

Saltpeter is an ingredient in gun power that can be found in bat and bird droppings and from naturally occurring chemicals in the soil. This soil was collected during the War of 1812 and the Civil War for making gun powder.

9. Native Pollinator Garden 0.50 miles

This area has been set aside for native plants that attract pollinators, such as bees and butterflies. These types of habitats are disappearing due to human development.

You will find areas that are left for native plants to grow throughout the park as part of our conservation efforts to improve wildlife habitats. They provide crucial habitat and food for many different bird, insect, and mammal species. By mowing in fewer places, less often, the park also cuts down on its carbon emissions. Be sure to leave the flowers for the pollinators.

10. In Front of the Lost River 0.58 miles

This cave is named for the uncertain origins of the water that flows through it, though a dye test in the 90s determined that it comes from a nearby sinking stream. In 1812, the miners removing saltpeter from the cave down stream heard the water flowing behind the rock. They decided to blast a hole in the wall to see what was behind the wall. When they found the stream they decided to run a water pipe down to the mine site to fill the kettles that boiled down the nitrate rich-soil to get saltpeter.

11. The Walk to Lace Waterfall 0.71 miles

This is one of the best places to see the many layers of the limestone rock and all types of flora and fauna. You may see giant millipedes making their way across the trail or multiple butterfly species flying by.

Blue and green heron fish along this part of the trail, and you may even spot one of our resident ravens. Many colorful songbirds also migrate through the area, and most days vultures can be seen circling overhead. Each season brings different flowers, colorful leaves, or even glistening snow as you walk the rest of the trail.

12. The Last Stop 0.90 miles

You have made it to Lace Waterfall, and the end of the trail. This is the far end of the 157 acres owned by Thomas Jefferson. It is also where the rock layers become more inclined, which is what formed this 50ft waterfall.

Once you have enjoyed the waterfall, you will head back down the trail the same way you came. Keep an eye out for wildlife and wildflowers on your way back. **Be sure to remember to leave no trace and pack out anything you brought with you on the hike.** Thank you for visiting Natural Bridge State Park.

For more information about Natural Bridge State Park, and each of the stops along the trail, pick up a copy of *Guide to Natural Bridge State Park and the Caverns at Natural Bridge* in the Visitor Center gift shop. The numbered sections on page 13 also correspond to this trail.



Natural Bridge State Park
6477 South Lee Highway

Virginia State Parks

Natural Bridge State Park

Self-Guided Walking Tour



Natural and Cultural History



www.virginiastateparks.gov

Welcome to Natural Bridge State Park. This pamphlet will guide you from the Visitor Center, down the stairs and along all of Cedar Creek Trail. Each section corresponds to numbered post along the trail

Cedar Creek Trail is paved part of the way, fairly flat, and considered an easy trail. Be sure to wear sturdy walking shoes and bring plenty of water. There is no access to drinking water along the trail. This trail is also an out-and-back meaning once you reach the final stop, you walk back out the same way. It is 0.9 miles from the Cedar Creek Café to the waterfalls and the same distance back. The total distance to walk to the waterfalls and back is 1.8 miles.

1. The Blue Ridge Mountains

This area has been a travel route for thousands of years, with the Monacans passing through as part of their trade routes. The Great Road passed by a few miles north and took European settlers farther south and west. In the 1800 and 1900s the bridge was a prominent tourist spot and has housed many different hotels. Now as a Virginia State Park, Natural Bridge still hosts visitors from around the world. Enjoy following in the footsteps of so many before you.

2. The Stairs Down to the Natural Bridge

As you walk down the stairs to the bridge, you are accompanied by Cascade Creek, which connects in with Cedar Creek downstream of the Natural Bridge. The tan mineral buildup is called tufa. This is calcite which was picked up by the creek as it flowed underground and then deposited as the water flowed over the rocks. The stairs are close to the area where the first footpath for park guests was located. Take note of the low voltage LED lights recently installed to save energy and reduce light pollution.

3. Thuja occidentalis

Arborvitae, or northern white cedar, is a tree more commonly found in the northern reaches of Appalachia, though specimens are found all along the Cedar Creek Trail. Even though this particular tree died in the 80s, by using average growth rate estimations this tree was thought to be over 1600 years old. That made this tree over 1000 years old by the time Europeans made their way here in the early 1700s.

****Cedar Creek Café****

You will pass by the Cedar Creek Café as you round the corner to see the Natural Bridge. The distance listed at each stop is the distance from the café letting you know how far you've hiked.

4. First Glimpse of Natural Bridge 0.03 miles

The Natural Bridge, and all the rock you will see along this trail, is made of limestone. This limestone was deposited under a shallow tropical sea almost half a billion years ago, causing the layers you see today. It was then pushed up into the Appalachian Mountains as North America and Africa smashed together during the formation of Pangea. As ground water slowly dissolved the limestone, a linear cavern was formed. Eventually, Cedar Creek started to flow through and continued to make the cave opening wider, and wider. This led to a collapse that left only a small portion of the ceiling standing, which we now know as the Natural Bridge.

5. The Front of the Natural Bridge 0.07 miles

In the walkway, half way under the bridge you will see a survey marker. This indicates the spot where the first survey was conducted in 1750, allegedly by a young George Washington during his tenure as Surveyor of Culpeper County. Supposedly he climbed about 20ft up and carved his initials into the rock on the creek side of the bridge. There is no conclusive evidence to suggest he truly did this,

but a “GW” is still visible. Look across the creek, 20ft up from the water’s surface, and you will see a white box, inside of which is the GW. Later surveys provided the first measurements of the Natural Bridge. It is 215ft tall, 40-50ft thick, has a 100ft span and is 90ft wide.

6. The Back of the Natural Bridge 0.17 miles

Following early visits by white frontiersman like John Peter Sallings in the early 1700’s, the legend of the Bridge spread through the young nation, eventually reaching future president Thomas Jefferson. He visited when he was in his twenties, and purchased the Natural Bridge from King George III in 1774. He bought 157 acres, including the bridge, for 20 shillings, the equivalent of a few hundred dollars in today’s money. Jefferson owned the property until his death, when it was sold by his family to settle his affairs. It went through many different private owners over the years. On September 24th, 2016 it became a Virginia State Park, meaning it will be protected in perpetuity, just as Jefferson always wanted.

7. Monacan Living History Exhibit 0.35 miles

The Monacan Exhibit operated from 1999-2019 and represented an important educational facility focused on interpreting Monacan lifeways circa 1699. The park is currently researching ways to renovate the exhibit to make it more sustainable and operate it into the future. Check back later to see what we are working on.

8. Outside of the Saltpeter Cave .46 miles

The saltpeter cave was formed when a bend in the creek washed away a soft layer of rock, forming a shelter cave. The cave is open during the summer months for guests. The cave is closed in the winter months to not disturb hibernating bats