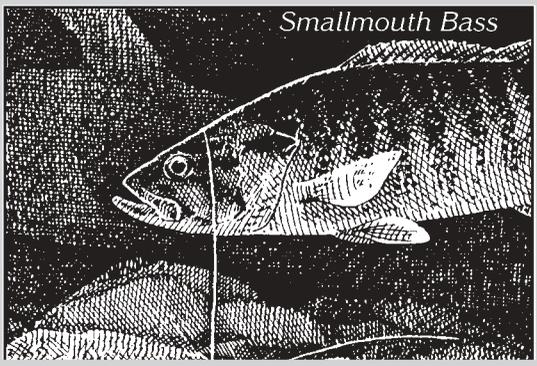
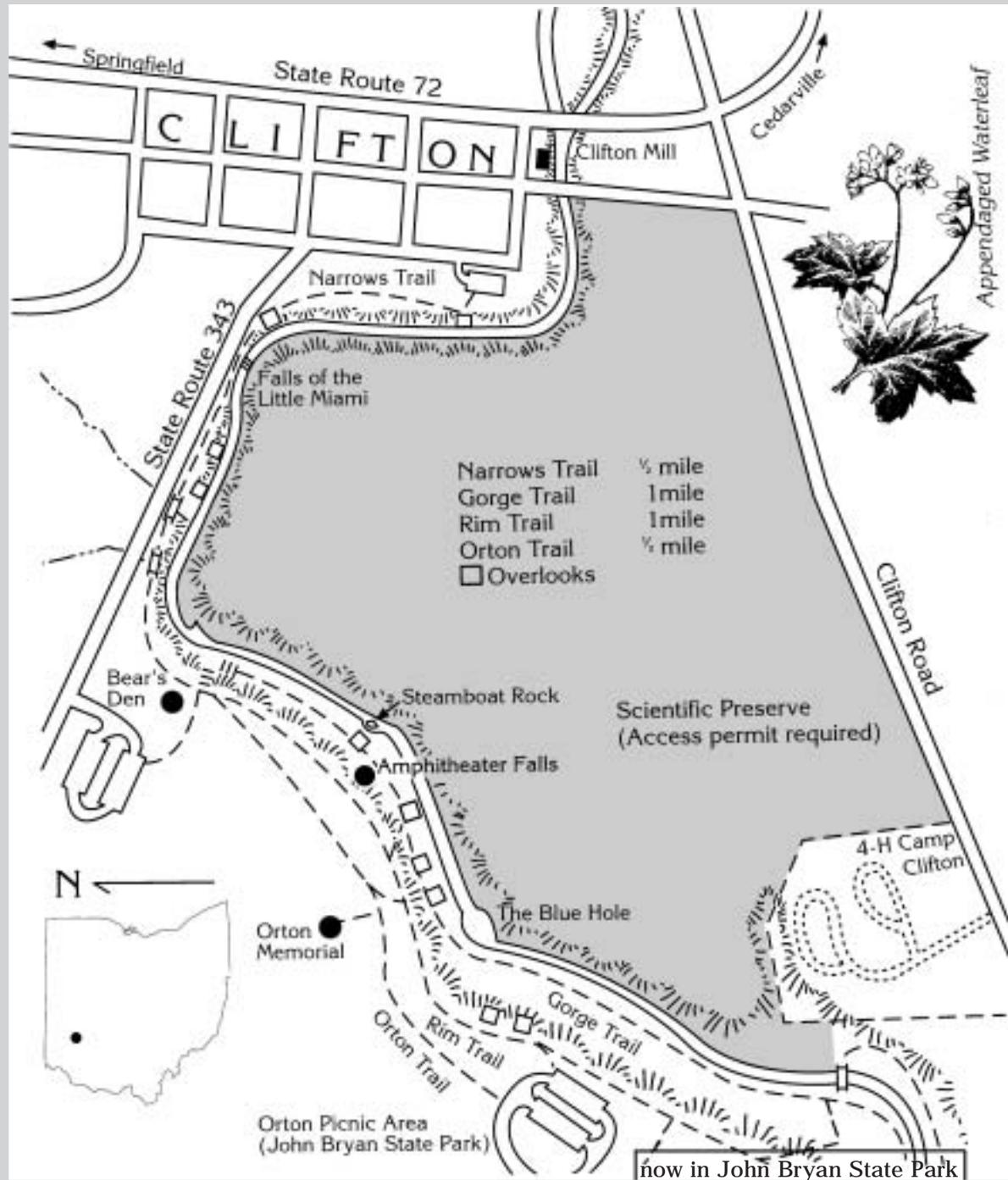
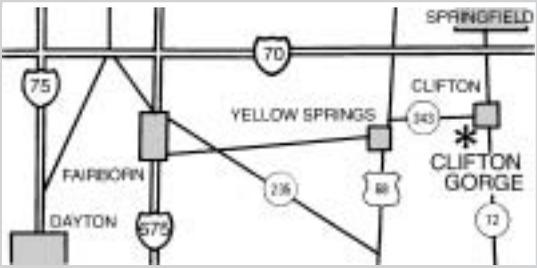


Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve



Smallmouth Bass

Location Map



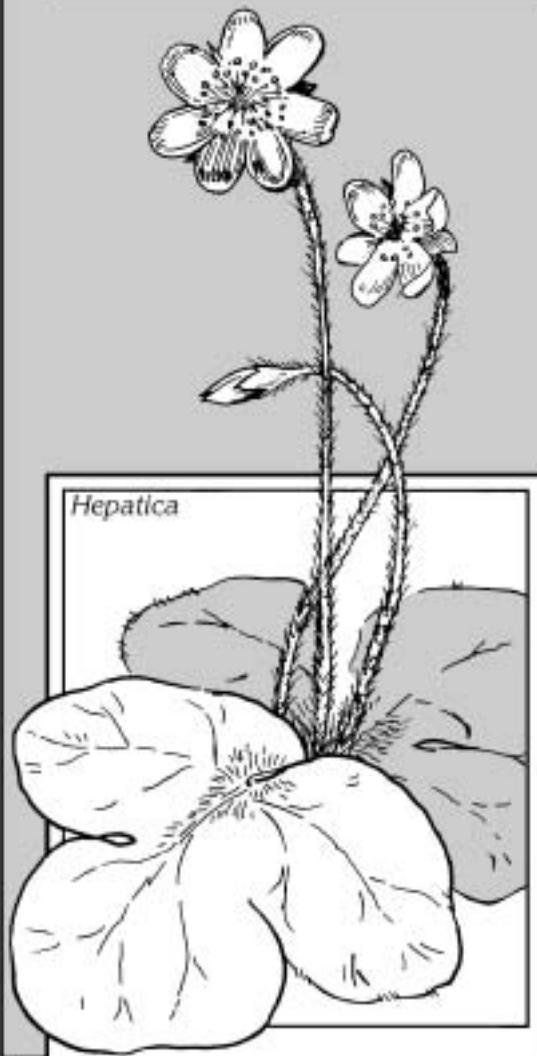
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Division of Natural Areas and Preserves
 1889 Fountain Square Court
 Columbus, OH 43224
 (614) 265-6453
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Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve



Hepatica

INTRODUCTION

The 269 acres comprising Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve were dedicated in 1970 to protect one of the finest examples of post-glacial erosion in the state. The preserve is also a memorial to John L. Rich, noted geologist and professor who was instrumental in its establishment.

Clifton Gorge is the result of erosion by a large meltwater river originating from the waning Wisconsinan continental glacier. Heading in the melting ice near Bellefontaine, this now extinct river plunged over the edge of the Silurian bedrock escarpment near Xenia. It rapidly eroded the soft limestones and shales beneath the escarpment, leaving the more massive Silurian dolomite unsupported. Continued undermining and collapse of the dolomite resulted in Clifton Gorge. Along the Narrows Trail, remnants of large potholes scoured out by pebbles caught in swirling eddies show that this process was also important in creating the gorge.

Because the different layers of rock forming the sides of the gorge vary in their ability to resist erosion, a distinct profile has developed. Resistant Cedarville dolomite forms the upper cliff which rises 40 to 50 feet. Less resistant dolomites beneath have weathered out to form recesses. In many places, this undercutting has allowed the Cedarville dolomite to separate along fracture planes and collapse to form slump blocks. Easily-eroded shale forms the lower slope. Although the Little Miami River is using the gorge as part of its course, it does little to deepen it. The gorge is being slowly widened, however, as shown by the scars of recent rock falls.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The shaded recesses of the gorge offer prime habitat for a number of interesting species, some of them rare in Ohio. Among those are the state threatened red baneberry, disjunct at Clifton Gorge from its other populations in northern Ohio, and wall rue, an uncommon fern. The preserve is noted for its fine display of spring wildflowers, especially hepatica and the tiny state potentially threatened snow trillium.

The unusual Chinkapin Oak forest covering the shale slope has survived, as has the disjunct population of Eastern hemlock and the cliff-loving Arbor vitae or white cedar. In order to protect these significant plant communities, that part of the preserve, south of the river, is only accessible with written permission from the division.

Turtles and birds are the most commonly seen animals, although several species of reptiles and woodland mammals also have their homes here. Among them is the Butler's garter snake, one of Ohio's rarer species.



Snapping Turtle

HISTORY

Hopewell earthworks and Fort Ancient campsites near the preserve show how popular the area was with prehistoric people. In historic times, major villages of the Shawnee were located nearby. Euro-Americans made use of the abundant water power of the gorge by building mills. The remains of two of them are still visible in the preserve.

A favorite tourist site since the early 1800s, Clifton Gorge has its share of tales. One of the most popular is that of a pioneer named Darnell who supposedly leaped across the chasm to escape Indians. Today Clifton Gorge is one of the most visited preserves in the system, continuing a tradition nearly two centuries old.



Nodding Trillium

Trails in the gorge are steep and slippery at times. Proper footwear and clothing are recommended. The cliffs of Clifton Gorge can be deadly. For your own protection and that of the preserve, **PLEASE USE DESIGNATED TRAILS ONLY! OFF-TRAIL USE IS PROHIBITED. NATURE PRESERVE RULES AND REGULATIONS ARE STRICTLY ENFORCED**

Eastern Hemlock



INVITATION

We invite you to become involved in protecting Ohio's natural areas and scenic rivers by following some of these suggestions:

- **Raise your awareness.** Visit other state nature preserves and scenic rivers in Ohio. There's one near you. Contact the division for more information or check our web site at www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/dnap.

- **Speak out.** Let others know how you feel about state nature preserves and scenic rivers. Public leaders cannot support the division if they do not know it is one of your priorities.

- **Check us!** Use your Ohio state income tax form to donate a portion of your refund to Nature Preserves, Scenic Rivers and Endangered Species. This program provides important funding for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

- **Call.** We want to hear from you. Call us with your questions or comments about state nature preserves and scenic rivers.

Your personal and active support plays a vital role in the continued protection of Ohio's natural landscape.