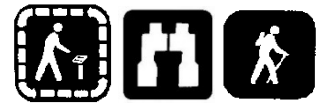




Bell Smith Springs



Bell Smith Springs contains clear, rocky streams and scenic canyons bordered by high sandstone cliffs and plants unique to Illinois. The trail consists of seven miles of interconnected trails, featuring strange and wonderful rock formations, such as Devil’s Backbone, Boulder Falls and a natural rock bridge. People enjoy hiking here because of the rock features, scenic overlooks, hidden springs and lush flora and fauna.

Trail Highlights

Interpretive signs explain Bell Smith Springs’ unique ecosystem and history. Stone steps built into the side of cliffs lead to the bottom of the canyon. Magnificent oak and hickory trees dominate the wooded slopes along the trail. The bottom of the canyon is filled with huge beech and tulip poplar trees that line the creek. During the spring, wildflowers carpet the forest. Trails pass deep pools along the creek’s edge, rock shelters in the bluffs and magnificent rock formations. You will encounter several scenic overlooks, some of which provide views of Bay Creek. Trail loops include Sentry Bluff Trail, traveling along an exposed sandstone cliff above the canyon floor; Mill Branch Trail, winding on either side of Mill Branch Creek; and Natural Bridge Trail, crossing the highest natural bridge with a span of 125 feet and an arch of 30 feet.

National Natural Landmark

Bell Smith Springs’ distinct plant communities and geological features make it a National Natural Landmark. Here, you will find a variety of habitats for plants and wildlife. Birders come from across America to find tanagers, sparrows, pileated woodpeckers, eastern phoebes and several different species of vireos. The canyons and wooded slopes provide habitat for more than 700 species of flowering plants, ferns and lichens.

Directions:

From Harrisburg: Take Highway 145 south 11 miles to Burden Falls Road. Turn right, go 5 miles to Ozark Rd. Turn south (left). Go to Bell Smith Springs Rd. Turn southwest (right) and proceed 2 miles to Bell Smith Springs.

From Vienna: Take Highway 45 north 12 miles to Ozark Road. Turn east (right). Go 10 miles to Bell Smith Springs Rd. Turn southwest (right) and proceed 2 miles to Bell Smith Springs.

Season of Operation: Open Year-round

Trail Distances: There are 7 miles of interconnected hiker-only trails.

Sentry Bluff Trail – 2.7 miles

Mill Branch Trail – 1.5 miles

Natural Bridge Trail – 1 mile

Trail Difficulty: Moderate to difficult.

To reach the canyon floor from the main trailhead, descend a stone stairway.

Facilities: Interpretive signs, camping allowed at Redbud Campground, vault toilet at main trailhead.

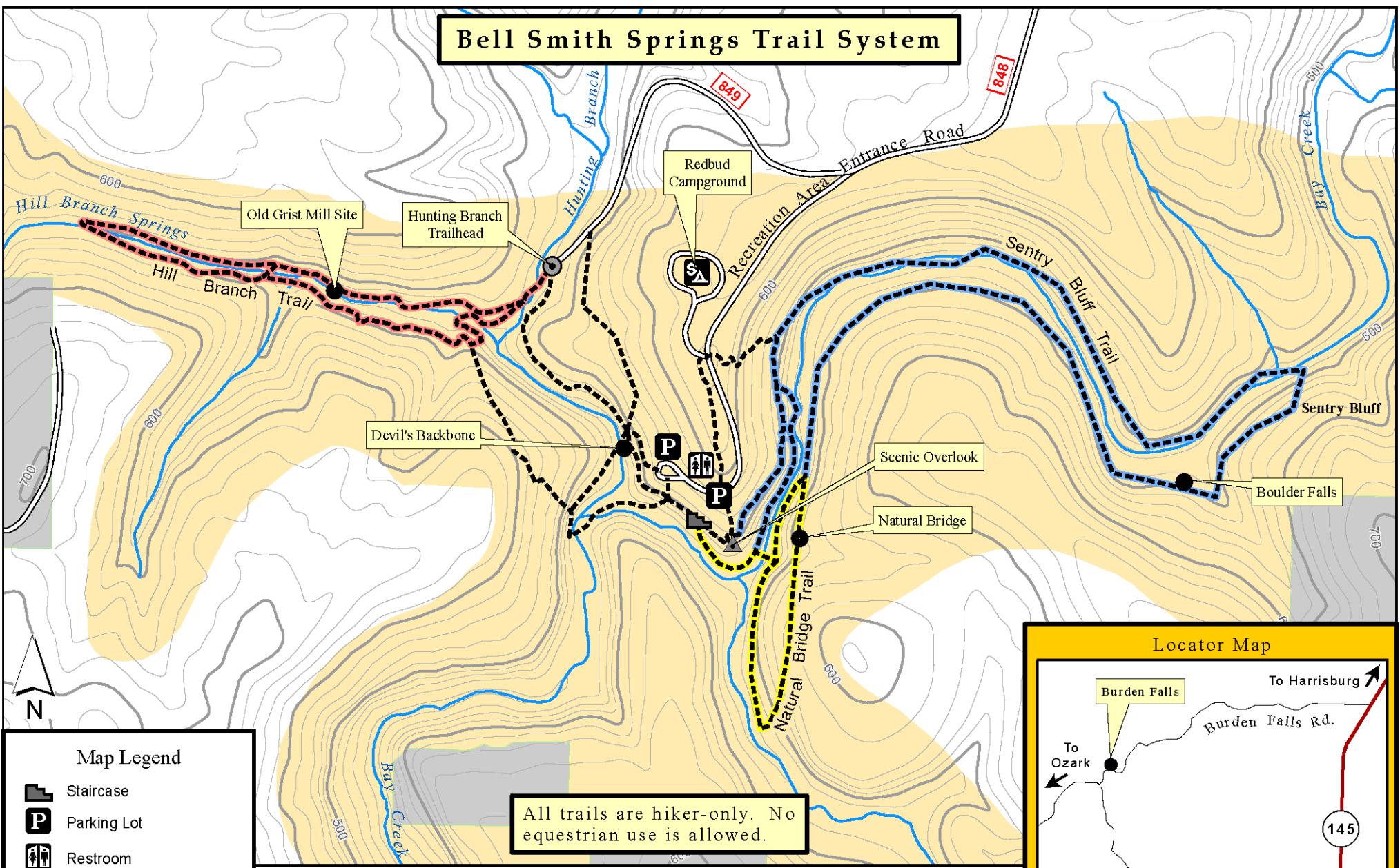
Safety: Extra caution should be used on wet, slippery rocks and near bluffs. Due to the canyon’s remoteness, take precautions before hiking (carry water, food, first-aid kit, etc.). Search and rescue efforts may be slower than in an urban setting. During wet seasons, water at creek crossings will be over ankle height. Poison ivy and venomous snakes are present.

In the event of an emergency, call 911.

Site Regulations: Equestrians are prohibited on the trail system. Leave what you find (rare and endangered species inhabit the area). Stay on the designated trails. No camping allowed outside of Redbud Campground.



Bell Smith Springs Trail System



Map Legend

- Staircase
- Parking Lot
- Restroom
- Hiker Only Trail
- Road
- Natural Areas
- National Forest Land
- Non-National Forest Land

All trails are hiker-only. No equestrian use is allowed.

Point of Interests along trails are not signed on the ground.

Trail Markings

- Hill Branch Trail (Red) 1.6 miles
- Sentry Bluff Trail (Blue) 2.7 miles
- Natural Bridge Trail (Yellow) .9 miles

