The Three Notch Trail commemorates the Three Notch Road that ran from St. George’s to Mt. Magazine. About 1779, the Franciscans first crossed in an Indian trail to the lead district. These early miners worked three- or four-month seasons, digging lead ore near the surface level. The Franciscans improved the 20-mile trail for larcenies and wagoners, blading the road by cutting up white bats into trees along the way.

The 5,300-acre S bar S Scout Ranch is located in the “Lead Belt,” in the northern quarter of the original 6,050-acre tract that Francis granted to Philippa Ramirez on June 14, 1723. The grant indicates that the lead already was under way, describing “two leagues of ground at the mines called Mines de la Loba.” The lead mines at Mines de la Loba, closed in 1858, lie just southeast of the Ranch. The Ranch had no ore deposits, although it provided timber for the miners.

Several homesteads dotted the Ranch, until the last was abandoned during World War II. Settlers made lead lordliness growing corn in the bottoms, trapping game, cutting timber, and working the season in the nearby lead mines. Their marks upon the land are many — sharp eyes can detect roads, ruins, and introduced plants.

**The West Loop**

**9.7 MILES, MODERATE**

Start at Castle Rock parking lot. Head NW to Fox Cove, then stop at a high ridge to join a pioneer road, deeply cut in places by long use. After intersecting the North Cutoff in a shallow saddle, cross Withes Branch on Nun’s bore quarters and east. After a dark cedar forest and a rock glade, cross a power cut and a paved road before crossing to the Campground parking lot.

*Drop into a creek valley, or “Sally,” from the saddle, then climb up from Camp Saka. Roughly follow the boundary, often opposite large pastures. Cross White Oak Springs Branch, which flows in winter and spring allowing the filling of canals, partially white water. After crossing the branches, climb a high bluff along Little St. Francis River, watch for cliffs. After a power cut, take a break atop cliffs overlooking Little St. Francis River. Cross a small stream, climb over a hill, and descend to Withes Branch. At the crest of the following knoll, take time for a rest to enjoy the view and unique rock formations.*

![West Loop Elevation Profile](image)

The North Cutoff

**1.0 MILES, EASY**

About 300 yards along the North Cutoff from its intersection with the East Loop is a box canyon called Fana Grotto. Notice the delicate arches above the trail, but be careful where you stop — don’t destroy it. From the grotto, the North Cutoff ascends a ridge to its intersection with the West Loop.

*Descend the knoll and visit Castle Rock. This eroded sandstone formation is the most unusual physical feature on the Ranch. Be careful, the rocks may be unsafe for climbing if wet or icy. End at Castle Rock parking lot.*

**The East Loop**

**3.3 MILES, DIFFICULT, 2 WET RIVER CROSSINGS**

Start at Castle Rock parking lot. After a trail grade about 50 yards north of Castille Rock, hike ESE down old settlers’ roads to Little St. Francis River. Feed the river, parallel the southern boundary, join an old road, and cross a large rock glade that quietly passes near cacti blooming in June. Climb out of the glades along the edge of magnificent cliffs overlooking the river, with anastole blooming here in May. The view is spectacular, but be careful.

Descend into the river valley to a quiet spot under a rock overhang. Feed Rock Creek, following the river. Watch for bear signs as the trail ascends a creek valley and climbs a rock debris to a large, forested plateau.

*Cross a large field — once pasture, now overgrown with red cedar and manzanita trees. Descend NW, leaving the field, to find Little Rock Creek and follow to the Campground. Watch for bear signs as the trail ascends a creek valley and descends from it to find Little St. Francis River.*

![East Loop Mileage](image)

**T R A I L  S A F E T Y**

Wear sturdy hiking boots or shoes and long pants in any weather. Carry plenty of water, a first aid kit, rain gear, compass, and trail map — the trailhead is your location on the map. Purify water using a filter or boiling or cooking.

Keep groups together — getting lost in this rugged area could be surprisingly in cold weather. In warm weather, beware of venomous snakes (copperheads and rattlesnakes) and use insect repellent to repel ticks and chiggers.

Exercise great care with fires — and note there is no explaining. Campfires must be made out before you leave them. Don’t bury trash. Carry all trash out, and buries it where it isn’t.

In high winds, snows, or ice may be dangerous and best avoided. Go to scouting.org for the Guide to Safe Scouting and online training in Youth Protection, Weather Hazards, and more.

**Three Notch Trail System**

There are three conquests to the trail system: 9.2 miles “West Loop” around Nan’s Lake, a 5.3-mile “East Loop” following Little St. Francis River twice, and two Loop connectors, a 3.0-mile “North Cutoff” and a 330-foot “South Cutoff.”

Both loops and the North Cutoff can be hiked in entirety for a total of 20.5 miles, satisfying an inclusion habit by requirement. The North Cutoff and two of the loops make a 16.5-mile hike, satisfying a requirement for the Backpacking merit badge. The northern half of the West Loop, from Castle Rock parking lot through the Campground access trail, makes an easy 5.3-mile hike, satisfying a requirement for Second Class Scout. The trails are primitive and rugged, suitable for Boy Scouts or Ventures — but not for beginners. Map and compass skills are required.

**Trailheads**

The primary trailhead for both loops is the Castle Rock parking lot. Both trail descriptions are written counterclockwise from this starting point. The East Loop also can be accessed from a trail (400 yards long) off Highway 80 and Old Fredricktown Road (rough parking). The West Loop also can be accessed from a trail (260 yards long) through the Campground between the Ranch headquarters and Camp Famous Eagle’s entrance, from a trail (90 feet long) across the road from Camp Famous Eagle’s entrance sign, and from a trail (916 long) across the road from Camp Saka’s entrance sign.

**Leaves No Trace**

- Plan ahead and prepare: travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly: learn what you need and minimize campsite impacts.
- Respect wildlife: be considerate of other visitors.
- Stay in the middle of the trailway of wet, muddy or erosive areas.
- Follow local rules, such as: do not disturb wildlife, do not disturb flora or fauna.
- Follow the Leave No Trace guidelines on the back cover.

*Consider established sites at Fox Cove (west) and Hartshock (west) on the West Loop, and Cedar Grove (west), Tall Timbers (dry), and Jones Pond (west) on the East Loop. Established sites feature a camping area and a food preparation area with a food bag. Trail safety: Use sturdy hiking boots or shoes and long pants in any weather. Carry water, a first aid kit, rain gear, compass, and trail map — the trailhead is your location on the map. Purify water using a filter or boiling or cooking. Keep groups together — getting lost in this rugged area could be surprisingly in cold weather. In warm weather, beware of venomous snakes (copperheads and rattlesnakes) and use insect repellent to repel ticks and chiggers. Exercise great care with fires — and note there is no explaining. Campfires must be made out before you leave them. Don’t bury trash. Carry all trash out, and buries it where it isn’t. In high winds, snows, or ice may be dangerous and best avoided. Go to scouting.org for the Guide to Safe Scouting and online training in Youth Protection, Weather Hazards, and more.*

**Three Notch Trail System**

![Three Notch Trail System](image)

**Boy Scouts of America**

Greater St. Louis Area Council

4562 West Pine Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63108-2193

214-336-8060

stlbgc.org

350.0R-0195

**Orders Patches**

Full-color embroidered patches are available at the St. Louis service center. These segments go on the curved edge of the patch. Earn the first two by hiking the loops and the third by hiking the 16-mile route using the North Cutoff.