

CACHE RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA

Illinois Department of Natural Resources - Division of Parks & Recreation
Canoe Fact Sheet



PUBLIC ACCESS: Between Route 37 and Perks, IL, Lower Cache River Access

DISTANCE: 3-6 miles on water trails and in Cache River Channel

AVERAGE TIME: Allow 3-5 hours

HABITAT: Southern bald cypress / tupelo tree swamp

Thank you for your interest in canoeing/boating in the Cache River State Natural Area. Although the Cache River meanders for approximately 110 miles through southern Illinois, there are only small sections that are navigable by small water craft. Man has extensively altered the Cache since the early 1900's. The River is divided into the Upper and Lower Cache by means of a diversion channel that forces the Upper Cache to empty directly into the Ohio River. The Lower Cache is then diverted into the Mississippi River near Horseshoe Lake State Fish & Wildlife Area.

As a result, increased stream velocity has deepened and broadened the riverbed causing severe bank erosion on the Upper Cache. Many fallen trees and log jams make navigating this section of the river difficult or impossible. However, the Lower Cache River offers the boater a quality experience of three to six miles of trails through the still waters of a southern cypress swamp. Visitors may bring their own water craft, 10 hp. limit, and access the Lower Cache River from the Lower Cache River Access located 1 3/4 miles west of IL Rt. 37 on the Perks Road and then one mile south on Access Road. Please see map and follow brown and white directional signs.

Car shuttles are not necessary since the river gradient and velocity are very small, allowing for an easy return to the access site. The trail is marked with international canoe symbols and arrows and/or yellow markers on trees. The Lower Cache is known as a precious remnant of a once-common wetland and is in the northernmost range of a true southern cypress/tupelo swamp in the mid-west. The highlight of the trail system is an opportunity to view the state champion bald cypress tree (*Taxodium distichum*) which is over one thousand years old. You may also tour Eagle Pond, owned by The Nature Conservancy, which contains a 850 year old cypress tree that has 209 cypress knees, tallest knee over 11 feet and aged at 190 years old. There are also boating opportunities on Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge on the Lower Cache River, south of Ullin, IL, for information call 618-634-2231.

Among the quiet waters of the Cache River there exists a remarkable diversity of flora and fauna. There are excellent opportunities for viewing wildlife, especially birds. You may observe blue and green herons, pileated woodpeckers, black and turkey vultures, egrets and waterfowl during your visit. At dusk, bats frequently sweep over the water in search of insects, and tree frogs fill the night air with their rhythmic chorus. Two species of venomous snakes of southern Illinois may be found in the Lower Cache area; however, encounters with them are rare. It is best to be cautious and observant.

For hikers: the Lower Cache River "Swamp Trail", access to the east from the parking area, takes you into a true southern cypress/tupelo swamp. It is two miles in length, round trip distance, and parallels Cypress Creek and the Cache River on an earthen berm created by channel dredging. It is an excellent trail for wildlife observation, especially at dusk in the spring when you can hear the swamp come alive with the rhythmic croaking of numerous frog species. During periods of flooding, this trail may be impassable or have wet and muddy conditions.

The 1000 foot paved trail traversing to the west from the parking area leads to a viewing deck from which you may see a portion of Buttonland Swamp and the Illinois state champion bald cypress tree.

The Section 8 Woods Nature Preserve offers a 235-foot boardwalk that offers a view of the state champion water tupelo tree (*Nyssa aquatica*), with a circumference of 22.5 feet and believed to be over one thousand years old. Section 8 Woods is located on State Route 37, 1/2 mile south of Perks Road.

Fishing/hunting: Pole and line fishing, and hunting are permitted in this area. There is a 10 hp. limit on all motorized boats. Please respect private property and obtain permission before using or entering private property. Private canoe tours are available. For information on private canoe tours contact the Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau, 1-800-248-4373 or visit them on the web at www.southernmostillinois.com.

Enjoy your visit to the Cache River State Natural Area.

For additional site information, contact the Cache River State Natural Area, 930 Sunflower Lane, Belknap, IL, 62908; phone: 618-634-9678 or 618-657-2064.