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Website and App Launch for the New Driftless Area Karst Trail Driving Tour



There is a brand-new way to find cool, unique sites to visit in the Driftless Area—the 24,000 square mile area that the glaciers missed where Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois meet—the Driftless Area Karst Trail website and Flyover Country App!

To celebrate 2021, the International Year of Caves and Karst, a collaborative effort was developed under the National Speleological Society and modeled after the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail: the Driftless Area Karst Trail (DARK). DARK is a driving tour that includes sixty-nine sites in four states that highlight the unique geology of the Driftless Region. The committee members behind the DARK Trail represent dozens of agencies, organizations, and businesses in the Driftless Area including the National Park Service, state parks, privately owned show caves, local tourism organizations, and various colleges and universities.

Explore DARK's 65+ Discovery Areas via new digital platforms

In developing DARK, committee members divided the region into “Discovery Areas” within each state. On the website, <https://driftless.caves.org>, these Discovery Areas are searchable by state and county, and include caves, springs, trails, state parks, scenic overlooks, and exhibits that showcase this dramatic landscape. The interactive [Flyover Country App](#), developed by the University of Minnesota and funded by the National Science Foundation, can be downloaded onto a smartphone and used to explore the geographic Discovery Areas.



The team is excited to offer the newly launched website and app to the public. They have identified the best karst-related sites to visit in the Driftless Area and have made it

easy for users to access information, plan a trip, and see features of the region's unique geology. By exploring specific Discovery Areas there, you can learn more about both well-known geologic landmarks and tourist attractions as well as lesser-known sites that are well worth exploring. So, if you're looking for places to escape the summer heat, check out the website: <https://driftless.caves.org/> or the [Flyover Country App](#) to find a cool cave or spring-fed stream to visit.

Additionally, the DARK committee is currently working to develop a variety of educational resources to engage visitors with these sites and to promote stewardship of the sensitive features within the Driftless Region. In the coming year, interpretive signage and other wayfinding devices will be developed in specific sites. There, visitors will be able to learn about karst conservation and the deeply rooted cultural history of the region.

The Driftless Region: A unique natural area vulnerable to water contamination

The Driftless Region is composed of a karst landscape. It is characterized by underground drainage systems like caves, sinkholes, springs, and rare plant communities. Its unique characteristics are formed by the erosion of rocks such as limestone from rain and flowing water. The deeply eroded river valleys of the Driftless Area offer beautiful, dramatic vistas that are home to many spring-fed, blue ribbon trout streams, isolated relic white pine stands, steep goat prairies, and more. Because the region lacks glacial sediment deposits, surface water drains quickly underground, dissolving bedrock and resurfacing through springs.

The natural areas in this region are stunning, but they are also vulnerable. Due to the unique nature of karst geology, groundwater in the Driftless Region is highly susceptible to contamination. Its preciousness and vulnerability are what prompted the development of DARK. The mission of this new trail is to foster a better understanding and stewardship of the karst landscape and its groundwater by engaging people with these special places.

Find out more and get involved in the Driftless Area Karst Trail!

The DARK committee is eager to grow this collaboration and reach a wider audience and are particularly committed to inclusivity and designing a welcoming trail for all.

To get involved with the DARK committee, contact Dawn Ryan at dark@caves.org.

To participate in marketing initiatives for the DARK project, fill out this survey to express your interest: https://umn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cUyUThU4BA8AxTg.

To stay up to date on the Driftless Area Karst (DARK) Trail, follow our newly launched Instagram account, [@driftlessareakarst](#), and like our Facebook page, [Driftless Area Karst Trail](#).

This project has been supported by the [National Speleological Society](#), the [Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership](#) at the University of Minnesota Extension, the [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#), and [National Park Service](#).