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Trout Talk

**‘Fishing widows?’ Not
at Bennett Spring
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By Chris Roden

June 2023

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'Fishing widows?' Not at Bennett Spring

The wives who accompany their husbands find the park offers them a dose of nature and peace

By Chris Roden

When schools are still in session and before young families bring their kids to the park to enjoy their summer vacation, Bennett Spring State Park is a weekday haven for middle-aged men.

Only a handful are accompanied by wives wearing waders to the cool stream that trout love to try their luck alongside their misters.

However, looking on the park's benches or in camp chairs set up in the inviting shade, one can find a few ladies enjoying Bennett Spring for reasons other than angling.

They know something that the wives who stayed at home, the fishing widows, do not.

Namely, Bennett Spring State Park is



Maryanne Newsom-Brighton and husband Ken Brighton take a break from taking a break.

also a haven for the people who value the calm that accompanies slowly moving water punctuated by a small waterfall and its larger cousin downstream.

In May, Sarah Soptic from Kansas City, Kan., relaxed on one of the benches on the upper end of the stream, reading a good book while her husband, Greg, fished out of sight upstream.

"This is one of my favorite places to sit, looking at the little waterfall. It's just lovely. Quiet and beautiful," Soptic said.

She does not sit on a bench all day. Mornings find her walking the road beyond the playground near the spring.

If she is not vigilant, passersby might wonder at her antics, seeing her exercising

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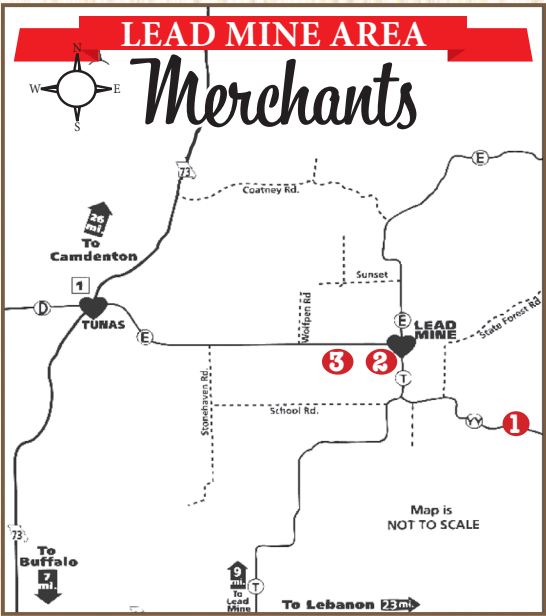
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WIDOWS

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with Tai Chi, waving her arms about, making swimming motions, walking backwards up part of the hill and standing on one leg to sharpen her balance.

"I stop down here when they drive by, but I do this at home too ... I keep waving in my neighborhood and figure who's going to bother a lady that looks crazy and she's swinging her arms around, right?"

Job one on her list is not exercise. It is "just enjoying the peace and quiet and the greenery and whatever animals you see," she said.

She said her evening entertainment was having a cocktail and a bonfire and music from her prim, a stringed instrument that illustrates her and Greg's Croatian descent.

In fact, they both play in a Croatian band back in their Strawberry Hill neighborhood in Kansas City.

She plays her prim indoors to avoid breaking the peacefulness of the park and so her neighbors cannot hear her mistakes. And she leaves it in the cabin

rather than bring it to the stream.

"They don't need to hear that. Sound carries so much. It's like no, no, no," she said.

It is the contrast between her normal environs and the park that makes it enjoyable for her.

"I love this place. It's quiet. I'm a city girl, so this a treat for me to be out here getting my dose of nature," Soptic said.

When it comes to her own dose of nature, Diana Clinard from St. Charles keeps a photographic record.

She brings her Sony DSLR camera when she and her husband, Mike, take the family to Bennett Spring. And she does not wait to arrive in Bennett to begin her photo-taking safari.

"When my husband is driving along, I usually take pictures out the window," Clinard said.

However, it is in the park that she finds a photogenic subject to shoot. She likes "the beauty of it. Pretty to look at," she said.

So while Mike fishes, Clinard also

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LCR Photo/Chris Roden

Sarah Soptic enjoys the park for its beauty and as a break from the city life in Kansas City, Kan.



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WIDOWS

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fishes, fishes for photos in a park that the family thinks outstrips both Meramec and Roaring River state parks and has no limit on what she can take home.

Likewise, Maryanne Newsom-Brighton also makes use of lenses. She uses her phone's camera to document the larger fish her husband,

Ken, catches.

She said she had tried fishing before.

"It's not my thing," Newsom-Brighton said.

However, being in a state park is a natural thing for Newsom-Brighton.

She was the naturalist in McCormick's Creek State Park in Indiana, working in its nature center and outdoor education program.

"That was never a job. It was fun. When we come down here, we tune out to everything else. He fishes, I watch birds, I read ... We love it," Newsom-Brighton said.

"This is my element," she said, surrounded by greenery as Ken fished from the huge rocks surrounding the spring pool.

The other lenses she brought with her were in her binoculars.

She does a lot of bird watching while Ken does his thing. She watched

as barn swallows took mud to build their nests in the eaves of the nearby cabins while blue jays and cardinals also gathered building supplies from nature's lumber yard.

Originally, they traveled from Indiana. When they moved to Vermont, they kept making the trip to Bennett, bringing their son, Casey, along.

And when Casey grew up and moved to North Carolina, they followed, but they kept finding their way back to Bennett Spring where their "to do" list gets shorter.

"From my standpoint, I can read without any guilt. There's nothing else I need to do ... and it's peaceful. And thankfully the weather report was wrong today," Newsom-Brighton said.

"We tried a couple of others years ago, but we keep coming back to this one. This one's familiar," she said.

"We tried Montauk," Ken Brighton

said. "This one is by far the best."

Maryanne told Ken she differentiates herself from the "fishing widows" that stay at home while their husbands enjoy fishing for hours.

"I don't consider myself a fishing widow, per se, because I go with you. I don't feel abandoned over here. I'm as happy as a clam," Newsom-Brighton said.

Ken confirmed she has found her niche.

"There's been times when I have fished until I'm ready to quit, and she'll tell me to 'Go back and fish. I've got another chapter to read,'" Ken said.

Whether it is reading, bird watching or photos taking, Bennett Spring has more to offer than just angling for rainbow trout.

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LCR Photo/Chris Roden


As a former park naturalist in Indiana, Marianne Newsom-Brighton is right at home in Bennett Spring State Park and indulges her bird-watching passion.




LCR Photo/Chris Roden

Diana Clinard from St. Charles, Mo., does not fish, but she makes good use of her Sony camera when she comes to Bennett Spring with her family.


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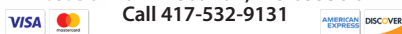
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