**Buffalo Rock State Park**

Buffalo Rock State Park is located on a bluff that was once an island in the Illinois River. Now standing majestically on the north bank, this promontory affords a magnificent sweeping view of the Illinois River. Located approximately three miles west of Ottawa, this 298-acre park has long been a favorite picnic area, as well as a nature lovers' delight. The area of Buffalo Rock was the home of the Illinois Indians when Louis Jolliet, the French explorer, and the Jesuit missionary priest Father Jacques Marquette made their trip up the Illinois River in 1673. Later the Illinois Tribe was virtually annihilated in protracted warfare with the aggressive Iroquois.

**Nature of the Area**

Two American bison call Buffalo Rock home. Their pen and grazing area is located across from the baseball diamond and they can be seen daily.

Titled "Effigy Tumuli" in tribute to the Native American burial grounds that inspired it, is a unique "earth art" that depicts five sculptures native [species] to the Illinois River. The Effigy Tumuli was the vision of artist Michael Heizer who created the sculptures of a snake, turtle, catfish, frog and a water strider. To better appreciate the sculptures, it is best to look first from a distance and then walk around on top of them to better understand the effigies. [An effigy is a sculpture or model of a person created to be damaged or destroyed as a protest or expression of anger.]

**History of the Area**

Buffalo Rock is said to have served the French as an early military, trading and missionary post. LaSalle and Tonty, after building Fort St. Louis on Starved Rock during the winter of 1882-1883 gathered almost 4,000 Indian warriors at the front of Buffalo Rock and formed a confederation against the Iroquois. Among the tribes in the confederation were the Miami who built their own fort on Buffalo Rock.  
Through the many years that followed, Buffalo Rock was used by a religious sect as a place for holding camp meetings, and still later was used as a site for a tuberculosis sanatorium. The Crane Company of Chicago purchased Buffalo Rock in 1912 and for about 16 years maintained a sanatorium for sick employees and a summer vacation ground for thousands of employees and their families. In 1927 the Crane Company moved their recreation park to a larger area and donated the land to the state to become a park. The deed to the property was turned over to the State of Illinois on November 15, 1928.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/buffalo_rock_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Apple River Canyon State Park**

Apple River Canyon State Park is in the hilly northwest of Illinois near the Wisconsin border. This scenic canyon area was formed by the action of the winding waters of Apple River. Limestone bluffs, deep ravines, springs, streams and wildlife characterize this area which was once a part of a vast sea bottom that stretched from the Alleghenies to the Rockies.  
The 297-acre park was purchased by the State of Illinois in 1932.

**Nature of the Area**

Flowing endlessly for countless centuries, the Apple River has cut through the masses of limestone, dolomite, and shale until massive cliffs now rise high above the water and canyons have formed. Vast ages of water and erosion widened and deepened the crevices as rivers and streams cut their way through the stone. Close-up views of the colorful canyon reveal walls dotted with mosses, lichens and tenacious bushes which have found crevices to hold their roots on the sheer walls.  
  
The glacial sweep which ironed out hills and filled valleys in other parts of the state left this area unscratched. This circumstance accounts for the large number of fossil remains to be found near the surface here. It also was responsible for the easy availability of the lead veins that has much to do with the early development of this section of Illinois.  
  
The park contains such wildlife as deer, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, eagles, hawks and 47 varieties of birds. At least 14 different ferns and over 500 different herbaceous plants and 165 varieties of flowers can be seen throughout the park.

**History of the Area**

Joutel, who was in the Mississippi Valley in 1687 and who was later to record LaSalle's expedition, wrote tales of Indian lead mines told by travelers to the "Upper Mississippi." The first white man to see the lead mines was Nicholas Perrot, a French trader who settled on the east side of the Mississippi in 1690. The first to exploit them was the Scotch adventurer, John Law. His Company of the West, founded in Paris in 1717 on the fraudulent claim that the Illinois lead mines were well-developed, collapsed with a thud, which was heard all over France and went down in history as the "Mississippi Bubble." In the nineteenth century American settlers arrived, driving the Sauk and Fox Indians out in the Black Hawk War, and the town of Galena, thriving on the profits of lead mining, became a roaring boomtown. Miners by the hundreds entered this country through a canyon which is now one of the principal attractions of the Apple River Canyon State Park.  
The town of Millville was established where the park is now, but not a trace of it remains. Named after its two sawmills, Millville became a stop on the Galena-Chicago stage route and flourished until 1854 when the Illinois Central Railroad, building its line from Freeport to Galena, passed four miles north of the town. In 1892 a devastating flood washed out the dam, swept away many buildings and drove the people out of the town forever.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/apple_river_canyon_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Jubilee College State Park**

Jubilee College State Park is a 3,200-acre facility, located in Peoria County between the towns of Kickapoo and Brimfield. This scenic area, with its rolling topography and meandering Jubilee Creek, offers various outdoor recreational opportunities.

**Nature of the Area**

Jubilee is situated in the Illinoisan drift-plain, and is deeply eroded into many complex valley systems, from near-level ridgetops and floodplains to steep slope ravines. Bedrock exposures are numerous and include shale, sandstone, limestone, and coal. The highest elevation is 660 feet. The topography and Jubilee Creek constitute an aesthetically pleasing environment for outdoor recreation activities, and provide habitat for numerous wildlife and fish species. Visitors may see deer, rabbits, squirrel, fox, coyote and raccoon throughout the forests, while the creek may offer glimpses of mink, muskrat and beaver.

Over 160 species of birds are present, and wild turkeys, stocked in 1988, call Jubilee home.

Jubilee Creek is a tributary to Kickapoo Creek that passes through the park from northwest to southeast. It is characterized by deep pools and fast riffles. The average width is 40 feet and the average depth is four inches. Fish species of interest to anglers include smallmouth bass, bluegill, catfish and carp. Swimming is prohibited in the creek.

**History of the area**

Named Jubilee College by its founder, Episcopal Bishop Philander Chase in 1839, in expression of his thankfulness and joy, the college was one of the earliest educational enterprises in Illinois. Through a series of misfortunes climaxed by the Bishop's death, the college closed in 1862. In 1933 the college and grounds, consisting of 93 acres, were presented to the state of Illinois. Since that time the Department of Natural Resources increased the acreage to 3,200. The college building, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, has been restored to its original appearance and is under the management of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/jubilee_college_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Big River State Forest**

Big River State Forest in western Illinois is 8 miles north of Oquawka on the Oquawka-Keithsburg blacktop. The forest is managed primarily to demonstrate sound forestry practices with demonstrations and talks on these practices available to interested groups.

**Nature of the Area**

Big River State Forest is a remnant of a vast prairie woodland border area that once covered much of Illinois. Among its vegetation are two endangered plants - penstemon, commonly known as bearded tongue, and Patterson's bindweed, which N.H. Patterson documented in the forest in 1873 for the first time anywhere.  
  
Some of the common plants found in the prairie are big and little bluestem, Indian grass, June grass, grama grass, flower-of-an-hour, cottonweed, prairie coneflower, pale prairie coneflower, prairie bush clover, purple prairie clover, and blazing star. Also found are western sunflower, kittentail, lead plant, prickly pear cactus, flowering spurge, aromatic sumac, false dragonhead, Sullivan's milkweed, horsemint, goat's-rue, and hoary puccoon.

**History of the Area**

The 200-acre Oquawka Refuge, acquired by the state in 1925, contains the area's oldest pine plantation. Established in 1928 and known as the Milroy Plantation, the 17-acre area contains red, white and jack pines that tower more than 50 feet high. Subsequent land purchases, beginning in 1941 and 1942, and a lease from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, have brought the forest to 2,900 acres.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/big_river_state_forest_in_illinois.html>

**Illinois Beach State Park**

A full range of recreation opportunities complement the expansive shoreline of Illinois Beach State Park. Stretching leisurely for six and a half miles along the sandy shore of Lake Michigan in northern Illinois, Illinois Beach State Park encompasses the only remaining beach ridge shoreline left in the state.  
Illinois Beach is a unique and captivating natural resource for all to enjoy. It was created by the titanic forces of glacial advance and retreat, and the steady winds that breathed across expansive Lake Michigan. The park has dunes and swales with sprawling marshes, forests of oak and vast arrays of animal life and vegetation.  
  
The 4,160-acre park, consisting of two separate areas, offers ample opportunities for swimming, boating, picnicking, hiking, fishing, camping and just appreciating nature.  
  
More than 650 species of plants have been recorded in the dunes area alone, including dozens of types of colorful wildflowers. Prickly pear cactus thrives in large colonies in the dry areas, and the wet prairies are carpeted with a wide variety of grasses and sedges. Large expanses of marsh in the swales support dense stands of cattail, bluejoint grass, prairie cordgrass, reed grass, big bluestem, and sedges.  
  
The sandy ridges are crowned by black oak forests with an open, savanna-like appearance, and several kinds of fragrant pines, introduced here a century ago, also prosper in the southern area.  
  
Just north of these pines is the Dead River which actually is a stream that is blocked by sandbars much of the year forming an elongated pond. When the water finally rises high enough, it breaks through the sandbar and drains the surrounding marshes. The abundance of aquatic plants and fish flourishing in this changing environment belie its name.

History of the Area

Long recognized for its complex geological structure, unique flora and spectacular beauty, the Lake Michigan dunes area originally was, in the 1700s, part of the "Three Fires" of the Algonquin Nation: the Potawatomi, Chippewa, and Ottawa. Before then the area had been occupied by the Miami.  
In the late 1600s, French explorers first visited the area as part of their survey of what was then known as the Northwest Territory. By the time Illinois became a state in 1818, the area was full of transient hunters and trappers. In 1836, a treaty was made with the local Native Americans, who were moved westward, and the area became part of Lake County.  
  
During the Civil War what is now the northern unit of the park became Camp Logan, a Union prisoner of war camp. This installation went on to serve as an Army basic training center through World Wars I and II (when it provided ideal conditions for practicing tank maneuvers), and, in the late 1940s, was turned over to the Illinois National Guard.  
  
Preservation efforts were considered as early as 1888, when Robert Douglas, a Waukegan nurseryman, and Jens Jensen, a famous landscape architect, discussed making it a regional park. With industry advancing from the south, sand mining ravaging the dunes, and parts of the surrounding countryside succumbing to pasture and homesteads, legislative efforts to save the area finally began in the 1920s.  
  
In 1948, the state finally acquired the first parcels of what is now Illinois Beach State Park. In 1950, the Illinois Dunes Preservation Society was established to protect the natural qualities of the area, and through its efforts and the efforts of the Department of Conservation the area south of Beach Road was dedicated in 1964 as the first Illinois nature preserve. The northern unit, from the Commonwealth Edison power plant to the Wisconsin border, was acquired between 1971 and 1982.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/illinois_beach_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Kankakee River State Park**

On land treasured for centuries - first by Native Americans, later by traders and farmers, and as early as the 1890's by recreation seekers - Kankakee River State Park offers you its proud heritage in an unspoiled setting. Anglers, canoeists, hunters, campers, hikers, cyclists, and other outdoor enthusiasts find the park's recreational opportunities unsurpassed. The naturally channeled Kankakee River, listed on the Federal Clean Streams Register, is the focus of the park's popularity.  
  
Enveloping both sides of the Kankakee River for 11 miles, in an area 6 miles northwest of Kankakee, the park consists of approximately 4,000 acres. Illinois Routes 102 on the north and 113 on the south frame the park, with Interstates 55 and 57 both providing convenient access.

**History of the Area**

Several prehistoric sites are documented within Kankakee River State Park. The park is within a region used by Illini and Miami Indians at the time of the first European contact in the 1670s and 1680s. By 1685 the Miami were sufficiently numerous that the Kankakee River was called the River of the Miami. Kickapoo and Mascouten also were in the region from 1679 until the 1760s. Potawatomi Indians hunted along the Kankakee River in the 1760s, and by the 1770s, the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Chippewa nations - "The Three Fires" - dominated the area. The most extensive village was "Rock Village" or "Little Rock Village" inside the present-day park near the mouth of Rock Creek. In 1830 it was the site of the last great Indian Council. Following the Black Hawk War in 1832, the Potawatomi ceded all of their land along the Kankakee and Illinois rivers to the United States. Most Potawatomi left the area by the end of the decade, except for Chief Shaw-waw-nas-see, whose grave is commemorated by a boulder along the nature trail at Rock Creek.  
  
Noel Le Vasseur and other fur traders, including Hubbard Chabare and Bourbonnais, traded with the Potawatomi along the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers in the 1820s. When the Potawatomi left the area in 1838, Le Vasseur persuaded a number of his fellow French Canadians to emigrate from Quebec to the Bourbonnais Township area. Because of his settlement efforts, he is called "the father of Kankakee."  
  
A Marker on the west bank of Rock Creek Bridge commemorates the log cabin village of Rockville. It was begun in 1840, nine years after William Baker and other Euro-Americans first began farming along the Kankakee River.  
  
The Kankakee & Iroquois Navigation Company - later known as the Kankakee Company - was chartered in 1847 to provide water power and a navigable waterway from the Illinois & Michigan Canal to Warner's Landing, along the site of the present-day Warner Bridge Road. The company failed in the early 1880s, shortly after the Wabash Railroad came through. At the Chippewa Campground, hand-cut limestone pillars mark where a railway bridge was to have been built before financiers ran out of money.

Just inside the park's main entrance is the Smith Cemetery with the graves of several family members, most of whom died of yellow fever at the turn of the century.  
  
A major industry in the area in the 1890s was the Custer Bowery Amusement Park, which frequently drew crowds from Chicago. The park was gone by the 1920s, but by then the river had become a popular spot for summer cottages. The area became more accessible to vacationers in 1928 when concrete roads were built along both sides of the river. In 1938 Chicago resident Ethel Sturges Dummer donated 35 acres of land for a state park. Commonwealth Edison turned over another 1,715 acres to the state in 1956. With the company's additional grants in 1989, the park now roughly totals 4,000 acres.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/kankakee_river_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Lincoln Trail State Park**

Whether you are looking for history, unusual plant life or recreation, Lincoln Trail State Park has something to interest you. Located just west of Illinois Route 1, two miles south of Marshall in Clark County, the area is named after the trail Abraham Lincoln's family followed en route from Indiana to Illinois in 1831. Three Native American groups, the Miami, Kickapoo and Mascouten, occupied the site before it was ceded to the United States in the early 19th century.  
Today, visitors to the 1,023-acre park can enjoy the sights of American Beech Woods; wildflowers, including the unusual squaw-root and beech drops; and recreational activities such as boating, camping, fishing, hiking and winter sports. There is truly something for everyone.

Nature of the Area

The focal point of the park is Lincoln Trail Lake, which covers 146 acres in the southwest corner of the park. With its numerous fingers and more than seven miles of thickly wooded shoreline, it offers one beautiful vista after another. Lincoln Trail Lake was the third lake created in Illinois (1955-1956) using federal monies under the Dingell-Johnson Act. The lake's maximum depth is 41 feet.  
American Beech Woods, an Illinois Nature Preserve, is an especially noteworthy part of the park. The deep ravines of the preserve overflow with a beech-maple forest that is little changed from pioneer days. Southern Illinois and the eastern border of the state are the only areas where the American Beech grows in Illinois. It is a distinctive tree, with smooth gray bark. If you're looking for something a little out of the ordinary, try to find squaw-root and beech drops. These two wildflowers are unusual because they lack chlorophyll.

History of the Area

Long before Abraham Lincoln passed through the area, it was settled by Native Americans. Before the 18th century, the main tribes in the area were the Piankeshaw and Wea, of a Miami group. In the early 1700s, the Kickapoo moved south from Wisconsin, pushing the Piankeshaw and Wea south and east. The Kickapoos remained in control of the land until it was ceded to the United States in two separate treaties.  
  
The western boundary of the first cession is known as the Old Indian Boundary Line or the One O'Clock Line. It runs through Clark County, passing through the Lincoln Trail State Park near the boat dock and crosses the campground. It is called the One O'Clock Line because it is said that, if you look south from Pilot Grove in Vermillion county, the boundary runs in the direction of the sun at one o'clock in the afternoon. The area west of the original boundary was ceded by the Kickapoo in 1819.  
  
The state acquired the first 31 acres of the park in 1936. The park and lake were officially dedicated in 1958.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/lincoln_trail_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Kickapoo State Park**

Kickapoo State Park offers running or hiking, canoeing, fishing for trout, camping, hunting or scuba diving.  
  
Once a scarred wasteland ravaged by turn-of-the-century strip-mine operations, Kickapoo State State Recreation Area's 2,842 acres now provide an outdoor playground with something to appeal to every member of the family. Twenty-two deep water ponds, ranging in size from 0.2 of an acre to 57 acres, provide a total of 221 acres of water for boaters, canoeists and anglers. Lushly forested uplands and bottomlands along the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River is habitat for enough birds, wildlife and wildflowers to please any nature lover, while nature trails and running trails provide pathways to inspiration and physical fitness. If you want a less demanding excursion in the outdoors, there are facilities for camping and picnicking.  
  
Kickapoo owes its crystal clear ponds and luxuriantly forested ridges and hillsides to the regenerative powers of nature. Nearly a century of coal production using strip-mining techniques devastated the landscape. But during the past 50 years, trees and vegetation have gradually reclaimed naked ridges of subsoil, and stagnant mine ponds gradually have cleared.  
  
The park apparently was the first in the nation built on strip-mined land, and one of the first to be subsidized through public contributions. The state's initial purchase of 1,290 acres of mined lands from United Electric Coal Co. in 1939 was largely underwritten with contributions collected from Danville area residents.

Nature of the Area

Once stark strip mine banks are now covered with a forest of cottonwood, haw, ash and wild cherry. Deepwater ponds abound with aquatic insects, plants, crustaceans, amphibians and a variety of fish. Cypresses, introduced along the pond edges, add to the variety.  
The Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, a federal and state-designated Scenic River, runs through the park.  
  
A bottomland forest of sycamores and silver maples and upland timbers of stately oaks, hickories, beeches, sugar maples and dogwoods are an endless source of fascination for nature lovers and habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. The variety, number and mix of hardwood species present in Kickapoo's upland and bottomland forests translate into a firestorm of fall color each autumn.  
  
In spring, the woods explode with a vibrant display of colorful wildflowers, including jack-in-the-pulpits, violets, bluebells, sweet Williams, spring beauties, Dutchman's-breeches, wake-robins and nodding trilliums.  
In the bottomlands, birders may spot kingfishers or pileated woodpeckers flitting among the stately trees. Other species that may be glimpsed include red-winged blackbirds, least bitterns, grebes, great blue herons, warblers, vireos and a variety of songbirds, and even wild turkeys. A birding checklist available at the park office lists more than 100 species documented at the park.  
  
A variety of animal life can be seen, including white-tailed deer, squirrel, raccoon, cottontail rabbit, muskrat, mink and ground squirrels.  
 Nature-lovers should be wary. In addition to the trees and wildflowers that proliferate at Kickapoo State Park, poison ivy is abundant. People using the trails should learn to identify the poison ivy plant and avoid it at all times of the year.

History of the Area

Kickapoo State Recreation Area and the surrounding area have a long and rich cultural history. Archaeological excavations have provided evidence of a prehistoric village on the Middle Fork River near the park that was home to Native Americans of the Woodland and Mississippian cultures between A.D. 500 and 1500.  
  
A Kickapoo village was located at the confluence of the Middle Fork and Salt Fork rivers. It was in this village that Kennekuk, the "Kickapoo Prophet" lived.  
  
Kennekuk became a religious leader espousing a modified form of Christianity that incorporated elements of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. A staunch advocate of temperance, Kennekuk became a mediator between local Native Americans and European settlers. He was a signer of several Indian treaties with the United States.  
  
European settlers were drawn to the area by the presence of salt springs, called salines, which were discovered in 1819. Wells were dug to obtain salt brine, which was then boiled down to obtain salt. The salt works were operated by a variety of operators until 1848, producing at the height of operation about 120 bushels of salt per week. One of the original iron rendering kettles can be seen in a small memorial at Salt Kettle Rest Area on I-74.  
  
Among the early settlers in the area were John Cox, Indian fighter and scout during the Black Hawk War, and his wife, Polly. Both are buried in a small pioneer cemetery overlooking the former site of their farmstead cabin near the entrance to Campground Fox. Additional settlers from the area are interred in the All hands Cemetery, just east of the main park pavilion.  
  
Between 1850 and about 1940, much of the Kickapoo State Park area was strip-mined for coal. In fact, Vermilion County is said to be the birthplace of commercial strip-mining practices and one of the first areas to use mechanization for strip mining. The spoil piles and mine pits left behind after nearly a century of mining was the legacy from which nature had to recover to transform Kickapoo State Park into the outdoor playground it is today.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/kickapoo_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Giant City State Park**

With its breathtaking natural beauty and unlimited opportunities for outdoor recreation, a trip to Giant City State Park near Carbondale is sure to delight visitors of all ages. From camping and horseback riding to fishing and rappelling, it’s an outdoor lover’s paradise. Visitors will marvel at the many wilderness trails, and a sure treat awaits anyone hiking the Giant City Nature Trail, home of the "Giant City Streets" formed 12,000 years ago by huge bluffs of sandstone.  
  
Nestled in the Shawnee National Forest, just minutes south of Carbondale, the area was named for the unique impressions made by its massive sandstone structures. Eons of geological faulting and folding have molded a landscape like none other, which is now clothed in lush garments of fern, moss, large flowering mints, hundreds of species of wildflowers and 75-plus varieties of towering trees. The natural splendor of Giant City has made it a renowned retreat that attracts more than 1.2 million visitors annually.

**History of the Area**

Shelter bluffs, or rock shelters, worn into the sides of the cliffs have revealed evidence of human habitation in this region from as early as 10,000 years ago, and the blackened ceilings caused by their fires are still visible today. On an 80-foot sandstone cliff near the main entrance, one can see the remains of a Native American stone wall that was erected between A.D. 600-800.  
  
The first European settlers moved into the area from Kentucky and Tennessee in the early 1800s, and by 1850, settlers were using the land to cultivate fruit trees. During the Civil War, many of the cliffs and canyons were used as havens by soldiers of both the Union and Confederate armies. By the early 1900s, many biologists, geologists and visitors had become intrigued with the region for study and relaxation. It provided ample opportunity for both.  
  
In 1927, the State of Illinois acquired more than 1,100 acres of land in Union and Jackson counties and dedicated the area as Giant City State Park. In 1936, the Civilian Conservation Corps completed construction of a lodge and 12 overnight cabins on the highest point in the park. Today, the park has grown to encompass 4,000 acres of spectacular countryside and the 110-acre Fern Rocks Nature Preserve.  
  
An 82-foot, 100,000-gallon water tower was constructed in 1970 to feature a 50-foot observation deck that provides panoramic views of large expanses of the area. In 1999, a 4,725-square-foot Visitor Center was completed. The new facility houses exhibits on the natural and cultural history of the park, as well as a gift shop, audio-visual room, and a discovery corner for children.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/giant_city_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Cave-In-Rock State Park**

Few natural formations are as awe-inspiring or intriguing as a cave. The deep, dark recesses immediately conjure up images of adventure, mystery, terror, robbers, and pirates.  
  
At Cave-In-Rock in southern Illinois, you can experience this fascination for yourself. Sitting atop the high bluffs overlooking the scenic Ohio River, the heavily wooded park is named for the 55-foot-wide cave that was carved out of the limestone rock by water thousands of years ago. Trails winding along the riverbank offer views of riverboats, barges and other river scenes.

**History of the Area**

The actual history of this imposing natural phenomenon is colorful and provocative. The first European explorer to encounter it was M. de Lery of France who, in 1729, called it Caverne Dans Le Roc. It was a conspicuous curiosity frequently mentioned by later travelers in diaries and journals.  
  
Following the Revolutionary War, this immense recess came to serve as the ideal lair for outlaws, bandits and river pirates who preyed on the people traveling along the Ohio River. One of the most ambitious of these ruthless malefactors was Samuel Mason. Once an officer in George Washington’s Revolutionary Army, in 1797 he converted the cavern into a tavern which he called the Cave-In-Rock.  
  
From this apparently innocent and inviting position, Mason would dispatch his cohorts upriver to befriend unwary and bewildered travelers with offers of help and guidance. As they neared the cave, these henchmen would disable their boats or force them toward the yawning hollow, where the hapless pilgrims would be robbed, or worse. Few victims lived to tell their story.  
  
By the early 1800s, following the demise of the Mason Gang, the cave sheltered the even more notorious Harpe Brothers, a pair of killers fleeing execution in Kentucky. They continued their personal reign of thievery and murder in Illinois, using the cave as hideout and headquarters until they too were killed.  
  
It’s interesting to note that the cave served as a backdrop for a scene in the movie *How the West Was Won*. The scene was a near-accurate portrayal of how, in the 18th and 19th centuries, ruthless bandits used the cave to lure unsuspecting travelers to an untimely end.  
  
Although other desperadoes continued to take advantage of the secrecy and seclusion afforded by Cave-In-Rock, by the mid-1830s the quickening westward expansion of civilization and the steady growth in the local population and commerce had destroyed or driven out the “river rats” (pirates) and the cave began to serve as temporary shelter for other pioneers on their way west. Throughout the 19th century, this remarkable geological feature was an important landmark, prominently displayed on maps from the period.  
  
In 1929, the State of Illinois acquired 64.5 acres for a park that since has increased to 204 acres. The well-wooded, 60-foot-high hills and the rugged bluffs along the river - commanding expansive views of the famous waterway - became Cave-In-Rock State Park.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/cave-in-rock_state_park_in_illinois.html>

**Cahokia Mounds State Park**

Managed by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, in Collinsville, Illinois, is located on the Mississippi River floodplain, across from St. Louis, Missouri. This site was first inhabited by Indians of the Late Woodland culture about AD 700. The site grew during the following Mississippian period, after AD 900, and by AD 1050-1150, the Cahokia site was the regional center for the Mississippian culture with many satellite communities, villages, and farmsteads around it. After AD 1200, the population began to decline and the site was abandoned by AD 1400. In the late 1600s, the Cahokia Indians (of the Illinois confederacy) came to the area and it is from them that the site derives its name.  
  
However, it is the building accomplishments and cultural developments of the earlier Indians that make this site significant. They constructed more than 120 earthen mounds over an area of six square miles, although only 80 survive today. These industrious people moved over an estimated 55 million cubic feet of earth in woven baskets to create this network of mounds and community plazas. Monks Mound, for example, covers 14 acres, rises 100 feet, and was topped by a massive 5,000 square-foot building another 50 feet high. As the largest prehistoric earthen construction in the Americas, Monks Mound is a testament to the sophisticated engineering skills of these people. Additionally, they built several "Woodhenges," large post-circle monuments that appear to have been used as calendars, and they also constructed several defensive palisades nearly two-miles long around the central ceremonial precinct.

Source: <https://www.stateparks.com/cahokia_mounds.html>

**Fort de Chartres State Historic Site**

Located on Illinois Route 155, four miles west of Prairie du Rocher, the site marks the location of the last of three successive forts named “de Chartres” built by the French during their eighteenth-century colonial occupation of what is today Illinois. The first two forts were erected in the 1720s and were square palisaded wooden structures with corner bastions. The third fort, erected in the 1750s, was a massive square stone structure enclosing six buildings, including a still-standing powder magazine that may be the oldest building in Illinois. This fort served as the French seat of government and its chief military installation in the Illinois Country. In 1763 France ceded much of its territory in North America, including Illinois, to Great Britain. British troops occupied the fort from 1765 until 1772, when encroachment by the Mississippi River caused a collapse of the south wall. Subsequently, the remaining walls and buildings fell into ruin.

The site features an imaginative reconstruction of portions of the third Fort de Chartres. The fort gate, built in the 1920s, has been remodeled several times. Portions of the fort's walls were reconstructed on original foundations in 1989. The site was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1960 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.  
  
Inside the fort are the “restored” powder magazine (portions of which are original), several reconstructed stone buildings, and the exposed foundations of other buildings, which have been “ghosted” in wood. The powder magazine is stocked with reproduction barrels and barrel racks. A combination museum and office building, built in 1928 on the foundation of an original fort building, houses exhibits depicting French life at Fort de Chartres. The large stone “Guards House,” built in 1936, contains a Catholic chapel furnished in the style of the 1750s, along with a priest’s room, a gunner’s room, an officer-of-the-day room, and a guard’s room. Also on the grounds are an operating bake oven, a garden shed built of upright logs in “post-on-sill” construction, and a kitchen garden with raised beds of produce that would have been grown in eighteenth-century Illinois.

Interpretive signs at various locations guide visitors around the site, and every weekend at least one costumed interpreter offers information on the history of the three forts. The museum is open daily. A trading post, housed in a structure resembling the fort’s reproduced stone buildings, offers souvenirs, snack foods, and reproductions of items that might have been found in eighteenth-century Illinois. Recreational facilities outside the reproduced fort include a day-use area with a picnic shelter and horseshoe pits.

Source: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnrhistoric/Experience/Sites/Southwest/Pages/Fort-de-Chartres.aspx>