

WATERFALLS AND WILDFLOWERS TOUR

This tour was designed to let the visitor travel the back roads and see the wonders of the Hocking Hills from his car. Most of the waterfalls can be seen without getting out or, at most, walking a few feet. However, the route includes the state park system which does require some hiking. The visitor may choose to bypass these if they have been visited in the past or save them for another trip. It is our hope that you will save the map and revisit from time to time.

These waterfalls are beautiful any season of the year, but are most apt to be flowing in the spring. In winter, they will be frozen into magnificent ice formations that defy description. Because of the steepness of the hills in this area, the water runs off quickly after a rain and might soon quit flowing. In late summer there might not be any water flowing over the falls. They are still quite beautiful, however, and we hope that you will enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the deep gorges and rock formations. Because of the intense shade in the gorges, there are few wildflowers near most of the waterfalls, but the roadsides are carpeted with them from early April through October. You may begin and end your tour at any point, but since this Writer lives near Cedar Falls the numbers start there.

1. Cedar Falls This deep gorge is shady and cool. Trilliums and Solomon's Seal bloom here early, before the leaves come out. The parking area has white, yellow and purple violets. It is an easy walk into the gorge over a well-maintained trail with easy slopes. The waterfall is spectacular and runs well into the summer. The trail out has numerous steps, so you may want to exit the way you came down.

2. Ash Cave Also a part of the state park- system, Ash Cave is accessible by an easy half-mile trail which has been paved to make it wheelchair friendly. Ash Cave is the highest waterfall in the county with a sheer drop of 90 feet to a plunge pool. In the winter, a huge ice stalagmite often forms, sometimes reaching the top.

3. Liberty Hill Road Turn right from Ash Cave and take the first road left (just a few hundred feet). This valley has several log cabins in lovely settings. You will go about a mile on fairly level road and then up a steep hill. At the top of the hill, turn around and go back down because you've already missed the waterfall. Although it's only five feet from the road, you can't see it going up the hill. It's easily visible as you go down.

4. State Route 56 Turn left when you return to SR 56. On your left in a few hundred feet you will see a cabin perched high above on a rock. Just past the cabin, look sharply on your left at a little place to pull off and you'll see a waterfall back under the foliage.

5. Chapel Ridge Road Continuing west on SR 56, this section is squeezed in between towering sandstone cliffs on your right and a beautiful little creek on your left which twists and turns in a tortured path among tall dark hemlocks. One feels isolated from the world here. Take time to enjoy it. In a mile or so the gorge opens up and you will see Chapel Ridge Road on your right. Turn here. The road begins to climb almost immediately. On your right the land drops vary sharply into a deep gorge. Just at the head of the gorge, park by the guardrail and walk along the edge. It's too steep to see from your car. This enchanting little waterfall could be easily overlooked if you weren't hunting for it. You can turn around just ahead and return to SR 56, turn right and continue westward.

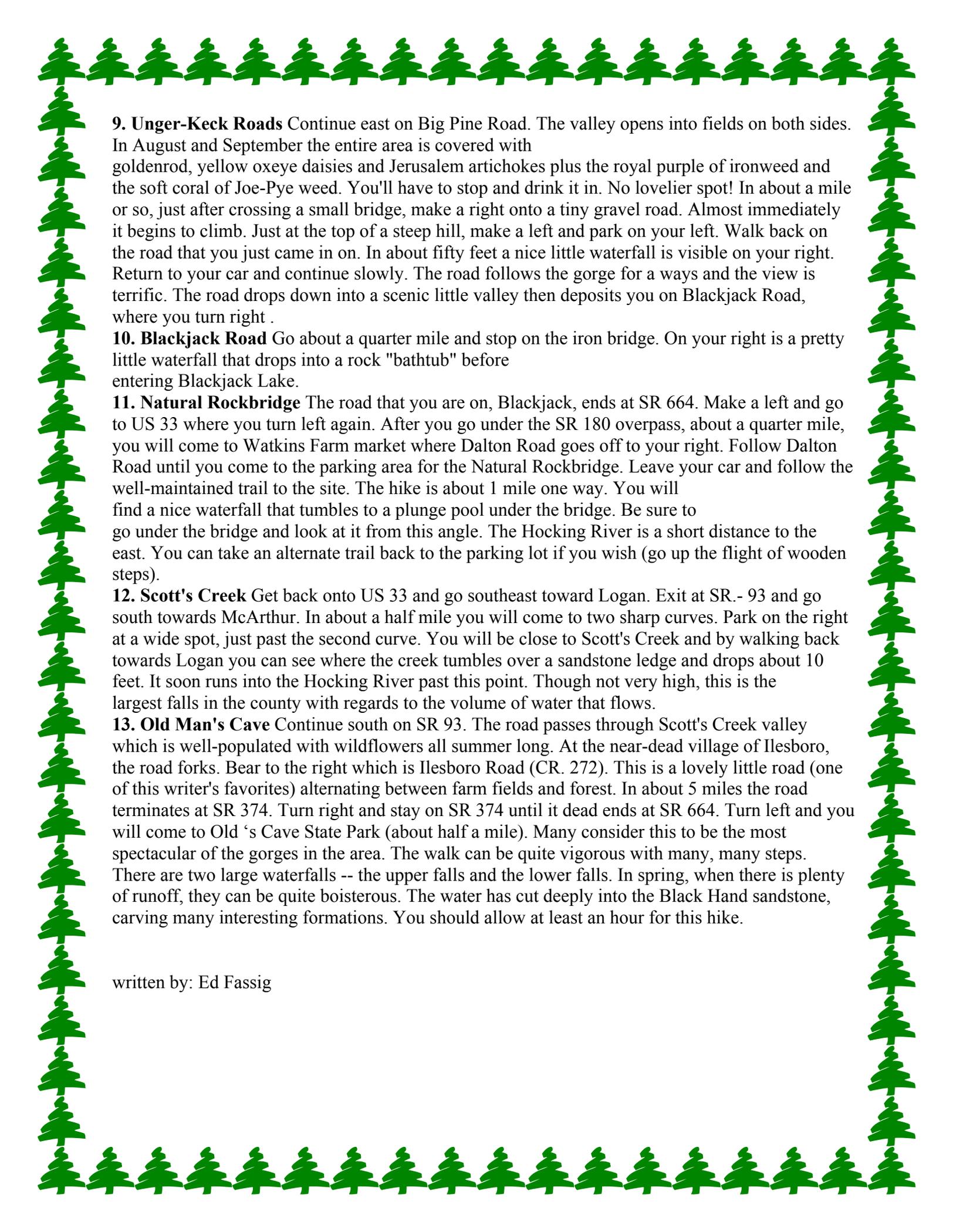


6. Chilcote Road Continue on SR 56 to South Bloomingville where you turn right onto SR 664. In a few hundred feet, turn left on Chilcote Road. In less than a half mile, the main road turns right and is joined by another smaller road coming in from the front. Take the right fork up the hill. The waterfall is on your left, on the steep part of the hill. The beauty of this waterfall has been ruined by litter. Let this serve as a valuable reminder of the toll that mankind can take on nature. Continue on the gravel road. It is a pleasant drive alternating between pine and hardwood forests and open fields dotted with daisies. In the fall one sees oxeye daisies and ironweed. Several small gravel roads join and depart the road you're on, but stay on the one that appears to be most traveled. In a couple of miles you will come to a very good black-topped road. This is Big Pine Road which leads to Conkle's Hollow. (Turn right onto Big Pine Road.)

7. Conkle's Hollow This entails a half-mile walk to a beautiful waterfall at the end of the gorge with two or more located in little side branches. It's an easy walk over a well maintained trail that is mostly level. The steep cliffs, 200 feet high, are spectacular and the highest in Ohio. It's cool and damp, even in the hottest weather. This deep shade doesn't permit flowers except in the very early spring. It will be well worth your time to take this hike if you can.

8. Pine Creek As you leave Conkle's Hollow, turn left on Big Pine. This road follows Pine Creek and crosses it several times. The first couple of miles are through deep woods. About two miles down the road you will see a sign on your right which designates this as a rock-climbing and repelling area. On your left is a small parking lot that was once a horseman's camp. If you are up to a short hike to some spectacular rock formations with a small waterfall, park here. Cross the road and follow the trail across the footbridge over Pine Creek. There are a couple of trees across the trail, but nothing difficult. Once you're across the creek, the valley opens up into a pleasant parkland. Although wooded, the trees are well-spaced and visibility is good. Before you are rock formations balanced on the ridgetop like dominoes. The forest floor is covered with violets, phlox and trilliums. The trail forks here -- take the right fork first and get the left fork on the way back. Only a couple hundred feet ahead a small waterfall trickles down the face of the cliff. The entire hike takes only 15 minutes and covers about a quarter mile. Well worth it!

8a. If you are more adventuresome than most, and suitably shod for a rugged mile long hike, try this. When you reach the cliff straight ahead, follow it to your right. Stay near the base of the cliff and continue in almost a circle until you come to a horseshoe-shaped gorge. Here you will see a 100 foot waterfall tumbling past a large rock shelter. It's a tough scramble, but you can get down to the cave and follow a trail that goes beyond if you choose. The word spectacular gets to be trite after a while, but I think you'll agree that it describes this gorge! Now, go back the way you came for only a hundred feet and look up. You'll see a trail going up to the top of the cliff. Climb up there and you'll find yourself on the Buckeye Trail. Follow it to the left. It follows the top of the cliff for 3/4 of a mile, past the top of another waterfall, Edison Hollow, then drops to the valley and takes you back to your car. You will marvel at the grandeur of huge slump blocks that have fallen from the cliff and narrow "Fat Ladies Squeeze" as the trail winds between them. The entire scene is topped by huge hemlocks and carpeted by moss, giving it an eerie green cast. I must caution that this is rugged and, in places, dangerous. This hike should not be attempted if you are not in good condition and suitably dressed. Those with children aged at least 8 to 10 years should make it okay. I that you will find this hike the highlight of your tour



9. Unger-Keck Roads Continue east on Big Pine Road. The valley opens into fields on both sides. In August and September the entire area is covered with goldenrod, yellow oxeye daisies and Jerusalem artichokes plus the royal purple of ironweed and the soft coral of Joe-Pye weed. You'll have to stop and drink it in. No lovelier spot! In about a mile or so, just after crossing a small bridge, make a right onto a tiny gravel road. Almost immediately it begins to climb. Just at the top of a steep hill, make a left and park on your left. Walk back on the road that you just came in on. In about fifty feet a nice little waterfall is visible on your right. Return to your car and continue slowly. The road follows the gorge for a ways and the view is terrific. The road drops down into a scenic little valley then deposits you on Blackjack Road, where you turn right .

10. Blackjack Road Go about a quarter mile and stop on the iron bridge. On your right is a pretty little waterfall that drops into a rock "bathtub" before entering Blackjack Lake.

11. Natural Rockbridge The road that you are on, Blackjack, ends at SR 664. Make a left and go to US 33 where you turn left again. After you go under the SR 180 overpass, about a quarter mile, you will come to Watkins Farm market where Dalton Road goes off to your right. Follow Dalton Road until you come to the parking area for the Natural Rockbridge. Leave your car and follow the well-maintained trail to the site. The hike is about 1 mile one way. You will find a nice waterfall that tumbles to a plunge pool under the bridge. Be sure to go under the bridge and look at it from this angle. The Hocking River is a short distance to the east. You can take an alternate trail back to the parking lot if you wish (go up the flight of wooden steps).

12. Scott's Creek Get back onto US 33 and go southeast toward Logan. Exit at SR.- 93 and go south towards McArthur. In about a half mile you will come to two sharp curves. Park on the right at a wide spot, just past the second curve. You will be close to Scott's Creek and by walking back towards Logan you can see where the creek tumbles over a sandstone ledge and drops about 10 feet. It soon runs into the Hocking River past this point. Though not very high, this is the largest falls in the county with regards to the volume of water that flows.

13. Old Man's Cave Continue south on SR 93. The road passes through Scott's Creek valley which is well-populated with wildflowers all summer long. At the near-dead village of Ilesboro, the road forks. Bear to the right which is Ilesboro Road (CR. 272). This is a lovely little road (one of this writer's favorites) alternating between farm fields and forest. In about 5 miles the road terminates at SR 374. Turn right and stay on SR 374 until it dead ends at SR 664. Turn left and you will come to Old 's Cave State Park (about half a mile). Many consider this to be the most spectacular of the gorges in the area. The walk can be quite vigorous with many, many steps. There are two large waterfalls -- the upper falls and the lower falls. In spring, when there is plenty of runoff, they can be quite boisterous. The water has cut deeply into the Black Hand sandstone, carving many interesting formations. You should allow at least an hour for this hike.

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