

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## See Rare Flowers at Long Hunter State Park's Couchville Cedar Glade

By Fran Wallas

Couchville Cedar Glade is a state natural area managed by Long Hunter State Park in Hermitage and the Division of Natural Areas. The best time to take this hike is during the summer when the rare Tennessee Coneflowers are in full bloom.

You will enjoy this easy level hike with no Poison Ivy. Although the hike is very short, only one mile, you go through three different plant communities: cedar glades, barrens and edge woodlands. A kiosk near the beginning of the trail explains the difference between glades and barrens. This hike is more a learning hike than an exercise hike. Your challenge is to observe when you are leaving one type of ecosystem and entering another. Your other challenge is to recognize the flowers that you may never have seen before except in books.

On entering the trail, you will notice the Eastern Redcedar trees that make up part of the glade community. The loop trail is clearly marked with arrows at each turn. After you make the first turn, the trail enters a woodland of mostly Shagbark Hickory, Hackberry and a few Shumard Oak trees. The Shumard Oak is one of the largest of

the "Red Oaks." Along the sides of the trail are fragrant sumac shrubs and St. Johns Wort shrubs.

Soon you will leave the woodland and enter a glade community. You can recognize the glade because of the shallow soil and exposed limestone. Tennessee Coneflowers are scattered throughout this open area. These cone-flowers are a federal endangered species found only in Middle Tennessee. You will want to photograph the beautiful groupings of glade flowers. There are Leafy Prairie Clovers, also an endangered species, and the glade onions. If you happen to be on the trail in full sun in the afternoon, you may see the Limestone Fameflowers. The rose-colored blooms only stay open for a few hours. The leaves, found around the base of the stem, are thick and succulent and are designed to store water in this dry environment.

After another turn, there seems to be a dry streambed. Water flows along this exposed limestone in the winter and spring, but the area is dry the rest of the year. This dry area is a place to see prickly pear cactus plants that may still be in bloom. As you cross this area, notice the diamond flowers and gumweeds.



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**A shady nook along the trail at Couchville Cedar Glade. Below: An Eastern Prickly Pear cactus.**

The trail enters an area with more soil, more grasses and no visible limestone. You are now in a barrens area. Before you get back to the parking lot, you will hike once more over exposed limestone. Did you sense the transition? To test out your expertise in identifying the different plant communities, you may want to repeat the hike at an even slower pace.

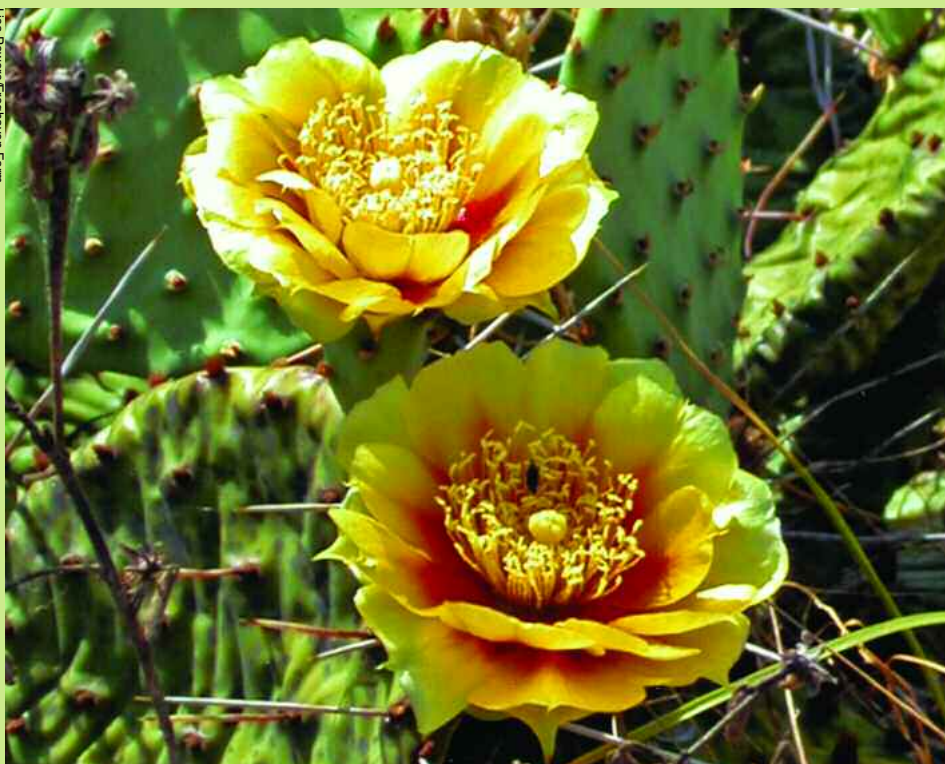
### Directions

Take I-40 to Mt. Juliet exit 226 and take Highway 171 South toward Long Hunter State Park, about four miles. Turn left on South Mt. Juliet Road toward Bryant Grove. Go a little under a half-mile to the small parking lot on the right.

Couchville Cedar Glade



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks on the Web site [www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes.](http://www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes))



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