

Kentucky's Nature Preserves



Spring hiking plans? *Escape to an enchanted forest*

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Brigadoon State Nature Preserve in Barren County reflects the 1947 Broadway production for which it is named. The former owners likened their retreat to the mythical Scottish village that appears from the mists once every 100 years. What better way for a busy Glasgow doctor and his wife to rest from their hectic schedules than to escape to a place the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines as idyllic, unaffected by time, or remote from reality? Walking among the towering trees, encountering the rich drifts of trillium at a turn in the trail, listening to the rush of water pouring from a seasonal spring, the preserve easily brings to mind the sense of being someplace enchanted.

The preserve has an interesting past that helps explain its present. It was part of a 1,000-acre land grant given to John Renfro, one of Virginia's Revolutionary War veterans. Renfro and his descendants settled along what was then known as Skegg's Creek (later Skaggs) and made their livings from the heavily forested land. In addition to farming, the family added to their income by making coffins and furniture. The property remained under the ownership of the Renfro family until 1960, when Dr. and Mrs. Russell Starr purchased it. Russell and Faye Starr maintained the property as a private preserve, hideaway and hobby farm until 1983 when they donated 90 acres to the Kentucky chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission used federal Land and Water Conservation Funds to acquire the preserve from TNC in 1985. At his death, Dr. Starr bequeathed additional acreage to the commission, which doubled the preserve's size. In all that time, the two families who owned the land cared for it and never took more than was necessary for their basic needs. As a result, we get to enjoy the beauty of a very old forest.

The deep soils on the north-facing slopes and ravines support a diverse forest community known as western mesophytic. It is composed mainly of tulip poplar, beech, northern red oak, sugar maple, walnut and white ash trees, some of which are considered to be old growth. The moist soils support an array of beautiful spring wildflowers sure to delight photographers and hikers. Surrounded on three sides by open lands, the preserve's 180 acres of closed canopy forest is a welcoming stopover for migrating birds. The preserve sits above the banks of the former Skaggs Creek, now a backwater of the Barren River Reservoir. The open water habitat adds to the site's diversity and helps explain the high number (120) of bird species that have been documented within the preserve. In the spring, birdwatchers can catch a glimpse of returning resident species staking out territories or migrants replenishing spent reserves to continue their northward journeys.

Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Funds were used to acquire a few additional acres to provide public access to the preserve. Its approximately one-mile loop hiking trail is of moderate difficulty as it runs along ridge tops and dips down into scenic ravines.

You don't have to wait every 100 years to visit; the preserve is open to foot traffic from sunrise to sunset every day. Please be respectful of the preserve and follow the rules so that everyone who visits can enjoy it. Pets, horses, picnics, hunting, collecting, fishing, ATV's and camping are not allowed. Peaceful nature observation and appreciation are encouraged.

LEFT and RIGHT: *Kelley's Run, a stream that cascades along mossy rocks in spring. Drifts of trillium grow beneath towering old-growth trees.* Photos by Harold Kelley, Brigadoon volunteer preserve monitor