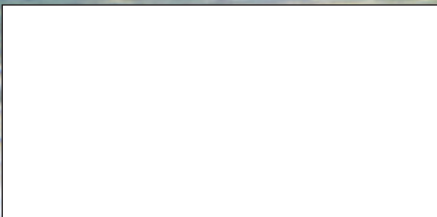


Trout

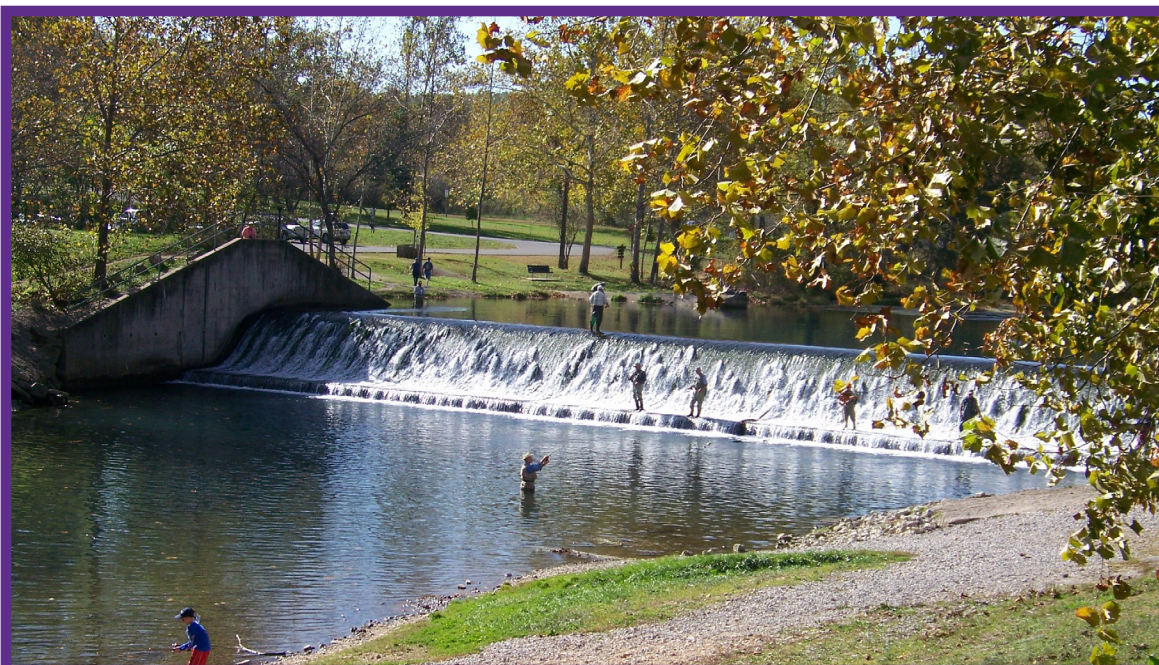


Talk

MAY 2020



Bennett Spring still open
Page 3



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COVID-19 can't keep anglers away



Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden

Chris Johnson from Kansas City, Mo., fishes near the bridge at Bennett Spring State Park.

Daily trout tag and license requirements have been lifted during coronavirus pandemic

**CHRIS RODEN
FOR TROUT TALK**

Fishing is still fishing at Bennett Spring State Park despite the effects of the coronavirus.

With the suspension of the requirement for daily tags and licenses came the end of daily stocking the stream.

While anglers heavily fished the park in the first few weeks of everyday free fishing, plenty of trout remain to make a fishing trip worthwhile.

Anglers report the usual varied rates of fishing success when the stream was daily stocked. However, the number of fish swimming past anglers as they waded the stream is down.

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens said the situation in Bennett Spring was much like the non-season months.

Not stocking the stream has only mildly affected what happens at the hatchery.



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“Setting us back a month isn’t a big deal. Ideally, I love to get them out the door when they’re ready to go out the door and get them stocked, but we’re okay,” Havens said.

He said his staff were raising fingerlings in the hatchery building as well as sorting and grading.

“The park has been fished really hard. We had a lot of people out on the first weekend that it was free and you didn’t have to have a license and you didn’t have to have a daily tag,” Havens said.

He said the trend continued into the second weekend as well as during the week.

Consequently, anglers are seeing smaller fish than usual in the stream.

“A lot of those folks took limits of fish out, and without replenishing the stock that’s in the spring branch, it only dwindles. What’s left are the small fish that nobody wants to keep... We see that seasonally anyway,” Havens said.

However, good fishing is still possible despite appearances.

“There’s always fish in the spring branch. There always will be. You can’t come down here and expect to have fish just swirling around your feet like normal. You can’t expect to watch along the bank and see a bunch of fish in the water. They’re there, but you’re not going to see them as much as you normally would,” Havens said.

While trout are still in the stream for the taking, other closures will have an effect on the fishing experience in the park.

Some of the park’s normal attractions are off limits: feeding the fish, eating in the shelters and playing on the playgrounds. With the closure of the Park Store, the park is limited to two public restrooms.

“Operationally, we’re keeping people at bay just to keep our staff from having too close of contact with the public,” Havens said.

However, people are still coming to Bennett Spring State Park. Eleven states were represented on the April 11-12 weekend with just fair weather.

Havens said another noticeable difference between the present and

before the quarantine was that anglers leave the park when the buzzer sounds since the campground is closed.

As a plus, with the reduced number of anglers, the park grass along the banks has a chance to recover and help fight the natural erosion.

What anglers reported on April 15 varied as much as on any other fishing day.

Paul Rothenheber from Columbia, Mo., came to Bennett Spring with his son-in-law, Dr. Max Lazinger. Between them they had five fish to clean.

“Normally, I’ll come down here on an average between 8 a.m. and noon—that’s when you want to usually fish—and I’ll catch anywhere from 12 to 20, and it’s slow today, but that’s fine,” Rothenheber said.

Rothenheber did not know that the hatchery staff had not stocked the stream since March before he came to the park.

He said fly fishing naturally supported social distancing.

“Normally, when you’re fishing, it’s always 10-12 feet apart anyway. At least that, maybe 15 feet apart,” Rothenheber said.

Lazinger, originally from New Jersey, was fly fishing for the first time and took the opportunity to slip into first place with three trout to his father-in-law’s two while Rothenheber cleaned the fish.

Fishing in Bennett Spring State Park was a nice break from his duties in a Columbia hospital.

“I work in the hospital, and we’re staggering our shifts to keep our exposure to each other even down, so I just did 14 straight days in the hospital, and now I have two weeks off,” Lazinger said.

Lazinger said the six feet rule was not enough protection for those outside on a breezy day.

“The reality is that with the wind blowing you want to be 20 feet away from someone, not six,” Lazinger said.



He said the same applied to the bike trails in Columbia where being in the breeze created by the rider in front means potentially inhaling germs for the trailing rider.

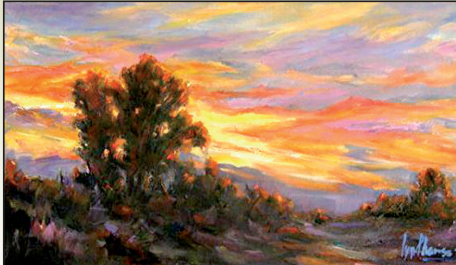



Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden

Gavin Bolin of Springfield takes advantage of a pretty April afternoon to celebrate

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"I wouldn't go into any store without a mask on. When you wear the mask, you're protecting other people from you," Rothenheber said.

He was enjoying a break from such concerns.

"Luckily, we live close enough that we can come here just for the day, and it's no big deal. It's nice to be out here than in the hospital. I love being outside," Rothenheber said.

Gavin Bolin, originally from Mountain Grove, lives in Springfield and worked as a barber before the quarantine caused a layoff.

He received his stimulus check and was in Bennett Spring State Park to celebrate and catch a few trout.

Bolin said he fished with Mike Ross before his recent passing. Fishing at the falls, he had not landed a fish after an hour of angling.

He thought it was tough to tell if fishing that day had been slow or not.

"It still beats working ... I was happy to see it was still open and you could still maintain well over six feet. There's plenty of room out here," Bolin said.

On a sunny cool day, he was happy to have the opportunity to be in the park.

"I just like being outside especially with everyone cooped up. There's a family over there. They're having a good time. I am very thankful that this is even around right now for us to do. I'm getting pretty sick of staying inside. I'm not an inside guy at all. There's only so much you can do around the house," Bolin said.

Chris Johnson from Kansas City was at Bennett on a day trip.

"When they're not stocking, there are not as many fish, but there's also not as many fishermen, so the pressure is not as high. We're still catching fish. It's still a good day ... Bennett Spring is a great place to quarantine," Johnson said.

It took him between a little over an hour to catch three respectable trout.

After an hour's fishing, Kyle Johnson from Clinton, Mo., had not caught any fish and his wife had only had a few bites.

He noticed the usual number of interested fish were missing.

"The water is not as clear as usual," Johnson said before moving to the shallows where the fish would have a better chance of seeing his flies.

Also outside the norm at Bennett Spring State Park was Havens' usual routine.

He said he misses the most enjoyable part of his job, which is interacting with the park's regulars. These folks, often older who should stay at home to avoid contact with coronavirus carriers, chose to live near the park to enjoy everything it has to offer.

With the redbud and dogwood trees coming on, Bennett Spring State Park is making itself pretty for visitors regardless of the number.

"It's still spring, it's still pretty and people should get out and enjoy themselves, but just be safe about it," Havens said.



Chris Johnson from Kansas City, Mo., takes the steps to meet up with his friends and show them his catch. Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden



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A walk in the park

There's a lot more to do at Bennett Spring State Park than fish for trout

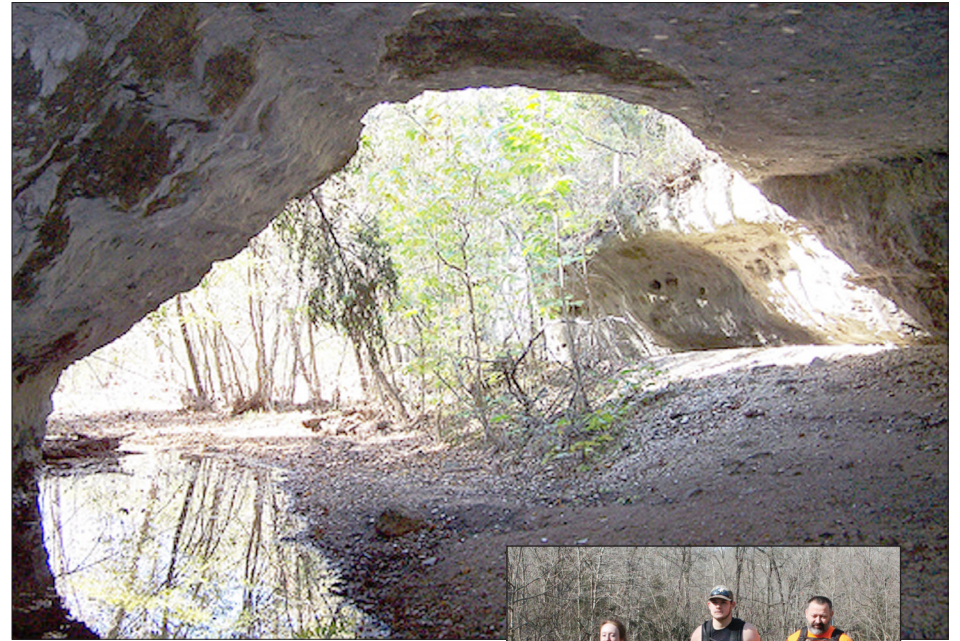
Each month Trout Talk puts the spotlight on a different trail at Bennett Spring State Park.

This month Trout Talk takes a look at one of the park's most unique and popular walking trails: the Natural Tunnel Trail.

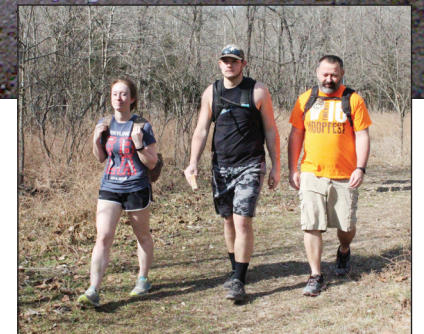
The trail's signature feature is the Bennett Spring Natural Tunnel, which is 296 feet long and forms an S curve through the hill.

Formed from Gasconade dolomite, the tunnel contains a large gravel creek bed. On its way to the tunnel, the trail crosses Spring

Hollow and passes through many different habitats. The trail is a combination of roads used by people living in the area from the 1840s to present and rugged wooded areas crossed by small streams. The wooded areas support abundant wildlife including deer, squirrels, chipmunks, many woodland birds and insects, including ticks. Several bluffs have interesting geologic features, tiny caves, sheer rock faces and deep overhangs with vines and other foliage.



The trail passes near a small cemetery that dates from the late 1880s and holds the graves of two families who lived in the area. The length of the trail is 7.5 miles with an estimated hiking time of 5 hours and 45 minutes.



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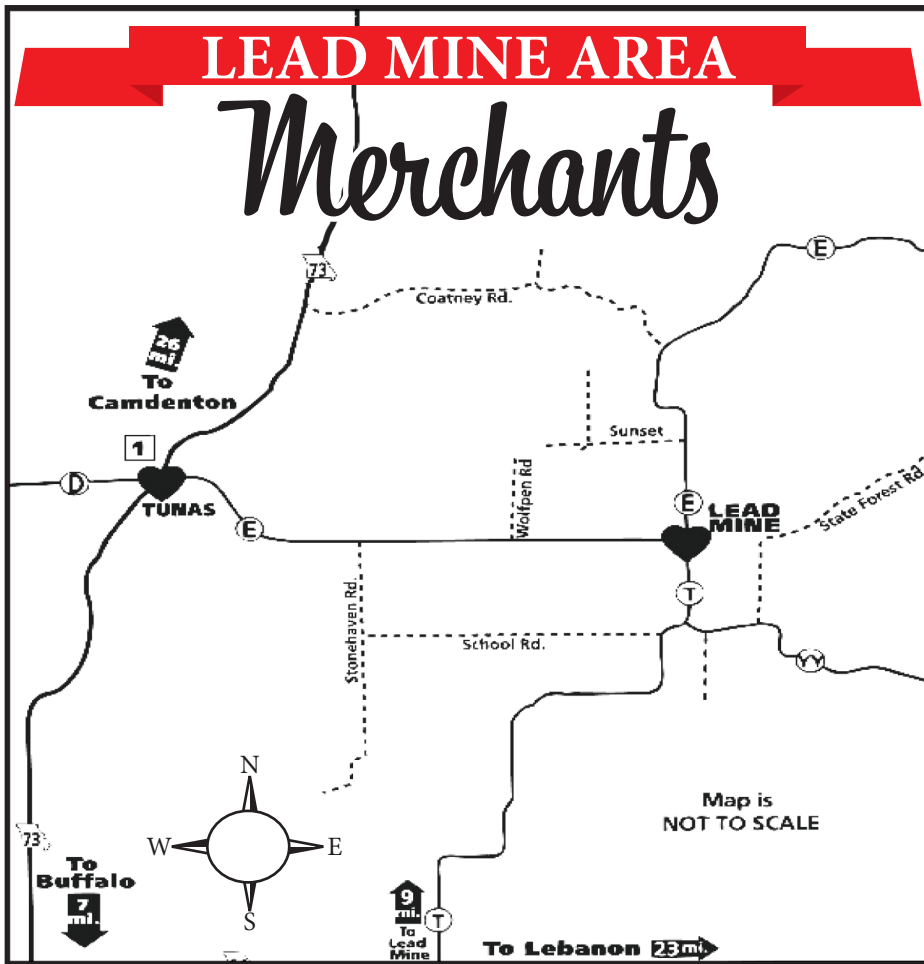
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Get in the zone

Take a look at Bennett Spring State Park's rules and regulations

FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures.

For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited,

even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

Trout Fishing Hours

May: 6:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m.

June and July: 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

August: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily





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Species: Rainbow trout

Scientific name: *Oncorhynchus mykiss*

Claim to fame: Rainbow trout are a popular sportfish in Missouri. Studies have shown trout fishing in the state provides a multi-million dollar benefit to the state's economy each year. Missouri's current trout program consists of Lake Taneycomo, four trout parks, 20 trout management areas and winter trout fisheries in 20 urban lakes in St. Louis and Kansas City.

Virtually all of these areas and opportunities are sustained by stockings from Missouri Department of Conservation hatcheries. The Department stocks more than 1.5 million trout annually in the state.

Species status: Rainbow trout are not native to Missouri, but were first imported here in the 1800s.

The rainbow trout's native range stretches along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to northern Mexico.

First discovered: The first scientific description of the fish was written by Russian naturalist Johann Julius Walbaum in the 18th century.

Family matters: Rainbow trout belong to the salmonidae family of fish. This family includes several species high in angling popularity such as brown trout, salmon, char and whitefish.

Length: The average length is 10 to 15 inches, but longer lengths have been reported.

Diet: Aquatic insects, terrestrial insects, snails and small fish make up the bulk of a rainbow trout's diet. There is some variance based upon local availability of food.

Weight: Most adult rainbows caught in Missouri range in weight from under one pound to one-and-one-half pounds, but they can grow larger.

Distinguishing characteristics: The upper parts of a rainbow's body are dark olive and thickly speckled with black spots. Of course, the tell-tale sign of a rainbow is the pinkish to pinkish-red stripe that runs the length of the body on both sides.

Life span: Rainbow trout have been reported to live up to 11 years in some parts of the country.

Habitat: Within their natural range, rainbow trout inhabit streams, naturally occurring lakes and reservoirs.

Trout do best in waters that generally remain below 70 degrees F. In Missouri, suitable trout habitat is limited to approximately 170 miles of Ozarks spring branches and spring-fed streams and the 2,080-acre coldwater reservoir of Lake Taneycomo.

Life cycle: Most of the trout in Missouri waters come from hatchery-raised brood-stock, with the few exceptions of some areas where conditions are suitable for some trout spawning to occur. In parts of the continent where trout reproduce in the wild, spawning occurs from early winter to late spring, depending on local conditions.

Eggs are laid by the female in a shallow pit dug by the female on clean, gravelly riffles. The female resumes digging upstream and the eggs are covered by gravel carried down by the current.

No parental care is provided to the eggs, which are dependent on oxygen present in the water percolating through the gravel.

Eggs hatch in about 21 days and the fry remain in the gravel until the yolk sac is absorbed.

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