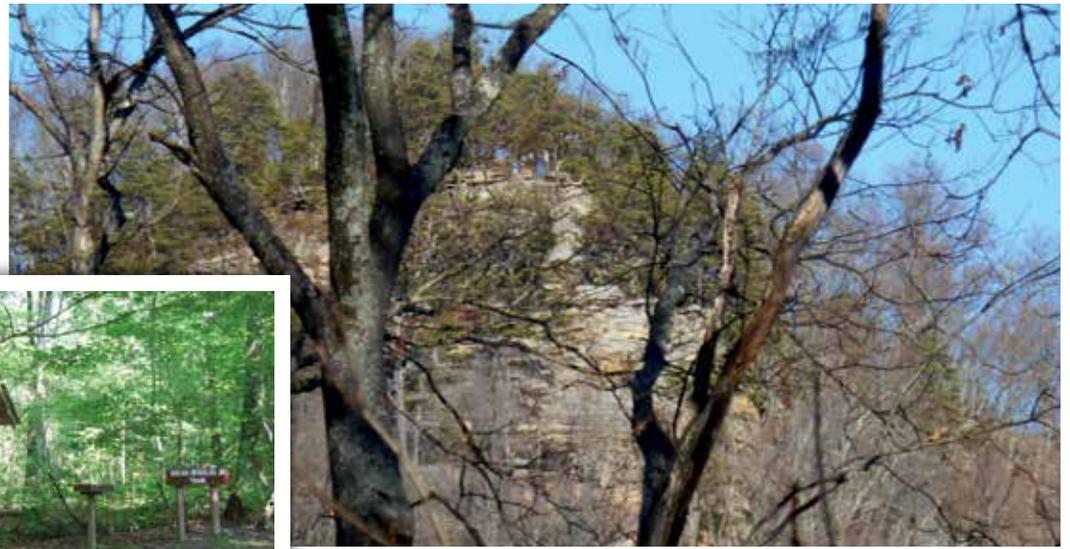


# Kentucky's Nature Preserves

**RIGHT: From Sage Point Trail, hikers can be seen atop Pilot Knob.** Photo by Kyle Elliott

**BELOW: A kiosk at the Oscar Gerald's Jr. Trail.**  
Photo by KSNPC



## Pilot Knob State Nature Preserve

*Millstone history observed along the trail*

**By Joyce Bender**  
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**F**all is a perfect time to visit Pilot Knob State Nature Preserve in Powell County. It is a favorite place for history and geology buffs as well as hikers. The 742-acre preserve has a promontory that is supposed to be the knob Daniel Boone and his party climbed in 1769 to try and get a good look at the country through which they were travelling. The climb is just challenging enough to get your heart pumping, and the view from the 730-foot elevation is fabulous when the skies are clear. Fall colors pop like a crazy quilt and spring's softer pastels of pink and rose and chartreuse look like a watercolor painting.

The trail system offers several choices for exploring the preserve. The 2.5-mile round-trip hike to the summit along the Oscar Gerald's Jr. Trail is considered moderately strenuous due to the elevation gain. The view is worth the hike! The Sage Point Trail is a 2.0-mile loop trail that departs mid-slope from the Gerald's Trail. It climbs and descends an adjacent knob known as Sage Point, and takes hikers to a stream at the bottom of a ravine before ascending to a saddle between Rotten Point and Pilot Knob and reconnecting to the Gerald's Trail nearer to the summit. It is considered very strenuous. A quarry

site with several unfinished millstones is located on Pilot Knob's lower slope and can be seen along the 0.5-mile easy-to-moderate Millstone Quarry Trail.

The preserve protects a good quality second-growth oak-hickory forest, which is representative of the knobs in this region. There are a number of forest communities, each associated with different environmental conditions such as elevation, soil type, bedrock, soil moisture and exposure to sunlight. Changes in forest composition are evident as you climb to the top of the knob. For example, the trees common to the summit are exposed to more sunlight and wind and less moisture than those at the base of the knob. The trees at the summit, mainly blackjack oak and Virginia pine, are stunted and small in diameter, but they have adapted to the harsh conditions. Blackjack oak is not found at the lowest elevations for the same reason tulip poplar and red maple are not present on the summit.

The sandstone outcrop near the summit is approximately 240 million years old. This type of sandstone is called

conglomerate—a mixture of sands and gravels deposited by an ancient stream that once flowed here. The large amount of quartz pebbles incorporated into the rock makes it good for grinding. Millstone makers began working in the Pilot Knob area by the 1790s and continued until the mid-to-late 1800s. Several millstones in various stages of production are found along the quarry trail. Unlike many large millstone quarries, the one at Pilot Knob was not a deep pit from which stone was exposed and removed. The quarrying activities at Pilot Knob were limited to splitting and shaping boulders that rolled off the top of the knob. The remnant stones were abandoned at different stages of production due to external flaws. These rejected millstones provide valuable insight into their manufacture.

The preserve is open from sunrise to sunset daily. Although infrequently encountered, there are venomous snakes on the preserve. Remaining on the trail and being observant are the best ways to avoid them. Hunting, camping, pets, rock climbing, plant or rock collecting, horseback riding and mountain biking are not permitted.