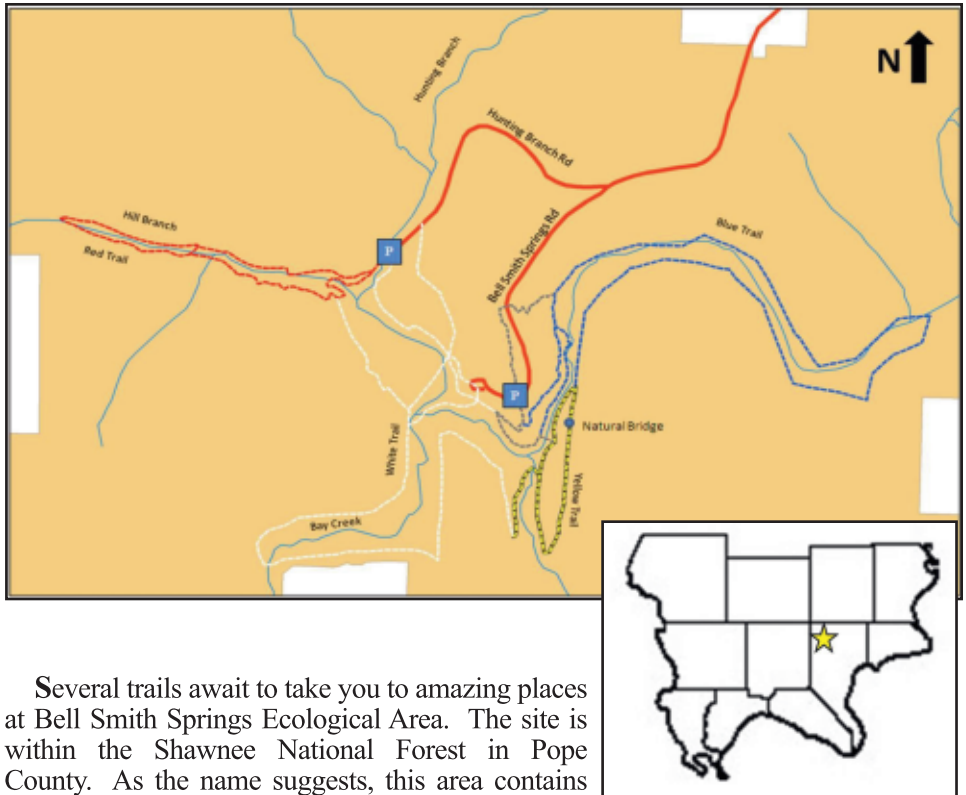


Bell Smith Springs Trails

Shawnee National Forest

Various hike distances - Moderate-Difficult Rating

Trailhead: 37.5193, -88.6576



Several trails await to take you to amazing places at Bell Smith Springs Ecological Area. The site is within the Shawnee National Forest in Pope County. As the name suggests, this area contains several springs, which provide the turquoise color to the water of Bay Creek. Over 700 species of plants are known from the site, including many rare species such as French's shooting star. Also notable at this site is a large natural bridge, a rock staircase built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930's, and an iron rung ladder up the side of a cliff.

Of the many trail options for exploration, two are worth mentioning. The first one is the blue trail. From the main parking lot, take the path downhill and follow the blue trail to the east (left). After a few miles the trail descends down to Bay Creek. This is a tricky water crossing that is sometimes impassable during periods of high water in the spring. The trail continues straight up the rocky cliff on the other side of the creek and joins a footpath at the top of the bluff. This part of the trail takes you back along Bay Creek in the other direction. Look for partridgeberry and clubmoss here, growing low to the ground. Enjoy the hike along the beautiful cliffs and canyons, and stop at the many scenic overlooks. When in doubt, follow the trail to the left at any junctures. This trail will lead to the top of the natural bridge where an iron rung ladder provides for a fun way to descend the cliff. Alternatively, go back to the last split in the trail and follow the other path which will lead to the base of the

natural bridge. From the natural bridge, follow the trail down to Bay Creek and use the rock stepping stones to get back to the other side. A rock staircase will lead you back to the parking lot at the top of the bluff. Another option is to drive to the short road off of Bell Smith Springs Road that leads down the hill to a creek called the Hunting Branch, where there is a picnic area. Cross the hunting branch near the parking area and follow the red trail to a large sandstone pavement area along a drainage known as Hill Branch. This wide open area is a natural community called a sandstone glade and the sandstone chute is a good place to see wildflowers such as cardinal flower and buttonbush.

While in the area, you may wish to visit another outstanding site nearby called Burden Falls, the tallest cascading waterfall in the state. It makes for a wonderful and easy side trip after your visit to Bell Smith Springs.

Notable wildflowers present at site

Cardinal flower
Lobelia cardinalis

Smooth phlox
Phlox glaberrima

St. Andrew's cross
Ascryum multicaule

Star tickseed
Coreopsis pubescens

Superb lily
Lilium superbum



Swimming hole. Cutleaf coneflower (inset)