

Giving Devil's Lake State Park its due

By Jason Francis
Special to the Lakes Edition

Boasting 500-foot Quartzite bluffs that tower over a picturesque 360-acre lake, this is one ...ahem....heck of a park.

Offering recreational opportunities aplenty, Devil's Lake State Park is one of Wisconsin's scenic gems.

To showcase and supplement the ample natural wonder, there are 29 miles of hiking trails, six miles of mountain biking trails, and a nature center offering programs and events. There are lakeshore picnic areas, swimming beaches and what are considered some of the best rock climbing opportunities in the Midwest. There are also incredible boating, canoeing, kayaking, scuba diving, bird watching and

camping opportunities.

In addition, the park boasts amenities such as hot showers, flush toilets, charcoal grills and concessions.

Located about three miles south of Baraboo at S5975 Park Rd., the 9,217-acre park is the largest in the state. Open daily year-round from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., the park draws more than three million visitors annually.

Devil's Lake is actually a remnant of the Wisconsin River, which once flowed through what is now the park but was blocked on both ends by glacier activity approximately 12,000 years ago.

The park was founded in 1911, though the area was a popular vacation destination for wealthy Midwestern families well before then. The first hotel there was built in

1866 and the area later became the home of five resorts, though the hotels all closed by the 1940s and no traces of these operations still exist.

According to Wikipedia (and numerous other sources), Devil's Lake was so named "because it is situated in a deep chasm with no visible inlet or outlet." The website continues: "The term, Devil's Lake is a misinterpretation of the Ho-Chunk name Tawacunchukdah or Da-wa-kah-char-gra, which better translates to 'Sacred Lake' or 'Spirit Lake'."

The Devil's Lake State Park Nature Center offers a three-dimensional landform model of the park, various historical artifacts and a series of panoramas showing the formation of the valley, which was once 1,000 feet

deep, but is now half-filled with rock and sediment and topped by the 50-foot-deep Devil's Lake, states the park's official website. There are also activities for the kids in the center.

Nature center hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, Memorial Day to Labor Day. From Labor Day to Columbus Day, the Nature Center is open Thursday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Nature programs are scheduled most summer days at 9:30 a.m. in the park's visitor center. Program themes include snakes, skulls, beavers, rocks, spiders, Indian mounds, beetles, bird watching, bats, plants, geology and more. Most programs are appropriate for people of all ages. There are also evening programs presented each Saturday night in the Northern Lights Amphitheater.

Visitor center hours are 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily in the summer and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. otherwise.

Directions to the park,



Above and lower left: Drawing more than three million visitors annually, Devil's Lake State Park is Wisconsin's largest, and perhaps most visually stunning, park. (Photos courtesy of TravelWisconsin.com)

as found on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website, are as follows.

From the south or east on Interstate 90/94: Take State Highway 33 west about 15 miles to Baraboo. Turn left (south) at the second traffic light onto Broadway, and go through town. At the second traffic circle, go left onto County Road DL and go two miles to the park.

From the northwest on Interstate 90/94: Go right (south) at exit 92. Take U.S. Highway 12 East about 10 miles to exit 219. Turn left onto South Blvd. Turn right onto Highway 136 and follow it about three miles to the

park entrance.

From the south on U.S. Highway 12: Take exit 219. Turn right onto South Blvd. Turn right onto Highway 136 and follow it about three miles to the park entrance.

From about April through November, the park can be reached via the Merrimac free ferry, located at State Highway 113 and County Highway DL.

For more information, visit www.dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/devilslake or www.devilslakewisconsin.com (a privately-owned website not associated with the DNR website). The park can be contacted directly at 608-356-8301.





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