

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park – A Colorful Woodland Loop

By Fran Wallas

A hike at Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park in Eva is a high point. Literally. The park is home to Pilot Knob, the highest point in West Tennessee, used in navigation by early riverboat pilots.

The best place to begin a hike at Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park is at the visitor center. Park staff members have prepared trail maps that are color coded for the three, five, 10, and 20 mile hikes. The colors on the map match the blazes on the trails. The five-mile hike, outlined in orange, is a perfect introduction to the beauties of the park.

To get to the trailhead, drive through the park to the end of the road at the Tennessee River Folklife Interpretive Center parking lot. You will want to spend time at the folklife center to learn about the history of the area, see some of the wildlife, and enjoy the views of Kentucky Lake. The center is also a good place to bird watch since Bald Eagles have been spotted there as well as other migratory birds. You will learn about life on the river and mussel diving. The center is also a good place to fill up your water bottles and buy a few peppermint sticks.

The trail starts behind the center. Follow the orange blazes. Since the beginning of the five-mile trail is also the beginning of the other trails, you will see several different colored blazes along the way. The first half-mile is along the ridge top with views of the lake and the fall col-



Kentucky Lake, seen from Pilot Knob in Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park.

ors. There are many blueberry bushes on both sides of the trail.

The trail descends steeply. You enter a shady hollow where Paw Paws thrive. There are several small creek crossings, but the water is usually shallow. You soon come to the trail junction where the three-mile trail splits off to your left. A little way past this split, the trail begins to climb up to the top of a large hill. There is an overnight shelter and a campsite at the top. This site is a good place to have a snack or lunch, but there is no water available.

Continue on the trail until you get to the next trail junction. The five-mile trail turns to the left on an old roadbed. Although roadbeds aren't as scenic, they are great if you are with a group. You can

enjoy talking with your hiking buddies without going single file. The trail goes over gently rolling terrain and ends at another roadbed. Turn left and follow the trail until you get to a gate and old cabin. Turn left on the roadbed. The trail leads you back to the park road. You can take the road or the trail up to the parking lot. You may want to plan your hike so that you can go to the Folklife Festival in September or attend one of the many ranger programs in the park.

For more information, call the Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park office at 731-584-6356 or visit www.tnstateparks.com/NBForrest.

The five-mile trail in the hollow at Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park.



Directions

Directions to Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park: Take I-40 to Exit 126 and travel north on Highway 641 for 15 miles to Camden. Do not take the Highway 70 By-pass. Continue instead to the traffic light and turn right on Highway 70 East. Follow the signs to the park.

Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)