

Brown County State Park Audio Tour
Indiana DNR Division of State Parks

- Map and audio files: on.in.gov/browncountysp
- This auto tour covers major spots in Indiana's Brown County State Park. It was produced by Indiana DNR staff.
- Plan on at least 1 hour for the tour. More if you plan on stopping at other points of interest along the way.
- Start the audio in the Nature Center parking lot. Note your odometer reading or set your trip odometer to zero at the beginning of the tour.
- Exit the Nature Center parking lot at the south end. Then proceed past the Raccoon Ridge and Taylor Ridge campground. Consult the maps at on.in.gov/browncountysp to find the 5 stations along the tour.
- The park speed limit is 30 MPH. Some steep hills and sharp curves will require you to go slower. Please drive carefully!

Narration

Welcome to Brown County State Park and our Self-guided Audio Tour. As you take this tour with us today you will discover new dimensions and gain a new perspective on this vast landscape of Indiana's largest state park. Brown County State Park is known internationally for its spectacular displays of autumn colors, but today we will unlock some of the secrets of the past hidden below the canopy, explore what makes this forest so special, and learn about what we are doing to ensure this special place continues to exist so that visitors can make memories for years to come. No matter what time of year you visit, this place is sure to supply beautiful views that will entice you to come back to see it in each new season.

Brown County State Park encompasses an area of some 15,815 acres. This vast area can be hard to grasp so, to put this into perspective, we will compare the park's size to a well-known piece of land: downtown Indianapolis, sometimes called the Mile Square, which has grown over the years and now covers an area of 6.5 square miles. Brown County State Park is roughly 25 square miles, or almost 4 times the size of downtown Indianapolis. This vast size makes Brown County State Park one of the 10 largest state parks in America.

Before you leave the Nature Center on your approximately 6-mile tour of Brown County State Park's Southern Loop, take note of your odometer, because you may find it helpful throughout your tour. For example, our first stop will be approximately six-tenths of a mile from the Nature Center Parking lot. Don't worry, there are signs along the way signifying our five stops. There is also a map of the tour available on this website to help you navigate the tour as well as point out landmarks along the way.

As you drive from here to Station #1, pay particular attention to the size of the trees. Notice their size and age. Even to the untrained eyes, it's easy to tell their young age and smaller diameter. That is because our park's forest is relatively young. The woods here in Brown County State Park have gone through changes throughout the years. Later in our tour we will talk about some of those changes.

Now then, let's get going. Your first stop will be the Civilian Conservation Corps Camp area. When you get to the sign for Station #1 click on the Station #1 link to learn more about this area.

Here we are at Station #1

This area is now a picnic and playground area, but during the 1930s it was home to a camp of the Civilian Conservation Corps, also known as the CCC.

All that remains of this camp are some barely visible foundations of the barracks and mess hall beyond the wood line. But the impact the CCC had here at Brown County State Park can still be seen today, and will continue far into the future. They planted over 11 million trees: Pine, Locust, and Walnut. You can see the pine plantation from most any vista in the park, as those trees are well-defined, and stand out from the other trees.

Other projects built by the CCC were many of the shelter houses throughout the park—the West Lookout Tower, Ogle Lake, The Saddle Barn, as well as several miles of hiking trails and trail structures. Much of the sandstone used to construct building foundations and outdoor fireplaces was quarried by the CCC workers from an outcropping here in the park.

As you leave this area to head for Station #2, look over to your left at the next vista. See if you can pick out the pine groves planted by the CCC. The pine trees seen from this vista surround Strahl Lake. We will invite you to get out and enjoy this area later in our tour. Station #2 is about half a mile ahead at Hohen Point. It will be on your left-hand side. When you get to Station #2, click on the Station #2 link to learn more about this area.

You've made it to Station #2, Hohen Point. This vista is one of the park's most majestic scenic views. This spot is 1,010 feet above sea level. If you look directly across to the distant horizon, you are looking due east; north is to your left, south is to your right. How far would you guess it is over there to the eastern horizon? (Pause) If it's a clear sunny day as you take this tour, you can see approximately 11 miles over to the farthest ridge. Also visible are pine groves, at the base of the long ravine in front of you. These pine groves mark Strahl Lake.

Hohen Point has two explanations for its name: One is that the word "hohen" means "high" in German, but the vista was more likely named after Mr. Frank Hohenburger, a photographer and journalist in Brown County during the early 1900s. With the mesmerizing views this vista provides, it's no wonder it is one of the most popular spots for panoramic photographs. You should plan a return stop to this spot during another season to see for yourself the many changes it goes through. You won't be disappointed.

Your next stop on this tour is just two-tenths of a mile away, an overlook on the right side of the road. When you get to Station #3, click on the Station #3 link to learn about this area.

Welcome to Station #3. You're now approximately 1.3 miles from the Nature Center. Here in front of you is still another beautiful view of the rugged terrain of our park. This vista provides a more south and westerly view. It's a good angle for those sunset photos you've always wanted to take. It's also from this vista that you can see just how rolling the terrain is here in Brown County, and how it reveals itself with several ravines and ridgetops. Pay particular attention to the exaggerated topography; there's very little flatland here. Brown County's geologic history can be traced back to more than 250 million years ago, to a time when most of southern Indiana was covered by a shallow inland sea. Sand and silt were carried

into this area by a river system and were deposited as a vast delta complex, similar to that of the Mississippi River delta.

After all this material was deposited, and then lithified, or hardened into rock, a huge uplifting process took place, not just here in Brown County, but through the entire region. The soft, easily eroded shales and sandstones, exposed to weathering and running water, simply wore away with the passing millions and millions of years to form these symmetrical hills and valleys so typical of the area we see today.

Erosion in its all-powerful effects on the landscape is still taking place, literally every time it rains. In a very steep relief area, such as here in the park, the effects are even more pronounced, even though the forest has made an attempt over the years to cover the hills and ridges.

Now get ready to travel another 1.3 miles to Station #4. Your destination will be a parking lot on the left side of the road, at the bottom of a long hill, which has some turns in it, so take care. The parking lot is located by a large timberform playground directly across from the Horsemen's Campground. When you get to Station #4, click on the Station #4 link to learn about this area.

You've made it to Station #4. You're approximately 2.6 miles from the Nature Center now, and this is the site of some historically significant happenings in the early days of Brown County. It is right here at the side of the large playground that several buildings once stood that belonged to the tiny village of Kelp, Indiana – that's K-E-L-P. All that can be seen of Kelp today, and that's only with close inspection, are a few of the buildings' foundations and old well sites. And there in the midst of those relics now stands a sign with a few historical notes about the real families who once lived here. That sign was put here by an elementary school class from Columbus, Indiana, who felt that such a quaint community as this should not be allowed to vanish and be forgotten.

The valley you are in now is known as Strahl Valley, and provided a protected area for Kelp Village. To be exact, Kelp Village consisted of one church, one school, one store, and a dwelling place. The only reason it was established back in 1886 was because the Brown County postmaster was requested to have names for all rural businesses wherever mail was to be delivered. The story has it that the village storekeeper exclaimed, "There is no name for this place?" precisely at the moment when another local resident named Harry Kelp walked into the store. Seeing old Harry in the doorway, the storekeeper promptly announced, "We'll call it Kelp!" And so the small collection of buildings, now with a brand new name, was soon allowed to have an established post office, right in the store.

In Kelp Village's later years, the tumbledown buildings of the deserted village were used to house the first arrivals of the Civilian Conservation Corps work crews. As more and more men arrived, their encampment was moved to the top of the hill, and the old buildings gradually fell into ruin. In the late 1930s, they were demolished entirely during a park cleanup campaign. Since that time, public feeling has been high to restore the village to its old working status. Perhaps someday, Strahl Valley will once again shelter a tiny village called Kelp.

Before leaving this pristine valley, now would be the time to enjoy that closer look at Strahl Lake and perhaps even hike around it on Trail 6. There's a parking lot ahead on your left, in just six-tenths of a mile, and you'll find restrooms there as well.

Whether or not you visit Strahl Lake at this time, in just a moment you'll be moving on to Station #5, 2 miles beyond your present location. As you come to the top of a long straight hill you'll see up ahead a

junction with another main park road. Before you get to the junction, look to your right for a small picnic area. That's where you can park safely while visiting Station #5. To reach the station, you'll walk about 50-60 yards along the left side of the joined road. For now, proceed to that picnic area at the top of the hill and click on the Station #5 link upon arrival (2 miles from here, but only 1.4 miles from the Strahl Lake parking lot).

Welcome to Station #5. You've traveled approximately 4.6 miles from the Nature Center. Up until now we've dealt mostly with historical information regarding Brown County State Park. And while this history is important to keep alive, our parks are also known for their natural history. This may include certain birds and animals that are known to live in the areas of our state parks, or certain species of plants or wildflowers worth saving, or as in the case of right here in our park, the occurrence of the rare and state-endangered yellowwood tree.

To find the yellowwood tree at Station #5, you'll need to cross the road from where you've parked and walk along the left side of the main road, heading south toward the campground. After about 50 yards, begin looking for a tree that's leaning out over the road noticeably. It will be forked about one foot off the ground, then forked again about 12 feet up. Its bark is quite smooth, untextured, and of a dark gray-green color. It is often mistaken for the American beech tree, for its bark is similar, but will never attain the height nor the size of the beech. The branching habit of the yellowwood is one characteristic that has most likely kept it from being used commercially for lumber. Its upper limbs are often broken or sheared off during high windstorms, and this is perhaps reason enough for its generic name of *Cladrastis*. This name is taken from Greek words meaning "brittle branch".

There are several reasons why the yellowwood tree is considered rare: Its legume habit of producing pods with only few viable seeds would be one reason; the fact that it may flower only once every three to four years is also significant; and perhaps its tolerance for cool and moist north-facing slopes is important to its growth and reproduction. On top of all these reasons can be added the stress caused by the presence of deer in the forest. Their menu includes young seedlings of many types, so that not only the numbers of yellowwoods are being reduced, but those of other forms of understory vegetation as well.

The presence of these trees in the Ogle Hollow ravine, right across from where this tree is growing, was the reason for the establishment of the Ogle Hollow Nature Preserve in 1970. This 41-acre tract will be a protected habitat for the yellowwood tree into perpetuity. The preserve has several yellowwoods along its trail for hikers to see. The Ogle Hollow Nature Preserve has a self-guided trail, and it's shown as Trail #5 on your park map. There's a brochure telling of the 22 stations along the trail, which you can obtain back at the Nature Center. So for now, take a good look at this yellowwood, because once you leave Brown County, you may never see another one.

Having seen this rarity of nature, it's time to head back to your vehicle or bike – carefully, please. And this concludes our self-guided Audio Tour of Brown County State Park. We hope you've enjoyed your stay with us, and that this tour might cause you to return at other times throughout the year, and drive or ride our park's "South Loop" again. Thanks again for visiting, and please drive carefully on your return home, and on all of our Hoosier highways.