

*Nature Beckons at These
Central Kentucky Sanctuaries*

TAKING A HIKE

By Patti Nickell

“If a man walks in the woods for the love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer. But if he spends his days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen.”

— Henry David Thoreau

With the technological advances brought by the 21st century, living a Walden Pond existence may not be possible, but Thoreau’s words continue to resonate. Ever since Adam and Eve were forced to flee Eden, mankind has suffered angst over their loss. A cynic may say that the suffering resulted less from the loss of innocence than from the loss of their garden paradise. Cynical, perhaps, but containing an element of truth.

In a hectic world of deadlines and headlines, rushing around and rush-hour traffic, jangling cell phones and jostling crowds, everyone longs for a garden paradise of his or her own.

Fortunately, here in Central Kentucky there are expanses of calm where nature can work her restorative power and return balance to busy lives.



PATTIE NICKELL

Lake Nevin at Bernheim Forest provides a peaceful setting for reflection.

LEXINGTON ARBORETUM

At Lexington Arboretum visitors can stroll through each of the state's distinct regional landscapes in an impressive 45 minutes.

The two-mile "Walk Across Kentucky" is an expedition across the commonwealth, from the Knobs, an area characterized by beech, yellow poplar, pin oak, sweetgum, sugar maple, northern red oak, oak, and chestnut trees, to the Mississippi Embayment — "where the southern swamps meet the prairie plains" — and where vegetation is as diverse as bald cypress and satin prairie grass.

In between, said Jim Lempke, the arboretum's curator of native plants, visitors will travel through the Cumberland Mountains, Appalachian Plateau, Shawnee Hills, and Pennyroyal re-

gions, "getting a glimpse of the distinct vegetation found in each area of Kentucky."

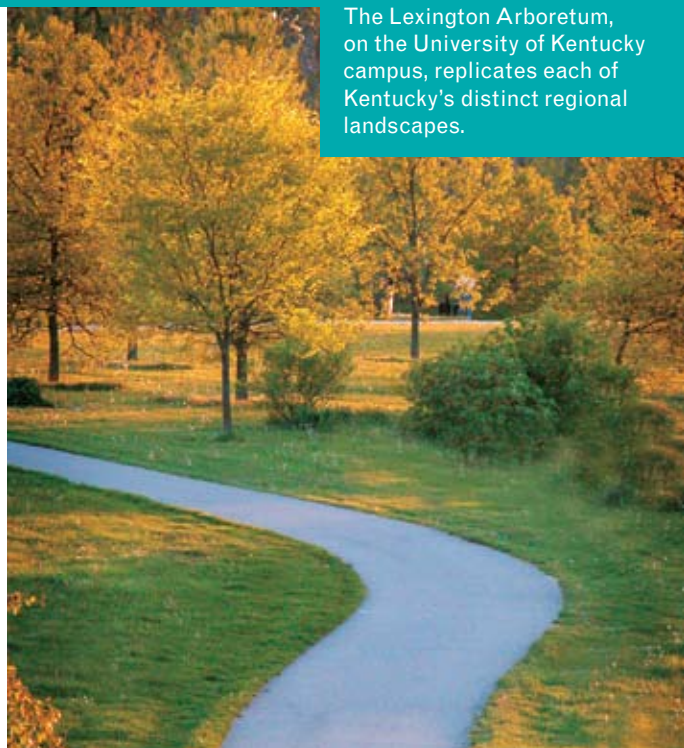
The remaining regional landscape is, of course, the Bluegrass, represented at the arboretum by the 15-acre Walnut Woods, where such species as black walnut, white and blue ash, yellow oak, and Kentucky coffee tree flourish. Walnut Woods gives visitors a look at what the area's flora was like two centuries ago when Lexington was a woodland savanna. One of the arboretum's more ambitious projects, according to Lempke, is to re-create the savanna setting by removing all invasive species of plants.

"Walk Across Kentucky" is just one facet of the 100-acre arboretum, which was created in 1991 on the University of Kentucky campus as a joint project between the college and the Lexington-Fayette County Urban Government, and which, in 2000, became the commonwealth's official state botanical garden. Its mission may be to serve as a community center for environmental education, horticulture, and urban forest renewal, but many Lexingtonians just think of it as their own little Garden of Eden, in which the rose and herb gardens are perfect for a stroll on a summer evening and whose shaded fountain courts and ornamental pond are places of peaceful repose.

The Arboretum is at 500 Alumni Drive on the UK campus. Free and open daily to the public from dawn to dusk. The visitors center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. (859) 257-9339. www.ca.uky.edu/arboretum/



The Lexington Arboretum, on the University of Kentucky campus, replicates each of Kentucky's distinct regional landscapes.



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY ARBORETUM

McCONNELL SPRINGS

How many urban areas can lay claim to having a National Historic Registry site, an archaeological treasure, and a wetlands nature sanctuary all in the same location?

In the heart of the city, McConnell Springs is a serene oasis — more suited to phosphorescent blue indigo buntings and jackrabbits than to the humans who live and work just a few miles away. A hiker on one of McConnell Springs' two miles of trails will see a floral canopy of great blue lobelia, yellow beggar's tick, scarlet cardinal's flower, pink swamp milkweed, blue flag iris, lavender appendaged water leaf, and multi-colored jewelweed — some 130 species in all.

The hiker also may encounter any of the numerous species of urban wildlife that call the springs home — garter snakes, box turtles, groundhogs, sharp-shinned hawks, even a shy red fox. What he or she may not encounter is another human, an amazing feat as the springs are within earshot of New Circle Road, one of the busiest thruways in the city.

This part of the Bluegrass was wilderness in 1775 when William McConnell and his fellow frontiersmen — explorers from Pennsylvania's upper Monongahela River region — camped alongside a natural spring while surveying the newly opened American frontier. Here they received word of a battle



At McConnell Springs, water flows up from an underground cavern. Below, the Blue Hole is one of the major springs.



JAMES R. REIMANN; TOP, DAVID ROBERTSON

TAKING A HIKE

springs and surrounding area fascinating. Already unearthed are rock fences dating back to the 1800s and ruins from an early 19th-century gristmill, both of which can be seen from the hiking trails. Archeologists continue to uncover trace evidence of early life at McConnell Springs, which in the years following its discovery served as a gunpowder factory, water supply for a distillery, and a horse and dairy farm.

As fascinating as the history and archaeological finds are, McConnell Springs' biggest draw continues to be its natural beauty. Visitors can enjoy the Blue Hole and the Boils, the two major springs. The Blue Hole has been a source of mystery since its discovery by Indian tribes, which marveled at the bright-blue color of the water. While their musings were more poetic, the scientific explanation for the turquoise color lies in the way the sun strikes the pool through the dense canopy of trees and the depth of the water, thought to be about 15 feet.

Water from the Blue Hole flows underground through limestone bedrock, emerging at the Boils, which gets its name from its bubbling surface water. This spring disappears as well, emerging in the cave-like formation of the Final Sink, where the waters flow underground yet again, resurfacing a third of a mile away at Preston's Cave and then joining the Wolf Run Creek to flow into the Town Branch of Elkhorn Creek.

The area around the Blue Hole has become a prime example of a forest wetland environment, where a variety of native wildflowers, rushes, and grasses help hold soil in place, thus restoring and preserving the biological richness of McConnell Springs.

McConnell Springs is inside New Circle Road just off Old Frankfort Pike, a few miles from downtown Lexington. Open free of charge daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Trails close at 4:30 p.m. (859) 225-4073. www.mcconnellsprings.org

BERNHEIM FOREST

On a glorious spring day, the combined scents from such trees as the Carolina silverbell, fragrant snowbell, Japanese lilac, Nannyberry viburnum, and seven-son flower permeate the air, making Mother Nature the ultimate perfumer.

Welcome to Bernheim Forest's Arboretum Way, which loops around the 250-acre arboretum, created from a design by Frederick Law Olmstead, who also designed New York's Central Park. Within these 250 acres are 50 species of trees, from the Tennessee pink redbud to the sweetbay magnolia, the full moon maple to the silky dogwood. This is a place for peaceful contemplation, where the soft soughing of the wind and the gentle ripples of Lake Nevin are the only sounds. Quiet pursuits are encouraged — solitary fishing on the shores of the lake, a meander along the paths and trails that wind through the for-

that had been waged two months earlier in a small Massachusetts town where the Colonial militia had bested the cream of the British regulars.

In a burst of patriotic spirit, they chose Lexington as the name of their settlement, in homage to that Battle of Lexington and Concord. Today that former campsite is on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to history lovers, archaeology buffs will find the

est more than 35 miles, ranging from .5 to 14 miles, or reading a book under the shade of a star magnolia or a double-flowered Higan cherry. Without skateboarders, boaters, or off-road vehicles to interrupt the stillness, nature's marvels become the prime attraction.

Located in Clermont, just outside of Bardstown, the forest was a gift to the people of Kentucky from Isaac Wolfe Bernheim, a German immigrant who settled in the commonwealth and rose from humble beginnings as an itinerant peddler to become a successful bourbon distiller, selling his bourbon under the I.W. Harper brand. In 1929 he bought and founded the area that is now Bernheim Forest.

In addition to picnic areas and 16 miles of paved road for bicycling, Bernheim Forest offers interactive outdoor exhibits such as scent and sound mazes and a discovery walk-about, a canopy treewalk rising 75 feet off the forest floor, an artists-in-residence program, an award-winning visitors center built from recycled wood, which proves that green is more than a color, and 6,000 species of trees, shrubs, native grasslands, natural woodlands, and a cypress-tupelo swamp scattered across 14,000 acres.

But perhaps more than anything else, Bernheim Forest offers a peace and serenity that would have pleased even Thoreau.



BERNHEIM

The visitors center at Bernheim Forest is built from recycled wood.

Bernheim Forest is off I-65 on State Highway 245 in Clermont, Ky. Open daily (except Christmas and New Year's Day) from 7 a.m. until sunset. Admission is free Monday through Friday although there is a donation box at the main gate. Weekend fees are \$5 per passenger car. (502) 955-8512. www.bernheim.org



WWW.KENTUCKYTOURISM.COM

Buckley Wildlife Sanctuary contains two walking trails.



WWW.KENTUCKYTOURISM.COM

CLYDE E. BUCKLEY WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

In 1967, when Emma Buckley was looking for a suitable memorial to her late husband, she set aside 374 acres along the Kentucky River in Woodford and Franklin counties and set about creating a mixed habitat for the enjoyment of those who love nature's varied guises.

At Buckley, visitors find 50 acres of open fields, two ponds, and a forest that serves as a transition zone between Northern and Southern flora and fauna. They will also find 100 species of birds, 25 species of mammals, and some 30 species of reptiles and amphibians, along with 200 species of wildflowers and ferns and 80 species of woody plants. With an area of such rich diversity, it only seems fitting that Buckley Wildlife Sanctuary be the only nature reserve in Kentucky to be managed by the Audubon Society. A final enticement is the dramatic gorge bisecting the sanctuary, exposing limestone formations rich in minerals and marine fossils.

Buckley Wildlife Sanctuary is a perfect spot for the entire family to spend a weekend afternoon as its three self-guided hiking trails are geared to the beginning hiker and/or families with children. There's a quarter-mile White Trail, a one-mile Blue Trail, and a two-mile Red Trail. Sure to please the children is the Bird Blind, from whose one-way windows they can spy on various wildlife headed to feeding stations set in a wooded grove. Birders can see everything from warblers to wild turkeys, with jewel-toned hummingbirds being the star attraction.

Other attractions include an early 20th-century farmhouse that has an educational center and seasonal activities such as spring wildflower walks. 🐦

Clyde E. Buckley Wildlife Sanctuary is at 1305 Germany Road in Frankfort. Open Wednesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on weekends from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is \$3. (859) 873-5711. www.audubon.org

*“The Best”
in a handmade baked product*

Magee's
of Lexington

726 E. Main Street
Lexington, KY 40502

Phone: (859) 255-9481

And they're off!

(No, not the horses, these extra pounds)

And they can be off sooner than you think, and stay off, with the gentle guidance of a degreed and highly skilled personal trainer from Fitness Plus.

No crowded gym. No special, pricey food. No pricey-baby-sit weight pills. Just a doctor-approved program, designed especially for you, which you can enjoy in the privacy of your home, or our exclusive facility in Chevy Chase.

FITNESS PLUS
premium of personal training and wellness services

202.9280
www.fitnessplus.com

Call us today for a free evaluation. And watch these pounds melt.

Private Studio Pilates Yoga **T.A.U.R.I.** Weight Management