

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.



Printed on recycled paper

2017



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) built cabins, and many hiking trails are prime attractions. State forest land surrounds the park, providing additional land for recreation and natural beauty in all seasons.

Directions

The park is north of US 30 between Chambersburg and McConnellsburg.

FROM THE WEST: I-76 to Exit 180, Fort Littleton, then US 522 north to Burnt Cabins and follow signs to the park.

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

FROM THE SOUTH: US 30 to PA 75 north at Fort Loudon 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, for state park information and reservations.

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 available on a first-come, first-served basis. 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, 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 to mid-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.

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 630 acres are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. Common game species are deer, turkey, and squirrel. The park land 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 unsecured 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.

BOATING: electric motors only
There are two boat launches and mooring spaces on Cowans Gap Lake. A concession in the day use area rents rowboats, kayaks, 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 that are available at most state park offices; launch use permit from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.



FISHING: Cowans Gap Lake offers excellent trout fishing and also has bass, perch, catfish, and panfish. There is an ADA accessible fishing pier. The South Branch of Little Aughwick Creek offers good trout fishing. Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply.

HIKING: 13 miles of trails
Complete trail descriptions are on the other side of this brochure.

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

thick for a single angler and 7" thick for a small group. Always carry safety equipment.

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

Enjoy the Winter

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

ICE FISHING: The 42-acre Cowans Gap Lake is open for ice fishing except for the ice skating area. **Ice thickness is not monitored.** For your safety, make sure ice is at least 4"

Spend the Night

CABINS: Ten rustic cabins are available during the spring, summer, and fall. The three-room cabins have a four-person overnight capacity and contain a refrigerator, stove, inside fireplace, ceiling fan, and two bunk beds. Up to two dogs are permitted in designated cabins for an additional fee. There is no indoor plumbing in the cabins. A water faucet is outside. A central comfort station has showers and flush toilets. The cabins are on the National Register of Historic Places because they were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

CAMPING: modern sites, some with electric
Cowans Gap has 201 campsites in two areas. The camping area has a sanitary dump station and modern comfort stations with flush toilets and warm showers. The campsites can accommodate campers from a small tent to a large motor home. Seven walk-in 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 deer season in December.

ORGANIZED GROUP TENTING: This camping area holds 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.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

The park offers a wide variety of environmental education and interpretive programs. Through hands-on activities, guided walks, and evening programs, participants gain appreciation, understanding and develop a sense of stewardship toward natural and cultural resources.

Curriculum-based environmental education programs are available to schools and youth groups. Teacher workshops are available. Group programs must be arranged in advance and may be scheduled by calling the park office. Programs are offered April to November. Contact the park office for more detailed information.

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, bear, 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 the Eastern towhee as they move about in the brush. As evening approaches, enjoy the flute-like calls of the veery and wood thrush.

Warm summer evenings bring out the bats of Cowans Gap 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. This is a good time of the year to listen to the bullfrogs as they call into the night "jug-o-rum" and the twanging call of the green frog.

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 turkey as they compete with the deer and bear for acorns. As you sit around a warm evening campfire, take time to listen for the far off calls of swans and geese as their V-shaped formations negotiate 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 laurel and rhododendron. 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 beauty 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, and listen in the evenings for the courtship calls of frogs and toads along the lakeshore and wetlands.

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 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 the clear-cutting of 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 did 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 the cabins, picnic shelters, and spent three years building the dam. The Cowans Gap rustic cabins are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Improvements have continued at Cowans Gap, with additions like the campground and modern restrooms. In 2002, Cowans Gap State Park closed to visitors for a year-long renovation to upgrade many facilities.

THE GEOLOGY OF COWANS GAP

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

A gap is a notch or pass in a mountain. Cowans Gap is an east and west pass in the north and south-running 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.

Most gaps are water gaps, which have a stream or river flowing through them. Cowans Gap is a wind gap and has no stream or river anymore. Millions of years ago, Allens Valley was not very deep. A stream flowed from the southern end of Allens Valley down through

the park and out over the hard rocks of Cowans Gap down to Path Valley.

A different stream flowed in the softer rock of the north part of Allens Valley by Burnt Cabins. In a process called stream capture, the two separate streams became one stream. The Burnt Cabins stream quickly eroded the soft rock, deepening and lengthening Allens Valley. The stream's head (its beginning) slowly moved south until the Burnt Cabins stream's head met the southern stream flowing out of Cowans Gap. The Burnt Cabins stream eroded Allens Valley faster and deeper than the other stream, until the southern stream eventually flowed into the Burnt Cabins stream, making one long stream that flowed the length of Allens Valley to Burnt Cabins, but did not flow through Cowans Gap.

The stream continued to erode the soft rock until the Allens Valley was much lower than Cowans Gap. Today, South Branch Little Aughwick Creek continues to carve the valley deeper and deeper.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Access for People with Disabilities

Park facilities available for use by people with disabilities include picnic areas, campground, cabins, parking, and a fishing pier. Restrooms in these areas are designated with the symbol for accessibility. 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 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

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

NEAREST HOSPITAL

Fulton County Medical Center
214 Peach Orchard Road
McConnellsburg, PA 17233
717-485-3155



Information and Reservations

For More Information Contact

Cowans Gap State Park
6235 Aughwick Road
Fort Loudon, PA 17224-9801
GPS DD: Lat. 39.99478 Long. -77.9249
717-485-3948
email: cowansgapsp@pa.gov
An Equal Opportunity Employer
www.visitPAparks.com

Information and 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, for state park information and reservations.

Pocket Ranger™ App by Parks by Nature



THE OFFICIAL
PENNSYLVANIA
STATE PARKS & FORESTS
Pocket Ranger®

DOWNLOAD OUR APP
GET ALL OF OUR MAPS!
Help preserve DCMR's print resources by going mobile!

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 campsite.

- 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!

Nearby Attractions

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

Buchanan's Birthplace State Park is the birthplace of James Buchanan, 15th President of the United States and the only Pennsylvanian to ever occupy the office of president. The park is in the foothills of the Tuscarora Mountains on the western side of the Cumberland Valley, seven miles north of US 30.

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

HIKING: 13 miles of trails

CAMERON TRAIL: 0.5 mile, more difficult hiking

This very steep, boundary trail is on the south end of the park and 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 Logging Road Trail above Camping Area B.

GEYER TRAIL: 0.5 mile, most difficult hiking

This rather steep boundary trail passes through areas of mountain laurel. The trail starts along Aughwick Road then climbs Tuscarora Mountain to Tuscarora Trail.

NORTH AND SOUTH LOGGING ROAD TRAIL: 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.

HORSESHOE TRAIL: 0.5 mile, most difficult hiking

This very steep and very rugged 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! Not suitable for equestrian or bicycle use.

KNOBSVILLE ROAD TRAIL: 1.3 miles, more difficult hiking

This old road climbs to the top of Cove Mountain, past the park’s landslide interpretive wayside, a CCC-era incinerator, and a park overlook. Cresting Cove Mountain, the Knobsville Road Trail ends at the park boundary. Hikers can continue on Standing Stone Trail to Horseshoe Trail or join state forest trails by taking either the Knobsville road

trace or Knobsville Trail to connect to Tailgate Road and hike to Route 522. This will add an additional two miles or more.

LAKESIDE TRAIL: 1.5 miles, easiest hiking

This very pleasant, nearly level, scenic trail encircles Cowans Gap Lake. This is the most popular trail in the park.

ONE MILE TRAIL: 0.4 mile, easiest hiking

This mountain laurel shaded trail begins along Aughwick Road just above the park office, then winds along the bottom of Tuscarora Mountain to join Three Mile Trail. Hikers can then 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, having walked about one mile.

PLESSINGER TRAIL: 1.1 miles, more difficult hiking

This rocky, streamside trail meanders alongside

Aughwick Creek and is a great access trail for anglers and a pleasant walk for wildlife watchers.

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, there is a short, 200-foot section of very steep trail.

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 and 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.

STANDING STONE HIKING TRAIL: 76 miles (2.4 miles in the park), orange blazes, most difficult hiking

Starting at the Cowans Gap Lake spillway, this trail goes north to join 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 the Mid State Trail, Tuscarora Trail, and the

Appalachian Trail. Overnight hikers must fill out an overnight parking permit which is available at the park office. They are encouraged to park at the park office.

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.

Tell us about your hike at:

