

- ◆ Follow the stairs to the top of the bluff. You are now walking through a **dry blufftop plant community**. Different trees and wildflowers grow on top than what we saw down below. The struggle for moisture and exposure to weather means it is never as lush up here. Look for Red Cedar and Post Oak, common throughout the park in dry areas. Be very careful as the trail comes near the edge of the bluff in places!

Many feet before yours have traveled these trails. Late Woodland period (500 – 800 A.D.) Native Americans are known to have lived in and migrated through the area that is Giant City State Park. Surely Native Americans before and after them were here and left little trace, as they were living throughout the Shawnee National Forest. By the 1800s, settlers were arriving from Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina to set up farmsteads. They later learned that sandstone bluffs did not provide the best land for farms. When the railroad came to Makanda, the area became an important shipping point for locally grown fruit and produce. Many local families recall earlier times before air conditioning when they picnicked on hot summer days near the cool sandstone shelters. By the late 1800s, professors and scientists were studying the diverse plant life in the park. Two plant species located in the nature preserve on sandstone cliffs were found by botanists Stephen A. Forbes and Dr. George Hazen French and were never before known to science: Forbes' Saxifrage (*Saxifraga Forbesii*) and French's Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon frenchii*). Since that time, noted botanist, Dr. Robert H. Mohlenbrock, did a detailed survey of the park's flora, identifying over 800 species of plants. Giant City became a state park in 1927—forever to be preserved as a living museum. The park has grown to encompass over 4,000 acres.

*Please carry out what you carry in.*

CIGARETTE BUTTS ARE LITTER!  
PLASTIC BOTTLES AND SODA CANS ARE LITTER!!



**Thank you for visiting  
Giant City State Park.**

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Printed by authority of the State of Illinois 3M – 7/15

# Trillium Trail

## *Fern Rocks Nature Preserve*



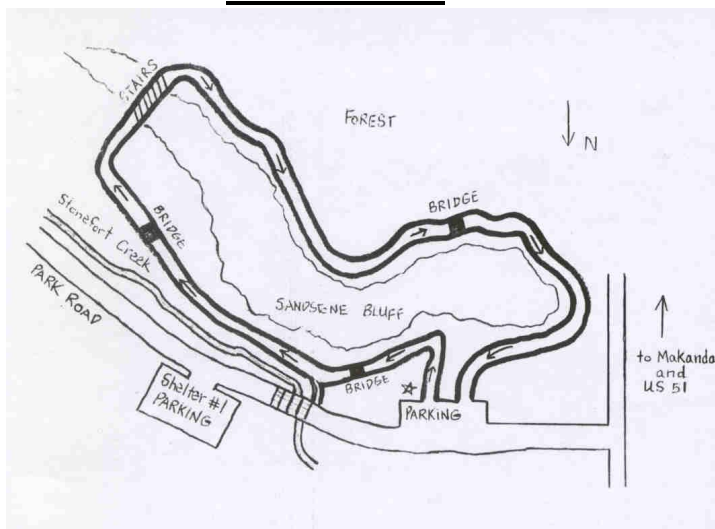
White Trillium (*Trillium flexipes*) Giant City State Park, Trillium Trail © Jan Sundberg, 25 April 2014

**Length: 2 miles**  
**Difficulty: Rugged**  
**Walking Time: 1 hour**



**Giant City State Park**  
**235 Giant City Road**  
**Makanda, IL 62958**  
**618-457-4836**  
<http://www.dnr.state.il.us>

## Trillium Trail



**Be careful – steep cliffs are dangerous and sandstone can be slippery.**

**Please stay on designated trails.**

**Poison ivy exists on this trail.**

**Copperhead snakes (venomous) hibernate in the sandstone cliffs**

*All plants, animals, and artifacts are protected by law in your state parks.*

*Welcome to Giant City's 110 Acre nature preserve!!!*

### Interpretive Features

Each season on Trillium Trail offers something different. In winter, many of the bluffs become visible and unique ice formations appear. In the spring, enjoy wildflowers and breathtaking waterfalls. Summer brings lush green vegetation and cool blasts of air from between the rocks. The fall delivers bright colors of leaves visible from the bluffs.

The natural area you are now entering is 110 acres of bluffs and forest designated as very high quality. Named **Fern Rocks Nature Preserve**, the area was dedicated in August 1973, the 47<sup>th</sup> of over 300 Illinois Nature Preserves.

A designated Illinois Nature Preserve is an area containing outstanding and relatively undisturbed natural characteristics. In particular, the primary objectives of preserving this area were to protect the sandstone bluff and forest communities; and to protect two Illinois-endangered plant species – the large white-flowered mint (*Synandra hispidula*) and grove bluegrass (*Poa alsodes*).

- ◆ The **sandstone bluffs** along the trail towering 80-100 feet above the forest floor are judged by geologists to be Pennsylvania era or around 250 million years old. The uplift, cracking, and crumpling of the Earth over millions of years formed the bluffs. Iron that occurred in the groundwater before the sand hardened formed deposits in the sandstone. These are the brownish-red lines and waves in the rock. The surface of the sandstone was eroded by the fast action of glacial melt water over 100,000 years ago during the time of the Illinoian glacier. The glacier stopped and began to melt just north of Makanda.
- ◆ As you cross the first small bridge, notice the lush north-facing sandstone cliff and the **diversity of plant life** these bluffs can support. Lichens, mosses, and liverworts can grow right on the rock. The abundant alum-root needs only a small amount of organic material to sink its roots. Moist rock ledges hold populations of wildflowers, ferns, and flowering wild hydrangea shrubs. Many years of storm water and snow melt created the flat rock waterfall area to your right.
- ◆ The rocky creek before you is **Stonefort Creek**. This is the creek that drains the Fern Rocks Nature Preserve. It empties into Drury Creek, which runs to the Big Muddy River, and finally the Mississippi River. The creek may be dry with only a few shallow pools providing drinking water for wildlife.

However, after a storm event this creek can be a raging torrent. Nature in southern Illinois has learned to adjust to these fluctuations.

- ◆ As you hike the trail use low voices and stop to look up occasionally. This area is **premiere habitat for birds** – from the giant Pileated Woodpecker (*Drycopus pileatus*) that frequents the tops of tall trees to the much smaller Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) seen flitting around the swampy thickets. Get your bird book! Here are some other birds you may spot on the Trillium Trail: The Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) nests on cliffs; the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) circles high in the air; the Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*) eats insects in the creek; and the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) hoots “who-cooks-for-you.”
- ◆ The next low bridge, crossing a tiny inlet to Stonefort Creek, is located in the midst of Giant City State Park's greatest **wildflower diversity**. From the end of March to mid-May, you can find up to twenty different blooming plants in this area. Due to the shelter provided by high cliffs and the moisture of the creek floodplain, wildflowers abound. Look for pink Wild Geranium, purple Larkspur, white Trout Lily, yellow Celandine Poppy, and, of course, the purple or the white Trillium. Pick up a **Wildflower Checklist**, arranged by month of bloom, at the Visitor's Center for a full list of bloomers at the park. If spring is gone, you are still in the midst of tremendous plant diversity. Since the woodland wildflowers are perennial (come back every year) the green plant leaves are still working to stockpile nutrients in the roots, rhizomes, corms, or tubers for next year's flowers. This is why it is extremely important not to pick any plants in the nature preserve!



Trout Lily

*Erythronium americanum*