

Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary

This tiny sanctuary is just east of downtown Saint Paul. Surrounded by busy highways and railroads there is no access to the Mississippi River. Ongoing restoration programs is converting this once heavily polluted landscape into a haven for birds and other wildlife.

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, located along the north shore of the Mississippi River east of downtown Saint Paul, was a significant site for Native Americans. Wakan Tipi (Spirit House), a cave, is located in the sandstone bluff that rims the north edge of the park. When Jonathan Carver stopped here in late 1766, he described the cave's interior as having many incised figures cut into the soft stone. Later visitors to the cave, however, didn't describe these same markings; soft sandstone, flowing water, and ceiling collapses may have eroded or destroyed them. The cave still exists, but access isn't possible. This was also the site of the North Star Brewery built in 1853. The brewery was later bought by Jacob Schmidt, a famous name in Minnesota brewing history.

In the late 1880s, railroads snaked their way into the area following the easy grades of the flat floodplains and the future park became an industrial area and rail yard.

The area was largely abandoned in the 1970s, until being made a Saint Paul park in 2005. Volunteers, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, many neighborhood organizations, and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area--some 25 stakeholders in all--are restoring the park to a mix of floodplain forest, prairie and oak savanna.

The 29 acre park is being restored to its native plant communities and the wildlife is returning. Two small ponds attract waterfowl and the uplands are home to grasslands bird species. Turkey vultures, bald eagles, and redtail hawks soar along the sandstone bluffs and many songbirds and other migrants flood through here in spring and fall. A spring-fed stream runs through the property. Wakan Tipi (Carver's Cave) is barricaded and not accessible, although the entrance is visible across a pond. Signage near the parking lot helps interpret the site.

Hours, Directions, and Contact Information

- 265 Commercial Street, Saint Paul, MN (GPS: 44.939155, -93.046364)
- Daylight through 11:00 p.m., unless otherwise posted. This area is isolated despite its proximity to downtown Saint Paul.
- Contact [Saint Paul Parks and Recreation](#) at (651) 266-6400 for more information.
<https://www.wakantipi.org/bruce-vento-nature-sanctuary>

Trail in the park – Length **1.1 mi** Elevation gain **13 ft** Route type **Loop**

Explore this 1.1-mile loop trail near Saint Paul, Minnesota. Generally considered an easy route, it takes an average of 20 min to complete. This is a popular trail for hiking and walking, but you can still enjoy some solitude during quieter times of day. The best times to visit this trail are April through August.

Watch You Tube Video:

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(1\) Welcome \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(3\) North Star Brewery \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(4\) Geology \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(5\) Wakan Tipi \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(6\) Bird Habitat \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(7\) Dakota Culture \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(8\) The Story of the Railroad \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Tour - \(9\) Future Cultural Center \(youtube.com\)](#)