Welcome to Bell Mountain Wilderness

This 9,143-acre Wilderness is part of the St. Francois Mountains, one of the oldest landforms in North America. The Wilderness is named for a family that once lived and farmed along the ridge top that is now known as Bell Mountain. Elevations range from 1,702 feet at Bell Mountain to 970 feet in the Joe's Creek drainage. Local relief is about 600 feet and is characterized by steep felsite and rhyolite outcroppings. Both Bell Mountain and Lindsey Mountain offer outstanding views of the surrounding area. The associated granite glades provide a variety of interesting plant and animal life.

The area is accessible from Potosi via Highway 21 south to Highway 32, then west on Highway 32 approximately 7 miles to Highway A. A trailhead is located about 2 miles off Highway A along Forest Road 2228; another trailhead is located on Highway A approximately 5 miles south of Highway 32. There are approximately 11.9 miles of trails maintained for hikers, including a small segment of the Ozark Trail.

Oak and hickory are the predominate tree species, with some areas of natural oak-pine and some short leaf pine plantations. Upland brush and red cedar make up a small portion of the vegetative component. Blackjack oak, winged elm, hickories, sumac, and native grasses are found on the glades. Lichens abound on the exposed-surface rock. Some areas on Bell Mountain that were cleared in the 1940's now have almost pure stands of Northern Red Oak.

Shut-in Creek crosses the area. It is a perennial spring fed stream with several shut-ins, or gorges along its course. Steep talus slopes intersect the stream course at several locations. Joe's Creek is another small perennial stream within the Wilderness.

Bell Mountain Wilderness provides a unique habitat situation not typical of the majority of Missouri's Ozarks. The predominately oak-hickory forest is interspersed with pine and scattered glades resulting in a diversity of plant species more common to old growth forest. This habitat situation favors mature forest species such as pileated woodpeckers, wood thrush and oven birds. Moderate populations of most game species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkeys and squirrels can be found. Visitors have a chance to see a unique environment and combination of plant and animal communities not found in other areas of the Missouri Ozarks.
Wilderness Regulations and Manners

Wilderness is a special area designated and set aside by Congress as an area affected primarily by the forces of Nature with little evidence of man's works," where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Many individuals seek out its peace and solitude, yet it has different meanings and values to different people depending on their background and whether they are backpackers, hunters, photographers, or hikers.

Wilderness contributes to the ecologic, economic and social health and well-being of our citizens, our country and our world. In addition to providing "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation," the Wilderness Act specified that wilderness "may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, education, scenic, or historical value." Overall, wilderness areas provide a host of both direct and indirect benefits, including recreation, protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, unique wild plant and animal species, and bequest to future generations.

Wilderness is primitive; trails are not well marked and there are no bridges at creek crossings. Meeting nature on its own terms involves inherent risks.

Increasing numbers of Wilderness users may seriously impact the very values they seek. To ensure that these values remain intact, please practice good wilderness manners and comply with the following regulations. Continue the legacy: make sure that others will not see evidence of your visit.

Wilderness Regulations

There are certain human impacts that could damage or destroy the wilderness resource. The following practices are prohibited, to protect the Wilderness resource and preserve Wilderness character:

- Traveling or camping in groups of more than 10;
- Possessing or using a motor vehicle, motor boat, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport (including mountain bikes and wagons), or landing an aircraft, dropping or picking up materials, supplies or persons by means of aircraft, including helicopters;
- Camping or building a campfire within 100' of trails, streams, or other occupied campsites;
- Littering or leaving refuse in an exposed or unsanitary condition; or placing a substance in or near a stream that may pollute the stream;
- Cutting or defacing live or dead standing trees or other vegetation;
- Leaving a fire without completely extinguishing it;
- Building of "structures" such as rock fire rings, lean-tos etc.;
- Tying stock directly to trees;
- Discharging a firearm or any other implement capable of taking human life or causing injury, in or within 150 yards of an occupied area, or in any manner or place whereby any person or property is exposed to injury or damage as a result of such discharge; or firing any tracer bullet or incendiary ammunition.

Missouri Department of Conservation hunting and fishing regulations and license requirements apply.
Wilderness Manners

Visitors should leave no sign of their presence so that the next person can enjoy natural scenes and solitude. You must tread lightly so nature can endure and replenish.

Before Your Arrival - Be prepared:

- Plan your party size, limit size of group to 10 persons or less. This reduces impact on soil and ground cover. Camp at least 100 feet away from the trail or water sources.
- Have the right equipment and clothing for primitive travel and the season of the year. Carry a good map and compass; practice safety and carry a first aid kit.
- Pack your own shelter, including needed poles and stakes; they are more comfortable than lean-tos.
- Reduce the spread of non-native, invasive plants by removing weed seeds from your animals and gear before arriving on the forest, and assuring that stock aren’t eating these weeds within 48 hours of their arrival on the forest.

During Your Visit – Considerations for Traveling and Camping:

- Register at the self-registration station located at the trailhead entrance, to help us monitor use and its impacts on the resources. This may also help to locate you in case of an emergency.
- Avoid overuse of popular areas, and search out the lesser known attractions.
- When traveling on a trail, stay on the trail. When traveling cross-country, use your map and compass. Use of blazes, ribbons or other trail markers should be avoided; let the next person find their own way as you did.
- Remember that saddle and pack stock have the right - of - way on trails. Step surely off the trail on the downhill side. Give way to them and avoid conflicts and possible accidents.
- Protect the solitude; seek out campsites that are out of sight and sound of trails and other camps. When sharing an area, keep a low profile and maintain the solitude.
- Only build campfires when needed, and keep them small. Dead fallen trees add to the natural environment and future shortages may cause complete restrictions. Fire rings are unnatural signs of man and should be avoided. The use of small gas or chemical cooking stoves is recommended. Use care with open campfires - make sure they are dead out and their evidence is scattered before leaving.
- Keep all dogs on-leash or under control.
- Leave your camp cleaner than you found it. Pack out what you pack in. Animals generally dig up what you bury, so don't. Dispose of human waste at least 100 feet from campsites, trails and waterways, by digging a shallow hole and covering it, nature will biologically decompose.
- Bell Mountain Wilderness is surrounded by private property. Please respect the rights and property of private landowners.

If You Have Stock

- Don’t tie saddle and pack stock directly to trees, as the rope rubbing and concentrated animal trampling will injure or kill the vegetation. It’s better to use hobbles or tie a rope between two large trees and use it as a hitch rail. Picket your stock at least 200 feet away from waterways, trails, or camps. When breaking camp, scatter manure and smooth up the area.
- Avoid prolonged stock grazing in one area; it can have a serious impact on vegetation. Bring concentrated supplemental stock feed to help reduce this impact.

General Comments

The Ozark climate is mild enough to make Wilderness visits feasible throughout the year, as long as visitors bring proper gear. When possible take advantage of this opportunity and plan your visit outside the peak
spring and fall use seasons.

Drinking water is not available in Bell Mountain Wilderness, open water sources within the wilderness are not recommended for drinking. Bring your own drinking water or be prepared to boil or treat water chemically.

Visiting the Wilderness is a primitive experience: trails are not well marked, and there are no bridges crossing streams.

Be aware of natural hazards that may occur within the Wilderness, and take precaution to maintain your safety. Flash flooding may occur during and after rainstorms; trees and limbs may fall with even moderate winds. The universal distress signal is three of anything: shots, shouts, smokes, whistles. You may not get cell phone or internet service in many locations: even GPS satellite coverage may be spotty in some circumstances. Make sure someone knows where you are going, and when you plan to return.

USGS quadrangle maps can be purchased from the Forest Service or the U.S. Geological Survey. The Wilderness is located on the Johnson Mountain, Banner, Edgehill and Johnson Shut-ins quadrangle maps. A map of the Potosi District can be purchased at Mark Twain National Forest offices.

Wilderness Rangers visit trailheads and patrol the interior of the area. They are there to assist you and answer your questions. Have a pleasant wilderness experience and remember, leave only footprints and take only photographs and memories.

To Volunteer to help protect this area, please contact us at the locations below/or mailto:mailroom_r9_Mark_Twain@fs.fed.us.

For Further Information Contact:

Potosi Ranger District.
10019 Hwy. 8 West
Potosi. MO 63664

(573) 438-5427

or

Forest Supervisor
Mark Twain National Forest
401 Fairgrounds Road
Rolla, MO 65401

(573) 364-4621


The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call 800-245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.