hills contrasting sharply with the hustle and bustle of summer. You can mosey along in your car rather than watch your rearview mirror. Mountain Rushmore remains open all winter as well as the businesses which serve visitors to the national memorial. An added winter tourist attraction is the large number and variety of wildlife in the fields and canyons along the highways which summer visitors rarely see.

Black Hills Lakes by Ruth Brown, Rapid City Journal (August 5, 2010)

Besides a variety of water activities, the lakes of the Black Hills offer an original environment.

"The scenery with all the ponderosa pine forest and the beautiful cliffs and the mountains around the lakes offer a whole different view and atmosphere than you would get at other lakes," said Amy Ballard, recreational forester for the Black Hills National Forest. "You can pull a boat up to the shore, and you can go on the beaches because it's absolutely public land. There's no stores, no billboards, no private docks and no houses that have private land. It's great."



Whether families are looking to enjoy a busy lake with speed boats or a quieter lake that's perfect for picnics and canoeing, the Black Hills has it.

"Deerfield Lake is a more quiet recreation experience because it's a no-wake lake," Ballard said. "It's the perfect place to kayak or canoe." Motor boats and pontoons can launch at Deerfield Lake, but it is a no-swim beach, according to Ballard.

"The water is very cold and you wouldn't want to swim there, but it has two nice picnic areas and camping," she said. "It is a nice quiet place to go and visit."

If visitors are looking to catch some fish, they may have better luck at a smaller lake such as Deerfield or Roubaix Lake, near Silver City.

"Certainly when it comes to Black Hills fisheries, we stock (Deerfield and Roubaix) often and with a lot of fish," said Gene Galinat, regional fisheries manager for South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks. "We stock with high numbers and nice-size fish. It keeps catch rates high and the size of the fish high."

Galinat said larger fishing areas such as Angostura and Belle Fourche reservoirs repopulate more naturally than the stocked lakes. Deerfield Lake is heavily populated with rainbow trout and some perch that should offer "outstanding fishing," he said.

Roubaix Lake is stocked with 11-inch fish and some 15-inch fish.



Custer State Park is home to four lakes, all of which can be enjoyed for different reasons.

For fans of jet-skiing, water-skiing and wake-boarding, Stockade Lake may be the place to visit.

"Stockade is the largest lake in the park, and can be used by all types of watercraft; there is no limit on motor size," said Craig Pugsley, park visitor services coordinator. "There is a swimming beach and boat ramp and a nice diversity of fishing." Legion Lake and Sylvan Lake offer canoe, row boat and paddleboat rentals, as well as swimming beaches and trout fishing. Legion and Sylvan lakes allow electric motors, but not power motorboats.

Center Lake is a no-wake lake and a common place for canoes and paddleboats to roam without being disturbed by large motorboats, Pugsley said.

For larger lakes, Pactola Reservoir and Sheridan Lake, both about 15 miles west of Rapid City, offer fishing, boating, camping, swimming and water-skiing. Sheridan is close to trailheads for the Flume Trail and the Centennial Trail. Pactola, the largest and deepest reservoir in the Black Hills, has a visitor center and offers fly fishing below the dam's spillway.

The temperature of the water at some locations, including Angostura Reservoir, has reached the perfect swimming temperature of nearly 80 degrees. Angostura has 47 miles of shoreline, with both developed and undeveloped beaches that have natural sand.

"Angostura has great waters to spend time whether it's swimming or fishing," said Willy Collingnon, district supervisor for Angostura recreation area. "It's a great place to spend a hot day."

Fishing

For the fisherman, year-round opportunities exist for the pursuit of rainbows, browns, brook, and cutthroat species of trout in the many streams, rivers and lakes of the area. Northern pike, yellow perch, and largemouth bass are also available in select areas.



Fishing in the Black Hills of South Dakota is primarily trout fishing in lakes and small streams. Most of these are in the Black Hills National Forest or Custer State Park. The largest lakes are Pactola Reservoir, Deerfield Lake, and Sheridan Lake. Some other lakes are Canyon Lake, Horsethief Lake, Legion Lake, Center Lake, Roubaix Lake, and Bismarck Lake. Streams in the area include Rapid Creek, Castle Creek, Spring Creek, Grace Coolidge Creek, and Spearfish Creek. Fish species available are mainly rainbow, brown and brook trout. Limited fishing is available for largemouth bass, northern pike and other warm water species in the Black Hills.

Hunting

The Black Hills area offers a variety of year round hunting opportunities. There are pronghorn antelope, mule deer, whitetail deer, elk, sage grouse, sharptail grouse, waterfowl, dove, small game and turkey hunting in the spring and fall. Bobcat, mountain lion, other furbearers, and small game are hunted in the winter. There is year-round hunting for coyotes, red fox, jack rabbits, and other animals classified as predators.

The Black Hills area ranges from timbered canyon country to river bottom meadows to sagebrush prairie. Wildlife lives, feeds and reproduces in the greatest abundance on the edge of one environment change to the next. The variety of habitat gives this area a very highly-diversified wildlife population and allows the hunter to experience a variety of wildlife viewing and hunting.

Obtaining Hunting & Fishing Licenses

South Dakota fishing and small game hunting licenses may be purchased from authorized license agents – such as sporting goods stores, bait shops and marinas – or at county courthouses. Big game and other hunting licenses must be applied for by season through the Game, Fish & Parks Department licensing office in Pierre. Application forms, deadlines and other information is available on each hunting season from the local GF&P offices or license agents.



Hike Up Crazy Horse

Held now for more than two decades, the annual Crazy Horse Volksmarch (an organized hike) is a woodlands ramble to the world's largest mountain carving in progress.

The 10K (6.2-mile) round trip hike is the most popular event of its kind in the nation, drawing up to 15,000 participants. It is the only time each year (weather permitting) the public can walk to the mountain carving in the southern Black Hills of South Dakota.

The Crazy Horse Volksmarch is sponsored by the Black Hills Chapter of the American Volkssport Association and hosted by Crazy Horse Memorial. Admission is free to the Memorial for Volksmarchers with a suggested two cans of food for each hiker for the KOTA Care and Share Food Drive. The Association charges \$3 per person (for all ages) for the hike.

There is no advance registration, but every hiker must check in at the starting point. The Memorial gates open at 6 a.m., and the hike starts between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. each day.

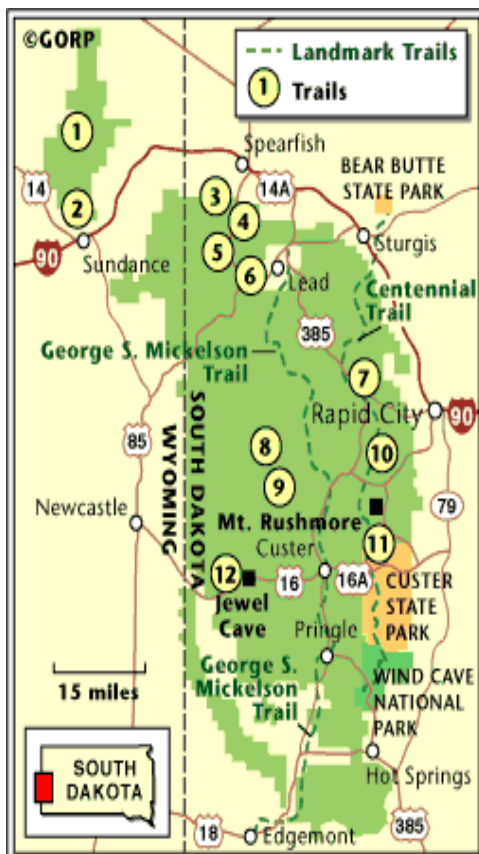
Hikers must register by 1 p.m. and be off the trail by 4 p.m. No pets of any kind are allowed on the trail.

The Laughing Water Restaurant at the Memorial opens for breakfast at 6 a.m. for the Volksmarch, and also serves lunch and dinner. The snack shop also is open. Coffee is always free at Crazy Horse Memorial.

The hike's turn-around point is on the outstretched arm directly in front of the carved face of Crazy Horse. Hikers get an up-close view of the mountain work that is blocking out the 22-story-high horse's head.



Hiker's Paradise



Because it is one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the forces of nature over eons of time have mellowed the Black Hills into a highly "user-friendly" area and none benefit more than the growing legions of hikers who take to "the Hills".

The newest of the trails system is the George S. Mickelson Trail.

Conceived in 1983, when Burlington Northern Railroad abandoned its 110-mile route from Deadwood to Edgemont, the rail grade includes high trestles, hardrock tunnels, cliff cuts and deep canyons.

It's great for either conventional bikes or mountain bikes, for easy hiking, or for horseback riding.

One of the state's premier hiking trails is the Centennial Trail, which was constructed to mark the 100th anniversary of statehood in South Dakota.

The trail stretches 111 miles from Bear Butte State Park in the north to Norbeck Lake in southern Wind Cave National Park near Hot Springs. It passes within one mile of Mt. Rushmore National Monument. The trail extends through two state parks, a national park, a national memorial, a national forest and a national historic recreation area.

Other worthwhile trail systems in the area include: Black Elk Wilderness and Norbeck Wildlife Preserve in the Black Hills National Forest which offers more than 50

miles of hiking trails. One trail climbs to the top of 7,242-foot Harney Peak, where hikers can see for 60 miles.

Badland National Park has six developed trails, ranging from the easy quarter-mile Fossil Exhibit Trail to the six-mile Medicine Root Trail. All of the 24,000-acre park is open to hikers.

Trails in Custer State Park range from the interpretive Prairie Trail, a 4-mile loop through rolling grassland, to the 12-mile trek along French Creek, which winds its way through lush forest and vegetation.