VERNON-DOUGLAS State Nature Preserve protects 730 acres of the rugged, forested knobs of Hardin County. Supporting some of the most mature second-growth forest in the Knobs region, much of this area has been left virtually untouched for the last 100 years. The preserve offers an incredible glimpse of the flora and fauna that have thrived among the high ridges and steep, narrow valleys of the area prior to and since European settlement.

Preservation of this land was the goal of its former owners. Brother and sister Ollie and Eleanor Douglas intended that the forest would never be logged. They desired to restore the farmed valley in Burns Hollow to forest. The land had been in their family since the early 1900's. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, Ollie Douglas applied a number of conservation practices on the land including erosion control and pine plantings in old agricultural fields. In 1972, the Douglas family donated their land to The National Audubon Society. The Audubon Society maintained the area as a nature sanctuary before donating it to the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission in 1992.

Civilization drifts away with every step along the 3.75 mile trail system. The trail begins in Burns Hollow, a north facing hollow with a broad valley in the early stages of succession following past agricultural use. Kudzu, now considered an exotic pest plant, was planted extensively for erosion and weed control. The invasive vine has slowed succession in some areas of the hollow, and is now gradually being eradicated. Virginia pine trees planted by Ollie Douglas are also prevalent in this hollow. Many have fallen due to age and subsidence of the soil. Climbing up toward the dry ridge, the trail passes through steep, forested slopes. Chestnut oak, red oak, and pignut hickory occupy the dry ridge tops. Some of the largest trees have yielded to heavy winds and ice storms. Strewn along the ridge, they offer nutrients and gaps in the canopy for their successors.

Pileated woodpeckers excavate large cavities in the dead snags still standing. Their 'laughing' calls echo down the hillsides. The trail diverges at the ridge top: One side of the loop descends across a gravely slope while the other continues along the ridge. Heading downhill, one finds the path full of fossil-bearing rocks. The cylinder-shaped fragments are fossilized animals called crinoids. These animals lived in a warm sea that covered this area millions of years ago. They are now immortalized in the Mississippian age limestone underfoot.

Soon the trail leads into the cathedral-like atmosphere of Hall Hollow, one of the best examples of acidic mesophytic forest in Kentucky. These forests are characterized by the impressive stands of mature, sugar maple, beech, and tulip poplar found here. The sounds of a stream nearby follow the path through the rich valley. In the spring, a tall canopy of green extends overhead while bright displays of wildflowers can be seen along the slopes and path. Deer and turkey tracks are abundant and quiet hikers may find these elusive creatures foraging ahead. The path winds its way up and out of the valley along the side of a steep hillside.

Some 300 feet above the valley floor, large, mature trees populate the ridge top. This is unusual, for most ridge tops have experienced logging in the past. A short spur along the crest leads to the Pinnacle which in wintertime will reward one with panoramic vistas of the Youngers Creek Valley. Youngers Creek drains the surrounding valleys and leads into the Ohio River, via the Rolling Fork River, near West Point. Meanwhile, the original path continues to wind along the ridge and descends to complete the loop and meet the short passage back to the parking lot.

The preserve is open for passive recreation from sunrise to sunset 365 days a year. Hiking, nature study, and photography are encouraged but please stay on the trail and leave all living and non-living materials as you find them. Horseback riding and bicycles are prohibited. Help us protect Kentucky's natural heritage by packing out all trash and traveling only by foot.

For more information please contact:

KENTUCKY STATE NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION
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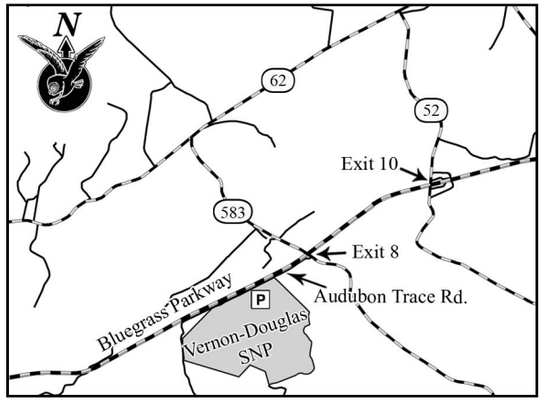
www.naturepreserves.ky.gov

KSNPC ~ November 2005

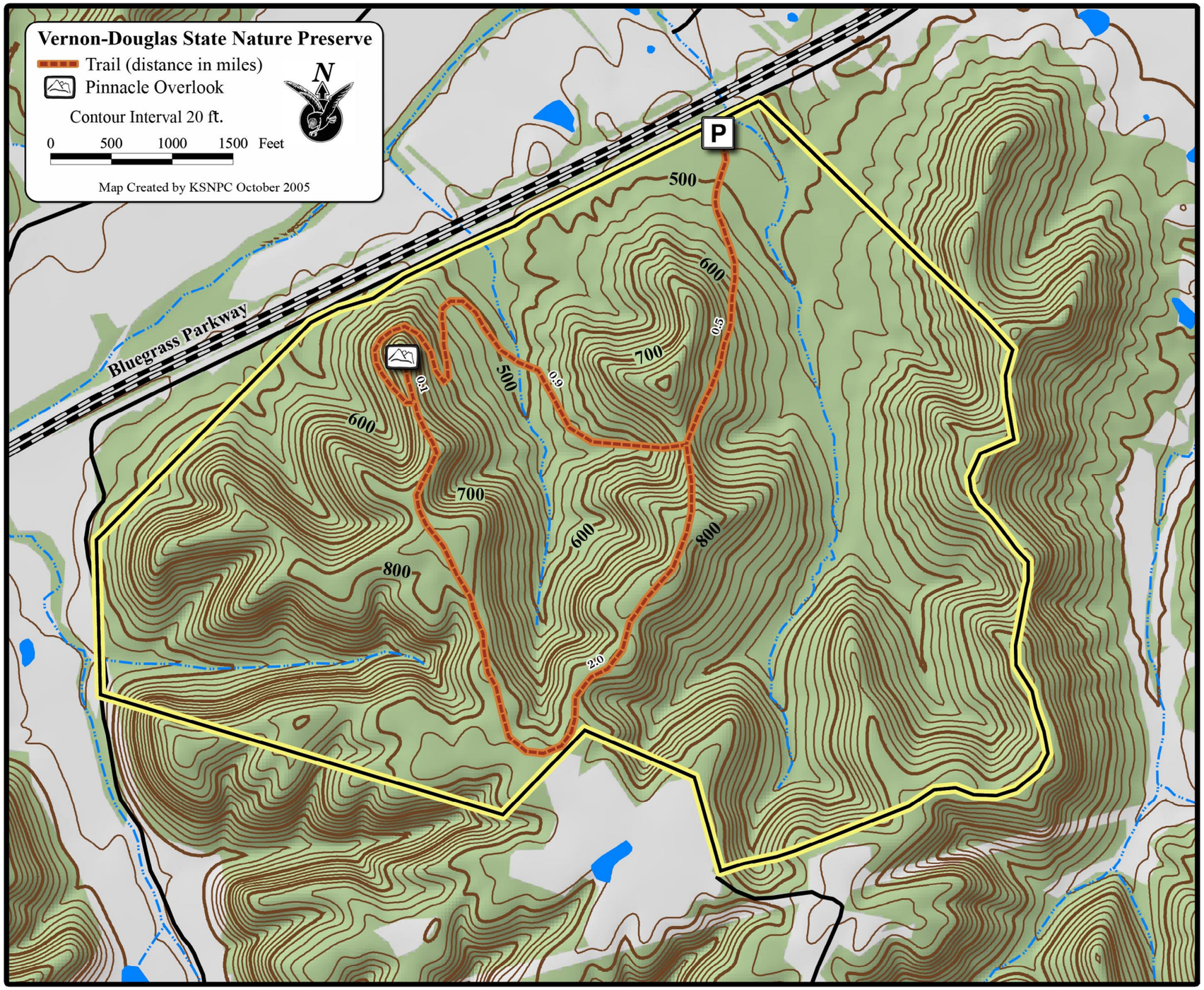
VERNON-DOUGLAS
STATE NATURE PRESERVE

~original artwork by Mary Walter



Nine miles east of Elizabethtown on the Bluegrass Parkway: Westbound Exit 8 (KY 583), turn right on KY 583 and take an immediate right on Audubon Trace Road. Eastbound Exit 10 (KY 52), turn right on to KY 52, turn left on US 62, turn left on KY 583, cross over the Parkway and turn right on Audubon Trace Road. The parking lot for the preserve is approximately 0.5 miles on the left.

By observing the rules for State Nature Preserves, you will be helping to protect Kentucky's natural heritage.

1. Preserves are open sunrise to sunset.
2. Trails are open to foot-traffic only. Please stay on the trail so that other visitors don't get lost following a new path that your feet have made.
3. Horseback riding, bike riding, climbing, and rappelling are not permitted in nature preserves because of their destructive impacts to the trails and natural features. Motorized vehicles are not permitted.
4. Possession of firearms, drugs or alcohol is prohibited.
5. Please leave the things that catch your eye to do the same for the visitor who hikes after you. Collecting, hunting and trapping are prohibited.
6. Camping, picnicking, building fires, radios/tape decks, and pets are not permitted in nature preserves.
7. Please remember to pack out your trash.

THESE RULES ARE ESTABLISHED BY 400 KAR 2:090. ANY PERSON IN VIOLATION OF THIS REGULATION MAY BE LIABLE FOR A CIVIL PENALTY OF $1000 PER DAY AND POSSIBLE CRIMINAL PROSECUTION AS PROVIDED FOR IN KRS 224.