

Standing Cedars – Buffalo Skull Tract

Ginny Gaynor

On the bluffs of the St. Croix River, the 245-acre Buffalo Skull site offers hiker and wildflower photographer much to ooh and ahh over. Prairie smoke, with its feathery seed heads, first drew me here. But exploring in April, hepatica demands attention and wandering the maple basswood forest is a must. A creek tumbles through the adjacent National Park Service land, carving its way along limestone bluffs, before dropping out of view over a waterfall.

Bloom status: They burned the prairie this year!! When I visited April 21, hepatica was blooming in the woods, buttercup dotted the prairie, prairie smoke leaves were greening up along the trail, and skunk cabbage and marsh marigold bloomed along the creek. I'd anticipate prairie smoke seed heads, which are such fun to photograph, should be blowing in the wind by mid May.

Website: www.standingcedars.org

Location: About 3-1/2 miles southwest of Osceola, WI, 2849 55th Ave/Drawbridge Road, Osceola, WI <https://www.google.com/maps/dir//45.2889651,-92.7431654/@45.2920312,-92.7498265,2212m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!4m1!3e0>

NOTE! A portion of 55th Ave/ Drawbridge Road is rough gravel. My little car manages it when its dry but I wouldn't chance it after a heavy rainfall.

Parking and amenities: There is a gravel parking lot and mowed trails. No toilets.

Public status, fee: Standing Cedars is a land conservancy with several parcels open to the public (restrictions on some parcels during deer hunting season). No fee.

When you're there: Take the trail north from the parking lot. Just after you reach the woods, a side trail (not shown on the map) leads through an open gate and here the woodland spring wildflowers thrive. If you stay on this side trail, you'll eventually (in ¼ to ½ mile) descend to a beautiful limestone bluff at the top of a waterfall, a very magical spot with marsh marigold and hepatica blooming in spring. Back on the main trail, continue north into the open prairie. Both sides of the trail have buttercup, prairie smoke, and lupine in spring. If you continue the loop trail, you're rewarded with more wildflowers the western woodlands.