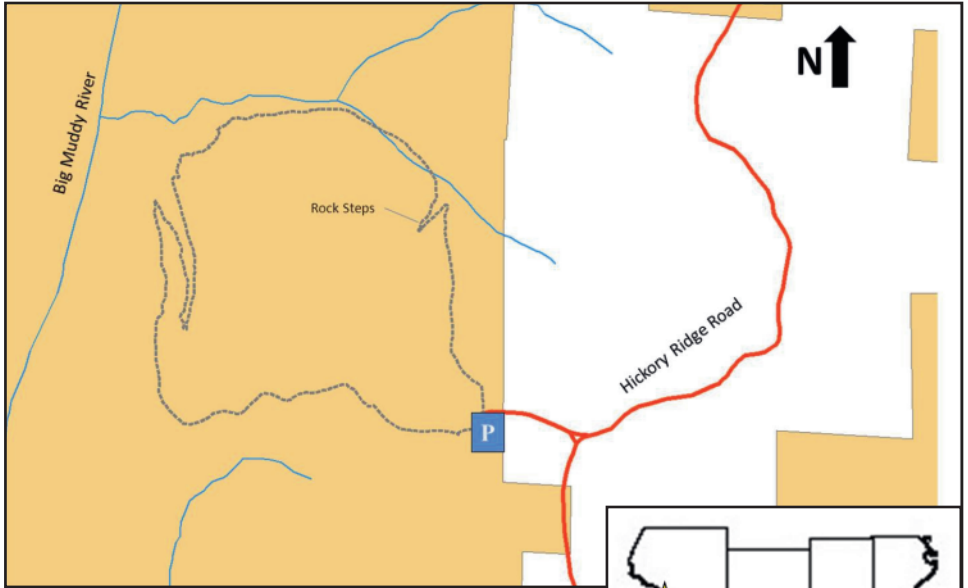


Little Grand Canyon Trail

Shawnee National Forest

4 mile - Difficult Rating

Trailhead: 37.6805, -89.3949



This strenuous hike will challenge even the most adventurous hiker. In southern Jackson County, the Little Grand Canyon displays some of the most unique sandstone ravines in the state. The trail is a 4-mile loop that is great from either direction from the parking lot. Descending the trail at the north end, you will walk through a small pine stand and make your way down the ridge to an overlook. After you round the corner, look for dry woodland wildflowers such as rue anemone, pussytoes, false dandelion and bee-balm.

The trail winds its way to a steep sandstone ravine that will take you to the bottom of the canyon. Rock steps have been created in the sandstone and are easy to follow. Flowing water often occurs in the sandstone chute, so extreme caution should be exercised. As you make your way into the canyon, look for dutchman's breeches, toothwort, pale corydalis, squirrel corn and spring beauty.

Some very interesting plants grow in the natural area. During the Illinoian glaciation over 100,000 years ago, plants adapted to northern climates flourished here and when the glaciers retreated, these "glacial relic" species persisted in moist, shaded, north-facing sandstone ravines like the Little Grand Canyon.

The characteristic example of this is bishop's cap, and the tiny snowflake-like flowers can be seen in flowering spikes covering the sides of the cliffs along the creek. Other relic species include partridge berry, shining clubmoss and sphagnum moss.

In the floodplain area at the base of the ravine is a rich display of spring wildflowers like liverleaf, bellwort, white trillium, celandine poppy and bloodroot, as well as many fern species. Blue cohosh, doll's eyes, dwarf phacelia and wild leeks are uncommon plants that call this area home. Flowering shrubs include pawpaw, redbud and flowering dogwood. At least one orchid has been seen along the trail and venomous snakes are known to inhabit the area.

The trailhead is located south of Murphysboro. From Highway 127, follow Orchard Hill Road west to Hickory Ridge Road. Go straight (west) 7 miles to the entrance road to the site.

Notable wildflowers present at site

Bishop's cap
Mitella diphylla

Rue anemone
Anemonella thalictroides

Dwarf phacelia
Phacelia ranunculacea

Wild leek
Allium tricoccum

Blue cohosh
Caulophyllum thalictroides



Canyon view. Bishop's cap (inset)