

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## The Lake Trail's in Bloom at Standing Stone

By Fran Wallas

Spring flowers, historic buildings, and a chance you might see eagles and hawks are among what draws folks to hike Standing Stone State Park's Lake Trail in Hilham.

To start the hike, cross the road in front of the office. There is a sign leading you to the Lake Trail. Hike a few switchbacks below the Park Tea Room/Nature Center Building down the steep hill to the road. Walk down the road to the large picnic shelter. The shelter is surrounded by blooming redbuds. Cross the long suspension bridge over Mill Creek. The bridge gives a closer view of the dam built by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Standing Stone State Park is on the National Register of Historic Places because of the WPA projects such as the cabins, boathouses, and group lodge.

After crossing the bridge, the trail climbs steeply up wooden steps. Follow the white blazes and green hiker medals. The trail flattens out just when you are ready to stop climbing. In early spring before the trees leaf out, you will get scenic views of the dam and picnic shelter far below. Any of these overlooks make a good water and snack break. Eagles, Ospreys, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and Cooper's Hawks have been spotted in the park. Any hikers who are also birders will enjoy watching and listening along the way. The trail goes through some dead pine trees that have been cleared from the path. Although these are not pretty, they provide good wildlife habitat.

When you get to the road, you will see a representation of the Moses Fisk

house. Moses Fisk was an early Overton County educator and founder of Hilham, Tenn. The town of Celina is named after his daughter. The trail begins to descend through a beech oak forest. As you climb up and down the hills, you will cross several seeps that can turn into beautiful waterfalls with enough rain. There are patches of Hepatica along the way. At the next road, turn to your left and go across the bridge. The trail starts again on the right just after the bridge.

The trail begins a long steady climb up to the crest of the hill. There is a great view of the lake curving below. At the end of the downside of the hill, there is a picnic table waiting for you. As you enjoy your lunch or short break, look at the Overton Lodge across the water. You will need to hike along the road to the lodge to continue the hike.

After you go around the Overton Lodge, walk past the Cooper Mountain Loop trail going off on the right. Stay straight on the Lake Trail that is also part of the Cooper Mountain Trail. You will see both blue and white blazes on the trees. There is a WPA boathouse across the water. Follow the trail about a mile along a branch of the lake until you get to a long footbridge on your left. Cross the bridge and follow the blazes to the next creek crossing that may require wading. You are entering a wildflower haven.

In about a quarter of a mile, you come to a sign that says "To Overton Lodge 2.5 miles; To Dam, 1 mile." Since you don't want to go to either of those places again, turn right and follow the trail up the wooden steps to another sign. This sign gives you the choice of going to



Spring wildflowers, like this Red Trillium, can be seen along the trail at Standing Stone State Park.

the cabin area or to the rec hall. You will eventually want to take the trail toward the rec hall, but now is the time to take a detour towards the cabins.

The highpoint of the hike is the flowered hillside below the cabins. This is the "ooh ah" part of the trail. Depending on when you hike, you may see Trout Lily, Shooting Stars, trillium, hepatica, some leftover Bloodroot, larkspur, and Twinleaf.

When you have had enough flowers, if there is such a time, turn back and follow the trail towards the rec hall. The trail climbs up one last hill and around the guardrail at the park road. Turn left and follow the road back to your car. You should reach your car just as your water, snacks, and energy run out. You may want to come back another time for a ranger-led wildflower hike to find out about the ones you can't identify.

### A view along the trail at Standing Stone State Park.



### Directions

Take I-40 to Exit 288 (The Livingston/Sparta Exit). Take Highway 111 north to Livingston. Turn left on Highway 52 west to the state park sign. Turn left on Highway 136. The best place to leave your car is at the park office. Park staff can give you trail maps and flower lists. The 4.8 mile Lake Trail is moderately strenuous because of the steep changes in elevation.

### Standing Stone State Park



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