

If you are familiar with the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce's slogan, "Des Moines the surprising place," you probably will agree that Walnut Woods State Park is one of those many surprises. Located just a few miles to the south and west of Iowa's State Capitol Complex, which is surrounded by the city of Des Moines, this state park is made up of 260 acres of Raccoon River bottomland.

The entire valley of which Walnut Woods is a part is due to the work of the Raccoon River and this meandering stream's influence prevails to this day. The park elevation is not that much higher than the normal river level. Close observation of this area will reveal shallow depressions and small ridges. For example, just south of the shelter house area there is a crescent-shaped depression many yards wide and one-hundred yards or more long. These depressions and ridges are scars left by countless floods and river channel changes that have taken place over the years. The river is constantly changing the appearance of Walnut Woods. The most dramatic change can be seen along the southwest border of the park, where the Raccoon River channel runs against the western edge of the park. Constant churning and washing take place removing tons of soil, sand, and gravel every year. This washing is even more drastic during flood periods, such as in March of 1979. No matter how alarming this loss of river bank may seem, it is all part of the natural meandering characteristic of the Raccoon River.

Probably the most surprising aspect of Walnut Woods is the fact that, within its timbered boundaries remains the largest surviving natural stand of black walnut trees in North America. Hence the name!

Only minutes away from the largest city in the state, the recreational opportunities at Walnut Woods are numerous. Some activities which are favored at this park are: FISHING, the Raccoon River is a very productive catfish stream. PICNICKING, there are approximately 80 acres of beautifully shaded picnic areas. Fireplaces and tables are situated close to all six parking lots. BIRD WATCHING, park personnel have identified over 90 different bird species at Walnut Woods from August 1973 thru August 1976. HIKING & NATURE STUDY, there is a self-guided interpretive trail which can be very helpful for school groups. There also are numerous foot trails along the river and around the perimeter of the park. One activity that has grown in popularity in the past few years is CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING, the entire park including 2.5 miles of trails is open to skiing in the winter.

For those who enjoy spending their free time camping in a primitive setting, Walnut Woods has a 32 unit

non-modern camp area with full shade, gravel pads, picnic tables, and fireplaces furnished. Since this park is located near Interstate 35, the camping area receives some trailer traffic, but for the most part the park is not congested and one should be able to relax in the natural setting of this camp area.

One thing that Walnut Woods is known for is the majestic stone and rough-cut wood building located in the center of the park. The lodge was constructed during the 1930's, of Anamosa dolomitic limestone brought in from some eastern Iowa quarry and rough-cut, hand fitted lumber. The quality construction of this building will allow it to endure for many, many years. Since its completion, this facility has been used by the public for a variety of purposes. The most popular activity in recent years has been wedding ceremonies and celebrations. It isn't hard to imagine how beautiful an outdoors ceremony on a warm June afternoon can be. Many couples bring in their own flowers, arches, and decorations. While others prefer to hold their ceremonies next to the natural decoration of a flowering crabapple tree. Other activities for which the lodge may be used include: family reunions, company picnics, holiday parties, business meetings, and many others.

The lodge is offered on a reservation basis and reservations may be made in person at the park office or by telephone. The Walnut Woods lodge is available from May 1st thru December 25th, seven days a week. Only one reservation is taken per day. This entitles the users to the facility from 10:00 AM until 10:30 PM. Further details may be obtained by calling the park office at: 515-285-4502.

CAMPING INFORMATION

Walnut Woods State Park will accommodate 48 camping units. There are electrical hook-ups available for those who prefer the modern touch. Walnut Woods camp sites are classified as non-modern as there are no flush toilets and shower facilities available. All camping permits are issued by the park ranger. For camping rates, see the enclosed insert.

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WALNUT WOODS

State Park



PARK RANGER ADDRESS

RR # 3, Box 133
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Telephone: 515/285-4502



CONSERVATION
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STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA
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DES MOINES, IOWA 50319

WALNUT WOODS

State Park

-  PARK RANGER
-  DRINKING WATER
-  PICNIC AREA
-  PHONE
-  TOILET
-  CAMPING
-  CAMPING WITH ELECTRIC
-  ENCLOSED SHELTER (Rental)
-  FOOT TRAIL
-  BRIDLE TRAIL

