

# Above Ground Trail Guide



These hills  
tell stories..



Please Recycle!

# Karst View Trail

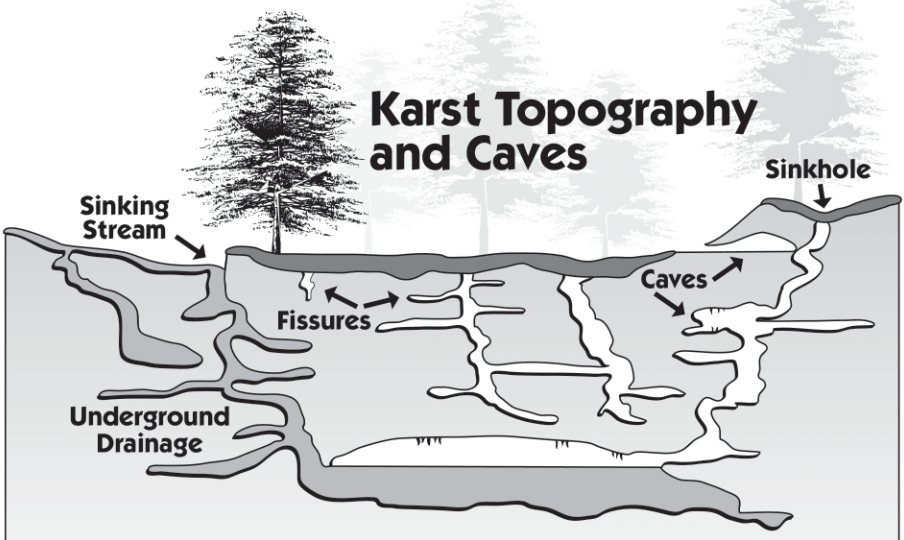
This easy 30 minute walk offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside.

**K1** This oak opening is typical of the landscape in this area prior to the European settlement of Wisconsin. More than 200 years ago, oak savanna and prairie ecosystems thrived here. The area in front of you is actively being restored. Widespread oak limb growth patterns are characteristic of the *Oak Savanna Ecosystem*, one of the most endangered on Earth. A fraction of intact examples of oak savanna vegetation remain in Wisconsin, less than 0.01 percent of the original 5.5 million acres from pre-settlement times.

**K2** The glaciers of the last Ice Age covered most of Wisconsin, leaving untouched the landscape called the *Driftless Area*. This vantage point is about 1380 feet above sea level. Observers can look south and see for miles on a clear day. This land was, for millions of years, the floor of a warm shallow inland sea. Over time, rivers, streams and glacial melt waters eroded deep valleys, carving out this once flat plain.

**K3** The feature before you is named *School Sinkhole*, for the large number of school children who have been educated here. Sinkholes are the evidence of a near surface cave below. A short distance to the north west is *Oscar's Sinkhole*, named for the man who discovered it when it formed suddenly in 1996. Sudden sinkhole appearance is the result of gradual settling of earth materials.

**K4** *Brigham Sinkhole* is one of many on the grounds. Geologists describe a landscape that includes sinkholes and caves as a *Karst topography*. When limestone rock dissolves underground, which is an important process in the origin of limestone caves, the land surface above ground is also affected. These geologic processes lead to this distinctive type of landscape.



**K5** Ebenezer Brigham came to Wisconsin in the 1820s during the lead rush. He settled here in Blue Mounds in 1828. This *First Dane County Settlement* became a trading post, stagecoach stop, inn, and Dane County's first post office. Brigham's place provided important services that helped others pursue their own lead treasure.

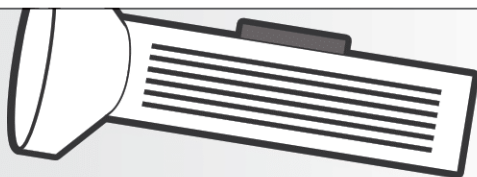
**K6** The quest to reestablish native plants to this landscape began on this land below the barn. Work is underway to restore the land to the native prairie and savanna ecosystem using local genotypes. This planting will be used as a seed orchard and *Prairie Demonstration Garden* allowing us to expand this unique ecosystem while educating our many visitors about prairie and savanna restoration efforts.

**K7** This surface depression is called the *North End Sinkhole*, formed because the cracks in the rock above the cave intersected and created a naturally weak cross joint. You are now standing above the section of Cave of the Mounds where the East Cavern connects to the North Cavern. Many visitors on the Cave Tour below marvel at the beautiful Painted Waterfall that lies about 40 feet below the surface here.

**K8** The U-shaped rock wall that surrounds the Cave Entrance Building is what remains of a *Limestone Quarry*. Quarrying for local needs began on Brigham Farm in 1903, and continued until the accidental discovery of Cave of the Mounds on August 4, 1939. You are now standing where quarry workers stood, looking in amazement at the mysterious hole in the rock wall left behind by the routine blast. Shortly after that blast, the Cave was entered by humans for the very first time. A look across the road behind you reveals a shelter above a Mine Shaft. It was built to assist in the construction of a bypass tunnel that runs under the road, along the underground cave passageway.

**K9** This small mound is deceiving. It sits above the Meanders section of Cave of the Mounds—with twists and turns downward like water descending a drain. The flagpole marks the Deepest Point that visitors travel, 70 feet below the surface, while underground on The Cave Tour.

**K10** A giant Burr Oak once stood here, masking this remnant of the *South End Sinkhole*. Years of erosion have slowly decreased the size of this sinkhole, filling it in with dirt and sediments. You are now standing about 40 feet above the South End of Cave of the Mounds. Below you in the Cave, *stalagmites* stand like towers along the South Cavern trail. *Stalactites* hang down from the ceiling and the constant drip of water can be seen and heard all around you. A Giant Cephalopod fossil can be observed in the limestone ceiling of this section in the Cave.



## Discovery Days

Cave of the Mounds was discovered on August 4th, 1939 during a routine blast in the Brigham Farm Quarry. After the dust settled, workers stared in amazement at the large opening in the rock—a great cavern! We celebrate this explosive event during our Discovery Days celebration, which takes place every year during the first weekend in August.

# CAVE OF THE MOUNDS®

National Natural Landmark

## Park Map

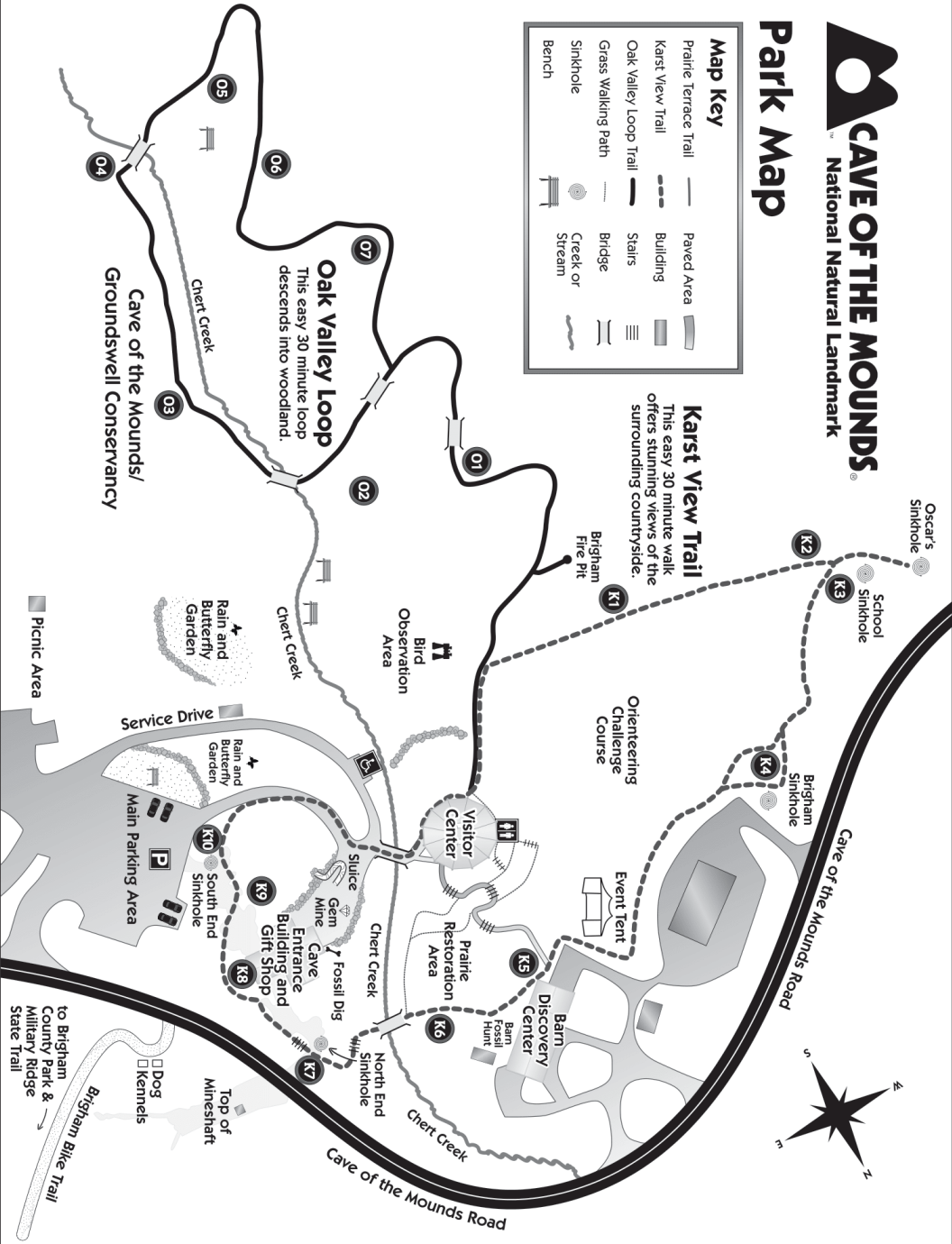
### Map Key

	Paved Area		Building
	Karst View Trail		Stairs
	Oak Valley Loop Trail		Bridge
	Grass Walking Path		Stream
	Sinkhole		Bench

**Karst View Trail**  
This easy 30 minute walk offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside.

**Oak Valley Loop**  
This easy 30 minute loop descends into woodland.

**Cave of the Mounds/  
Groundswell Conservancy**



# Oak Valley Loop

This easy 30 minute loop descends into woodland and savanna.

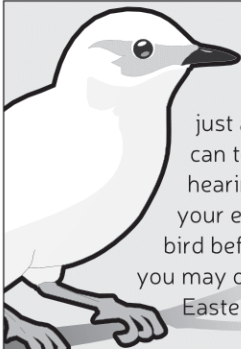
**01** Oak savanna and prairie grassland once co-existed, forming the primary landscape of the pre-settlement Blue Mounds area. Savanna areas existed within the larger prairie and were characterized by clumps of large oaks with a low-hanging, wide-spread limb pattern. Below these limbs, many unique species of flowers and grasses grew. Many of these native species are being cultivated through traditional management practices in this *Oak Savanna Restoration* area.

**02** There are two main *oak groups*—red and white. You will see two types of trees from each of the oak groups here on the grounds. The *Black Oak* and the *Red Oak* are in the red oak group, while the *Burr Oak* and the *White Oak* belong to the white oak group. All oak leaves are lobed, but those in the red oak group have pointed ends while those in the white oak group have rounded ends. Try to identify the many oaks you find along the trails, in the gardens and around our the picnic areas.

## RED OAK



## WHITE OAK



## Listen for the Birds

Identifying birds isn't as difficult as you may think. Noting just a few characteristics of a bird, such as shape, color or habitat, can tell you a lot about what type of bird you may be seeing or hearing. Listening to bird songs is a wonderful way to expand your enjoyment of nature. You may not always be able to see a bird before you can hear their calls. Rare and harder-to-spot birds you may observe or hear on our grounds include the Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Bluebird and Great Horned Owl.

**03** Trees that perish in the forest are not always considered a loss. This moss and lichen covered fallen tree is slowly being recycled into new soil by the forest's tiniest creatures, called *decomposers*. They, in turn, provide food for plants and larger species. Fallen trees like these are an important part of the *Forest Life Cycle*, and help to maintain the overall health of this fragile ecosystem. By opening up the canopy, sunlight is now able to reach the once shaded forest floor.

**04** *Chert Creek*, seen here, is an intermittent stream. It flows when it receives water from rainfall runoff, springs or from some surface source such as melting snow. The creek is named for the beautiful, unusual boulders found along its bank and in the many gardens here. If you look closely, you will see many small cavities filled with crystals. These cavities sometimes hold water, even after the stream stops flowing. Many animal species visit Chert Creek as a water source all year 'round so it is an important component of wildlife habitat.

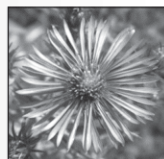
**05** *Signs of wildlife are all around you!* Ground cover and trees provide shelter for animal families. Deer rub antlers against trees and eat away bark and small twigs. Birds and bats rest in the treetops as well as in nest boxes built especially for them. Squirrels munch on walnuts, leaving piles of shells behind. This is good hunting ground for predators like fox and coyote, as well as birds of prey like hawks and owls. After a good snowfall, tracks of rabbit, deer, red fox, squirrel, coyote, various birds and other small mammals can be found along the trail.

**06** Stand quietly and observe the interactions between *man & nature*. Thanks to help from Groundswell Conservancy (formerly the Natural Heritage Land Trust), this tract of land is now protected by a *Conservation Easement* whereby future development is restricted. As spaces for nature enjoyment become more scarce, it is important to preserve green spaces such as this for wildlife habitat, education, and as a natural respite from the business of modern life. Visit [groundswellwisconsin.org](http://groundswellwisconsin.org) for more information.

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## Wildflowers of Wisconsin

Wisconsin is fortunate to have a diverse assortment of wildflowers. In every season, blooms of various colors appear. Most wildflowers have a specific season of blooming. For example, you may see the Yellow Trout Lily blooming in early spring, the tall and brightly flowering Compass Plant during the height of summer, or the beautiful bright purple New England Aster in the fall. Recognizing the many varieties of wildflowers enhances your appreciation of this beautiful site.



**“Thus, he who owns a veteran burr oak owns more than a tree. He owns a historical library, and a reserved seat in the theater of evolution.”** – Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

**07** Some of the oaks in this wood are estimated to be over 200 years old. Species of *Burr Oak*, *White Oak*, *Red Oak* and *Black Oak* all reside along this trail. Oaks produce acorns, a nourishing food for a host of birds and mammals. These majestic trees are a valuable resource, but oaks are slowly disappearing from our woodlands. When oaks are harvested or die of natural causes, they're often replaced by other faster growing tree species. *Oak Regeneration*, an important management tool, supports the survival of these big beauties, however, intense competition from many tree, shrub, and plant species can make this job difficult. Controlling this competition and monitoring oak seedling development are important steps in this process. Techniques like these are used in an effort to regenerate the oak woodland throughout this valley.



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## Travel Green Wisconsin

Wisconsin's conservation history and leadership has a long tradition. Cave of the Mounds National Natural Landmark is proud to participate in this tradition of environmental stewardship as a charter member of Travel Green Wisconsin. Through this certification program, we work to continuously improve our environmental footprint - locally and globally - by reducing energy, water and waste consumption, encouraging recycling, providing environmental education opportunities and restoring native ecosystems. Among these projects are our Prairie and Oak Savannah Restoration projects, Rain Gardens, Butterfly Gardens, Public Educational Programs and environmentally focused Day Camps. In addition, we have taken steps to reduce our consumption of energy, water and single-use waste. A high efficiency wood burner uses wood from the property to heat our visitor center. We avoid watering by planting drought tolerant plants, and we do not water or use any weed killers on our lawn, so please understand if it looks a bit brown in the heat of the summer. We have considerably reduced single-use plastic waste by both staff and visitors by offering affordable, environmentally conscious options. While visiting us today, please help us to care for this special place so that future generations may continue to appreciate it as we do today. If you would like more information about Travel Green Wisconsin, please visit [www.travelgreenwisconsin.com](http://www.travelgreenwisconsin.com).

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**"Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you... while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."** – John Muir

*For more information about Cave of the Mounds & Wisconsin's Driftless Area please contact us at:*



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