

Trail Markings:

General Forest Trails marked by white diamonds with trail numbers written onto them.

Sentry Bluff Trail - Blue diamond

General Area - White diamond

Mill Branch Trail - Red diamond

Natural Bridge Trail-Yellow diamond



**Safety:** Personal safety-Make sure someone knows your route and establish a check in time. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear depending on the weather and terrain. Carry plenty of water, food, compass and a first aid kit.

Environmental safety-Be aware of poison ivy and stinging nettle. Various insects including ticks and mosquitoes are present here during spring, summer and fall. Venomous snakes are also present here including timber rattlesnakes and copperheads.

At all times, this hike is remote and the closest vehicle accessible areas is the trailhead if troubles occur. Precautions should be taken for long hikes (water, food, first-aid kit, etc.).

**Emergencies:** The nearest hospital is Harrisburg Medical Center in Harrisburg, IL. Cell phone service along the trail can be spotty so be

prepared and know where your closest outlet is when dialing 911.

**Camping:** The Redbud Campground is the designated camping area near the Main Parking Lot. There is no camping along the trails since they are all within the Natural Area. Use existing campsites, don’t create new ones. Leave the campsite cleaner than you found it.

**Facilities:** There are no facilities along this entire trail, only at the main parking lot. Bury human waste and toilet tissue in a 6 inch deep “cat hole” at least 200 feet from water.

**Travel Time:** This depends entirely on how fast you hike and how much exploring you do but it is suggested that most should be able to do these hikes in 3-4 hours.

**Surface Type:** Dirt and rock

**Trail Ethics:** “Please practice Leave No Trace principles” Pack It In, Pack It Out. Some rare and endangered species of plants are located in the area so please stay on the designated trails and leave the rocks and plants for others to enjoy. Equestrians frequent this trail system: hikers should yield to horses.



Bell Smith Springs Loop

Shawnee National Forest

2025

**Description:** Bell Smith Springs is one of the most beautiful recreation areas the Shawnee National Forest has to offer. It contains a series of clear, rocky streams and scenic canyons bordered by high sandstone cliffs and an abundance of vegetation unique to Illinois. The trail system consists of eight miles of interconnected trails featuring strange and wonderful rock formations, such as Devil’s Backbone, Boulder Falls and a natural rock bridge. Hiking this system of trails is a favorite activity because of the rock features, scenic overlooks, hidden springs and lush flora and fauna.

One of the biggest challenges for visitors/hikers is the hike back out of the canyon since it is a 150 foot climb up stairs and hills so be prepared. The picture is one of the stairs. Parking at the Hunting Branch lot eliminates this climb, there is a steep hill to drive down to Hunting Branch.

The reverse map includes all official

Forest Service designated trails, although old trails and user-made trails may exist which can cause confusion for hikers. The purple trail shown on the map is no longer maintained but still may exist.

The entire area is designated as a National Natural Landmark due to the area’s distinct number of plant communities and its unique geological features, it has been designated a national natural landmark. This combination of geological and ecological qualities has created a variety of habitats for a diversity of plants and wildlife.



<https://maps.app.goo.gl/rGfR6p6c8bY8C03Mh99> - Hunting Branch Lot

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/iGXu9k6BwmoZGfaz7> - Main Parking Lot

The following dropped pin is a link to the trailheads so Google can give you the best directions depending on where you are coming from.

Directions to the Trailhead

This brochure will still be a handy reference to know what the points of interest might be.

NF Day Hikes”

Once the app is downloaded access the map store and search for the following map: “Shawnee

this:

**Avenza:** The map included with this brochure is available in the Avenza Map Store for downloading to your smart phone. The Avenza App can be downloaded by searching the app store on your phone for

Devil's Backbone formation



Mill Branch Canyon Barrens



The Natural Bridge spanning 125 feet and arching 30 feet from above and below.



Red / Mill Branch Loop - Hunting Branch Trailhead



Yellow / Natural Bridge Loop - Main Parking Lot Trailhead



Blue / Sentry Bluff Loop - Main Parking Lot Trailhead



Elevation profiles are based on counter clockwise hiking

Trail Elevation Profiles



