rugged scenery surrounding the Stone Face area. The landscape is known for its sandstone formations and scenic overlooks, making it a rewarding destination for those who enjoy exploring beyond the region's more familiar attractions.

November 14: Giant City State Park

On November 14, hike leader Melanie Kasson will guide participants through Giant City State Park, one of Southern Illinois' most recognizable outdoor destinations.

Located near Makanda, Giant City is famous for its enormous sandstone bluffs, narrow rock passages and towering trees. Its name comes from the massive rock formations that resemble the streets and buildings of an ancient city.

The park features a variety of trails winding through forests, along rocky outcroppings and past remarkable natural formations. Whether you've visited Giant City dozens of times or are discovering it for the first time, the park's unique landscape offers something worth exploring in every season.

The hike begins at 10 a.m. Participants should check the Society's website for the designated meeting location and additional information.

November 28: A Post-Thanksgiving Adventure

After the Thanksgiving holiday, hikers will have another opportunity to stretch their legs and enjoy the outdoors on Saturday, November 28.

The destination and meeting location have not yet been announced, but participants can visit rivertorivertrail.net for updated information as the date approaches.

For anyone looking to enjoy some fresh air after the holiday festivities, a guided hike offers a refreshing alternative to spending the weekend indoors.

December 12: Winter on the Trails

The hiking adventures continue into December with a guided outing led by Steve Melville on Saturday, December 12, beginning at 10 a.m.

Although the destination has yet to be announced, early winter can be a wonderful time to explore Southern Illinois. With the trees largely bare, the forest reveals rock formations, distant hillsides and views that can be hidden behind dense foliage during warmer months.

Hikers should visit the Society's website for the destination, meeting location and any additional details.

December 19: Jackson Falls

The final scheduled hike of the season takes participants to Jackson Falls on Saturday, December 19. Led by Bob Mulcahy, the hike begins at 10 a.m., with participants meeting at the Jackson Falls parking area.

Located within the Shawnee National Forest, Jackson Falls is known for its dramatic sandstone bluffs, rugged wooded terrain and seasonal waterfalls. The area is a favorite among hikers, photographers and rock climbers, offering impressive scenery throughout the year.

Although waterfall flow depends on recent rainfall, the surrounding rock formations and peaceful forest setting make Jackson Falls a beautiful destination regardless of the weather.

It's a fitting place to close out the Society's fall hiking season and enjoy one last outdoor adventure before the holidays.

What to Know Before You Go

All hikes are free and open to the public, and reservations are generally not required unless otherwise noted by the Society.

These are not leisurely nature walks. The hikes are considered at least moderately difficult and are intended for individuals in very good health who have previous hiking experience. Participants should be comfortable walking on uneven terrain, navigating hills and spending several hours outdoors.

Hiking boots or sturdy shoes are strongly recommended, along with a walking stick for added stability. Participants should also bring their own drinking water and snacks. As temperatures begin to drop, dressing in layers is a good idea, particularly for December outings.

Dogs are not permitted on the guided hikes.

Because routes, meeting locations and other details may change, hikers are encouraged to check the Society's website before heading out. Additional information, including trail maps and hiking resources, is also available online.

Discover What's Waiting Around the Bend

One of the greatest things about living in or visiting Southern Illinois is having so much natural beauty right in our backyard. Sometimes, all it takes is a little encouragement to venture beyond the places we already know.

Whether it's discovering a new trail, revisiting a favorite state park or simply spending a Saturday outdoors with others who enjoy hiking, the River-to-River Trail Society offers a great reason to lace up your boots and explore.

And with guided hikes continuing into December, there's still time to experience another side of the Shawnee National Forest before the year comes to a close.

For the complete fall hiking schedule, updated meeting locations and additional information, visit www.rivertorivertrail.net. ■