Travels in Time
Indiana State Parks

The sites included in this itinerary are in some way recognized by programming that filters through the DHPA—the State or National Registers, the Historic Theater Initiative, the Cemetery Registry, the Underground Railroad Initiative, and others. The itinerary are by no means a comprehensive list of sites in Indiana related to each theme.

McCormick’s Creek State Park

Eyeing the state’s centennial, Colonel Richard Lieber and others helped organize the creation of McCormick’s Creek State Park in 1916, making it Indiana’s first state park. McCormick’s Creek earned its named from John McCormick, a Revolutionary War veteran who received the land in 1816 as payment for his service. Although John McCormick never lived here, his daughter and her husband Jesse Peden owned and farmed the land for many years.

Visitors were drawn to this area of Indiana in the late 1800s by the unique geology exhibited in the park. Exposed throughout the park are three limestone outcroppings that spurred the beginning of a limestone quarry in 1878. This quarry would go to supply stone for the basement and foundation of the Capitol building in Indianapolis. Remains of this quarry can still be seen along one of the trails in the park. The beautiful environment, full of waterfalls and intriguing geologic formations, led to the creation of a sanitarium in 1880 by Dr. Fredrick Denkewalter. The therapeutic benefits of natural settings and healthy living, advocated by those involved with the sanitarium movement, fit ideally with this landscape. Park staff interpret both the stone foundation of the Peden barn and the restored springhouse.

In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Project Administration (WPA) played important roles in developing the park’s infrastructure. The CCC’s work included building trails, shelter houses, the stone arch bridge, and the front gatehouse. Later, the WPA constructed cabins, the amphitheater, falls stairway, and the tennis courts. The McCormick’s Creek Entrance and Gatehouse were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2978.htm
250 McCormick’s Creek Park Road
Spencer, IN 47460
(812) 829-2235
Turkey Run State Park

Also celebrating its centennial in 2016 is Turkey Run State Park. Originally slated to be Indiana’s first state park, the failure to reach a deal on the purchase of park lands resulted in the creation of McCormick’s Creek S.P. a few months earlier. The brainchild of Colonel Richard Lieber, who also founded Indiana’s state park system, Turkey Run’s stunning beauty and high quality ecosystem, is in large part due to the protections’ afforded by its previous owners, the Lusk family.

Salmon Lusk, a veteran of the War of 1812, purchased land in Parke County in 1822 in the area that would become Turkey Run State Park. After outgrowing their first home, the Lusk family erected a poplar wood frame and brick building in its place. The bricks were fired on site and the interior woodwork of the home was made from black walnut. The home, with furnishings originally belonging to the Lusk family, is interpreted by the park.

Other unique features at Turkey Run include a coalmine and the Turkey Run Inn. The coalmine was active from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. The original structure of the Turkey Run Inn was built in 1919, a first for Indiana’s state parks. Around this same time, Lieber relocated a timber log cabin built in the 1840s to the park, which staff uses to interpret the creation of the state park system. More recent undertakings include a planetarium and a 2 ½ mile backpacking trail.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2964.htm
8121 E. Park Road
Marshall, IN 47859
(765) 597-2635
Though not as well known or as visited as Turkey Run, Shades State Park shares much of the same natural splendor, geology, and ecosystems that visitors to Turkey Run have enjoyed for one hundred years. Added to the state park system in 1947, “Shades of Death” as it was known before its establishment, was a popular tourist destination back into the mid-1800s.

Two layers of exposed bedrock can be found at Shades including the 225-million-year old Pennsylvanian sandstone and 250-million-year old Mississippian bedrock composed of siltstone, limestone, and shale layers. Marine fossils within the Mississippian bedrock include crinoids, bryozoans, and brachiopods. Other geologic attractions include the “Devil’s Punch Bowl,” “Silver Cascade Waterfall,” and the “Devil’s Backbone,” located within Pine Hills Nature Preserve-- Indiana’s first nature preserve.

The park’s distinctive geology - the joining of the Pennsylvanian and Mississippian bedrock layers- resulted in numerous springs throughout the park. In the late nineteenth century, a movement emerged touting the curative and restorative powers of mineral water and exposure to the outdoors, leading to the creation of the Garland Dell Mineral Springs Association at the Shades. An inn known as the Dells Resort provided guests access to the areas natural features. The eventual owner of the Dells Resort, Joseph Frisz, who helped preserve the land, later sold his holdings to the state, for the creation of Shades State Park.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2970.htm
7751S 890W
Waveland, IN 47989
(765) 435-2810
Mounds State Park

From Native American mounds to merry-go-rounds, Mounds State Park attests to the varied history of Indiana. Named after the numerous Native American constructed mounds dotting the park, these features drove the preservation of this land and the formation of the state park. Archaeological excavations carried out in the park reveals construction of the mounds began around 250 BCE, by the Adena, a late archaic people. Utilized for approximately 500 years, the mounds served primarily a ceremonial function, first by the Adena and later the Hopewell—a name given to them by scientists to describe the changing culture of these native groups.

In all, ten mounds have been identified within the park’s boundaries. Varied in size and shape, all include some sort of astronomical alignment with stars or constellations. Multiple Hopewell burials have been unearthed in the largest mound, the Great Mound, as well as other artifacts like copper for beads, mica for carved stones, obsidian (volcanic glass), and seashells throughout the mound complex—indicating a complex culture and extensive trade networks.

Like many Indiana state park stories, the preservation and landscape are due in large part to individuals, in this case the Bronnenberg family. In the early 19th century, the German family settled in Madison County, eventually owning the lands that now encompass the park. Their second home still stands near the park entrance and can be visited. Successive generations of Bronnenbergs, realized the value of the mounds and prevented their looting or plowing under.

In 1905, the family leased 40 acres of land to the Indiana Union Traction Company, to build an interurban stop and construct an amusement park. Located between the Great Mound and the bluffs of the White River was a wooden roller coaster. Visitors could also take a ride on the park’s merry-go-round, kiddie train, or float in a canoe on an artificially dammed section of the White River. The amusement park operated until 1929. Mounds State Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2977.htm
4306 Mounds Road
Anderson, IN 46017
(765) 642-6627
Falls of the Ohio State Park

Established in 1990, the Falls of the Ohio State Park encompasses a rich cultural and natural history unlike anywhere else along the Ohio or Mississippi rivers. Between the start of the Ohio River near Pittsburgh, PA and the confluence of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, the Falls of the Ohio represented the only place where shallow rocky rapids impeded river travel-- until their submersion by dams in the late 1800s. However, what Falls of the Ohio State Park is best known for are its exceptional fossil beds. The naturally exposed 390-million-year old Devonian fossil beds are among the largest in the world. To date, more than 600 species of fossils have been described at the Falls, two-thirds of which have been “type specimens,” which are fossils described for the first time. Included in these fossils are more than 250 species of corals.

Culturally, Falls of the Ohio S.P. has a plentiful history as well. In 1778, George Rogers Clark established the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the Northwest Territory on Corn Island. Clark later founded Clarksville, and his home site below the falls is part of the park. The original cabin was destroyed in 1854; a cabin, relocated from Ripley County, Indiana, is interpreted by park staff. In addition to Clark’s cabin, a second constructed cabin interprets the lives of the McGees, enslaved Africans to George Rogers Clark. The McGees lived in Guinea Bottoms, one of the first free African-American settlements in the Northwest Territory.

On October 14, 1803, Captain Meriwether Lewis met Captain William Clark, brother of George Rogers Clark, at the Falls. Over the next few weeks, a crew was assembled with men from the surrounding areas in Kentucky and the Indiana Territory, making up the “Corps of Discovery,” which spent two years exploring the Louisiana Purchase.

http://www.fallsoftheohio.org/
201 W. Riverside Drive
Clarksville, IN 47129
(812) 280-9970
Indiana Dunes State Park

Garnering its name from its most prominent features, Indiana Dunes State Park offers an experience and ecosystem exclusive to the state park system. The ever-changing dunes began forming around 6,500 years ago with the retreat of the last glaciers, when a beach forming farther out in Lake Michigan began moving towards land. This sandy beach eventually formed the Great Marsh, and when lake levels dropped, sand was blown inland creating the dunes. In addition to the unique dunes, the park offers the highest levels of biodiversity of any Indiana state park, thanks to being at the intersection of multiple ecosystems, which include prairies, deciduous forest, and wetlands.

The unique diversity of the area led botanist Henry Cowles to the dunes in order to study the relationship between plants and the environment. From his research, Cowles pioneered the study of ecology and the twin ideas of plant succession and climax formations, arguing that ecological communities change over time, moving toward a stable plant community.

Today, the park offers a watchtower for those interested in birding, hiking trails, and a nature center.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2980.htm
1600N 25E
Chesterton, IN 46304
(219) 926-1952
Each of Indiana’s state parks has something unique to offer and Spring Mill is no exception. Although currently encompassing over a thousand acres, the original 295 acres was purchased from a cement company for one dollar. Included in that purchase was a pioneer village dating back to the early 1800s, containing an 1817 spring-fed three-story gristmill, which still operates and provides corn-grinding demonstrations. The village consists of twenty historical structures, many of which can be accessed, including an original restored springhouse, tavern, and distillery. During certain times of the year, these buildings are staffed by heritage interpreters who portray the year 1863 and demonstrate period crafts.

A pioneer of a different sort can also be found in the park. A memorial to Hoosier astronaut and Mitchell native Virgil “Gus” Grissom interprets the life of America’s second man in space. Exhibits at the memorial interpret Grissom’s life and career as a Mercury astronaut, and include artifacts like his space suit, the Gemini 3 “Molly Brown” spacecraft, and other artifacts from his personal and professional life.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2968.htm
3333 State Road 60E
Mitchell, IN 47446
(812) 849-3534
Brown County State Park

Opened in 1929, Brown County State Park is the largest of Indiana’s state parks. Known for many decades as the “Little Smokies” because of the area’s resemblance to the Great Smoky Mountains, the park draws more people to it than any other in the state park system. Attracting many to the park are the vivid fall colors, viewable from several lookouts and nearly twenty miles of roads winding through the park. These spectacular landscapes drew Hoosier Group artists like T. C. Steele, William Forsyth, Otto Stark, John Ottis Adams, and Richard Gruelle to Brown County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to paint the area.

In June of 1934, the Veterans Civilian Conservation Corps Company 1557 began extensive work to improve the park. Besides planting black locust, black walnut, and various pines and spruces (to help repair badly eroded slopes due to years of farming), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers also erected many of the existing buildings and trails within the park used today. The west lookout tower, many of the scenic vistas, and the CCC hiking trail are all part of the legacy of the corp’s time in the park, as are many other projects by various CCC groups in the state park system.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2988.htm
Nashville, IN 47448
(812) 988-6406
Pokagon State Park

Dedicated in 1925, Pokagon State Park is named for Potawatomi leaders Leopold and Simon Pokagon who lived in this area during the 19th Century. However, Potawatomi settlements date back to at least the early 1800s around Lake James, now part of Pokagon State Park. Chief Simon Pokagon was born in 1830 and later documented Potawatomi customs, legends, and language. During the Potawatomi’s presence in the area, they helped shape the environment making up the park. The Potawatomi set fires for the purpose of driving game and growing crops, helping to keep some parklands open.

Besides housing Native American communities, Pokagon State Park hosted another group at one point—glaciers. During the most recent advance of glaciers, nearly 10,000 years ago during the Wisconsin Glaciation, many of the parks prominent features and lakes were formed as the ice retreated and melted.

Today, Pokagon hosts numerous opportunities born from the park’s creation. Indiana’s only toboggan run (open November through February), originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, can reach speeds up to 42 miles per hour as it drops ninety feet over a quarter mile. Company 556 of the C.C.C. was also responsible for the main beach, inn beach, gatehouse, shelter houses, Spring Shelter, trail system, and saddle barn. Pokagon State Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2973.htm
450 Lane 100 Lake James
Angola, IN 46703
(260) 833-2012

To learn more about the National Register of Historic Places, preservation, or historic buildings or other program administered by the DNR-DHPA, visit us at www.in.gov/dnr/historic