

Things to
know and
enjoy about

Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway

Characteristics of Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway

The Longleaf Trail, now designated a scenic byway, has long been recognized as one of the most scenic drives in Louisiana. The terrain is exceptionally rugged for Louisiana, ranging from 120 to 400 feet in elevation. Vistas along the road include mesas, buttes and sandstone outcrops, backdropped by longleaf pines.

The Trail crosses Kisatchie Bayou, a state natural and scenic stream. It then traverses the National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve, running adjacent to the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness for about half its length. It provides numerous opportunities for viewing the wilderness.

The area through which Longleaf Trail passes was prized for its beauty in the 1700s. The Trail was originally constructed as a single-lane road by the Civilian Conservation Corps about 1935. Its reconstruction and modernization began in 1972.

Location of Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway

The Longleaf Trail is located 5.5 miles south of the Derry exit on Interstate Highway 49. The 17-mile route follows a high ridge through the rugged Kisatchie Hills area, connecting to Louisiana Highways 117 and 119.

Largely because of its unusual terrain, the Kisatchie Ranger District is considered by local residents to be the "crown jewel" of the 600,000 acre Kisatchie National Forest. Variations in topography range from level land to very steep bluffs. The highest point on the Kisatchie National Forest is 410 feet above sea level. Elevations of 360 feet are numerous along the Longleaf Trail and afford views of more than 20 miles.

Sights along the Scenic Byway

The Longleaf Trail Scenic Auto Tour was initiated in 1968; however, it has not been promoted in recent years. Longleaf Trail's designation as a scenic byway reestablishes it as a high-quality auto tour. Opportunities for sightseeing and interesting things to know along the Trail are as follows:

1. **Military Road** — Roughly 2 miles of the Longleaf Trail are located on the original route of the historic Opelousas-to-Ft. Jesup Military Road. Government Land Office maps from 1832 show it as the "Road from Opelousas to Natchitoches." At that time it was the primary route to Fort Jesup, Louisiana, a military outpost known in the early 1800s as the "Gateway to the Western Frontier." During the spring of 1864, the historic route played an important part in the Red River Campaign of the Civil War. In March 1864, it served as the main thoroughfare of retreat for Confederate forces fleeing the Union troops under General Nathaniel Banks. One month later, Confederate troops led by General Richard Taylor used it to defeat Banks' Union troops at the Battle of Mansfield.
2. **Longleaf Vista** — The Longleaf Vista is surrounded on three sides by the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness and provides excellent views of the wilderness and the country beyond it. Easily seen from the vista are several mesas, buttes and sandstone outcrops. Small fossils and petrified wood have been found scattered in the hills. A short walk along the nature trail offers interesting information about native plants. A shaded picnic area provides a pleasant place for Forest visitors to enjoy an outdoor lunch. Modern restroom facilities and a small visitor center are provided.
3. **Statesman Tree** — Occasionally the early loggers would leave a fine tree as a seed source or another purpose. This large, overmature tree is about 230 years old. It sprouted from a pine seed around 1750 and is typical of trees that covered the Kisatchie Hills for centuries. Nearby smaller trees are about 60 years old.
4. **Caroline Dornon Hiking and Horse Trail** — This 12-mile trail extends from Longleaf Trail to Kisatchie Bayou Camp. It is named in memory of Miss Caroline Dornon. "Miss Carrie," as she was known, is credited with tenaciously encouraging much of the enabling legislation that resulted in the establishment of the Kisatchie National Forest.
5. **Red Dirt Fire Tower Site** — Now, as in the past, an essential job in forest management is protection from wildfires. Old-timers often would spike trees so they could climb them quickly and look for fires. Later, fire towers were built to replace these early crow's nests. This tower site, which dates back to 1936, got its name from a settlement known as "Red Dirt." Red Dirt Tower was removed in 1983 because it was no longer needed. It was replaced with a forest-wide system of aerial detection.
6. **Kisatchie Hills Wilderness** — The Kisatchie Hills were formed millions of years ago. Known locally as the "Little Grand Canyon," this area was designated a wilderness in 1980. Its terrain is exceptionally rugged for Louisiana. Steep slopes, rock outcrops, and mesas provide a vivid contrast to the surrounding highly productive, heavily timbered forest. Kisatchie Hills is popular with hikers and sightseers for its unusual topographic features and scenic vistas. The Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway skirts the wilderness boundary for about seven miles from FS Road 339 to its intersection with La. Hwy. 119, affording many opportunities to see across the wilderness.

7. **Early Logging History** — A visible portion of a historic timber or naval stores narrow-gauge tram bed lies adjacent to the Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway. The Longleaf Vista Nature Trail passes near a late 19th-early 20th century turpentine still.
8. **National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve** — The 38,450-acre National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve was established in 1941. The U.S. Forest Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries cooperate in its management.
9. **Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Trees** — As loggers moved through the virgin forests, they left small or deformed trees. Two 135-year-old trees adjacent to the Trail are reminders of past logging operations. They are infected with red-heart decay, a disease common to overmature pines. Pines such as these are favored roosting and nesting habitat of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.
10. **Superior Longleaf Pine** — Forest genetics promises professional foresters the ability to grow more wood on less land. It requires locating trees with superior characteristics of growth, quality, and resistance to disease. These are called "super trees." Only one in 350,000 will qualify. Through cross-breeding, a superior seed supply is being developed for tomorrow's forests.
11. **Old Lotus School Site** — An old well is all that remains of the first school in this area. A historic stage coach route from the south intersected the Longleaf Trail near here.
12. **Kisatchie Bayou State Natural and Scenic Stream** — To protect its natural beauty, Kisatchie Bayou was included in the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Stream System. Kisatchie Bayou has changed over time. Indians referred to it as the "Kisatchie," meaning "Cane Country," because of cane patches along the stream. The cane patches washed away in destructive floods of the early 1900s. Today's professional forest management, however, provides a protective cover for the soil. This helps slow water flow and minimizes the possibility of serious flooding.
13. **Prehistoric Indian Sites** — The general vicinity of the Kisatchie Ranger District is within the traditional range of the late prehistoric Caddo Indians. Several sites of that time period are within a mile of Longleaf Trail.
14. **Kisatchie Work Center** — More than 100 years ago Bellwood Academy was located here. It was on the edge of the western frontier and offered advanced study in several fields. Newton C. Blanchard, Governor of Louisiana from 1905 to 1908, was an alumnus of the school. The Academy closed its doors in 1863. Little use was made of the site until 1935, when a CCC camp was built there. After the Kisatchie National Forest was established and the CCCs were disbanded, this location entered its current use as a field office and equipment depot for the Kisatchie Ranger District.

Other Developed Recreation Sites — Within a short driving distance of the Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway there are several camp and picnic sites. *Camping and picnicking areas offering facilities:* Kisatchie Bayou and Dogwood. *Primitive camping:* Lotus, Red Bluff, Cane, Corral, Oak, Coyote and Custis.

Additional information — You can obtain more information about recreation opportunities or get answers to other questions. Please call 318-352-2568, or write to District Ranger, USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 2128, Natchitoches, LA 71457.

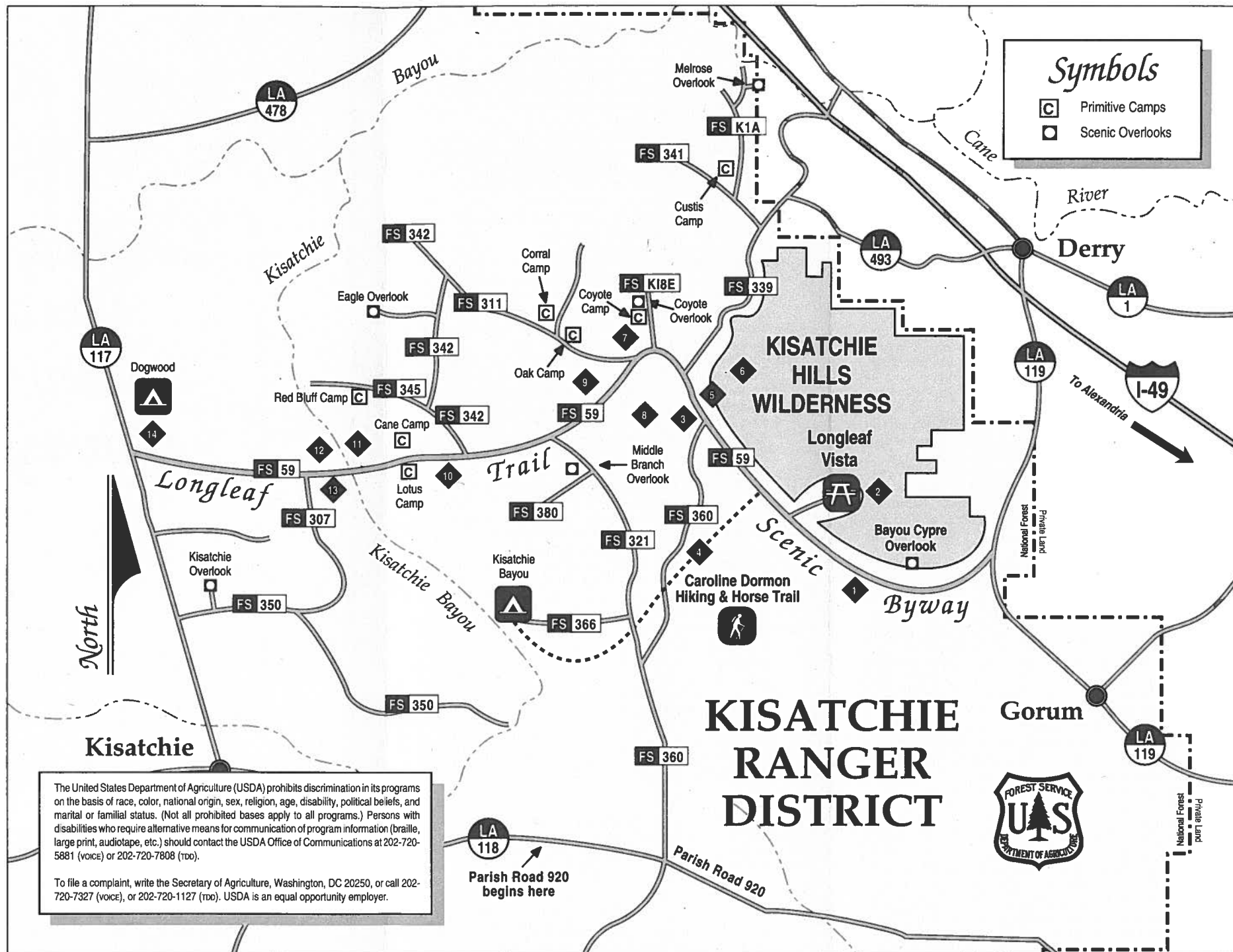


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Kisatchie Ranger District

Kisatchie National Forest
Louisiana





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Welcome to the Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway

This route, one of the finest scenic drives in Louisiana, was nominated in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. Guiding motorists through the most unique scenery in the Kisatchie National Forest, the Longleaf Trail offers natural beauty as well as direct and indirect access to several popular recreation spots in the Kisatchie Hills area.

See the other side of this publication for descriptions of the wonderful attractions to be enjoyed by visitors. Numbered diamonds on the map are keyed to detailed interpretive text on the reverse side.

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