

Clifty Creek Conservation & Natural Area

by Susan E. Hohman

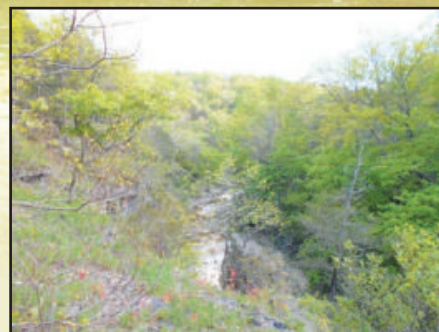


In 1857, Missouri geologist G. C. Broadhead visited the site of what is now known as the Clifty Creek Conservation and Clifty Creek Natural

Area, a combined 486-acre site in Maries County, preserved for the enjoyment of the people. Mr. Broadhead's description of the area is not entirely correct as one finds it today, yet the clear stream and growth of trees and vines, along with the cliffs he describes is still "wildly picturesque and romantic," as he wrote at the time. (source: MDC website: www.nature.mdc.mo.gov)

In 1971, Clifty Creek became the first designated natural area in the state of Missouri. Numerous varieties of mature trees fill the landscape on the sloping ground there, while an assortment of other trees line the creek valley. To date, 458 plant species have been recorded for the area, including Indian

paintbrush, purple prairie clover, downy goldenrod, and rough sunflower to name a few of the types of flowering vegetation found there. The cliffs of dolomite support the growth of Drummond's goldenrod, walking fern, wild hydrangea, and wild columbine also.



In addition to the attractive botanicals found at Clifty Creek, the area's scenic natural bridge, with a span of 40 feet and a height of 13 feet is a popular draw to visitors. The natural bridge was "formed where a tributary of Clifty Creek goes through a spur of Gasconade formation dolomite." (source: MDC website) Hikers can walk the 2.5 mile loop hiking trail that



leads from the six-car parking lot on Maries County Road 511 to the natural bridge and back. Volunteers from around the state built this trail entirely by hand.

Due to the rugged terrain of this area, little has changed since settlement times. The forest is thick with trees and numerous bird varieties make their homes in and among them. "Along the creek look for kingfisher, northern parula, and Louisiana waterthrush. In the woods look and listen for wood thrush, scarlet tanager, black-and-white warbler, worm-eating warbler, pileated woodpecker, and red-eyed vireo." (source: MDC website) For a family, group, or individual outing that



takes you back in time, Clifty Creek is a great local source of pioneer-like enjoyment.

Directions to Clifty Creek: From I-44, take exit 163 Dixon. From this point, head north on Hwy. 28 past Dixon, MO and turn right onto Hwy. W, which is approximately 13 miles north of the Hwy. 28/I-44 interchange. Follow Hwy. W until it turns to gravel and proceed to the parking lot.



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Physical: 104 West Third Street
Mailing: Post Office Box 261
Dixon, MO 65459

Email: jimthomas@cablemo.net

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