

Al Foster Trail Guide

This large interconnected grouping of public land is owned by St. Louis County Parks, the Great Rivers Greenway, the City of Wildwood and the Missouri Division of State Parks. Over 2,000 acres of public land occurs along the Meramec River. This large tract of land has a number of trails for hikers, and bikers. The rugged north river hills provide the trail user with a feeling or sense of getting away from the hustle of urban life. The hills are heavily wooded with mature oaks and hickories. Diversity abounds with woodlands, old riverine sloughs, blufftops and rock outcroppings. Numerous access points occur to the Meramec River for the adventurous fisherman. Beautiful vistas exist with the backdrop of the Crescent Hills to the south of the river. This is one of the most scenic areas along the Meramec Greenway.

Al Foster Trail

5.5 Miles Flat Crushed Stone Hikers & Bikers

The Al Foster Trail is the main trail throughout this area of the Meramec Valley. The trail is dedicated to the memory of Al Foster a journalist and historian who dedicated much of his life to restoring the Meramec River. From its trailhead in Glencoe the trail retraces the historic path of the Pacific Railroad, the first railroad to go west from St. Louis in 1851.

At the Glencoe Trailhead the trail user will find restrooms but no running water. The trail starts in a south direction toward the Meramec River and goes by the train station for the miniature Wabash Frisco and Pacific Railroad. This railroad is seasonally open to the public providing nearly 2 miles of tracks. The steam locomotives pulling passenger cars up and down the river valley provide an enjoyable family outing.

Just past the train station the trail user can go either to the east or the west along the Al Foster Trail. Going west (right) the trail user will enjoy a splendid ½ mile of trail. The bridge over Hamilton Creek is still supported by the original bridge abutments constructed for the first railroad. (The abutments have been shored up to accommodate the new bridge). Hamilton Creek is a spring fed creek that begins in Rockwood Reservation. The creek is known for its aquatic diversity. This new stretch of trail is a joint effort between the Great Rivers Greenway, and the City of Wildwood. The trail passes under old river bluffs and gives up glimpses of the Meramec River. In the future it is hoped the trail will continue to the west and south and ultimately connect with Route 66 State Park.

Taking the trail to the east (left) the trail user can begin a journey towards Castlewood State Park. One of the first landmarks encountered is the large bluff adjacent to the trail. This property is known as Packwood Parksite and is managed by St. Louis County Parks. The 100 acre site was owned by a man named Packwood who made a fortune in soap manufacturing. The property was donated to the Missouri Humane Society and then later purchased by the Parks Department. Plans are in the works to construct a lengthy multi-purpose trail utilizing this tract of land. Portions of the property are on the Register of Historic Places.

The trail leaves the bluff area and continues onto one of the segments of Castlewood State Park. This area was acquired in the 1970's from the Majestic-Mohan sand and gravel operation. Here the landscape is open with residual piles of sand and gravel scattered about. This unique habitat has been a boom to prickly pear cactus. A native Missouri cactus is well adapted for the droughty rocky soils. A side trip to the Meramec River will

reveal a historic relic of the sand and gravel day. Beached on the bank of the Meramec is an old tug boat that use to push barges loaded with material up and down the river. It is difficult to imagine barges running the narrow and sometimes shallow river.

The Al Foster Trail intersects with the Rock Hollow Trail before continuing to the east. (See Rock Hollow Trail Guide). The next trailhead is located at Sherman Beach County Park. A large gravel bar makes getting to the river very easy. No restrooms or running water exists at Sherman Beach Trailhead. A short 1 mile loop trail can be taken by taking the Stinging Nettle Trail at the Sherman Beach trailhead. This gravel trail follows the Meramec before reuniting with the Al Foster.

The next trail junction is with the Cedar Bluff Trail that runs through another portion of Castlewood State Park. (See below).

A washout along the Missouri Pacific Railroad prevents the trail user from continuing on the Al Foster to the main portion of Castlewood State Park. It is hoped this washout can be repaired and the trail re-opened. The trail user can take Stinging Nettle Trail to form a loop trail that begins to head back to the Glencoe Trailhead. Suitable for cross country skiing.

Stinging Nettle Trail

2.6 miles Flat Rock Treadway Hikers & Bikers

Stinging Nettle Trail begins at the Sherman Beach parking lot. A loop trail can be created by using a combination of the Al Foster and the Stinging Nettle Trails. Both trails have a rock surface.

Leaving the beach parking area the trail continues through the wooded river valley paralleling the Meramec River. The trail provides excellent views of the Meramec River. Sherman Beach was originally part of the West Tyson Park expansion when additional park land was purchased in 1979. The land was owned by the Mincke family who were in the lumber business supplying building materials to a growing City of St. Louis in the 1870's.

Cedar Bluff Trail

2.6 miles Steep Natural Treadway Hikers & Bikers

There is no vehicle access to the Cedar Bluff Trail. The only way to get there is off of the Al Foster Trail. Trail signs will direct you off of the Al Foster onto the Cedar Bluff Trail. This tract of land is managed by Castlewood State Park and consists of 250 acres. This loop trail follows the heavily wooded ridges and valleys. Contrary to its name there is no bluff but the trail does provide some nice vistas of the surrounding hills. Deer and turkey are often seen along the trail.