



# Bell Smith Springs



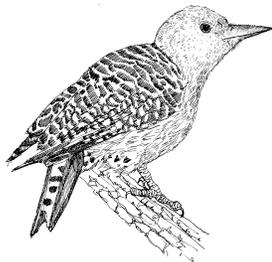
Bell Smith Springs is one of the most beautiful recreation areas the Shawnee National Forest has to offer. It contains a series of clear, rocky streams and scenic canyons bordered by high sandstone cliffs and an abundance of vegetation unique to Illinois. The trail system consists of eight miles of interconnected 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.

## Trail Highlights

Interpretive signs at the main trailhead explain the unique ecosystem of Bell Smith Springs and history of the area. Stone steps built into the side of the cliffs lead to the bottom of the canyon. Magnificent oak and hickory trees dominate the wooded slopes along the trail, while the bottom of the canyon is filled with huge beach and tulip trees. During the spring months, the forest floor is alive with colorful wildflowers. The trails pass deep pools along the creek's edge, shelter pockets 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 in the Forest, spanning 125 feet and arching 30 feet.

## 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. Birders come from all over the country to find tanagers, sparrows, pileated woodpeckers, eastern phoebes and several different species of vireos. The canyons and wooded slopes provide habitat for over 700 species of flowering plants, ferns and lichens. That is about 20% of the total number of plants and lichens known in the entire state of Illinois.



## Surrounding Area

Burden Falls and Bay Creek Wildernesses, Teal Pond, Millstone Bluff Archaeological Site, Lake Glendale Recreation Area, Trigg Fire Tower, Jackson Hollow and River to River Trail.

## Emergencies

The nearest hospital is Harrisburg Medical Center in Harrisburg. The nearest public phone is in Vienna. You can also call 911.

**Length :** 8 miles of interconnected hiker-only trails  
General Area Trails – 1.5 miles  
Sentry Bluff Trail – 3.2 miles  
Mill Branch Trail – 2 miles  
Natural Bridge Trail – 1.5 miles

**Travel Time :** You can choose to hike only for a few hours or spend one or two days hiking all eight miles.

**Surface Type :** Dirt and rock

**Difficulty Level :** Moderate – Difficult. To reach the canyon floor from the main trail, you must descend a stone stairway.

**Recommended Season :** Spring and fall when more water runs over the canyon's falls; also summer months.

**Facilities :** Parking, accessible restrooms and interpretive signs. Camping and picnic areas are also within the recreation area.

**Access :** From Harrisburg, take Highway 145 south 9 miles to Delwood. Take Forest Rd. 402 west 4 miles to Forest Road 447. Turn south on Forest Road 447, continue past Teal Pond to Forest Road 848. Turn southwest on Forest Road 848 for 2 miles to the Recreation Area entrance. From Vienna, take Highway 45 north to Ozark. Turn east and follow the directional signs to the recreation area entrance.

**Safety :** Extra caution should be used where the trail is near the bluffs and when traveling on wet slippery rocks. Beware of poison ivy and sumac plants. Due to the remoteness of the canyon, precautions should be taken for long hikes (water, food, first-aid kit, etc.).

**Trail Markings :** Sentry Bluff Trail - Blue diamond 

General Area - White diamond 

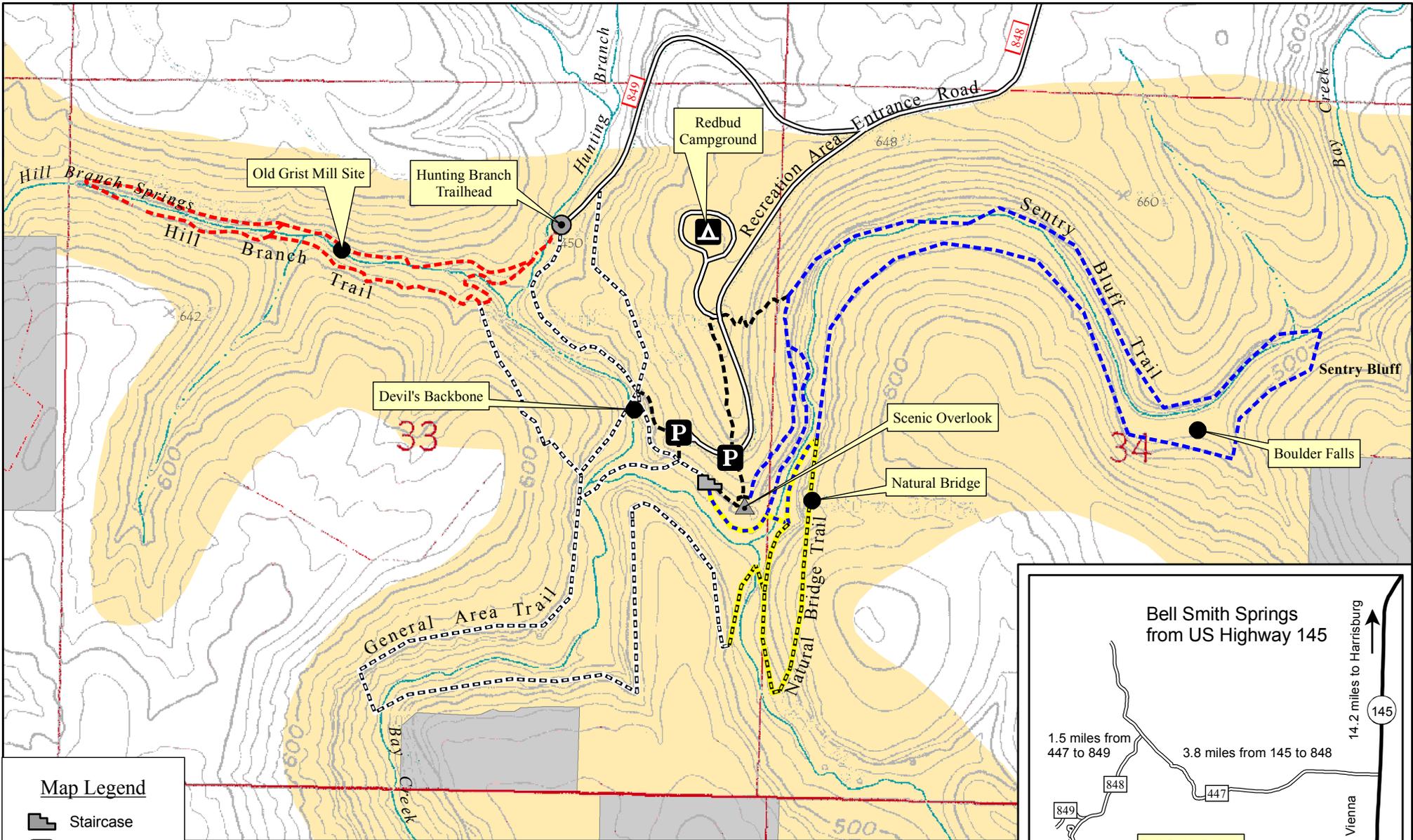
Mill Branch Trail - Red diamond 

Natural Bridge Trail - Yellow diamond 

**Trail Ethics :** 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 are prohibited on this trail system.

The USDA Forest Service is a multicultural organization and is committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

# Shawnee National Forest Bell Smith Springs National Natural Landmark Trail System



**Map Legend**

-  Staircase
-  Parking Lot
-  Road (Gravel)
-  Natural Area
-  Non-NF land

Trail Markings

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  General Area - White diamond    |  Sentry Bluff Trail - Blue diamond     |
|  Hill Branch Trail - Red diamond |  Natural Bridge Trail - Yellow diamond |

