# MAQUOKETA CAVES STATE PARK

## Trail Guide & Difficulty Ratings

9688 Caves Rd, Maquoketa, IA 52060 • Park Office: 563.652.5833

### Difficulty Rating Key

| Easy | Moderate | Hard |
|---|---|---|
| Flat, well-marked paths | Some incline or uneven terrain | Steep, slippery, or strenuous |

| # | Trail Name & Description | Length | Est. Time | Difficulty |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | **Woodland Trail**<br>The primary north-valley trail and one of the most scenic in the park. Begins as a paved track near a small amphitheater, then descends steps and curves onto a dirt path heading north through deciduous forest. Passes Wide Mouth, Dug Out, Twin Arch, Hernando's Hideaway, and Up-N-Down Caves along the way.<br>**Tip:** *Wear sturdy shoes — the dirt sections can be slippery when wet.* | 0.49 mi | 30 min | Moderate |
| B | **Woodland Walk**<br>A very short, easy stroll near the campground. Ideal for campers wanting a quick nature break without committing to a longer hike. Essentially a connector path through a small wooded area.<br>**Tip:** *Perfect for young children or anyone wanting a gentle morning walk from the campground.* | 0.03 mi | 5 min | Easy |
| C | **Caves Trail**<br>A short path along a steep rock face giving access to Twin Arch Cave, Hernando's Hideaway, and Up-N-Down Cave. Though the trail itself is brief, the cave entrances it serves offer a range of challenges.<br>**Tip:** *Use this as a launching pad for the northern cave cluster — budget extra time for exploring the caves.* | 0.10 mi | 5 min | Easy |
| D | **Dancehall Trail**<br>The main approach trail to the Upper Entrance (#12) of Dancehall Cave. Descends concrete stairs into the cave's dark, damp passage, guided by an asphalt path and electric lighting. Time estimate includes time inside the cave.<br>**Tip:** *Bring a flashlight even when the lights are on. Wear waterproof shoes — a stream runs through the cave.* | 0.19 mi | 30 min | Easy |
| E | **Raccoon Creek Trail**<br>A peaceful trail following the east side of Raccoon Creek at the bottom of the lush valley. Passes the Middle and Lower Dancehall Cave entrances and meanders through a mix of open grassland and wooded areas. | 0.21 mi | 10 min | Easy |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Tip:** *Great for wildlife spotting. Look for herons along the creek in early morning.* | | | |
| F | **Campground Trail**<br>The shortest route connecting the campground to the main valley trail network. Rated moderate due to a noticeable incline as it descends into the valley. Quick and functional — a daily-use trail for campers.<br>**Tip:** *Can be slippery after rain. Use caution heading back uphill at the end of the day.* | 0.19 mi | 5 min | Moderate |
| G | **North Trails**<br>The shortest trail segment in the park — a quick connector on the north side linking the main valley paths. Serves as a junction point for visitors exploring the northern cave cluster and turning back toward the main park area.<br>**Tip:** *Useful as a turnaround point. Combine with Trail A for a complete northern cave loop.* | 0.06 mi | 5 min | Easy |
| H | **Dancehall South Trail**<br>A pleasant valley-floor trail running south from Dancehall Cave toward the western valley. Leads to Rainy Day Cave and Ice Cave, and continues further west toward the restored prairie area. One of the most rewarding easy walks in the park.<br>**Tip:** *Ideal for families after finishing Dancehall Cave. Wear waterproof footwear near Rainy Day Cave.* | 0.42 mi | 10 min | Easy |
| I | **Valley Trail**<br>One of the park's most varied trails. Starting near Balanced Rock, the trail passes through rugged terrain, goes through a cave tunnel passage and along Raccoon Creek. About halfway, it begins a gentle uphill ascent through timber before bursting into open prairie at its western end.<br>**Tip:** *One of the best trails for experiencing the full range of the park's landscape — forest, creek, cave, and prairie.* | 0.57 mi | 15 min | Moderate |
| J | **Valley Overlook Trail**<br>A Raccoon Creek Valley perimeter ridge trail that circles the valley and offers scenic elevated views of the limestone bluffs and creek below. Fewer crowds than the valley-floor trails make this a peaceful option for those seeking a bit of solitude.<br>**Tip:** *Best views are in spring and fall when foliage is not fully blocking the bluff vistas.* | 0.38 mi | 15 min | Moderate |
| K | **Youth Camp Trail**<br>A longer easy trail running along the east side of the park through the East Prairie area, connecting to the Youth Group Camp Area. The prairie sections are excellent for wildlife observation and offer a quieter alternative to the busy cave trails.<br>**Tip:** *Great for birdwatching. Bring binoculars and keep an eye out for native prairie birds.* | 1.3 mi | 30 min | Easy |
| L | **Outer Loop Trail**<br>A perimeter ridge trail circling the valley with fantastic views through forest and scenic overlooks of the creek valley below. | 0.70 mi | 15 min | Moderate |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Includes the most elevation gain alongside the Valley Trail. A rewarding loop for those wanting a bit more challenge.<br>**Tip:** *Combine with the Valley Trail for a satisfying full loop through both valley floor and ridge.* | | | |
| **M** | **Upland Prairie Trail**<br>A shorter moderate trail winding through the upland prairie restoration area on the west side of the park. Passes a restored prairie, an experimental oak savanna restoration, and a wildlife food plot — offering a unique ecological experience distinct from the cave-focused trails.<br>**Tip:** *Visit in midsummer when native wildflowers are in peak bloom.* | 0.31 mi | 15 min | **Moderate** |
| **N** | **Firebreak Trail**<br>The longest trail in the park — an easy walk along a mowed path through restored prairie on the western edge. Ideal for anyone wanting a quiet, crowd-free hike. Native plants and wildlife can be seen in all directions. The flat, open terrain makes this highly accessible despite its length.<br>**Tip:** *Bring water and sun protection — the open prairie offers little shade on hot days.* | 2.23 mi | 45 min | **Easy** |

*Walking times estimated at 2 mph • No rock climbing, rappelling, or mountain biking permitted • Always cave with a partner*