

# BLANTON FOREST STATE NATURE PRESERVE

BLANTON FOREST STATE NATURE PRESERVE protects the largest old growth forest known in Kentucky. Approximately 2,350 of the preserve's 3,000 acres is old-growth forest. Located on the south face of Pine Mountain near Harlan, Blanton Forest is one of the larger old-growth tracts in the eastern United States. The forest's significance was first recognized in 1992 during a natural areas inventory conducted by KSNPC.

There are several definitions for old-growth forests. All agree that they are relatively undisturbed except for natural phenomena. Many of the trees at Blanton Forest are three to four feet in diameter, towering 100 feet or more above the forest floor. Some of the trees may be as much as 400 years old.

Standing dead snags, large decaying logs and a lack of stumps attest to the fact that the forest has not been logged. The forest soils are spongy and thick with decaying plant material. When a tree falls to the ground and lets in light, new growth appears in the canopy gap. This accounts for the different sizes and ages of trees making up the forest here.

Blanton Forest supports several distinct natural communities. The most diverse community is the mixed mesophytic forest. This forest typically includes a variety of canopy trees such as sugar maple, beech, tulip poplar, basswood, hemlock, and several species of oaks and magnolias. It is found on moist, rich slopes and in some ravines. The larger ravines, or hollows, support a hemlock dominated forest. Rhododendron grows in dense tangles along the shaded stream banks and moist slopes.

Drier sites on ridges support oak dominated forests as well as oak-pine forests. Massive chestnut oaks with twisted limbs and scars from lightning strikes illustrate the endurance needed to occupy the exposed, rocky slopes.

Mountain laurel blooms grace these sunny ridges each May. One species that is missing from this community is the American chestnut which was destroyed by the chestnut blight in the 1930's. Seen now only as young saplings sprouting from persistent roots, the chestnut once dominated the forests found on these drier slopes.

The preserve includes unique wetlands located near the top of the mountain. Soils and topography have played a crucial role in the development of acid seeps or bogs at the heads of several streams on the mountain's south face. Mats of sphagnum moss harbor several rare insects and impressive stands of cinnamon ferns, some growing chest high. Watts Creek, a stream within the preserve that supports a population of the federally threatened fish, Blackside dace, begins in one of these seeps.

Cool, moist hollows and rich slopes provide the perfect environment to sustain clear-running streams. In the height of summer and into the typically dry fall, the streams continue to flow. The undisturbed soils and downed trees act like sponges to retain moisture and let it out slowly to sustain the forest. Most small streams flowing through second growth forests (those that have been previously logged) are reduced to a trickle during droughty weather.

The plant and animal life is rich and diverse. Wildflowers bloom on rocky outcrops and in shady hollows. Several rare mosses have been discovered. Ravens, endangered in Kentucky, soar above the cliffs. Birds requiring interior forest habitat for nesting, such as the black-throated blue and hooded warblers and the scarlet tanager, find suitable habitat here. A variety of salamanders and small mammals can be found under logs and in rocky crevices. Black bear and the introduced elk are using the crest of Pine Mountain as a travel corridor and

signs of their presence are becoming more common.

Blanton Forest is named for former owners Grover and Oxie Blanton. They purchased the land in 1928 and passed it on to their daughters with the understanding that it would never be logged. The Blanton family's desire to protect the forest forever was fulfilled when in 1995 and 2001 the Commission, with assistance from the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) acquired two parcels on the south face of Pine Mountain. The KNLT has been working with the Commission to protect additional acreage and endow a fund to aid with management.

The preserve is open to the public sunrise to sunset, all year. Parking is located adjacent to Camp Blanton. A kiosk marks the start of the trail. Hikers are asked to respect the private property of Camp Blanton and to follow the gravel road to the Watts Creek Trailhead. Sights you will encounter along the moderate to very strenuous loop trail include the unparalleled view from Kobby Rock; a jumble of sandstone boulders known as "the Maze"; and an expansive rockshelter known as "Sand Cave". An easier hike is available on a trail along Watts Creek which features views of tall hemlocks and beech trees as well as evidence of farming that once occurred on the flatter creek bottoms. Hikers may encounter venomous snakes and the loop trails pass by hazardous cliffs. Visitors are advised to remain alert and allow sufficient time to complete their hike before sunset.

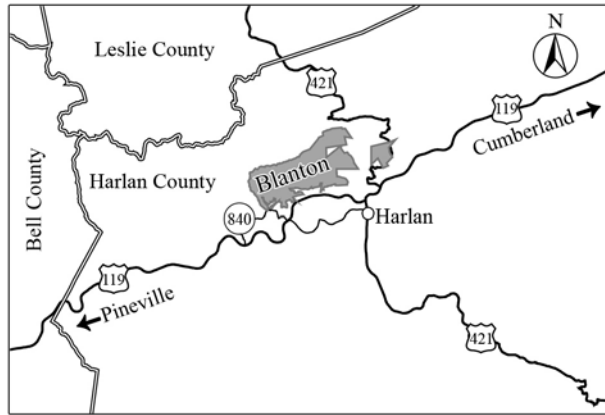
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For more information please contact:

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rendering of a photo by Pam Spaulding



From Interstate 75, take exit 29 onto U.S. Hwy 25E at Corbin. Travel south on U.S. 25E to Pineville. Turn left on U.S. Hwy 119 (crossing the Cumberland River) and travel north for 23.5 miles. Turn left on KY 840 at a sign for Camp Blanton. Follow KY 840 for approximately 2 miles; the parking area for the preserve is adjacent to Camp Blanton.

**By observing the rules for State Nature Preserves, you will be helping to protect Kentucky's natural heritage.**

1. Preserves are open sunrise to sunset.
2. Trails are open to foot-traffic only. Please stay on the trail so that other visitors don't get lost following a new path that your feet have made.
3. Horseback riding, bike riding, climbing, and rappelling are not permitted in nature preserves because of their destructive impacts to the trails and natural features. Motorized vehicles are not permitted.
4. Possession of firearms, drugs or alcohol is prohibited.
5. Please leave the things that catch your eye to do the same for the visitor who hikes after you. Collecting, hunting and trapping are prohibited.
6. Camping, picnicking, building fires, radios/tape decks, and pets are not permitted in nature preserves.
7. Please remember to pack out your trash.

THESE RULES ARE ESTABLISHED BY 400 KAR 2:090. ANY PERSON IN VIOLATION OF THIS REGULATION MAY BE LIABLE FOR A CIVIL PENALTY OF \$1000 PER DAY AND POSSIBLE CRIMINAL PROSECUTION AS PROVIDED FOR IN KRS 224

