

10 A Snag for a Nest

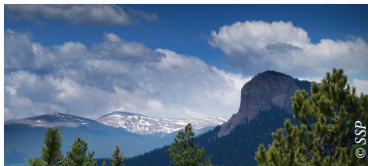


WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER

You'll notice throughout Staunton, as in any wooded area, dead trees still standing among the live growth. While park staff clears them if they obstruct our trails or pose potential danger to park patrons, these snags provide important shelter for many types of birds. Notice the holes in some of the trees. Cavity nesting birds, such as woodpeckers, peck large holes in the rotting wood and create nests therein. Smaller birds such as chickadees and wrens like to take advantage of these ready-made homes. Listen carefully and you may hear the sweet songs from an occupied snag.

11 Lion in Wait

That rounded out-cropping you see in the distance is one of Staunton's signature scenic formations, Lion's Head. You can hike, mountain bike or ride horseback the eleven-mile round trip. On your way up you may choose to picnic at Elk Falls Pond before ascending Lion's Back Trail. Be sure to take in the breathtaking view of the Elk Falls that cascades across the canyon from the summit. It's one of the longest routes through our park, but the scenery is well worth the adventure.



VIEW OF LION'S HEAD

12 Friendly Fir

Here you'll find yourself surrounded by another of Staunton's collection of conifers, the Douglas fir. Notice that unlike the Blue Spruce, this tree's needles are quite soft and flat.

(to remember:

FIR = FLAT = FRIENDLY)

Can you find this tree's cone? It is around 3 inches long and displaying tri-tipped bracts beneath its scales. The bracts are often described as the back feet and tail of a mouse trying to hide. In addition, the cones hang below the tree's branches, belying the fact that the Douglas fir is actually NOT a true fir. The cones of a true fir stand upright.



DOUGLAS FIR CONE

13 Geology

The rock faces you see in the distance consist of igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic rock. The large dome-shaped rock is an igneous intrusion. The once liquid molten rock oozed through underground cracks during the uplift and then cooled. The overlying rock has eroded away now exposing the hardened granite dome. When you hike through the park keep in mind that the geological and biological forces of uplift, faulting and weathering continue to sculpt the breathtaking formations before you

14 Dwarf Mistletoe

Notice the strange, coral-looking growth on this Ponderosa pine's branches? No, you're not suddenly snorkeling through a Caribbean reef; you're actually looking at dwarf mistletoe, a slow-growing parasite that can eventually kill the tree. Although it shares half its name with the traditional Christmas decoration, you wouldn't want to spend much time kissing under this mistletoe. Once a year, its fruit violently expels seeds at speeds around 60 miles per hour.

15 Pine Squirrel Midden

Look at the ground around your feet: what may appear to be just the usual woodland debris is actually the remainders of a chickaree feast! More commonly referred to as pine squirrels, chickarees gather cones to one area and return when hungry to eat the cones' seeds. As the squirrels drop the cones' inedible scales and cores, the leftovers build up underneath. This pile of leftovers is called a midden.

Their midden of scraps is not the only sign they provide regarding their living in the park. Squirrels are also vocally territorial creatures: as you walk through Staunton you may be serenaded by their protective chatter. Try not to take the scolding too personally...remember you are walking through their neighborhood.

16 Lichen, Likely

If you've run your hands along any rocks along the trail, you may have felt both a soft, dark green moss and a rougher, flakier substance. The latter growth is called lichen (pronounced LI-ken), and it is actually a combination of fungus and algae.

Approximately 1,000 types of lichen grow throughout the Rocky Mountains; some hang from dead tree branches, and others actually grow on top of soil.



CHOCOLATE CHIP LICHEN

Here's an amusing anecdote park naturalists like to tell:

Fred Fungus and Alice Algae took a "lichen" to each other. Fred offered to build the house, if Alice would do the cooking, but now their marriage is on the rocks.



Please consider returning this brochure to the box at the trail head or sharing with a friend for a future visit.

This brochure was made possible through the efforts of the Friends of Staunton State Park. For more information, please visit www.friendsofstauntonstatepark.org.

And feel free to log onto Facebook for the latest updates, pictures and ways you can become an official friend!



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Special thanks to the Staunton State Park Volunteers who assisted in developing this brochure.



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COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

Davis Ponds Interpretive Trail Brochure



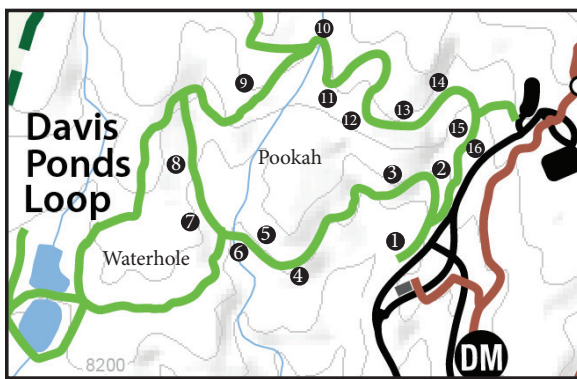
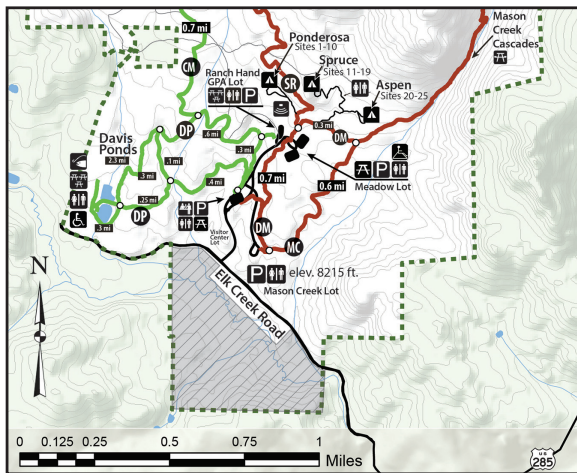
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Enjoy Your Self-Guided Hike

Welcome to the Davis Ponds Self-Guided Hike at Staunton State Park! A family-friendly introduction to almost 4,000 acres of park, this easy hike is a little over 1 mile long, with very little change in elevation.

The Davis Ponds Trail is 2.3 miles total and consists of two loops: Waterhole and Pookah. Along the Pookah Loop we've marked 16 informational stations; the Interpretive Brochure you're reading provides interesting facts about the features of each.

The map below shows the approximate location of each station. Station 1 is located at the Davis Ponds Trailhead sign. To follow the trail markers in sequence, stay left at the Trailhead trail junction.



Staunton State Park is the legacy of Frances H. Staunton. As her beneficiaries, present and future generations are entrusted with this land – to enjoy, protect and treasure as she did.

1 Welcome to Pookah Loop

The land on which you're standing was once part of the vacation property owned by Mary Coyle Chase and her family. Ms. Chase gained fame as a playwright in the 1940s; her play, *Harvey*, won the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and was later adapted into a film starring Hollywood icon Jimmy Stewart.

So what's a pookah? Ms. Chase had grown up listening to Irish folktales about imaginary animals known as pookahs. According to legend, a pookah (Old Irish for "spirit") is a creature that takes the form of different animals and mischievously interacts with settlers of the island's countryside. Ms. Chase indeed cited these tales as inspiration for the pookah of her signature work: her *Harvey* is an invisible, 6-foot tall white rabbit who causes his human companion no small amount of comic chaos.

2 The Ponderosa Pine

Observe the beautiful Ponderosa pine! Growing at altitudes of 5,000 ft. to 8,500 ft. above sea level, the Ponderosa is the most common pine tree in this part of Staunton.



FEMALE PINE CONE

Look around and find the pine's distinctive hard, dark brown cones. While its female cones are large and abundant on the trees' branches, the smaller male cones grow only in early June. Wind blows the males' pollen into the female cones, producing the seeds that either grow into new trees or become food for woodland creatures.

3 Beat it, Beetles!

Tragically, over the past decade millions of acres of Colorado pine and spruce trees have been ravaged by beetles. The insects lay eggs in a tree's bark, producing a toxic fungus that inevitably kills the host tree. While there is currently no way to wholly prevent this wide-spread beetle kill, forest managers monitor beetle activity to assist in forest management planning.

4 Montane High Meadow

Grasses, wildflowers, and other plants create colorful meadows in areas where it is too wet or dry for tree growth in the montane. These montane meadows provide food in the spring and summer months to several animals in the park, including elk, deer, and other small animals. Coyote roam these meadows hunting for their next meal. As you walk along the trail you will notice mounds of soil. These mounds are the results of pocket gophers digging underground tunnels allowing them to eat plant roots. At night, owl's listen intently for the sound of mice and other small animals scampering through the grasses.

5 Aspens & Elk



ASPENS IN FALL

Here you have a tremendous view of Black Mountain. Although its 11,700 ft. summit is technically in Pike National Forest, Staunton's highest elevation is on the mountain's flank. From here you will also notice a beautiful stand of aspen trees. Each autumn the aspens' leaves turn from bright green into a notable golden hue, yielding magnificent photo-ops and works of art. Plan to hike the park again in the fall to marvel in their beauty. In addition to being beautifully colored, aspens are different in the fact that they grow separate male and female trees. Also, their root systems can remain inactive for years and begin to sprout when given the ideal conditions.

What do you think makes the dark marks on the stark white bark? Most of these marks are blackened scars left after elk have taken bites from the tree's bark. Notice, the marks only go so high – as high as the elk can reach!

6 Trash or Treasure?

While less natural than the chickarees, the pile of rusting cans and other debris in front of you can be considered a human midden. Smaller than the logging leftovers you may see on Old Mill trail, a site like this contains glimpses into the lives of those hardy individuals who once settled this area. You can think about such lives and stories; however, please leave these sites undisturbed. And although previous occupants of our park land may have left these middens, please refrain from creating your own.

Help us preserve Staunton's natural beauty by disposing of any trash in designated bins, or by taking it with you when you leave.

**Stay right on Pookah Loop to find Station 7. Waterhole Loop leads to the Davis Ponds. Originally only utilized by the inhabitants of the old Davis Ranch, Staunton has upgraded these ponds to be used for recreational fishing. Enjoy a picnic lunch, or try your luck at fishing. A Colorado State Fishing License is required for anyone older than 15 years.*

7 Why Weed?

Some of Staunton's 4,000 acres were previously used for ranchlands. Unfortunately, this type of use often leads to the spread of weeds. Non-native grasses are planted as feed for animals. Often times weed seeds are mixed with other seeds. If not controlled, weeds quickly spread and can take over the native plants. You'll find an unfortunate excess of thistles, yellow toadflax and common mullein alongside our beautiful variety of wildflowers.

ASK PARK STAFF HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER TO KEEP STAUNTON BEAUTIFUL!

8 Our Stately Tree

You're now standing under Colorado's state tree, the Blue Spruce. A spruce is often described as being "sharp". Its sharpness comes from the short, stiff needles on its branches. Take one of the needles and roll it in your fingers, you will feel that



BLUE SPRUCE PINE CONE

it is square. A helpful alliteration to make spruce identification easier: SPRUCE = SHARP=SQUARE.

Can you identify this spruce's cones on the ground? They're a lighter brown than a Ponderosa's, soft to the touch and usually about 3 inches long.

9 Abert's Squirrel

One opportunistic critter you'll hopefully observe in Staunton is the tassel-eared Abert's squirrel. Distinguished by its pointed ears and dark fur, Abert's squirrels particularly favor the Ponderosa as their source for food and shelter. Look up into the branches of this tree to find balls of twisted branches that form stout platforms for the squirrel's nests.



ABERT SQUIRREL