

Southern Indiana offers many trail options

By Sara Miller 812-331-4352 | smiller3@heraldt.com
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With a number of state parks and forests within an easy driving distance, hiking remains a popular summer activity for young children and adults alike. But with so many to choose from, trying to decide where to spend some quality time with nature can be overwhelming. That's where local hiking and park enthusiasts come in.

I don't hike the state parks often, preferring the much less crowded state forests and smaller nature preserves, Myke Luurtsema said. Luurtsema, who works for the Indiana Forest Alliance, has hiked trails all around southern Indiana.

"In Yellowwood State Forest in Brown County, I would recommend Lake Trail," Luurtsema said. "While part of it follows along close to the road, which isn't ideal, it goes through some old forests on the west side of Yellowwood Lake, providing nice views of the lake in the shade." Lake Trail is 4 1/2 miles long, which Luurtsema said is manageable in a few hours.

For a more intense hike, Luurtsema recommends High King Trail. "It's a tough climb, but it offers a good view of the lake," Luurtsema said of the half-mile trail, which is also in Yellowwood State Forest.

Some of Brown County's best trails can be found in the Morgan-Monroe State Forest, Luurtsema said. "The Low Gap Trail is a good 9-mile, one- or two-day hike. People can camp along the trail in the back country area."

The forest also has Rock Shelter Trail, which is just over 3 miles and goes by a rock outcropping in a narrow ravine, Luurtsema said.

The Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill offers hikers in Brown County 600 acres to explore. "Visitors can walk along a ridge on an old gravel road, which provides great views of the rugged hills," said Katrina Folsom, communications director with Sycamore Land Trust. A new 2-mile loop trail in the preserve is in the process of being completed by volunteers of the Hoosier Hikers Council.

Brown County is not the only place that offers prime hiking trails, however. "The Cedars Preserve near Harrodsburg in Monroe County has a 1-mile loop trail that takes hikers past an old limestone quarry and through a stand of eastern red cedar trees," Folsom said.

The Lake Monroe property also added new trails this year, wildlife specialist Rex Watters said.

Among the new additions is Pate Hollow Trail, a 7.7-mile, hike-only trail that is the result of a joint effort of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Hoosier National Forest. An older road serves as a connector for those who'd like a shorter hike on the new trail.

Each trail has its own character, Watters said. Some of them, like those in Allens Creek State Recreation Area, have a scenic overlook of Lake Monroe. Allens Creek offers the Turkey Trot Trail, a 1.75-mile trail located on a high peninsula around the lake.

Trails in the Paynetown State Recreation area include the easy, half-mile Tree Trek Trail and the moderate 1-mile Whitetail and 1.25-mile Blue Bird trails. These trails give you varying habitats and forested areas that overlook parts of Lake Monroe, Watters said.

The Fairfax State Recreation Area, which includes the 1.75-mile Big Oak Trail, runs through more open fields, Watters said. The Big Oak Trail is named so because it takes hikers past the Big Oak Tree, which is approximately 175 years old.

Lake Monroe also hosts part of Indiana's only designated wilderness area, the Charles C. Deam Wilderness, which encompasses 13,000 acres of the Hoosier National Forest.

The Dilcher-Turner Canyon Forest in eastern Greene County has sandstone outcrops and seasonal waterfalls along its newly completed 2-mile loop trail. "I always feel in awe when I visit this preserve," Folsom said.

Greens Bluffs is one of Luurtsema's favorite places to hike in Owen County. It's owned by the Nature Conservancy, he said. There is a great blue heron rookery along Raccoon Creek and a nice native hemlock stand, which one trail runs through.

Luurtsema also recommends the trails at Owen-Putnam State Forest. There is a nice hike near the main state forest campground, which goes by a seasonal waterfall and through some nice forests, he said.

For hikers looking for a flat, paved road, Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest in Orange County has an easy half-mile trail. It's totally level, has an interpretive sign along it with some benches and a riparian forest on each side, Hoosier National Forest public affairs specialist Teena Ligman said. Although the trail has not been formally approved as a wheelchair-accessible trail, many find it an easy trail to access and hike.

For more information about hiking trails on state properties, go to www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/3631.htm or www.in.gov/dnr/parklake. For more on the Hoosier National Forest, go to www.fs.usda.gov/main/hoosier/home. For more on Sycamore Land Trust preserves and more, go to sycamorelandtrust.org.

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TrailesMonroe.jpg



TrailsBrown.jpg



Yellowwood State Forest
■ Lake Trail
■ High King Trail



TrailsGreene.jpg



TrailsOrange.jpg



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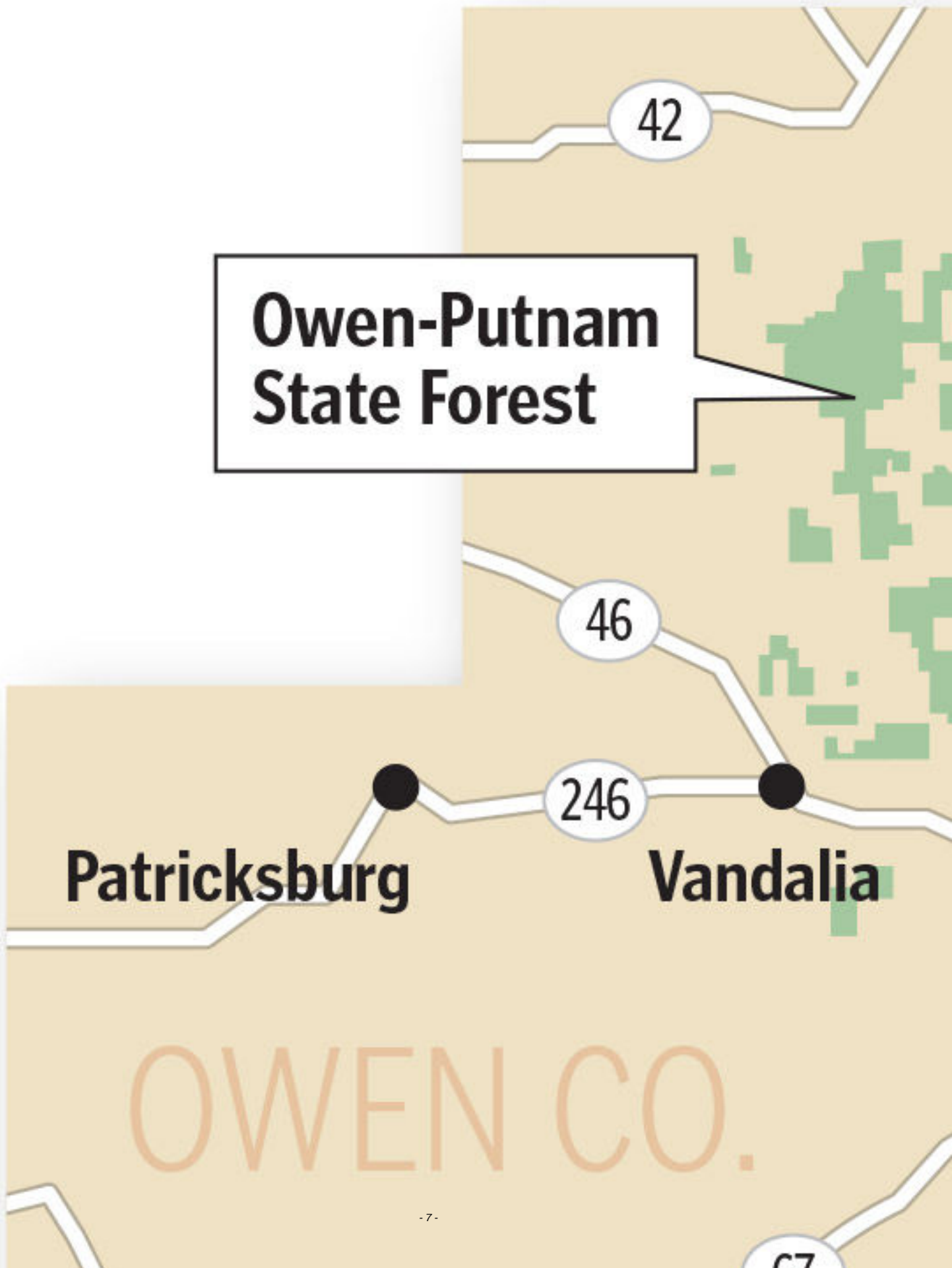
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**Owen-Putnam
State Forest**

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