

# FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK

## SUMMER FACILITIES AND FEATURES

- 22 semi-modern campsites (15 with electricity) with showers and flush toilets
- 9 rustic campsites
- 8 miles of hiking trail
- 12 miles of horseback trail
- 7.3 mile bike trail connecting Fairfax to Fort Ridgely
- 3 walk-in campsites
- 25-unit horse campground
- Primitive group camp
- 2 picnic grounds
- Nine-hole golf course
- Historic Fort Ridgely

### HELP US PROTECT MINNESOTA'S PAST:

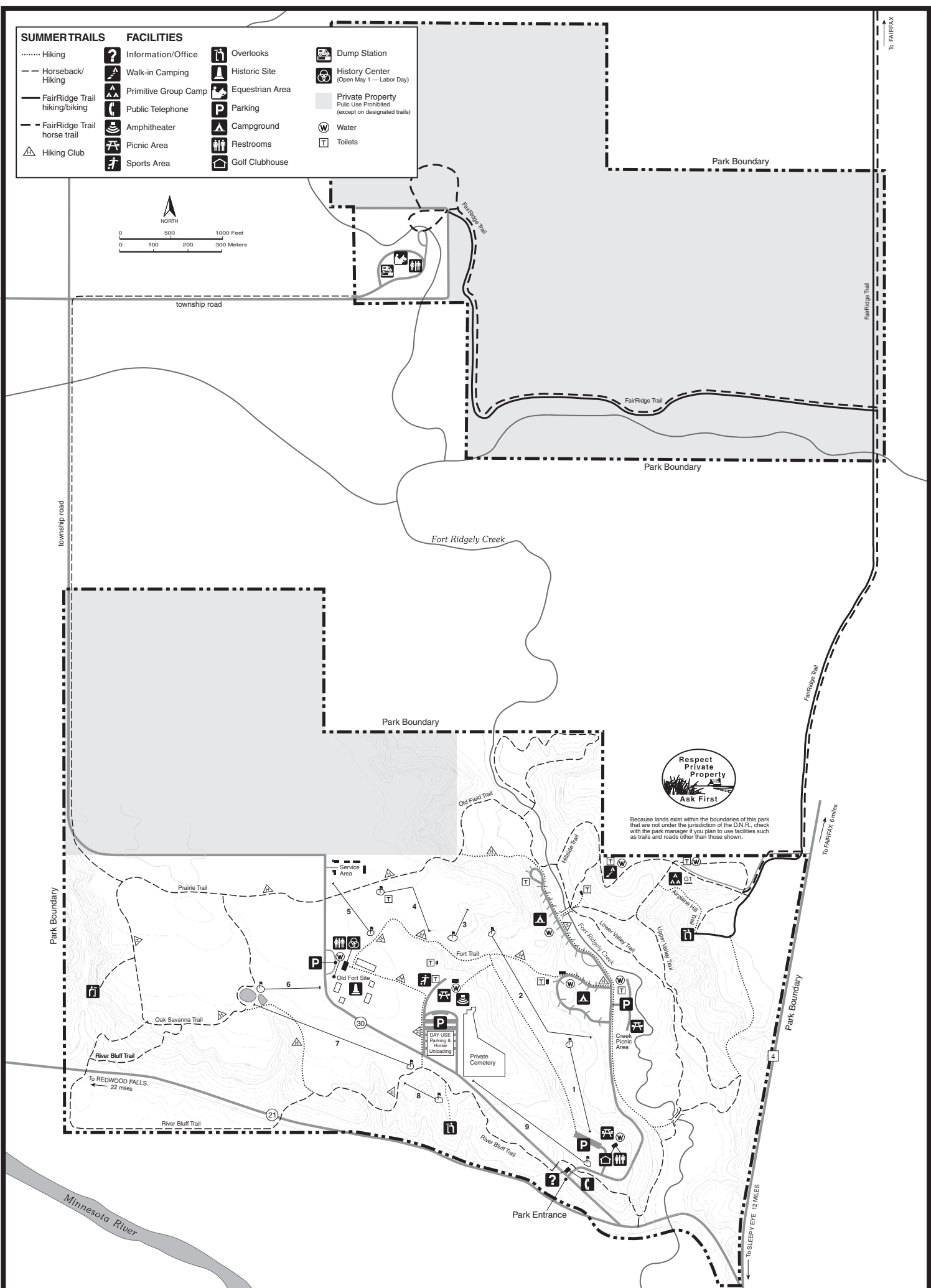
Please leave artifacts where you find them. Report findings to park staff.

### LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

The DNR has mapped the state showing federal, state and county lands with their recreational use. Public Recreation Information Maps (PRIM) are available for purchase from the DNR's Gift Shop. DNR's website also has information on trails, parks and major sporting and map stores.

Check it out - you'll be glad you did!

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Department of Natural Resources





**FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
 Fort Ridgely State Park  
 72158 County Road 30  
 Fairfax, MN 55332-9601  
 (507) 426-7840

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 Department of Natural Resources  
 Information Center  
 500 Lafayette Road  
 St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

**(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)**  
 1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

TDD (Telecommunications  
 Device for Deaf)  
 (651) 296-5484 (Metro Area)  
 1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

DNR Web Site: [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)  
 State Parks Page: [www.mnstateparks.info](http://www.mnstateparks.info)

**FORT RIDGELY STATE PARK** is located along Minnesota State Highway 4, six miles south of Fairfax in Nicollet and Renville Counties. The entrance to the park is off Nicollet County Highway 21. Highway map index: G-18.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** Fort Ridgely State Park covers 478 acres of wooded ravines and open meadows on the north bluff of the Minnesota River Valley. The park is named after the military post which occupied the site in the 1850s and 1860s. It is a place of quiet and calm where visitors can observe nature, learn about

a period of Minnesota's history, and enjoy year-round outdoor recreational activities.

**GEOLOGY:** The last glaciers to cover this part of Minnesota retreated approximately 12,000 years ago. They left behind almost 200 feet of sand, gravel and rocks (called glacial till) on top of a layer of clay sediments and hard bedrock.

Fort Ridgely State Park sits atop two layers of this glacial till. Lying underneath the till in parts of the park is a layer of white clay known as kaolin. Deposits of this clay are exposed in the banks along Fort Ridgely Creek in the northern part of the park.

The bedrock of granite and gneiss, visible at Morton and elsewhere in the river valley, is not visible anywhere in the park.

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT:** For over 130 years, the land that is now Fort Ridgely State Park has been greatly impacted by logging, farming, grazing, road and building construction. Today, through active natural resource management activities, the park is attempting to recreate or restore the park's original natural character.

The open bluffs overlooking the Minnesota River have been the least disturbed of any area in the park. The best displays of prairie wildflowers and grasses are found in these areas. In fall, these bluffs are a favorite sunning place for garter and bull snakes. (There are NO poisonous snakes in the Minnesota River Valley.) Soaring overhead, hawks and bald eagles can be seen riding the warm air thermals that rise from the river valley below.

Throughout the park are numerous meadows, each distinct in character. Some have scattered prairie wildflowers and grasses, others are dense stands of non-native plant species. In 1982, a large meadow was reestablished on the park's western edge. This planting of native prairie grasses and wildflowers is an attempt to return this area to its original character.

On the edge of the park's bluffs, and by some of the meadows, are large bur oak trees with low, spreading branches. At one time, these oaks grew out in the open surrounded only by prairie grasses. These areas, known as oak

savanna, gradually disappeared as the prairie was plowed and its fires suppressed. Shrubs and other trees then invaded the oak savanna, creating a forest-like condition.

Fort Ridgely State Park uses controlled burns to restore the natural character of the bluffs, meadows and oak savanna. Controlled burns are fires deliberately set, under specific conditions, by a trained crew. The fire is controlled by mowed breaks and fire-extinguishing equipment. Fire kills woody plants, non-native flowers and grasses, while encouraging the native prairie plants to flourish.

Growing in the park's deep ravines, and along Fort Ridgely Creek, are large ash, basswood, sugar maple, hackberry and black cherry trees. During the 1970s and early 1980s an insect-borne fungus (Dutch Elm Disease) invaded Fort Ridgely, killing most of the park's American and red elm trees.

The park's wildlife has been quick to utilize these dead trees for feeding and cavity nesting sites. The dead trees opened up the forest canopy, letting sunlight in and setting the stage for a new round of plant succession. Since dead trees are an asset to woodland wildlife, the only trees removed are those which pose a hazard to park users. The rest are left for wildlife to use.

**RECREATION:** A variety of year-round recreational opportunities are available at Fort Ridgely State Park. A modern campground offers 22 level, grassy sites (15 with electricity) for all types of camping enthusiasts, with flush toilets and showers. For those seeking a more rustic experience there is a separate 9-site campground with just the basics available. The park also offers 3 walk-in campsites for backpackers, a primitive group camp and a 25-unit horse campground.

Nature lovers will enjoy the eight miles of hiking trails which wind through a variety of wooded ravines and open prairie meadows. Twelve miles of this trails system are available to horseback riders from spring to fall, and to snowmobilers in the winter. There are over four miles of scenic trails groomed for skiers during the snow season.

A choice of picnic areas awaits visitors throughout the year. The main Upper Picnic

Area, adjacent to the fort site, has a large, level, shaded picnic grounds with horseshoe courts, a volleyball court, playground equipment, and an open shelter, which may be reserved. A second choice, the Chalet Picnic Area, surrounds an enclosed, heated shelter building that may be reserved for family reunions, parties or other get-togethers on a year-round basis. The winter sliding hill is located adjacent to this area. Another alternative, the Creek Picnic Area, provides more solitude. Picnic next to Fort Ridgely Creek, relaxing to the sounds of this spring-fed stream on its journey through the park.

Golfers will enjoy the challenging nine-hole golf course which is nestled into the valleys surrounding the fort site. The golf experience is reminiscent of golf as it was played in the past. The course is a walk-only course and family members are welcome to walk along. Rental clubs and green fees are available at the Park Office.

**HISTORY:** Fort Ridgely was built in 1853 as a U.S. military garrison on Minnesota's frontier. This military post was to provide protection for the newly settled lands of southern and central Minnesota. It eventually played a prominent role in the Dakota Conflict of 1862.

The Minnesota Historical Society's Interpretive Center at the fort site contains exhibits and information about garrison life and the people and events surrounding Fort Ridgely during the 1850s and 60s.

The old fort site, with five acres of land, was purchased by the State of Minnesota in 1896 to create a memorial to the participants of the Dakota Conflict at Fort Ridgely. When an additional 148 acres were purchased in 1911, the site was designated as a state park. By the end of 1927, park facilities included a nine-hole golf course and an elaborate concrete stage which had been constructed in a natural amphitheater.

The park was developed by the U.S. Department of Interior under the State Park Emergency Conservation Work Program during the 1930s. A 240-man unit of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) developed the park under the supervision of the National Park Service. The CCC camp was located in the area now used as the rustic campground.

The CCC was followed by the Veteran's Conservation Corps. The CCC constructed many of the park buildings and assisted with road building, trail construction, tree planting, sodding and major erosion control projects.

**SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK...**

- The park belongs to all Minnesotans. Please treat it with respect and help us to protect it by following the rules.
- The park is open year-round. On a daily basis, the park gate is closed from 10 P.M. to 8 A.M. the following morning except to registered campers.
- Camp only in designated locations.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and arrows, and all other weapons is prohibited in state parks.
- Pets must be restrained on a leash no longer than six feet. Pets are not allowed in park buildings.
- Park in designated areas only.
- Motor bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on park roads, not on trails.
- Enjoy park wildlife and plants but please respect them. Do not pick or dig up plants, disturb or feed animals, or scavenge dead wood.
- Build fires only in designated locations—fire rings or fireplaces. Wood is available for purchase from park staff. Portable stoves or grills are permitted.
- Daily or annual permits are required for all vehicles entering a state park. They may be purchased at the park headquarters or the Information Center in St. Paul (see "FOR MORE INFORMATION" to left).

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*This information is available in alternative format upon request.*

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