ABOUT THE PARK

At over 32,500 acres, Itasca State Park includes not only the beginning of the Mississippi River, but large tracts of Minnesota’s remaining old-growth red and white pine forest. Established in 1891, Itasca is Minnesota’s oldest state park and was created to protect the forests and waters surrounding the Headwaters of the Mississippi River. Shaped by glaciers over 10,000 years ago, the rolling landscape conceals over 100 lakes within the pine, spruce, birch, oak and maple forests. Centuries of disputes over what lake was the true source of the great river led park founder Jacob V. Brower to settle the dispute once and for all, determining that Lake Itasca is the headwaters of the Mississippi River.

TRAIL HIGHLIGHTS

Mississippi Headwaters Area
Accessible • Concrete • Asphalt • Gravel • Wood boardwalk
Discover the Headwaters of the Mississippi River; follow the first quarter-mile of trail along the river and enjoy views across Lake Itasca. Watch for warblers, eagles and common loons in this excellent spring birding area.

Dr. Roberts Trail
Gravel • Wood boardwalk • Grass • Hilly
Travel through a bog, marvel at the Old Timer’s Cabin, and climb a ridge overlooking Lyendecker Lake. This is an excellent trail for wildflower photography. A self-guiding plant identification booklet is available in park gift shops.

Aiton Heights Fire Tower
Gravel • Grass • Hilly
Wind through a maple-basswood forest, look for trumpeter swans and otter at Mary, Allen and Kasey lakes, and climb the 100-foot tall fire tower for a panoramic view of the Lake Itasca watershed. Make this a 3-mile loop route from Douglas Lodge (Ozawindib/Alton Heights/Deer Park trails).

Wilderness Drive
Asphalt • Hilly
Tour through outstanding examples of red-white pine forest with numerous hiking trail options along the route. This is your best chance to see wildlife such as black-backed woodpeckers, white-tailed deer, fisher and porcupine.

MORE TO EXPLORE AT ITASCA

• Pedal 6 miles of bike trail, or complete the Wilderness Drive loop to add another 10 miles
• Explore the woods and wildlife—hike over 45 miles of trails.
• Discover a free state park naturalist program.
• Take home a souvenir from one of three gift shops.
• Enjoy a narrated tour on board the Chester Charles II Tour Boat (concession).
• Rent a canoe, kayak, stand-up paddleboard, pontoon or bike at the Itasca Sports Rental (concession).
• Travel the river route to the Gulf of Mexico: the Mississippi River State Water Trail, Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail Bikeway all begin here!