Start at Castle Rock parking lot. After a small grade about 50 yards south of Can-
dle Rock, hike ESE down old settlers’
routes to Little St. Francis River. Ford
the river, parallel the southern boundary,
join an old road, and cross a large rock
glade where prickly pear cactus bloom
in June. Climb out of the glades along
the edge of magnificent cliffs overlook-
ing the river; wild azaleas bloom here in
May. The view is spectacular, but be care-
tul.

Descend into the river valley to a good
rest stop under a rock overhang. Ford
Rock Creek, following the river. Watch
for beaver sign as the trail ascends a
creek valley and climbs a rocky defile to a large, forested plateau.

Cross a large field — once pasture, now overgrowing with red cedar
and sumac trees. Descend NW, leaving the field, to follow Little Rock Creek
west. Here for sharp-eyed can see vestiges of an old wagon road.

Ski a pond; look for beaver-chewed trees. Hike north up the Pipeline
across Beaver Run. Follow a well-forested ridge and descend from it to
ford Little St. Francis River.
The Three Notch Trail System

There are four components to the trail system: a 9.7-mile “West Loop
around Nims Lake, a 9.3-mile “East Loop” fording Little St. Francis River
twice, and two loop connectors, a 1.0-mile “North Cutoff”
and a 0.3-mile “South Cutoff.”

Both loops and the North Cutoff may be hiked in their entirety for a
total of 21.0 miles, satisfying a Hiking merit badge requirement. The
North Cutoff parts of the two loops make a 16.1-mile hike, satisfying
for the Backpacking merit badge. The
northern half of the West Loop, from Castle Rock parking lot
through the Camporee Area 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 Ven-
turers — 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 (480 yards long)
from the ranch headquarters, (20 miles south of Cas-
trace. The West Loop also can be accessed from a trail (260 yards long)
at the Camporee Area (parking) between the Ranch headquar-

ters and Camp Famous Eagle’s entrance, from a trail (90 feet long)
across the road from Camp Gamble’s entrance sign, and from a trail
(0.5 mile long) across the road from Camp Sakima’s entrance.

Interesting local points of interest include:

- The primary trailhead for both loops is at Castle Rock parking lot.
- Both trail descriptions are written counterclockwise from this starting
point. The East Loop also can be accessed from a trail (480 yards long)
west of O’O’ and Old Ste. Genevieve Road trailhead.
- Both loops and the North Cutoff can be hiked in their entirety for a
total of 21.0 miles, satisfying a Hiking merit badge requirement.
- The North Cutoff parts of the two loops make a 16.1-mile hike,
satisfying a requirement for the Backpacking merit badge.
- Both loops and the North Cutoff are suitable for Boy Scouts or Ven-
turers — but not for beginners. Map and compass skills are
required.

TRAIL SAFETY

Wear sturdy hiking boots and shoes and long pants in any weather.
Carry plenty of water, a first aid kit, rain gear, compass, and trail map
always know your location on the map. Purify water used for drink-

ing or cooking.

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

Exercise great care with fire — and note there is to be no smoking.
Campfires must be dead out before you leave them. Don’t bury trash.
Carry out all non-burnables. Hunting is not allowed.

The trail passes several areas along Little St. Francis River near the
cenity, some 100 feet high; no horseplay. Rock surfaces can be very slippery when wet or icy.

In high water, stream crossings may be dangerous and best avoided.
Go to scouting.org for the Guide to Safe Scouting and online train-
ing in Youth Protection, Weather Hazards, and more.

The West Loop

9.7 MILES, MODERATE

Start at Castle Rock parking lot. Hike NW to Fox Cove, then atop 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 Willow Springs
on Nims Lake’s northern end. After a dark cedar forest and a rock
formation.

Cross Roses Springs Branch, which flows in
over a hill, and de-
send into the river valley to ford Little St. Francis River.

Consider established sites at Fox Cove (wet) and Hart Knob (wet) on
the northern end. After
a shallow saddle, cross Wills Branch
in June. Climb out of the glades along
the edge of magnificent cliffs overlook-
ing the river; wild azaleas bloom here in
May. The view is spectacular, but be care-
tful.

Descend into the river valley to a good
rest stop under a rock overhang. Ford
Rock Creek, following the river. Watch
for beaver sign as the trail ascends a
creek valley and climbs a rocky defile to a large, forested plateau.

Cross a large field — once pasture, now overgrowing with red cedar
and sumac trees. Descend NW, leaving the field, to follow Little Rock Creek
west. Here for sharp-eyed can see vestiges of an old wagon road.

Ski a pond; look for beaver-chewed trees. Hike north up the Pipeline
across Beaver Run. Follow a well-forested ridge and descend from it to
ford Little St. Francis River.

The Three Notch Trail Map & Guide

REGULATIONS

• Written permit from Greater St. Louis
Area Council required. See permit
requirements for Second Class Scout.

•  Respect wildlife  •  Be considerate of other visitors.
•  No pets, firearms, hunting, fireworks,
alcohol, non-medicinally prescribed drugs,
or swimming.
•  State of Missouri fishing regulations and
license apply.
•  Respect property boundaries.

Leave No Trace

• Plan ahead and prepare  •  Travel and camp on durable surfaces
• Dispose of waste properly  •  Leave what you find  •  Minimize campsite
impact  •  Respect wildlife  •  Be considerate of other visitors.
•  Avoid toilet facilities, bury human waste in
“cat holes” dug to 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet
from water sources, cover and disguise.
•  Carry out what you carry in. Pick up litter. Don’t cut trees.

TRAIL MARKERS

The trails are blazed with 5” x 7” white plastic markers nailed to
trees. Double blazes indicate intersections with other trails.

Backpackers may camp along the trail in established backcountry sites or
any suitable place at least 200 feet from trails and water sources.
Follow the Leave No Trace guidelines on the back cover.

Consider established sites at Fox Cove (wet) and Hart Knob (wet) on
the West Loop, and Cedar Grove (wet), Tall Timbers (dry), and Jones
Pond (wet) on the East Loop. Established sites

Hiking the Leave No Trace guidelines on the back cover.

Consider established sites at Fox Cove (wet) and Hart Knob (wet) on
the West Loop, and Cedar Grove (wet), Tall Timbers (dry), and Jones
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Hiking the Leave No Trace guidelines on the back cover.