

LITTLE JERUSALEM BADLANDS STATE PARK

Geological Gem

Breathtaking rock formations set the scene at Kansas' newest state park

— by Terri Peterson Smith

A milelong stretch of 100-foot white spires glows in the afternoon sunlight, and the only sounds are the wind and the occasional screech of a hawk or the howl of a coyote. It's easy to understand why Greg Mills, manager of Kansas' newest state park, Little Jerusalem Badlands, says, "This is my little place of Zen."

Formerly private land, the long-awaited park opened in October 2019, giving the public access to this otherworldly gem of geology for the first time. The 332-acre park offers panoramic views of dramatic chalk towers that formed from sediment at the bottom of an inland ocean that covered most of central North America

roughly 70 to 140 million years ago. These delicate formations contain shells of ancient clams and oysters and abundant fossils of swimming and flying reptiles.

Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park is an unusual collaboration between the Nature Conservancy, a global nonprofit conservation organization that owns the land, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, which operates the park.

The park currently offers two hiking trails, the ¼-mile Overlook Trail and the 1½-mile Life on the Rocks Trail, with more to come. To protect the terrain, visitors are allowed off the trails only

on tours guided by park staff. Either way, they experience the park's unique geology and ecology, and take away an understanding of the land's fragility and why we need to preserve it.

Located in western Kansas, Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park is easily accessed from Interstate 70 and U.S. Route 83. The two designated trails can be hiked year-round from sunrise to sunset, and guided tours can be scheduled by calling 620-872-2061.

STAY AND PLAY

Seven miles from Little Jerusalem Badlands, Historic Lake Scott State Park offers 50 campsites with water and electric hookups, seven sites with full hookups and 80 primitive sites, along with opportunities for hiking, boating, swimming, fishing and hunting. www.ksoutdoors.com/state-parks

↓ Viewing the otherworldly landscape of chalk bluffs and towering spires, visitors to the newly opened Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park may have a feeling they're not in Kansas anymore.



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