

# DEVIL'S EYEBROW NATURAL AREA

PRELIMINARY SUGGESTIONS February 15, 2018

Devil's Eyebrow Natural Area (DENA) is a big, diverse block of public land north of Beaver Lake administered by Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. It is also part of Beaver Lake Wildlife Management Area (Arkansas Game and Fish). Access to the main area of 2,500 acres is from highway 62, approximately 0.5 miles east of Gateway.

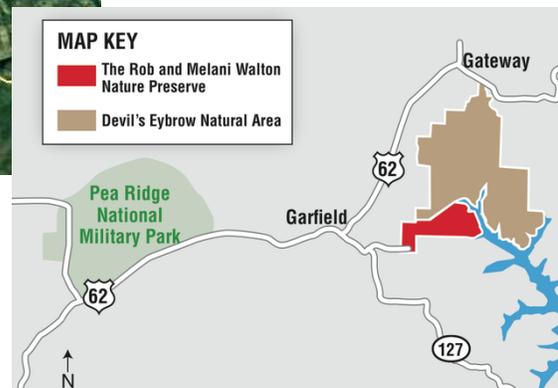


From Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission website: "Devil's Eyebrow Natural Area is located at the northern end of Beaver Lake along Indian Creek and its tributaries. The terrain is rugged and steep, consisting of deep, bluff-lined hollows separated by steep ridges. Much of the area is underlain by alternating layers of chert and limestone that include caves and many springs. Plant communities are diverse and include high quality glades, woodlands, bluffs, rich hardwood forests, and riparian forests. Devil's Eyebrow supports one of the highest concentrations of rare plant species in Arkansas with several species typically found far to the north and others that are restricted in distribution and considered globally rare. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) and the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) share undivided fee title and co-manage this natural area."



Currently, DENA consists of around 3000+ acres with 410 acres adjacent protected in the The Nature Conservancy's Rob and Melani Walton Nature Preserve. In addition,

DENA now includes the Banks tract in Poddy Hollow, approximately 4.5 miles east on Highway 62, along the north side of the highway. The Banks tract includes high-quality glades. (Google map and a map reproduced from Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette of October 30, 2015. Also, see ANHC comprehensive map at the end).



In terms of native plants, DENA is highly diverse at more than 550 documented species. There are also numerous interesting glade species like collared lizards. The bird community is also diverse and includes Cerulean Warblers, Worm-eating Warblers, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, and many other species.

My experience with DENA began in early May 2013 during a field trip just before the official dedication. In an age when we are incessantly told government is evil and wasteful, it is our government and our government biologists and administrators, in partnership with private interests, who have now brought forth onto this land a new Natural Area. We got our sneak preview by tagging along with botanists Theo Witsell and Brent Baker from ANHC. We enjoyed a small flock of migrating Bobolinks in the grassy upland fields near the parking lot. From there we walked along an old ridge road through limestone glades, with relic logs of once mighty Ozark Chinquapins, limestone rocks with ancient sea fossils, native black raspberries, Ovenbirds, Black-and-white Warblers, remarkable red Fire Pinks, and in the cool shadows of the creek bottom, flowering Yellow Buckeyes, Louisiana Waterthrush, and an overflight by a whistling Broad-winged Hawk.

The creek bottom steps off like a natural amphitheater in limestone. For a ways it is pools and stone, then steady flow, with colorful crawfish and darters in clear water. Golden Ragwort was blooming along the stream, along with Jack-in-his-pulpit, and up on the ridge, a Scarlet Tanager signing. Another world, for sure, and no more than one-half mile from where we parked.

There was a dun-colored Cricket Frog in the creekbed, a Box Turtle in the glade with some colorful heritage from the ornates, Northern Parulas, a busy Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Pawpaw (zebra swallowtail) Butterflies in flowering Pawpaws.



There are almost 12 miles of formal trails rated “strenuous” to explore in DENA. For the rest of us, I suggest the following, fairly easy preliminary walk that will at least allow you to experience part of this extensive Natural Area. This only covers DENA’s northern margin. You can get a feel for what DENA is like, but remember this samples a very small part of a big natural area that extends southward to Beaver Lake.

From where you turn off Highway 62, it is about a 0.3-mile drive to the parking lot. There is interesting birding along here. Check out the big open fields. Also check out overhead – Bald Eagles are common in the area and winter and they nest along Beaver Lake.

There is also a partially restored glade where some cedars have been removed. This can be quite birdy. On February 12, 2018, I saw Field, Fox, Song, and White-throated Sparrows without any effort. There were also Dark-eyed Juncos, Northern Cardinals, Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Red-shouldered Hawk. An adult Bald Eagle flew over; later, Red-tailed Hawk and a few Turkey Vultures. That was just getting to the parking lot.

From the parking lot the old ridge road is an easy-to-walk trail into DENA proper. The first 0.1-mile from the parking lot skirts an open field on the west and a forested ridge and slope on the east. The trail then enters the woodland proper (Eastern Red Cedars, mixed hardwood species including Red Oaks and Shagbark Hickory). This is generally wooded and level for about 0.1-mile. Thereafter, the trail begins to descend into a steep hollow. This is relatively moderate, from elevation 1540-feet down to 1452, for approximately 0.1 mile. Along this way, notice limestone outcrops and a lot of cut cedars. The cedar cutting is part of the glade restoration work in many places throughout DENA.

There is an attractive information sign at this point where the trail begins a steeper descent to the



hollow below. I sat on a ledge and enjoyed the view of the hills and hollows, but didn't walk any further.

So what might you find on a trip to DENA in summer? Summer birds at DENA were noted during a survey for Cerulean Warblers conducted by Dr Jennifer Mortensen of UA-Fayetteville in June 2017. Overall, she found summer birds at DENA similar to those at nearby Whitney Mountain (about 5-miles south), though Cerulean numbers were lower at DENA compared to those on the slopes at Whitney Mountain.

She shared a rough list of birds she tallied in point counts. She did not record birds that were just flying over (like vultures). If you walked the 12-miles of trails you might find most of this. But even if you don't, the good conservation news is that the habitat where they nest is now protected public property:

Acadian Flycatcher

American Crow

American Redstart

American Robin

Barred Owl

Black-and-White Warbler

Blue Jay

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Carolina Chickadee

Carolina Wren

Cerulean Warbler

Eastern Wood-Pewee

Hooded Warbler

House Wren

Indigo Bunting

Mourning Dove

Northern Parula

Ovenbird

Pileated Woodpecker

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Red-eyed Vireo

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Scarlet Tanager

Summer Tanager

Tufted Titmouse

Warbling Vireo

Wood Thrush

Worm-eating Warbler

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Yellow-throated Vireo

I said “preliminary” at the start of this description. It will take many years to fully appreciate the natural wealth in such a big rough area. This should be all the excuse needed to make many return trips.

The map below is from ANHC and shows the arrangement of the various parcels and their management. Taken together, these represent a highly significant block of ecologically diverse, protected, public property. – Joe Neal February 2018

