

TRAIL 8, BROWN COUNTY STATE PARK

Convenience with a backcountry feel

By Nick Werner, OI staff

Hills and solitude attract most people to Brown County. Whether they are passing through on a week-end trip or live there, those who love the place are usually seduced by the peace and quiet of the rolling, relatively unbroken forest.

Trail 8 at Brown County State Park epitomizes the area's appeal in roughly 4 miles.

The trail is also known as the HHC Trail, short for Hoosier Hikers Council. The Martinsville-based non-profit improved the trail from 2002–2007, re-routing areas that were too steep or too wet, according to property manager Doug Baird.

"They followed the contours of the hills and 'hollers' so the trail was less steep and more easily walked," Baird said. "With the trail skirting the sides of the hills, the views down into and across the 'hollers' were more scenic for hikers."

The park property map lists the trail as moderate. The surface is dirt, with few hazards beyond the typical tree roots and occasional rock. Relatively sure-footed hikers will have no problem. The trail is well-marked. Two long, gradual uphill are its biggest obstacles.

The difference between the trail's lowest and highest points is about 300 vertical feet. Total combined elevation gain for all ascents is about 650 feet.

Hikers should bring water and wear sturdy hiking shoes or boots. The hike will take 2–3 hours.

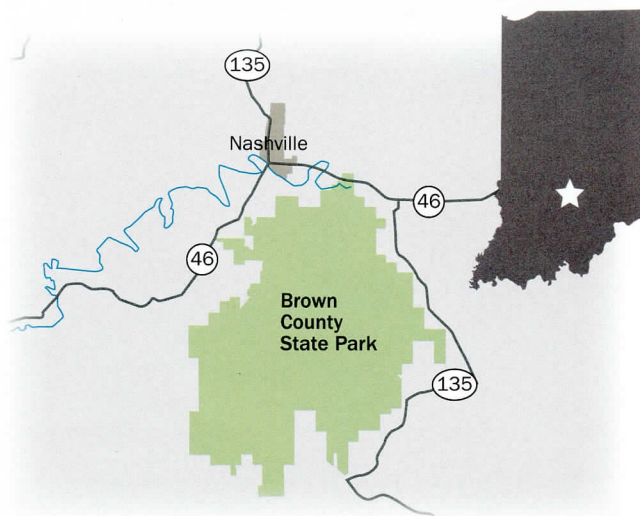
The trail is lollipop-shaped, providing a chance to bypass the toughest mile.

Both trailheads are on the nearly 16,000-acre park's west side. One is on a ridge at the West Lookout Tower, not far from the West Gatehouse, off State Road 46. The other is to the south, on low ground, off the Ogle Lake parking lot.

Do yourself a favor: Start at the West Lookout Tower and navigate the trail clockwise. This gives your legs a chance to warm up before tackling hills, and provides the advantage of going down a steep, long staircase instead of up it.

The first section of trail from the West Lookout Tower parallels a park road on the way to Hesitation Point, perhaps the most breathtaking of the park's overlooks. About a half-mile in, the trail emerges from the woods and forks at Tulip Tree Shelter. Taking a right turn there will shorten the hike. Otherwise, continue through the clearing and follow the trail's outer loop back into the woods.

Near Hesitation Point the trail turns south, away from the road. This stretch explores two isolated valleys in one of the most remote sections of park. Hiking in winter, after leaves



have fallen, offers excellent views. At several high points, hikers can see the hazy blue outlines of ridges miles away.

Downhill from Hesitation Point, hikers will encounter the aforementioned stairs—145 steps total. The structure keeps traffic off steep slopes to minimize erosion.

In the valleys, where small streams flow most of the year, birds are abundant. Even in winter, hikers are likely to see several songbird species and plenty of colorful woodpeckers.

During winter, you are as likely to encounter a deer as another hiker.

Brown County State Park will be closed Nov. 14–15 and Nov. 28–29 for deer reduction hunts. Plan your trip accordingly.

Trail 8 is among 20 miles of hiking-only trails offered at the park. The park provides 20 miles of hiking/mountain biking trails and 70 miles of bridle trails, too.

HHC has also improved Trails 2, 3, 7 and 9 at the park and at several other DNR properties across southern Indiana.

Getting there: From Nashville, take State Road 46 west (toward Bloomington). After about 2.5 miles, turn left at the park's West Gatehouse. After about a mile, the West Lookout Tower and Trail 8 trailhead will be on your right. □

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Visitors hike Trail 8 in fall 2015. The trail is also called the HHC Trail for improvements made to it by Hoosier Hikers Council volunteers.

