

# There's great hiking in the fall

By Cathy Meyer Special to the Hoosier Times  
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November is a great time to take to the woods of southern Indiana and enjoy nature. Many trees are still quite colorful and as the leaves fall from the trees, the landscape is revealed. The bugs and snakes are gone, the air is cool, and the crowds have disappeared.

While the Indiana state parks are deservedly very popular for hiking and have many visitor amenities, there are miles of trails on other state properties, national forest properties and wildlife refuges and private lands managed by land trusts, including The Nature Conservancy and the Sycamore Land Trust.

While some of these preserves are closed to visitors or inaccessible, many welcome hikers with parking areas and developed trails.

Hikers should be aware that hunting is allowed on parts of state and national forests. Most hikers are not concerned about squirrel hunters and deer hunters with bows, but the deer firearms season may be a concern.

The firearm deer hunting season runs Nov. 16 through Dec. 1 this year. Dates for all hunting seasons can be found on the Indiana Department of Natural Resources website at [www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild](http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild).

It's a good idea to wear blaze orange clothing during the fall if you are hiking in any area that may be used by hunters.

Do not wear anything white, which may resemble a deer's tail to a trigger-happy hunter. To avoid hunters entirely, stick to state parks, nature preserves and private lands, including those owned by land trusts.

If your dog goes along on your hikes, please keep it leashed, for the dog's safety and to avoid annoying other hikers and prevent your pet from harassing wildlife.

Dogs are easily lost in unfamiliar areas when they scent game and pursue it. Leashes are required on many trails and prudent on all of them.

## What to take

Prepare for the unexpected. Weather can change quickly in the fall, and a sunny day may become cloudy and cold. Rain, and even snow are possible, and a wet hiker is a cold hiker. Hypothermia is a real, and dangerous, possibility in the fall and winter. Avoid cotton clothing, and choose wool or fleece.

Take extra clothing, a raincoat, water and food. Something to start a fire and an emergency shelter may be valuable on longer treks. Review your route, take a map and compass and know how to use them.

Cell phone reception is spotty in remote areas, so don't count on using your phone for help. A GPS unit may not work under the tree canopy or batteries may die. Advise someone of your plans and when you expect to return. You may want to leave a note on your car dashboard with the date and time you left and emergency contact info.

## Where to go

Morgan-Monroe, Yellowwood, Owen-Putnam and other state forests have a variety of trails of varying lengths leading through the wooded hillsides. Maps are available at the offices or online. Some of these have designated backcountry areas, where backpackers are permitted to camp along the trail. The state forests do allow hunting, except in recreational areas and around the buildings.

The Hoosier National Forest comprises thousands of acres in southern Indiana. There are more than 260 miles of designated trails available for hiking. While hikers may explore off of the trails, use of a map is encouraged since much of the forest property is interspersed with private lands. The Hoosier National Forest website and the main office along Ind. 37 in Bedford have fliers, trail maps, basic rules and safety information.

The Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area, named for Indiana's first state forester, is the only federally designated wilderness area in Indiana. Use of such areas has many restrictions, such as limited party sizes, to preserve the primitive nature of the area. Use of any wheeled or motorized vehicles or machinery is prohibited.

While many hikers are aware of the Deam, fewer use the nearby Hickory Ridge trail system. Located just south of the Deam, Hickory Ridge trails may be used by hikers, cyclists, and horseback riders. Almost 50 miles of interlocking loops traverse scenic ridges and ravines, so hikers can easily choose a trek of the right length. A primitive campground serves as a trailhead, and there are also connections to the old Hickory Ridge log church. The campground has a vault toilet and bulletin board with rules and other information posted, but no water supply. Although these trails are lightly used, trail users should be prepared to yield to other users. Hikers and cyclists should step to the downhill side of the trail for passing horses and cyclists should also yield to hikers.

The Hoosier National Forest trail closest to Bloomington is also the newest. The Pate Hollow Trail offers more than 7 miles of pathway designed and constructed with the assistance of the Hoosier Hikers Council and permits only foot traffic. An old road serves as an inner connector for those desiring a shorter hike.

The trailhead parking lot and the first few feet of the trail are located just behind the main office at the Paynetown State Recreation Area, managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The trailhead is administered by the DNR and offers access not only to the Hoosier National Forest Pate Hollow Trail, but also to the DNR White Tail Trail. The White Tail Trail intersects just a few feet from the parking lot and takes off to the left. There is a bulletin board with maps at the beginning of the trail and the entire trail is well marked.

The Pate Hollow Trail features creeks, valleys and hills covered by mixed hardwoods. There are glimpses of Lake Monroe, especially after the leaves fall. The trail is quite popular with trail runners as well as hikers. Beth Cossairt, an avid trail runner, said, The Pate Hollow Trail is one of our favorites. The terrain is varied; there aren't very many people; and it's really scenic. It's also just a few minutes drive from Bloomington.

Land trusts, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Sycamore Land Trust, own land and hold conservation easements to protect land from development. The lands they own may allow public use, but other preserves owned by individuals and protected by conservation easements do not. These nature preserves often include very scenic areas with special natural features or flora and fauna. Land trusts rely heavily on volunteer labor and donations to do their work, so if you enjoy visiting these preserves, consider making a donation or helping out on a work day.

The Nature Conservancy is a national organization dedicated to preserving natural areas, and its Indiana Chapter manages several nature preserves in southern Indiana. Many are open to public use and are fairly well-known, including Cedar Bluffs in southwestern Monroe County and Greens Bluff in

Owen County.

The Brown County Hills office of The Nature Conservancy project office includes more than 350,000 acres in portions of seven counties: Bartholomew, Brown, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Monroe and Morgan. The Hitz-Rhodehamel Nature Preserve, located in Brown County, is a 350-acre property. The Hoosier Hikers Council recently developed a three-mile trail through the preserve's oak covered ridges and ravines. The preserve is managed as high quality woodland bird habitat by the removal of invasive Japanese stilt grass and garlic mustard and by prescribed burning. Hikers may park next to the TNC sign on Freeman Ridge Road. Dan Shaver, project manager of the Brown County Hills office, enjoys showing off the steep hills and hollows of this preserve.

Sycamore Land Trust is another, more local, land preservation organization that covers 26 counties in southern Indiana. A guide to Sycamore preserves is scheduled to be released this winter. While many of the preserves are not easily accessed, others have parking lots and trails and welcome public use.

The trail at the Cedars Preserve, located in southwestern Monroe County, follows a creek along an old quarry roadbed and climbs into the adjacent hills. Two intersecting loops offer a choice of distances past limestone outcrops, sinkholes, a large grove of old cedar trees and artifacts from a 100-year-old limestone quarry. Visitors should be careful not to block the bridge or the driveway to the private home at the end of Thrasher Road.

John Lawrence, assistant director of Sycamore Land Trust, said, "The Cedars is my favorite place to go for a hike. It's close to home and is never crowded. Every season, there is something different to see."

Lawrence also recommends hiking at Beanblossom Bottoms, on Woodall Road in northwestern Monroe County, and Touch the Earth Preserve in Bartholomew County.

The Beanblossom Bottoms Trail is completely flat, and interpretive signs explain the special wetland plants and animals that are found there. The first part of the trail follows an old gravel road and ultimately leads to a platform with a view of an active bald eagle nest. Before reaching the eagle platform, hikers can turn off on a three-mile-long wooden boardwalk traversing acres of wetlands in various stages of succession. The trail was funded by the Duke Energy Foundation and the Dr. Laura Hare Charitable Trust and built largely by the efforts of more than 250 volunteers. It would not be possible to access this property without the boardwalk, so it is a special treat.

Part of this state designated nature preserve is covered with sedges, rushes, grasses and buttonbush, which are rich shades of russet and gold in the fall. The wooded portions of the preserve contain large pin oak and sweet gum trees. Wood ducks may number in the hundreds during a fall hike through these woods. Observation platforms are sited in the sedge meadow and in the forest overlooking a large stand of trees killed by a beaver dam that flooded the trees roots. This is a good place to watch red-headed woodpeckers.

Touch the Earth Preserve is easily accessible, south of Ind. 46, and just east of the Bartholomew County Line on Country Club Road. A network of trails winds through old fields and woodlands of this 98-acre preserve. Invasive shrub control is an on-going challenge here, so expect to see some dead shrubs. Lawrence said, "This property has some beautiful scenery in the fall, without the Brown County crowds."

Nearby, on the north side of Ind. 46, is Tangeman Woods, a site used as an outdoor lab by school groups, but also open to public use.

The options for hiking are unlimited in southern Indiana, so go ahead, get off of the couch and take a hike!

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# Brown County Hills

## Seeing the forest AND the trees

The Brown County Hills offer a spectacular opportunity for conservation. A high concentration of diverse ecosystems exist within a small area. About half of the forested lands here are held in public ownership and half being in private land ownership. The long-term health of the forest depends on the conservation of the private land and the careful management of the public land.



### About

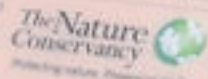
- The Woods with 114,000 acres of public land
- Brown County
- As of 2012, the majority of

As the state's largest non-forested block of forest, the Brown County Hills are a rare and irreplaceable natural resource. These forests, with their diverse diversity of wildlife, grasses, shrubs, and trees, the Brown County Hills is home to a rich array of native species, including large and small mammals and amphibians that rely on this forest landscape for survival.

### Conservation

- Conserve natural resources
- Dry Creek, Upper Beech, Maple, P...
- Conserve natural resources including the C and W...
- Protect native plants and animals

People who rely on the forest landscape, like the students, workers, and visitors from all over the world, are an important part of the forest's future. The Nature Conservancy is working with public and private land managers to ensure the long-term health of the Brown County Hills forests. Through donations from private individuals, foundations and corporations, The Nature Conservancy is able to permanently protect special areas within the Brown County Hills such as the Hip-Rushbottom Woods Preserve.



Protecting nature. Promoting life.

These interpretive signs are by Bill and Andy Warner

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