

Welcome to Preparation Canyon State Park

The 344-acre Preparation Canyon State Park is a remote wild-like area that has forests, savannas, and prairie. Many unique plants are found throughout the area, such as: bur oak, ferns, jack-in-the-pulpit, columbine, pasque flowers, regal fritillary, and many other species. Visitors may also see interesting wildlife roaming the park such as bobcats, deer, turkey, great plains skink, songbirds and other nongame species. The park is located in Iowa's unique Loess Hills. It provides a beautiful backdrop for hikers and family picnics. Visitors will enjoy walking along the many streams and springs. Picnic tables, a shelter and pit toilets are provided. Preparation Canyon State Park lies at the very north end of Loess Hills State Forest (LHSF).

HISTORY

The park encompasses what was once the town of Preparation. In 1853, Charles B. Thompson broke from the Mormon wagon trail to Utah after receiving a message from the 'Spirit.' The Mormon leader and elder led 50 to 60 Mormon families to Kanesville, now Council Bluffs. Upon much searching, Thompson and a few select men chose to settle in the area called "Monona," an Indian name meaning "peaceful valley." Here they organized the town of Preparation, complete with houses and schools and where they started Monona County's first newspaper which Thompson owned and operated.

This place was their "School of Preparation for the Life Beyond." The Mormons soon learned they had discovered one of the richest farming valleys in the new territory. Realizing the valley's potential wealth, Thompson's newspaper printed this message from a spirit he called 'Beneemy': "I appoint Charles B. Thompson chief steward of my house to receive, hold, manage and direct all the treasures of my house to him." Believing this, the people turned over all deeds and possessions to Thompson, who grew quite wealthy. Thompson also taught his followers to call him 'Father Ephraim' after Ephraim in the Holy Scriptures.

In 1856, the people realized their mistake and asked for the return of their property, but "Father Ephraim" refused.

Angered, some people sought to hang Thompson. After receiving a warning from a young follower, Thompson escaped the mob by hiding in a friend's attic in Onawa. He then fled the state, unable to secure the deeds. Many disillusioned Mormons then left the valley and headed for Utah.

Several years later, the Iowa Supreme Court divided the land equally among the remaining families, whereupon the town of Preparation began to grow. At one point, Preparation had 67 houses, a post office, skating rink and blacksmith shop. But by 1900, all that survived was a stockyard which closed in 1946.

Martha and Walter Perrin, descendants of the original Mormon families, sold 82 acres of their land to the state of Iowa in 1934. In 1969, Martha Perrin sold another 157 acres, and eventually, the Perrin family homestead site to the state. These acres of land once contained the town of Preparation, including the valley the Mormons had settled many years ago for their "Preparation for the Life Beyond."

HIKE-IN CAMPING

There are ten hike-in campsites, each with a picnic table and fire grill; eight are provided in the eastern half of the park and the other two in the west end of the canyon. Registration for these campsites are obtained through self-registration at the east parking area.



PICNICKING

Preparation Canyon State Park is an excellent place for a family picnic or cookout. Picnickers can have fun, while also enjoying views of the dramatic ridges of the unique Loess Hills and Bur Oak woodlands. The park is also located on the National Scenic Byway.

TORNADO 2008

In June of 2008 a devastating 1/3 mile wide tornado went through the heart of the park, from west to east, and wiped out approximately 175 acres of forest which were salvaged and harvested. Then in 2010, seedlings were planted to reforest the area for future generations to enjoy.

NATURE STUDY

The state park and state forest are excellent areas for nature study and viewing of wildlife. They both include some of the most diverse species habitats of prairies and forests in the state. Nature lovers will enjoy viewing the rugged Loess Hills which were formed by windblown soil thousands of years ago. The hills with depths over 200 feet deep are located along the Missouri River in Missouri and Iowa. There is loess across the entire planet, but not as deep as here or in the 1000 feet deep hills of China.

REGULATIONS

Fires are permitted only in designated areas or where fire grills are provided. Fires must be extinguished when the campsite or picnic area is vacated. Visitors are to carry out their trash from picnic and other day-use areas. No horse or bike riding permitted on the trails.

THE LHSF VISITORS CENTER is located within the Pisgah city limits and features interpretive displays of the forest and forestry, art displays, landscaping with native grasses and interpretive walkways. The forest is open to picnicking, hiking, nature study, cross country skiing, hunting, fishing, and primitive camping. Parking lots provide good accessibility to the forest. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) manages the Loess Hills State Forest which comprises 11,604 acres of this unique ecosystem.

LEWIS & CLARK STATE PARK, home of the authentic reproduction of the keelboat "Discovery" from the Lewis & Clark Expedition is approximately 24 miles northwest of Preparation Canyon. An annual Lewis & Clark festival is held in June celebrating the Lewis & Clark expedition. For Information Contact: c/o Lewis & Clark State Park, 21914 Park Loop, Onawa, IA 41040; call 712-423-2829 or email Lewis-and-Clark@dnr.iowa.gov.

