

Simpson Township Barrens Area

Shawnee National Forest

No defined trails - Easy Rating

Parking: 37.4797, -88.7394



Near the small town of Simpson in Johnson County, Simpson Township Barrens features high quality woodlands and limestone glades. A diversity of prairie and woodland plant species abound in these communities. Shrubby sundrops and quillwort grow in the small ephemeral drainages, the prairie-like openings called glades contain rattlesnake master and blazing stars, and the woodlands in between are loaded with interesting wildflowers like indian physic, Sampson's snakeroot, butterfly pea, wild petunia, New Jersey tea, goat's rue, and several species of milkweeds. This site is among the most botanically rich natural areas in southern Illinois. It is the most frequently burned site within the Shawnee National Forest and it shows.

To access this area, it is best to park in the small pulloff on the east side of Trigg Tower Road and cross the road to hike in the woodlands on the west side. There are no trails in this area, but the woodlands are generally open and easy to walk through. The ease of cross country travel depends on how much time has passed since the last prescribed burn. Small oak trees can occur in moderate density, discouraging hikers, but there is usually an easy way around. In general, the woodlands occur on a moderate south-facing slope, with numerous glade openings scattered throughout, just look for the patches of prairie grasses like big

bluestem, and the tall spikes of blazing stars. On the east side of the road is another large limestone glade. This area is much more open and contains prairie species like butterfly milkweed, rosinweed, and prairie indian plantain.

To get to the site, take Highway 147 north from Highway 146 in Vienna. Shortly after the highway turns to the east, turn north (left) on Trigg Tower Road and follow until you reach a small pulloff next to a sign and a wooden fence. While in the area, you may wish to visit Trigg Tower, an old fire tower along Trigg Tower Road at the top of the hill, north of Simpson Township Barrens. A portion of the fire tower remains and it provides stunning views of the Shawnee National Forest from the top.

Notable wildflowers present at site

Butterfly pea
Clitoria mariana

Indian physic
Porteranthus stipulatus

Rattlesnake master
Eryngium yuccifolium

Variiegated milkweed
Asclepias variegata

Wild petunia
Ruellia humilis



Barrens. Gray-headed coneflower (inset)