







## Canoe Trail

The **Lower Cache River Trail** offers paddlers a quality canoe experience, 3 to 6 miles in length, through a magnificent cypress-tupelo swamp. The highlight of the trail is Illinois' largest and, therefore, **state champion bald cypress tree**. Like many trees within Cache River State Natural Area, it is more than 1,000 years old.

Canoeists can begin at the Lower Cache River access area or at a private boat launch (\$1 fee) south of Perks. Car shuttles are not necessary. The trail is marked with international canoe symbols and arrows and/or yellow stripes on trees. Canoe maps and fact sheets are available at the site headquarters and wetlands center.

While canoeing the Lower Cache is enjoyable, paddlers should be aware that the Upper Cache River is difficult if not impossible to canoe. Severe bank erosion, which is responsible for trees tipping over and creating log jams, makes canoe portages very frequent.

## Hiking Trails

There are more than 18 miles of designated foot trails within Cache River State Natural Area. Other than Little Black Slough Trail and Tupelo Trail which are considered moderate in difficulty, the trails are easy to walk. A five-mile segment of the 45-mile-long Tunnel Hill State Trail will pass through some region, providing expanded opportunities for hikers and cyclists. Paralleling the Karnak-Belknap Road on its northern side, the Tunnel Hill Trail will link Little Black Slough, the Lower Cache and the Henry N. Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center. *All trail lengths are based on round trip distances.*

■ **Todd Fink-Heron Pond Trail** (1.5 miles) with access at the Heron Pond area: This easy trail includes a truss bridge over the

Cache River and features a floating boardwalk to the middle of Heron Pond's cypress pond. There are 10 interpretive panels located along the trail.

■ **Little Black Slough Trail** (5.5 miles) with access via Wildlife Bluff, Marshall Ridge and Heron Pond areas: Bald cypress and tupelo swamps, sandstone bluffs, floodplain forests and hillside glades highlight this moderately difficult trail that gives hikers passage to Boss Island. A rock ford on the Cache River, difficult to cross during high water, must be negotiated 1.5 miles west of the Wildcat Bluff access.

■ **Lookout Point Trail** (1 mile) with access east of the Wildcat Bluff access area: Taking visitors along the edge of a high-quality hillside barrens, this trail provides an overview of the Cache River, its swamps and floodplain forests.

■ **Linkage Trail** (2.4 miles) with access via Heron Pond, Wildcat Bluff and Marshall Ridge areas: Linking Heron Pond Trail and Little Black Slough Trail, this easy hike offers a chance to observe the **state champion cherrybark oak tree**.

■ **Marshall Ridge Trail** (2.8 miles) with access via the Marshall Ridge area: Winding through reforested fields, this easy trail connects with the Linkage Trail and provides a gateway to Heron Pond or Little Black Slough.

■ **Tupelo Trail** (2.5 miles) with access via Marshall Ridge Trail area: This moderately difficult trail begins a quarter-mile north of the Marshall Ridge access area and goes through rolling upland forest to the southern shoreline of Little Black Slough. It gives excellent views of tupelo gum trees and swamp.

■ **Lower Cache River Swamp Trail** (2.5 miles) with access via the Lower Cache River area: Paralleling Cypress Creek and Cache River on a high earth berm, this trail takes hikers to a cypress and tupelo swamp. It is a great place to hear the rhythmic croaking of tree frogs at dusk in the spring. With 3,000 linear feet surfaced in aggregate, much of the trail is accessible year-round, except during periods of flooding. A 1,000-foot handicapped-accessible trail, located west of the toilet facility, ends with a viewing platform overlooking the swamp. A 20' x 28' picnic shelter is available with privy toilets, water hydrant and drinking fountain.

■ **Big Cypress Tree Trail** (250 feet) with access via the Big Cypress area on the Lower Cache River: This short flood-plain forest

trail takes visitors to one of the bald cypress trees older than 1,000 years and whose base circumference is more than 40 feet.

■ **Section 8 Woods Nature Preserve Boardwalk** (475 feet) with access via Section 8 Woods area: Passing through a cypress-tupelo swamp and a flood-plain forest, this handicapped-accessible boardwalk ends with a view of the **state champion water tupelo**. Along the boardwalk, 10 tree species are identified and there is a kiosk with interpretive panels.

## Past and Present

The area's natural resources have always been important to people living in the Cache River valley. Native Americans found the region rich in wildlife and relied on their expertise in fishing, hunting and trapping for food, hides and furs. The first European settlers arrived in 1803, and, finding the soil too wet to farm, concentrated their efforts on timber harvesting. By 1870, several saw mills were processing timber for lumber, railroad ties, boxes and charcoal. Large-scale drainage and land-clearing efforts began in the early 1900s, eventually bringing thousands of acres of bottomland under cultivation. The state of Illinois acquired the first parcel of Cache River State Natural Area in 1970, following cooperation among private, governmental and commercial groups working together to conserve this unique natural resource.

Today, a cooperative effort called the Cache River Wetlands Joint Venture Partnership is working to protect and restore a 60,000-acre wetland corridor along 50 miles of the Cache River. Partners include the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Ducks Unlimited with support from the Friends of the Cache River Watershed. The focus is to repair natural ecosystems and provide hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing and other recreational opportunities, which will promote economic development and tourism.

Scientific and educational use of the area is allowed by permit, issued by the Department of Natural Resources. For information about the permit, hunting and fishing regulations or the site in general, contact Cache River State Natural Area, 930 Sunflower Lane, Belknap, IL 62908, or phone (618) 634-9678 or Henry Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center 8885 State Rt. 37 South Cypress, Illinois 62923 phone (618) 657-2064.

