The Black Elk Wilderness lies in the heart of the Black Hills, within the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve and the Black Elk Wilderness. Nearly everyone has a special place somewhere in the outdoors. Many have found it in the central Black Hills, within the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve and the Black Elk Wilderness.

This area has a rich mining history, and you may encounter old cabin remains or mine workings. One gold deposit supported two stamp mills ($5 million value of gold at today’s prices). Never enter an abandoned mine - they are often very unsafe.

Harney Peak Trail #9 from Sylvan Lake to Harney Peak is heavily used from May 1 through September 30. If you are looking for solitude, please consider one of our less traveled trails.

Harney Peak was named after General William Selby Harney, in 1855. The Civilian Conservation Corps constructed a stone tower in 1938 that served as a fire lookout until 1967. In 1982, the tower, dam, and pump house were placed on the National Register of Historic Places because of their historic significance.

To keep our water sources pure, please stay to the right of the water sources. Streams in the forest may look clean, but never drink water from them. The Norbeck and Black Elk Wilderness are stocked with a number of fish species that will bite into afternoon thunderstorms.

To reduce conflicts with wildlife and other trail users, please be a responsible visitor. Please leave no trace of your visit.

Keep close to Nature’s heart, yourself, and break clear away once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods.

-Walt Whitman
The rewards include stunning views of four states. Especially in the summer. Hikers begin on a roadbed that leads to a fire tower built by the National Park Service. This is the most popular route to Harney Peak - be prepared to encounter many people, especially in the summer. Hikers begin on a roadbed that leads to a fire tower built by the National Park Service.

After traveling a mile through meadows and forest, users will begin to see Elkhorn Mountain, with dramatic peaks and rock outcrops. Climbing steeply, the trail emerges onto a ridge where users can see the back of Mt. Rushmore. Two thirds of the way to the top is a popular overlook and hitching rail. Riders take note - there is only one minor drainage with ample wildlife viewing opportunities. As the trail climbs, vistas of the Black Elk Wilderness are great year-round; in the fall, the hills are gold with aspen.

This one-hour loop is a favorite of campers in the area, and is a primary Wilderness portal for hikers and riders. Views of the Black Elk Wilderness are great year-round; in the fall, the hills are gold with aspen. Riders and hikers often use this trail to access Mount Rushmore National Memorial. It provides a great opportunity to experience the solitude of the Black Elk Wilderness. Adventurous users from Iron Creek Horse Camp or the Norbeck Trailhead within Custer State Park use it in combination with Grizzly Bear #7 for a loop hike. Upper portions of the trail have no water or places to camp.

This is the most popular route to Harney Peak - be prepared to encounter many people, especially in the summer. Hikers begin on a roadbed that leads to a fire tower built by the National Park Service. The trail is steep, but the rewards include stunning views of four states.

This trail is a portion of the 111-mile Centennial Trail that travels from Wind Cave National Park, through Custer State Park, to Bear Butte State Park in the northern Black Hills. Designated as a National Recreation Trail, users on this section are treated to beautiful scenery and relative solitude.

Located in Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, this trail offers hikers several views of Mt. Rushmore along the way. The trail is rugged and rocky, crossing over streams and up steep steps. Hikers and horseback riders often use this trail to access Mt. Rushmore from the Black Elk Wilderness.

Picnickers at Iron Mountain Picnic Ground often use this trail to stretch their legs. It is fairly level as it winds through a pungent ponderosa pine forest.

This trail leads to an area of spectacular granite spires which lend the area its name. Pioneer rock climbers Herb and Jan Conn were the first to climb many of the spires in the vicinity. Today the trail is used by rock climbers as a primary access route to many of the climbing areas. A level area near the end provides a pleasant picnic spot.

If you want a great view and don’t have the time to hike to Harney Peak, this trail is for you. At the top of this steep and rugged trail, users can enjoy views of Harney Peak, Cathedral Spires, Mt. Rushmore, and the town of Custer. Some rock scrambling is necessary to gain the final summit.