

Tribbett's Woods

Near the small Jennings County community of Commiskey stands Tribbett's Woods, one of the few remaining examples of old growth "flat woods" in Indiana today. This 33 acre grove was stewarded by the Tribbett family since 1857. In 1980, the last two members of this lineage, Ida and Clifford Tribbett, were still living across the field just east of the woods. Born around the turn of the twentieth century, this brother and sister, neither of whom had married, had known this woods all of their lives.

In 1980 they were no longer farming, but Clifford still milked one cow and Ida churned the cream and made butter. She also kept a small flock of ducks and geese and raised a garden. An outhouse was still in use and a pendulum clock ticked off the minutes.

Conversations often turned to the woods. What would happen to it after they were gone? The tillable land and buildings would go to the family who

had taken over the farming when Clifford retired, but the woods was a different matter. Even though they were not "well off," they did not want to sell it. They would have preferred to make a gift to The Nature Conservancy.

Unfortunately, Clifford passed away before the woods changed ownership, but Ida continued to live in the home for several more years. She was at peace knowing that the stately beech and chestnut oaks would be spared and the money was there if she needed it.

The Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy transferred ownership to Oak Heritage Conservancy in 2005, in accord with its policy to divest some of its properties to local land trusts that can better monitor them. We are delighted to steward this land, as it is an outstanding example of the "flat woods" that were common in southeast Indiana in pre-settlement days.

The term "flat woods" refers to the table-

like terrain of this plant community. These woods are wet in spring and dry in fall, and only certain plants can thrive in these harsh conditions. The woods are alternately wet and droughty because their soils prevent spring rains from percolating down into the ground and then dry out quickly in the heat of summer. The soils were formed over thousands of years, from wind blown loess, laid over till from the Illinoian glacier.

Beech, swamp oaks, red maples, tuliptree, and sweet gum dominate this forest, and a special array of wildflowers, ferns, sedges, and shrubs grow in the understory.



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Glimpse history.

Walk inside this forest and feel what Indiana was like when European settlers arrived. Forests like this one covered over 85 percent of the state. Tribbett's Woods is an old growth forest, meaning that it has never been logged or cleared. Many of these trees are over 250 years old, and this place has been a forest since the last glaciers receded 10,000 years ago.

Listen for woodpeckers.

The pileated woodpecker and many others call this forest home because there are plenty of insects living in the fallen or standing dead trees.



Think about what's below your feet.

Below your feet are grayish-white clay soils that are poorly drained. The ground sits wet after rains, but becomes hard as brick in a drought. These soils make for tough growing conditions, so only certain species can survive in a flatwoods like this. A unique combination of trees grows here – these are all species that are common in some part of southern Indiana, but they rarely grow together. Look for beech, sweet gum, red maple, white oak, and swamp chestnut oak.



Points of Interest



Educational Sign



Observation



Parking



Trailhead

Streams

Trails

Property Lines Light

Habitat Type

Access

Hay Field

Immature Forest

Mature Forest

No Access

Old Growth Forest

Open/Meadow Area

Open Water

Pollinator Habitat

Restoration Area-Forest

Restoration Area-Pollinator

Native Wildflowers

0 0.02 0.04 0.08 Miles

