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Caesar Creek State Park Perimeter Loop Trail

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Caesar Creek State Park Perimeter Loop Trail

County: Warren

Nearest town: Harveysburg

Total distance: 11.7-mile loop

Hiking time: 6 to 8 hours as a day hike or 2 days for an overnight hike. Backpacking and camping permits required.

Trail conditions: Well marked and well worn. Meadow traverses can become overgrown in summer.

Blazes: Yellow

Water: Available seasonally from April 1st to November 1st at group campgrounds (except Day Lodge Group Camp) and other developed facilities in the park

Highlights: Wooded lakeside hiking, lake views, Horseshoe Falls, opportunities for fossil hunting

Maps: USGS 7.5': Waynesville, Oregonia, New Burlington & Clarksville; ODNR Caesar Creek State Park map; hand drawn backpack trail map available at www.caesarcreekstatepark.com

Contact Info: Caesar Creek State Park, 8570 E. State Route 73, Waynesville, Ohio 45068, phone: 937-382-1096

Internet: www.ohiodnr.com & www.caesarcreekstatepark.com

Getting there: To put the largest and more secluded camping area—Day Lodge Group Camp—near the halfway point of the hike, park at the Wellman Meadows Trailhead on the southeast side of the lake. From the interchange of Interstate 71 and State Route 73, take SR 73 west for 4.0 miles and turn left onto Oregonia Road. Travel 2.3 miles on Oregonia Road and turn right onto the road leading to the Wellman Meadows Boat Ramp. Look for a large state park sign reading “Wellman Meadows Group Camp / Wellman Meadows Boat Ramp” at the road’s entrance. Travel this road for 0.6 mile and turn right into the trailhead parking area. The Wellman Meadows Group Camp is located just ahead on the left. Day hikers and overnight hikers selecting a different camp have the option of parking at numerous other developed facilities around the southern one-third of the lake.

Trailhead coordinates: 39.4859°N, 84.0457°W (WGS84); UTM 16 754077E 4374682N (NAD27); UTM 16 754081E 4374882N (NAD83)

Background

Like Burr Oak, Caesar Creek State Park’s focal point is a recreational lake. In this case a much larger one, coming in at just over 2800 acres. Again, flood control was the impetus for damming this valley in 1978, part of the Little Miami watershed. Tales of history run deep in this region of Ohio, dating all the way back to the Paleozoic era, when a shallow sea covered most of the state. The park’s excellent fossil hunting in ancient sedimentary limestones and shales—exposed courtesy of an ancient bedrock upheaval--gives testimony to the life of this long vanished body of water. In more modern times, several early Ohio Indian cultures inhabited the park’s forests. The Hopewell Indian race lived in the region during a period from 300 B.C. to 600 A.D. and left behind the nearby Fort Ancient earthworks. From 1200 A.D. to 1600 A.D., a later Indian race known as the Fort Ancient Indians lived on the banks of Caesars Creek. Woodland Indian tribes such as the Wyandot, Miami and Shawnee also called this part of Ohio home. The area’s name originates from a slave captured by the Shawnee, and then later adopted and given the valley.

Surrounding the lake are lands dedicated to Caesar Creek State Park and Caesar Creek Lake Wildlife Area. Below the dam, 483 acres are set aside for the Caesar Creek Gorge Nature Preserve. The preserve’s main attraction is a 180-foot deep gorge formed by glacial meltwater cutting down through bedrock. Fossil rich Ordovician limestone and shale are exposed in the gorge. Caesar Creek State Park is located in the glaciated Till Plains region of Ohio, so the landscape is not as dramatic as in unglaciated hill country, but still scenic. Terrain relief generally struggles to reach 100 feet around the lake and is greatest in the gorge. The area is rich in plant life with several different plant communities thriving. Oak, hickory, beech and maple trees grace the wooded hillsides.

The Trail

A hike on Caesar Creek's Perimeter Loop Trail is a pleasant and a not-more-than-mildly-strenuous stroll through an often changing landscape surrounding the lower one-third of Caesar Creek Lake—Ohio's deepest. Along the way you'll pass many lake views, two waterfalls, a restored pioneer village, fossil-rich limestone exposures and many state park facilities. All this while staying in or near the cedar sprinkled deciduous woodlands that hug the lake. The first day of an overnight hike, using the route we have described below, takes you near park facilities and the more active, noisier central section of the lake, using a busy four-lane section of State Route 73 to cross over the lake. The second day offers more peaceful wooded walking farther away from roads near the shore of the quieter southern end of the lake, but still not out of earshot of revving boat engines. There is a bit of road walking over the lake's dam, but the trail finishes nicely with visits to Horseshoe Falls and the rocky Flat Fork Creek. Below the dam, the Caesar Creek Gorge State Nature Preserve provides additional opportunities for hiking and exploring a 180' deep gorge cut by glacial meltwater through the same fossil-rich Ordovician limestone and shale found in the park.

The yellow-blazed Perimeter Loop Trail is actually comprised of a joined series of point-to-point trails, or segments. Most segments don't really have names, but are identified by the points of interest they connect on either end. In the field, you will see 4"x 4" posts with single-letter reference points and larger signs indicating mileage to both ends of that respective segment. From the variety of maps available from the state park office, only a crudely hand drawn map shows the single-letter reference points. This map is not readily handed out to park visitors. No map seems to show trail segments consistent with the way signage indicates in the field. The official state park map doesn't show reference points or segments. Fortunately, for the hiker/backpacker, the trail (or segments) is blazed consistently and often, and easy to follow. We have elected not to include either letter or segment references on our enclosed map.



A section of trail

The trail is well worn and used considerably by day hikers. Fishing enthusiasts use sections of the trail as well to reach the lake, especially where parking is nearby. Where the trail traverses meadows and woodland fringe areas, shoulder-high seasonal overgrowth is possible. Our revisit to the trail for this document in June 2012 found the trail to be freshly and frequently blazed with yellow paint in both directions, as well as many sections of the trail mowed to minimize seasonal overgrowth. There are not too many opportunities to walk astray from the main trail if you stay alert. There are often many unofficial side trails leading to lakeside fishing spots, but the distinction is easy to make. Around Horseshoe Falls, a popular day hike destination, waterfall seekers have worn many side trails above and below the falls, so a little extra attention needs to be paid here. The Buckeye Trail joins the main trail just after stepping off the State Route 73 bridge over the lake and runs coincident with the main trail for approximately 6 miles.

Backpack camping is currently restricted to five state park designated group camps and two single-site primitive backpack camps. Overnight backpackers are required to obtain a permit from the park office prior to hitting the trail. The permit can be either emailed or mailed to you by park staff and must be returned for approval. Since the park office has been relocated to Cowan Lake State Park, it is inconvenient to try and obtain a permit the day you arrive. A little upfront planning is a must. You must also state your desired camping location(s) on the permit.

All group camps are essentially large open treeless meadows offering little privacy and protection from the sun. One camp, Horseman's Group Camp, is not located near the trail and would require adding an additional 4.0 miles to your total mileage. As the name indicates, it is used primarily by horseback riders. The four other group camps are named as follows: Day Lodge, Wellman Meadows, Cedar Point and Hickory Overlook. The Cedar Point and Hickory Overlook camps are located approximately 1.0 mile and 0.5 mile, respectively, from the trail, requiring an out-and-back road walk from Fifty Springs Picnic Area to reach. Day Lodge and Horseman's are primitive group camps. The only improvements found at Day Lodge are a couple of picnic tables. Picnic shelters and flush toilets can be found at the other three group camps.

The use of any of the group camps--except Day Lodge, which is free--does come with a cost. Currently, all backpackers, whether you're a party of one or a dozen or more, pay the same daily rate of \$75. To avoid this unfair and exorbitant fee, you will want to plan your overnight stay using the Day Lodge Group Camp on the western side of the lake or using one of the two single-site backpack camps. Reservations are required in advance through the state park office for all camps. A good time to reserve a campsite is when you call to obtain your backpacking permit. Only one group can reserve a camp at a time. If you are a single backpacker, you may be asked to share the camp with a larger group at the group camps. Reservations are issued in a first-come, first-served manner. The park office does not maintain weekend hours, so plan accordingly.



Wellman Meadows Trailhead

The two single-site backpack camps are fairly new additions to the trail. They are located right on the trail at inconvenient locations, near active areas in the park and close to the trailhead. There are no improvements at either site. As of this update written in June 2012, signs have not been posted to direct you to either site. In fact, neither site could be located without a GPS unit and obtained coordinates from the park office. Once located with a GPS unit, nothing indicative of a campsite

could be found at either location, so they are indeed primitive and apparently lightly used. One of the primitive campsites is located just up the trail from where we have chosen to begin the hike for this document near Wellman Meadows Group Camp. The coordinates for this site are 39.4854°N, 84.0448°W (WGS84). The other primitive site is located at the Fifty Springs Picnic Area, near a shelter house in an overgrown meadow, about 2.3 miles into the hike. The coordinates for this site are 39.5003°N, 84.0226°W (WGS84). If you choose to camp at either of the primitive sites, you'll most likely want to choose a different beginning point, such as Furnas Shores Boat Ramp, for instance. The state park office can provide you with an aerial map of each primitive campsite when you call for you backpacking permit.

The trip we have developed for the Perimeter Loop Trail takes into consideration the fact that most backpackers will use the free Day Lodge Group Camp as their overnight camp and not either of the poorly placed primitive backpack camps. The Wellman Meadows Trailhead was chosen as the starting point because it puts the Day Lodge Group Camp at just under 7.0 miles into the hike, hiking counterclockwise. This leaves a pleasant, mostly wooded hike of just under 5.0 miles to finish out the trip. Day Lodge Group Camp is farther away from state park improvements than the two primitive sites and it is the only free group camp.

To ease the burden of extra weight, a pre-hike drop-off of gear or water at the Day Lodge Group Camp is a viable option as the camp is easily accessed by vehicle. A young forest surrounds the camp, providing good cover for cached gear. The Day Lodge Group Camp can be reached by travelling State Route 73 west past the lake for 2.8 miles. Just before the village of Waynesville, turn left onto Clarksville Road and follow it for 1.4 miles to Middletown Road. Turn left onto Middletown Road and find the group camp 0.2 mile ahead on the left.

A hike begins from the Wellman Meadows Trailhead located on the road serving the Wellman Meadows Boat Ramp and Group Camp. The Perimeter Loop Trail crosses this road approximately 100 yards before you turn into the trailhead parking area. As you start out, walk the road east, or towards Oregonia Road, and make a left onto the trail at its intersection with the road. Alternately, follow an unofficial path visible in the grass on the east side of the parking area. This path will enter a woods and arrive at the main trail in approximately 100 yards. The first primitive backpack camp is supposed to be located on the trail just north of where the trail crosses the road.

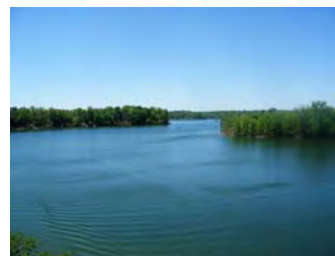
It won't be long after getting warmed up that you'll enter the large circular layout of the finely restored Pioneer Village. You'll find most of the structures locked, but feel free to walk the grounds. Numerous yearly events from a Civil War encampment to festivals open this site to the public. The trail follows a gravel road around the interior of the village, signage will direct you. Soon, you'll arrive on Pioneer Village Road where the trail makes a right and follows the road for 50 yards before forking left onto an old road, soon passing a pond and a communications tower. A left turn on Pioneer Village Road will take you to the Nature Center in a short distance.

The old road you'll walk after the Pioneer Village is still indicated on USGS 7.5' maps. It is now largely overgrown and the young forest is encroaching into the swath. At the 1.4-mile mark, the trail arrives at Lukens Road and follows the road to the left for 0.2 mile. This pre-lake road now ends at water's edge. The trail leaves the road near the lake and follows the lakeshore through cedars to a footbridge over Crawdad Falls. This is a particularly peaceful section of trail along a narrow and secluded inlet of the lake at the mouth of Jonahs Creek. Watch for waterfowl and muskrat.

After Crawdad Falls, it won't be long before you emerge from the woods and arrive at the open Fifty Springs Picnic Area at the 2.3-mile mark. Restrooms and a covered picnic shelter are located here. The second primitive backpack camp is supposed to be located in the overgrown meadow behind the picnic shelter. For nearly the next 1.0 mile, the trail follows paved roads. The first short stretch of pavement serves the picnic area and the Cedar Point and Hickory Overlook Group Camps to the left. Soon, the trail emerges onto busy State Route 73 and takes a left, heading for the bridge over the lake.

Immediately after exiting the SR 73 bridge the trail leaves the road, requiring a climb over a guardrail, and drops steeply downhill to the left toward the lakeshore. At the bottom of this short descent, the Buckeye Trail comes into view from under the bridge and intersects the trail. The blue blazes of the Buckeye Trail and yellow blazes of the Perimeter Loop Trail share the same path for the next 6.0 miles plus. The early section of the now shared trail is active with fishermen, wide and well worn. Many side trails lead to the nearby lakeshore. As the trail approaches the Furnas Shore Boat Ramp and the 4.0-mile mark, the trail narrows and becomes more overgrown in rejuvenating woodlands.

At the Furnas Shores Boat Ramp, the trail emerges from the woods right on top of the steep ramp and then reenters the woods just past the parking area after a brief road walk. From this point, it's a wooded up-and-down trek to the Day Lodge Group Camp, complete with lake views and many cedar trees. After a near miss with SR 73 at mile mark 4.7, the walk becomes noticeably more peaceful. Many fine examples of elm, sugar maple, beech and oak are passed en route to camp. Closer to camp, the tendency of the trail is to stay higher up on a ridge above the lake. Just before camp, the trail passes a side trail to an old sugar camp and then arrives shortly at the Hopewell Day Lodge. Don't camp here. If camping at the Day Lodge Group Camp, you'll want to leave the trail and follow Middletown Road to the west, going away from Hopewell Day Lodge. In 0.2 mile, you'll arrive at camp.



Caesar Creek Lake from SR 73

The camp is basically a mowed field adjacent to the lightly traveled Middletown Road. A pond is located at the rear of the camp and does offer a nice pond-side camping site behind some trees, out of view of the road. Expect to encounter some territorial geese in warmer months trying to claim this spot. A few individual trees offer shade in summer, but also serve as potential lightning rods during storms. At the start of the second day's hike, follow Middletown Road back toward Hopewell Day Lodge, but stay to the right of the lodge until the road ends and pick up the trail to the right at the entrance to a chained-off old road. Watch for signs.

The second day continues with more pleasant wooded walking above the lake. At 7.7 miles, an abandoned paved road is crossed, and actually followed for a few yards. Be sure to take a few minutes to walk this old road right down to the edge of the lake for a nice water view. Over the next 1.5 miles, the scenery remains unchanged. A nice lake view and lakeside resting spot at the tip of a short peninsula is passed near the 8.6-mile mark. After 9.0 miles, the trail draws closer to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Visitor Center. A few short nature trails intersect the main trail and soon the trail emerges from the woods in front of the Center.

Along with the Visitor Center, the Corps maintains all facilities around the dam, the dam itself and the upcoming Flat Fork Ridge Recreation Area. There is marked improvement in the quality of the facilities maintained by the Corps versus those by the State. Explore this area and the informative Visitor Center as time permits. While at the Visitor Center, obtain a required--but free--fossil hunting permit if you wish to hunt them in the emergency spillway just ahead. The final section of trail from the Visitor Center back to the trailhead offers a lot of variety and provides a nice end to the hike.

From the Visitor Center, the trail follows Clarksville Road around a sweeping turn and then onto and across the dam. Excellent views of the lake and the downstream gorge are found from atop the dam. After crossing the dam, the trail turns left and enters the Flat Fork Ridge Recreation Area, the Buckeye Trail bids adieu at this point. Restrooms and other improvements for day use are located at the recreation area. The trail continues out the back of the lower parking area via wooden steps. The trail exits the recreation area lakeside and soon enters the emergency spillway. On the opposite side of the spillway, a long escarpment of exposed limestone is noticed. This is Mecca for Ohio fossil enthusiasts. The trail will pass near this escarpment as it exits the spillway near the lake. Even if fossils aren't your area of interest, it's hard not to be amazed at their density in this rock. The vast majority are brachiopods (clam-like creatures).

Past the emergency spillway, the trail climbs a bit and reenters a woodland rich in cedars. Soon, water can be heard to the left and the tops of sycamore trees rooted in the rocky gorge below are seen. Near the 10.7-mile mark, you are unknowingly atop a high bluff above Flat Fork Creek until you take a few steps to the left off the trail and view the rocky creek directly below your feet. In a few more steps, a wonderful waterfall can be seen below. This is Horseshoe Falls (aka Flat Fork Falls). A steep, unofficial trail forking downhill left to the falls will tempt you but with some patience you'll arrive at the falls soon. The trail ahead will curve around toward the shallow gorge. Soon, you'll arrive at an intersection where the trail forks left and right. The more noticeable left fork gently lowers you to the falls. The right fork used to lead to a cable suspension bridge over the creek, but it was removed in 2010. Going either direction now leads to a creek crossing. You'll most likely go left in order to explore the falls. The official trail crosses the creek near the old suspension bridge site, upstream of the waterfall. After crossing the creek below the falls, walk 50 yards upstream along the opposite bank to find the main trail again.



Horseshoe Falls & Flat Fork Creek

Resuming the trail on the opposite side of the creek near the old suspension bridge site, soon arrive at a 4" x 4" post marking an intersection with a side trail. The main trail goes right here. Following the side trail leads to many spur trails traveling back towards the creek below the waterfall and the bluff you were recently standing on. The side trail follows the creek and will actually return to the main trail in 0.25 mile, but it is very overgrown in warmer seasons.

The final stretch of just less than 1.0 mile is mostly wooded, passes a pond and a couple of trail intersections then brings you back to the road where it all started. A left turn on the road will take you back to the trailhead in approximately 100 yards.

Perimeter Loop Trail Notes and Mileage

0.0 Start at the Wellman Meadows Trailhead on the road serving Wellman Meadows Group Camp and Wellman Meadows Boat Ramp. Walk east on the road, away from the lake, for 100 yards and turn left where the trail intersects the road. Alternately, follow the faint path heading east from the middle of the parking area for 100 yards into a wooded area and arrive at an intersection with the main trail. Turn left.

0.1 Pass one of two primitive backpack campsites. The site was not discernible as of this writing and was located with a GPS unit and coordinates obtained from the park office.

0.4 Arrive at the Pioneer Village. Signage will direct you through the village to Pioneer Village Road just ahead. Turn right on the road and then left after 50 yards onto an old road blocked off by a chain. Turn left on Pioneer Village Road to visit the Nature Center.

1.4 Make a left onto Lukens Road.

- 1.6** Exit Lukens Road to the right.
- 1.75** Cross a wooden footbridge over Crawdad Falls. Go left after stepping off the bridge. Watch for yellow blazes.
- 2.2** Cross a stream with no bridge.
- 2.3** Arrive at Fifty Springs Picnic Area. Go right on the road serving the picnic area, toward State Route 73. The second primitive backpack campsite is supposed to be located in the overgrown meadow behind the picnic shelter.
- 2.6** Emerge onto SR 73. Go left.
- 3.25** Exit SR 73 to the left by hopping over a guardrail and heading steeply downhill. The guardrail and road signs are blazed. The Buckeye Trail joins the main trail at the bottom of the slope.
- 4.0** Arrive at the Furnas Shores Boat Ramp. Go right, following the road serving the boat ramp. Be sure to keep the parking area on your right.
- 4.15** The trail forks left from the Furnas Shores Boat Ramp road. Carsonite signs and blazes mark this junction well.
- 5.6** The trail forks. Go right.
- 6.1** Arrive at a junction with the Old Sugar Camp Trail. Go straight to stay on the main trail. Fork right to follow the short OSCT, which returns to the main trail ahead.
- 6.45** Arrive at the Hopewell Day Lodge. The trail continues straight, passing very near the front of the lodge. If camping at the Day Lodge Group Camp, head right from the front of the lodge, following the road at an angle away from the lodge past a meadow and an abandoned archery range on the right.
- 6.7** Arrive at Day Lodge Group Camp. The next day, follow the road back in the direction of Hopewell Day Lodge but stay to the right of the lodge. Resume the main trail where the road ends and go right at the entrance of a chained off old road. Watch for signs and blazes.
- 7.7** Emerge onto the abandoned old Clarksville Road. Go left for 50 yards and then fork right off the road back into the woods.
- 8.65** Enjoy the view from this peaceful lakeside spot located on a small peninsula.
- 9.0** Arrive at an intersection with the Adena Trace Loop trail near the USACE Visitor Center. Go left. In 50 feet, the main trail forks right. Watch for yellow blazes.
- 9.2** Emerge onto the lawn in front of the USACE Visitor Center. The trail continues on Clarksville Road past the Visitor Center and a service center en route to the dam. Road sign posts are marked with blazes.
- 9.6** Enjoy the view from the top of the dam.
- 9.8** After exiting the dam, the trail turns left into the Flat Fork Ridge Recreation Area. The trail continues out the back of the lower parking area, down a set of wooden steps. Watch for signs and blazes. The trail is graveled and fenced until it arrives at the emergency spillway in 0.2 mile.
- 10.2** The trail enters the emergency spillway. Notice the escarpment of exposed limestone ahead. Fossil hunting is permitted here with a free permit from the Visitor Center. Just past the emergency spillway, the trail heads slightly uphill and enters a woodland. An unofficial trail forks downhill left toward the lake near here.
- 10.7** Take a few steps off the trail to the left and peer into the rocky gorge directly below. Just ahead, Horseshoe Falls comes into view. An unofficial trail forks steeply downhill to the left toward the waterfall. Stay on the main trail.
- 10.85** Arrive at a T intersection. Go left at this intersection downhill to explore the falls. Cross Flat Fork Creek below the falls and walk 50 yards upstream along the opposite bank to find the main trail.
- 10.9** Arrive at an intersection marked by a 4" x 4" post with an overgrown side trail that travels along the creek. Go right to stay on the main trail.
- 11.1** Pass a pond. Soon, the side trail from the creek enters from the left.
- 11.4** Pass a side trail and footbridge to the left. Continue straight.
- 11.5** Arrive at a junction with the Wellman Meadows Loop trail. Go right.
- 11.6** Emerge onto the road back to the trailhead. Go left.
- 11.7** Arrive back at the trailhead.

Day Hikes

Completing the 11.7 miles of Perimeter Loop Trail as a day hike is an attainable goal for the fit hiker. Unlike the more challenging hilly terrain of southeastern Ohio, the single most change in elevation on any rise or descent here is about 70 feet. Shorter day hike options are plentiful due mainly to the many points of trail access from state park and Corps of Engineers operated facilities. Since this trail consists of only one large loop, all day hikes will be of the out-and-back nature.

The southern half of the loop offers the most variety. A recommended hike starts at the Flat Fork Ridge Recreation Area near the dam and travels the main trail in an easterly direction to Horseshoe Falls, passing through the fossil-rich emergency spillway on the way. This trip is short--about 2.2 miles to the falls and back, but you'll want to take your time and explore the points of interest along the way and admire the lake views. Go a little farther and visit the Pioneer Village for a roundtrip total of 4.3 miles.

To explore the quietest section of the trail, park and start at the Hopewell Day Lodge and hike south along the west side of the lake to the USACE Visitor Center. After a visit at the Center, head back north over the wooded, rolling landscape and return to the day lodge. The total distance for this hike is 4.7 miles. Nice lake views are found the closer you get to the Visitor Center. Nearby Caesar Creek Gorge Nature Preserve offers additional day hiking.

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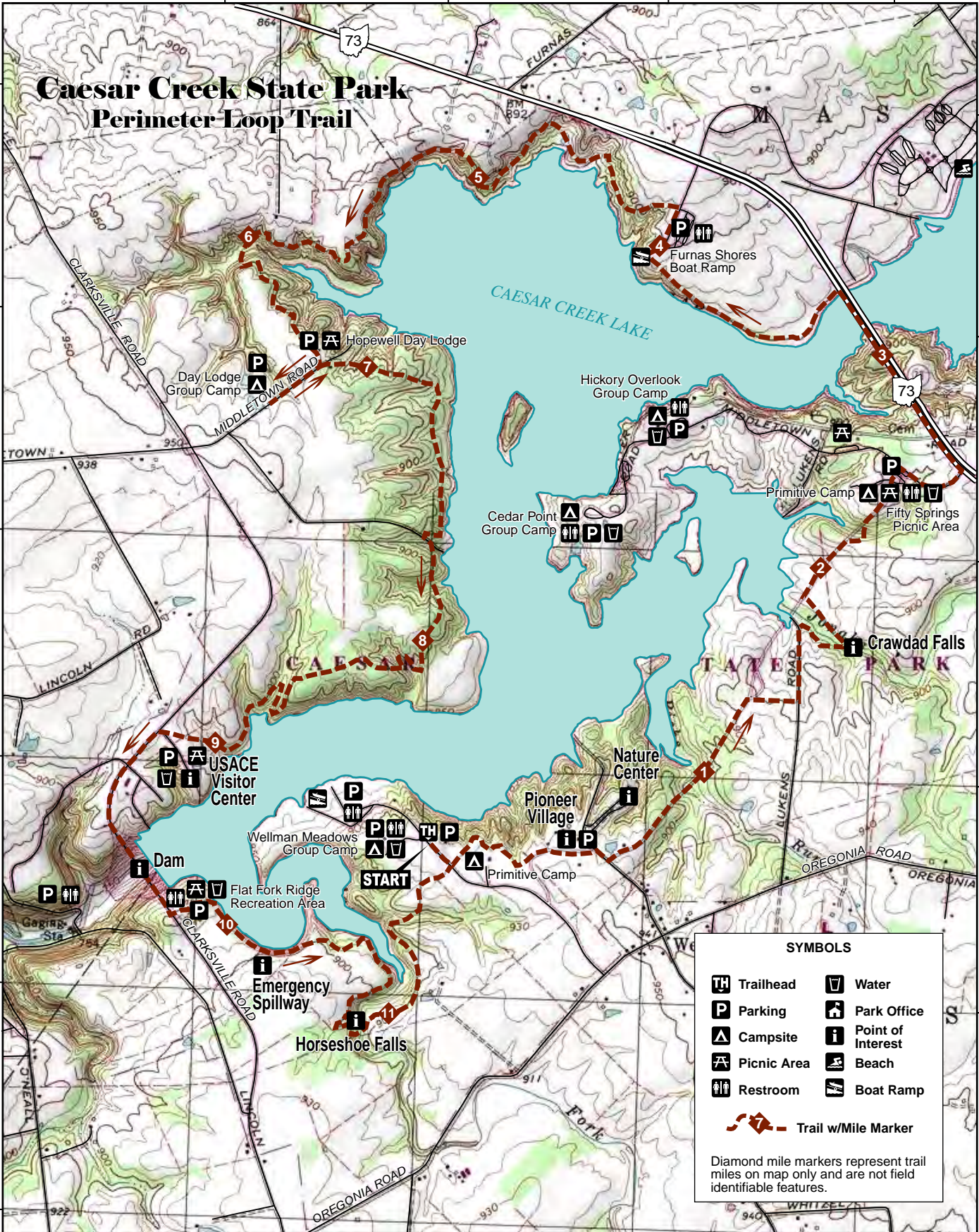
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Caesar Creek State Park Perimeter-Loop Trail



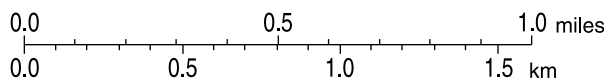
SYMBOLS

Trailhead	Water
Parking	Park Office
Campsite	Point of Interest
Picnic Area	Beach
Restroom	Boat Ramp
Trail w/Mile Marker	

Diamond mile markers represent trail miles on map only and are not field identifiable features.



Base map created with TOPO!
© National Geographic Maps



1" = 2000'

1000-Meter UTM 16 Grid
NAD 27

contour interval 10'

