- **Reward yourself with repeat visits to this short woodland trail. From March to September *wildflowers* can be found around almost every bend. Start off your spring with the abundant Spring Beauty, Toothwort, and Dutchman's Breeches. A bit later in the spring you will find Spiderwort and Pussy Toes. Then comes the exciting Shooting Star and False Dandelion. Just wait because here comes Beardstongue. It is not over yet—some flowers like the heat of summer like the unique Indian Physic. Wildflower season will close with the yellows of Goldenrods and Sunflowers.**

**Virginia Spiderwort**
*Tradescantia virginiana*

**Northern Cardinal**

***Please carry out what you carry in.***

# Thank you for visiting Giant City State Park.

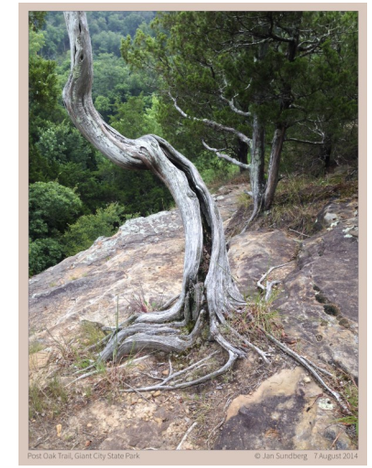
**Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and those funded by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer IDNR, 524 S. Second, Springfield, IL 62701-1787; 217/785-0067; TTY 217/782-9175.**

**This information may be provided in an alternative format if required. Contact the IDNR Clearinghouse at 217/782-7498 for assistance.**

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

# The Post Oak Nature Trail

*Partially Paved*




**Length: 1/3 mile**
**Difficulty: Easy**
**Walking Time: 30 minutes**

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

**Built in 1978, this trail was designed to accommodate our guests with mobility constraints and is wide enough for wheelchairs or strollers but has some uneven surfaces. The trail is equipped with several benches and observation platforms that will allow you to take your time and enjoy the beautiful southern Illinois scenery.**

## Interpretive Features

- **As you walk near the pond's edge, you will observe several aquatic plants. The pond is slowly filling in, creating a *wetland*. As plants die and fall into the water, they turn into organic matter or soil. Also, the plants are making seeds, increasing their numbers each spring. Wetlands are very important for wildlife. Not only are they a rich source of food, they also act like a sponge, holding water in times of flood and slowly releasing water during drought. This is a good spot to view birds, amphibians, reptiles, and insects.**

- **Some of the aquatic plants around the pond include cattails, common arrowhead, water plantain, and duckweed. The tall, dark green plants with sword-like leaves and brown or green spikes on the top are *cattails*. They are commonly found along the edge of wet areas. Cattails have been widely used for food by Native Americans, early settlers, and even by people today. They are possibly one of the best and certainly the most versatile of our native edibles. The young shoots can be pulled in spring and peeled to reveal a tender white core that is eaten raw or cooked like asparagus.**

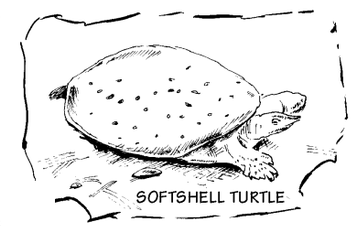
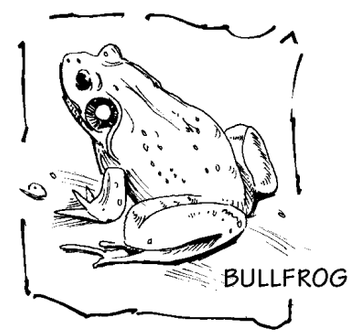
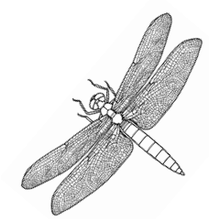
**In early summer the yellow pollen can be shaken into a bag and sifted through a strainer to make an excellent protein-rich flour. Although cattails are native to Illinois, they can become invasive and take over a wetland. This is most often noticed in wet ditches along roads.**

- **Follow the path into a beautiful *forest community* dominated by oaks, maples and hickories. You will pass first through a moist upland forest community into a dry upland forest. Changes will occur in the make-up of the plant life as different plants desire more or less moisture. The Post Oak, for which this trail was named, is located in the dry upland. It is a shorter, slower growing oak that likes dry sandstone blufftops. Other plants that like this community are Red Cedar, Blackjack Oak, Farkleberry, and Shadbush. Check the sandstone floor of the forest for Prickly Pear Cactus, not common in southern Illinois but found here.**

Post Oak

*Quercus stellata*

- **The sandstone bluffs that will soon come into view were shaped by the fast and hard moving *meltwater of the glaciers* some 100,000 years ago. As the glacier began to recede and melt just north of Makanda, cold water full of debris scoured the sandstone leaving dips and hollows in the rock. During storm events water drains off this bluff to the forest below. Look for smooth, stair stepping tracks running over the edge.**

- **Did you notice the flat, multi-colored *lichen* that can grow right on the sandstone? It can sometimes look like paint on the rock, but it is actually a fungus. Lichen is just the beginning of the formation of organic material on the rock surface providing a place for roots of other plants to hold on. Soil and plant debris passing with the wind catch on the lichen. There are many different species of lichens, some preferring to grow on tree bark rather than rock.**

- **Because of the availability of *water*, the Post Oak Trail is a popular area for wildlife. Mammals like deer, rabbits, and raccoons come here for their morning and evening drinks. Birds love the area because insects breed in the wetland, seeds are abundant, and they too need a drink. Of course, turtles, frogs, and snakes love the habitat that this wetland provides. If you're visiting in the middle of the day, there may be evidence of animals. Perhaps the deep V of a deer track or a feather or a turtle shell will indicate who was here.**