

Little Buffalo State Park

by Kelly Houghton



Photo-courtesy of DCNR

Little Buffalo State Park, located on 923 acres of Perry County, has been attracting visitors for centuries. Little Buffalo Creek, after which the park is named, attracted both Native Americans visiting the creek on hunting trips, as well as farmers and merchants who actively farmed the land until the 1960s. Today, over 300,000 people each year continue to meet at Little Buffalo for fantastic fishing and an extensive selection of unique outdoor activities.

Little Buffalo's 88-acre Holman Lake has built the reputation of being a great warmwater fishery because of

its wide variety and good numbers of fish. Families especially favor the lake because of the large panfish population. Since the western end of the lake is very shallow and predominately under 3 feet, it heats up quickly after ice-out in the spring, and bluegills and crappies are commonly pulled from the water. As the lake warms, the panfish disperse and you can find them almost anywhere and in every season. There's also a great yellow perch population, but finding them can be tricky. Waxworms, small minnows and tube jigs are the baits of choice for panfish.

Bass anglers also do well on Holman Lake, which is designated as a "Big Bass Lake" by the Fish & Boat Commission. Big Bass regulations restrict anglers to a limit of four bass that must each be over 15 inches.

According to Jeff Woleslagle, Little Buffalo State Park's environmental education specialist, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), bass fishing in the fall can be amazing.

"I have seen some real lunkers in my time here including a couple of 8-pounders," said Woleslagle. The

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LITTLE BUFFALO STATE PARK



Map courtesy of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources



- Park Office
- Lifeguard Station
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Boat Rental
- Picnic Pavilion
- Overlook
- Public Phone
- Blue Symbols Mean Accessible
- Food Concession
- Playfield
- Boat Launch
- Showerhouse/Restrooms
- Ice Skating
- Hiking Trail
- Cross-country Ski Trail
- Volksmarch Trail
- Bench
- Unpaved Road
- State Park No Hunting
- State Park Hunting

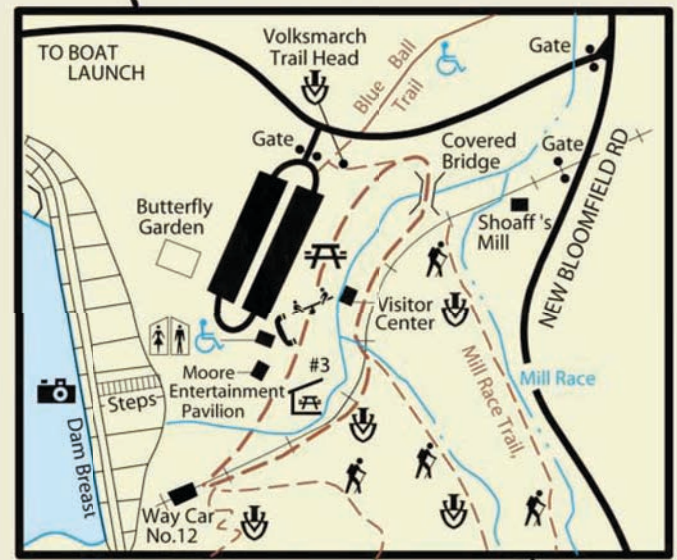




Photo: Spring Gearhart

lake also has a lot of bass in the 12- to 14-inch range that are exciting to catch on light tackle. Good water quality and habitat are responsible for the fantastic numbers of bass and the hotspots that are well dispersed in the lake, which has a maximum depth of 35 feet.

In addition to panfish and bass, the Commission stocks good numbers of tiger muskies each fall. A small but very dedicated group of anglers targets these muskies.

“Some real brutes have been pulled out,” said Woleslagle.

Trout fishing is also popular, and the lake is stocked in season with adult brown trout and rainbow trout. A small population of smallmouth bass can also be found in the lake, as well as bullhead catfish, which can be caught by the main boat launch at night. Anglers can obtain a free lake structure map at the park office.

Although most of the shoreline, with the exception of the dam breast, is open and accessible to great shore angling, the lake also has boating opportunities. Little Buffalo State Park permits only electric-powered and non-powered boats, which may be launched at one of the state park’s two public launches. The main launch is located near the dam and east day-use area. The second is on the southwestern shore near the main picnic area.

For visitors staying overnight who wish to store a boat, the park offers

a large extra parking area near the campground. For locals or those who consider Holman Lake to be their favorite angling location, 60 private mooring spots are available for a fee from April 1 to Nov. 1. There is a waiting list for these spots. The best way to get on the list is to phone or stop by the park office. If you don’t own a boat, a boat rental is located next to the swimming pool. It operates the weekend of Memorial Day through Labor Day. Canoes, rowboats and paddle boats are available.

Because boaters are restricted to electric motors only, the state park has become the area’s ideal paddling destination for visitors who enjoy the beauty and tranquility of calm, peaceful water. The western shore’s shallow waters where Little Buffalo Creek enters the lake, as well as the eastern part of the lake near the dam breast are the best areas to explore. Kayakers and those who enjoy canoeing commonly see a wide variety of waterfowl, beavers, muskrats, deer and painted turtles while paddling near the shorelines.

Aside from boating and angling, hiking, hunting and picnicking are also popular. Hikers enjoy the park’s 8 miles of trails while hunters can use 300 acres to hunt deer, turkey, grouse, rabbit, pheasant and squirrel. Picnicking is another favorite activity, and families looking for a pristine picnic spot enjoy their choice of two picnic areas—the main picnic area on the southwestern end of the lake or the east picnic area located in the east day-use area.

The main picnic area surrounds the swimming pool and also has showers, a seasonal food concession and playground. Many picnic tables, restrooms, charcoal grills, horseshoe pits and picnic pavilions are available at each location.

Little Buffalo State Park is also the perfect destination for families that would like to combine a day of picnicking and fishing. The shoreline around the main picnic area and the handicapped fishing pier on the eastern shore are great spots to cast a line while enjoying a family picnic.

Along with great fishing and an extensive list of activities, the state park’s facilities are undeniably some of the best and most distinct in the state. An entertainment pavilion, butterfly garden, historic covered bridge and mill, and a new, stunning visitor center are all accessible at the east day-use area. In addition, the park’s impressive swimming pool is a state-of-the-art facility with water slides and a splash park, while the new 40-site campground, which is available on a first-come, first-serve basis, boasts a gorgeous reception hall rented for weddings and other events.

Little Buffalo State Park also has unique special events that the whole family will love. During the third weekend of every October (18th and 19th this year), the Apple Festival takes place at the historic water-powered Shoaff’s Mill, where homemade apple cider and apple butter are made. Local farmers brought their crops to Shoaff’s Gristmill until the 1940s. Today the mill is operating again and is a showcase of the park since its restoration. A Halloween Night also takes place on the last Saturday in October, in addition to a Christmas Walk that draws close to 12,000 visitors each December.

Holman Lake is a favorite of area ice fishermen because of its high panfish harvest. Trout and warmwater fish are also commonly caught. Ice fishing is permitted anywhere on the lake except in the ice skating area. From 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day during the winter, a 2-acre skating area is maintained near the main boat launch on the east end of the lake. A warming hut and heated restrooms are also on site. All hiking trails are also open for cross-country skiing. Little Buffalo Creek Trail, which runs between the main picnic area and the west end of the park, is the best winter trail.

Little Buffalo State Park itself can easily be reached from the Newport exit off US Route 322. For additional information on Little Buffalo State Park, call the state park office at 717-567-9255 or visit online at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks. □