



Tishomingo State Park

The P Autu

By Kevin Tate

Leaves in yellow and orange under a clear, blue sky line trails that wind and lead away. Campsites overlook waterlines. Waterfalls gurgle. Rustic cabins filter breezes that blow in through screen doors and out through windows as all the world takes its first deep breath of fall. Visitors to Mississippi's state parks may hike or bike or fish. They may boat or golf or swim. They may play volleyball or reunite with family or rediscover the past, or they may do nothing, whatsoever, at all. Like gold, peace and quiet are where you find them. Through the easy access points more than 20 state parks create, finding them is both an easy quest, and a worthy one.

"Every park is unique, every park is beautiful, and every one has its own hidden treasures that are worth our time to find," said Donna Perkins. She is an assistant manager of Tombigbee State Park near Tupelo. There she helps oversee a very popular park nearly 700 acres in size but, in her years in Mississippi's employ, she's spent time at every park under the state's care, from Buccaneer State

Park on the Gulf of Mexico to J.P. Coleman State Park on the Tennessee line.

"Years ago we were offered an opportunity that I accepted to serve as a roving manager," Perkins said. "I spent several weeks at a time at each state park, filling in wherever help was needed. That's what convinced me everyone should see all of them, too. Each

Clark Creek Natural Area is a popular hiking spot.

has something unique. Every park is special. They're all wonders that belong to all of us, right here in our own back yards."

Legends of the fall

Our own definitions of fall vary by region. Here in the Deep South, our observance of the season actually begins in the last weeks of summer. Here, fall means college football, the September dove opener and our anticipation of an opportunity to relax without benefit of conditioned air. Deer hunters plot solutions for bow stands while the deep green leaves of sweet gum and oak change hue. Time free of oppressive heat begins to expand from late evening into early afternoon, hinting of its intentions to creep even further. Now, hiking, camping and fall fishing come seriously into play, for what is a hike without a breeze as refreshing as the view, a fishing trip without a frenzied bite, a campout without a crackling fire?

Footpaths to anywhere

Walk in cool shadows and warm sunshine on a day before the hard cold arrives, passing over sharp hills and foot bridges, beside bubbling springs, beneath great outcroppings of rock,



Parks of Summer



Squared away for whatever weather might bring, an orderly campsite is the first step to finding peace of mind.

along seashores or lakesides or wherever your feet may take you. These wonderful sights lie close to home, close enough for a Saturday afternoon drive to offer all the walking one might want.

Archeologists have found evidence of humans living on the land encompassed by Tishomingo State Park as long ago as 7000 B.C., and it's easy to see why. The appeal of mountains and rivers is not an invention of modern real estate men, it's a draw as old as mankind. The time that's passed since the earliest human footprints were laid there is scarcely a hiccup on the geologic scale, so yes, when the first men stood beneath the bluffs and drank from the springs and watched the strong river roll by, it looked very much like this. Rocky riverbeds and sandy seashores bear silent witness too. These are the sights found along roads less traveled.

Teaching man to fish

Schools of shad that have spent the hot summer months growing strong now take to the shallows in big lakes like Pickwick. Large enough to entice even the wariest of bass, these silver-scaled rockets churn the grassy banks and rocky flats of big waters like the Tennessee River, whipping game fish of all sizes into a frenzy.

"We have a good many fishermen who stay in the campgrounds and cabins

who like to fish in the fall," Ruth Watson, with J.P. Coleman State Park, said. "They like to just get away and have their view of everything. We have bass fishermen all the way up through November."

Come fall, for fishermen interested in all species of bass, the dog days are past, winter's doldrums lie ahead. Fall's opportunity to capitalize sits in the here and now. Carpe pisces. Seize the fish.

Sleeping under the stars

Even in the subtropical latitudes where our state parks lie, the swap of day for night is a pronounced transition. From the stark light of midday to late afternoon's gloaming and into the deep, clear nights capped by the Milky Way above, a night illuminated only by fire and punctuated only by sounds of the wild is well worth the effort. The path of escape doesn't have to go far to be complete, either.

"You've got to think about where your quiet place is at home," Perkins said. "Camping in a state park is 10 times more because there's peace and quiet everywhere you look, everywhere you walk. The campfires at night pop and crackle, the frogs crank up before a rain, the crickets sing and the stars shine big and bright."

Mississippi State Parks have 21,000 acres of land which afford access to approximately 90,000 acres of the best fall fishing in the state. With approximately 250 cabins and over 1600 RV sites, there's no better place to be a part of the changing of the seasons. As our State Park motto

states: Mississippi State Parks, Always in Season.

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To begin exploring Mississippi's state parks for yourself, go online to mdwfp.com/parks-destinations to see what the state has to offer, or visit reserveamerica.com, where you can see photos, compare prices, make reservations and set adventure underway all on your own.

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Quail Hollow State Park Golf Course

