



The Shawnee Hills took millions of years to form. The rock formations and cliffs at Garden of the Gods are made of sandstone and are about 320 million years old. Long ago most of Illinois, western Indiana and western Kentucky were covered by a giant inland sea. For millions of years great rivers carried sand and mud to the sea, where it settled along the shoreline. Over time, the weight of the sediments turned them into layers of rock thousands of feet thick. At Garden of the Gods the sediment layers were over 20,000 feet thick or about 4 miles deep. Eventually, a great uplift occurred, raising the inland sea above sea level causing it to fill in with sand and mud. The uplift also fractured the bedrock exposing it to nature's erosive forces. Since that time, windblown sand, rain and freezing and thawing actions have worn down the layers of sediment creating the beautiful rock formations at Garden of the Gods. To find out more read the signs along the Observation Trail.

The Observation Trail

The Garden of the Gods Observation Trail is a 1/4 mile long interpretive trail. It is made of natural flagstone and leads to areas near the bluffs, where there are outstanding views of the Shawnee Hills and the Garden of the Gods Wilderness. Visitors will find many interesting rock formations with names such as Camel Rock, Table Rock and Devil's Smokestack. The Observation Trail has some short, steep grades and a few steps. However, as a whole, the trail is not tiring. **Caution should be used because there are high cliffs in the area.**

Trail System

Access is good from Garden of the Gods Recreation Area to the River to River Trail and Garden of the Gods Wilderness. Rocky streams, sheer cliffs, pine stands, hardwood forest, trickling streams, rock overhangs and scenic vistas are encountered along this trail system. Springtime offers abundant wild flowers and rushing streams. Autumn offers beautiful fall colors and ripe fruit, such as persimmons. Users are encouraged to obtain more detailed maps before entering the backcountry. Overnight parking is available at the backpacker's parking lot.

Camping & Picnicking

Pharaoh Campground is open year round. Facilities include 12 campsites, tables, fire grills, toilets, drinking water and trails. Nice views of the Shawnee Hills can be seen from the campground and picnic areas. The Pharaoh Picnic Ground is open year round, as is the Observation Area.

Wilderness

Garden of the Gods Wilderness is 3,300 acres in size and is relatively undisturbed. The Garden of the Gods Wilderness borders the Recreation Area on three sides. No motorized vehicles or mechanized equipment is permitted in the Wilderness. Visitors are encouraged to "leave no trace" of their visit.

Emergencies

The nearest hospital is Harrisburg Medical Center in Harrisburg.

USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity provider & employer.

Length:

Observation Trail (flagstone path) – ¼ mile (~30 min.)

Entire Trail System –16.9 miles

Indian Point Trail – 1.6 miles

Surface Type: Observation Trail –Flagstone surface
General Trails – Dirt


Difficulty Level: Easy to difficult

Recommended Season: All year

Facilities: Picnic area, restrooms, parking, campground (non-electric sites), hiking trails, and interpretive signs along Observation Trail.

Access: From Harrisburg, take Highway 145 south 5 miles, to Highway 34, then take 34 south for 5 miles. Then turn east onto Karbers Ridge Road 2.5 miles to Forest Road. Turn north onto Forest Road for 1.5 miles to the recreation area entrance road. There are directional signs from Harrisburg to the recreation area.

Trail Markings:

Hiker/Equestrian Trails =  white diamond

River to River Trail =  blue i

Safety: Use caution when where the trail is near the bluffs and when traveling on portions of the trail that are wet and slippery.

Please Keep in Mind:

- 1) Pets are allowed only on a leash.
- 2) Picnic areas and Observation Trail are open from dawn to dusk.
- 3) Use trash receptacles. Pack-it-In, Pack-it-Out rules apply to the entire trail system.
- 4) Camp only at designated sites in the campground.
- 5) Disposable food and beverage containers are not permitted on the Observation Trail.
- 6) Stay on the designated trail and leave the beauty of the rock and plants for others to enjoy.

For More Information

Hidden Springs Ranger District

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www.fs.usda.gov/shawnee