

# NATURE TRAIL

## Trace State Park

### Jason M. Stewart

#### Memorial Trail

Trace State Park's Jason M. Stewart Nature Trail offers a unique landscape of upland pine, hardwoods, and wetland forest. The park is located on the Pontotoc Ridge in Northeast Mississippi, which in itself is a unique wedge of high land entering the state in a series of ridges twelve to fourteen miles wide. Forming a distinct topographic feature, bordered on the east by the low, gently rolling Prairie Belt, and on the west by the valley-like depression of the Flatwoods.

The Pontotoc Ridge forms a divide between the waters flowing east and west. For instance, east of the ridge (city of Pontotoc, and Trace State Park) the waters flow into the Tombigbee drainage area, while the water which falls west of the ridge courses toward the Mississippi River.

Wildlife and plant species in the area are diverse and plentiful. There is a probable chance of viewing deer year-round. Mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and wading birds can be easily seen along the banks of Trace Lake. With abundant populations of mammals (deer, fox, raccoon, bobcat, beaver, muskrat river otter, and nutria) as well as upland birds (bobwhite quail, songbirds and wild turkey), birds of prey (hawks, vulture, osprey, and owls), a few should catch your eye. Although winter

months are cold, viewing of eagles and other migratory waterfowl can be seen within the park. The area is dotted throughout with many species of ferns, mosses, and wild flowers as well.

*This trail is named after Jason M. Stewart, a 13-year-old that dearly loved the out-of doors. He was a member of the Challengers 4-H Club and was known for his work in wildlife management, environment and community service. Jason began working on this trail project, shortly there after he was killed in a horseback riding accident at his home. In honor and memory of this young man, The Challengers 4-H Club finished this trail, dedicating it to Jason, and all youth that can and do make a difference in our communities, the environment and in our hearts.*

#### Fossil Exhibits:

There is prehistoric evidence that the park was once covered by the ocean. Ample proof of this fact is shown on hilltops and on sides of hills and valleys within the park. Fossil remains of shellfish, sharks' teeth and vertebrae of small fish and animals, together with soil deposits which evidence the wash and mulch of the sea. Occasionally specimens are found, usually in this same limestone deposit, of the huge animal live of prehistoric time.

#### Vegetation Life:

A Study of the plants of Trace State Park was conducted by Mrs. Marcie Floyd and Dr. M. B. Honeycutt. They identified more than 487 plant species within the park. Sixteen of these are considered rare, endangered, or otherwise noteworthy.

#### Trees:

- White Oak
- Water Oak
- Cherry Bark Oak
- Swamp Red Oak
- Black Jack Oak
- Shagbark Hickory
- Sweet Gum
- Loblolly Pine
- Short Leaf Pine
- Eastern Red Cedar
- Red Maple
- Persimmon
- American Ash
- Pawpaw
- June berry
- Supple jack
- Flowering Dogwood
- Redbud
- Winged Elm
- Sparkleberry
- Chickasaw Plum
- Tulip (Yellow) Poplar
- American Sycamore
- French Mulberry
- Spicebush
- Sassafras
- Beech
- Black Cherry
- Black Walnut
- Boxelder
- Common Hackberry (Sugar Berry)
- Eastern Cotton Wood
- Honey Locust
- Winged Sumac
- Common Sumac

#### Ferns, Grasses, Flowers, etc.:

- Wild Comfrey
- Wild Petunia
- Little Sweet Betsy

- Wild Geranium
- Ebony Spleenwort
- Rattlesnake Fern
- Christmas fern
- Broad Beach Fern
- Turkeyfoot
- Plume Grass
- Switch Grass
- Indian Grass
- Big Bluestem
- Purple Top Grass
- Wolf tail Sedge
- Little Bluestem
- Ragweeds
- Rose-Pink
- Partridge Pea
- Daisy Fleabane
- Dwarf Dandelion
- Blazing Star
- Lyre-Leaved Sage
- New England Aster
- Compass Plant
- Honeysuckle

#### Emergent Wetlands:

- Cut Grass
- Wild Water Pepper
- Wool Grass
- Common Cat Tail
- Button Bush

#### Rare, Endangered, Noteworthy:

- Purple Cone Flower
- American Columbo
- Shadow Witch (Orchid)
- Wild Ginger
- Carolina Angle – Pod
- Nettle Leaved Sage
- Horse Gentian
- Wild Petunia
- Mullein Foxglove

- Meadow Sedge
- Flesh-Colored Thorough Wort
- Skullcap

## C A U T I O N

When venturing into the outdoors, you are entering other creature's homes. Some wild animals can be easily disturbed, and too much human interference may drive an animal out of an otherwise suitable habitat. Loud noises, sudden notions, and straying from designated trails can jeopardize natural areas. Be cautious, keep a low profile, take care not to damage habitats, and pack out all litter. Please leave pets at camp/home. They might chase or injure wildlife or be attacked themselves.

Approaching animals in the wild may be dangerous and can disrupt their natural routine. If an animal responds to your presence, sit quietly or move away slowly. Resist the temptation to approach baby animals. They may be cute, but they are wild animals and can frighten easily or even attack you. Chances are their parents are nearby keeping a protective eye on them and you. Also of note parents will most often abandon their small offspring if human scent is present on them, leaving the offspring to circum to the wild elements.

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