

## JOHN J. AUDUBON TRAIL

12-Mile Circular

Rated for: Scouts and Venturers

### Historical Note

This is a 12-mile circular wilderness trail in the Fredericktown section of the Mark Twain National Forest in Ste. Genevieve County. The trail is established as a memorial pilgrimage hike through the area which the great naturalist and artist visited on his wide-ranging bird collecting trips while living in Ste. Genevieve.

Audubon came to Ste. Genevieve in early 1810 with his friend and business partner Ferdinand Rozier to establish a mercantile business. Eventually the partnership was dissolved and Audubon returned to Kentucky. While in Ste. Genevieve and during two summertime visits to the St. Charles, Missouri area in 1837 and 1839, Audubon collected and painted birds for his seminal work *Birds of America*. Audubon returned to Missouri in later years and left St. Louis on April 16, 1843, aboard Pierre Chouteau's fur trading boat *Omega* for a trip to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. On this western trip, Audubon collected specimens and made sketches for another major work *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*.

A display of birds mounted by Audubon may be seen in the Ste. Genevieve city museum. This collection includes a Scarlet Tanager, which is pictured on the trail emblem. The home in which Audubon and his family stayed during their summertime visits to St. Charles in 1837 and 1839 is still standing. It is the Dr. William J. McElhiney "Spring Bend" home, located 4 miles from St. Charles on the South Bottom Road.

### John J. Audubon Descriptions

The trailhead is at the ford where Forest Road (FR) 2199 crosses Bidwell Creek (N 37 degrees 43.264 W 90 degrees 10.516). The trailhead is 20 miles from either S-F Ranch or Ste. Genevieve. It can be reached from S-F by taking Highway 67 to Knob Lick, east on DD to OO, south on OO to T, east on T to FR 2199, north on FR 2199-4.6 miles to Bidwell Creek. Directions from the St. Louis metro area: I-55 south to State Highway 32 (2<sup>nd</sup> Ste. Genevieve exit), west on Highway 32 (0.2 mile), south on County Road B, east on County Road WW 5.7 miles to Bidwell Creek Road (street sign only), right turn on Bidwell Creek Road 0.5 mile, right turn at *Cold Water Club*, at approximately 0.4 mile turn left on FR 2199 (gravel road). This turn is at a creek crossing and can be impassable for low vehicles. Turn right upon crossing the stream and follow this road (FR 2199) as it curves to the west for approximately 6.5 miles. Both approaches to the trailhead are shown on the area map, which is distributed with the trail map.

The approach from the west is recommended if you are apprehensive about the stream crossing. Bidwell Creek Road (FR 2199) is quite steep in places and may be impassable when covered with ice or snow. Also, watch for flash floods in heavy rainstorms. Be sure to park cars safely above possible high water level at the trailhead.

The trail is all on public land and in very rugged terrain. Hikers will encounter about 3000 vertical feet of ups and downs on the 12-mile route. Much of the route is along perennial creeks, which require crossing. The open glades along these creeks offer trail camping possibilities during much of the year. Creek water must be purified before use. The trail may be hiked in one day, or over a two-day period.

Care must be taken when following the markers, as local ATV riders tend to initiate new, unmarked trails throughout the area. It is recommended that hikers carry both a Womack 7.5' quadrangle map ("topo") and a National Forest map of the area and a compass (essential). Those tracking their route with the use of a GPS may also wish to "bag a geocache". These are placed by private individuals and contain miscellaneous assorted items for trade (no contraband). Coordinates to one such cache are N 37 degrees 43.170 W 090 degrees 10.940.

Getting lost in the area can be serious, especially in cold weather. Groups should stay together. In warm weather watch out for poisonous snakes and use insect repellent for chiggers and ticks (28% DEET or greater). For safety reasons, smoking and hunting by hikers is prohibited, although this area is opened to sportsmen during the hunting season and should be avoided at that time period. Great care must be exercised with fire; campfires must be dead out before you leave them. Do not bury trash; carry all refuse out with you; do not litter campsites or trail; do not cut or hack any standing trees or foliage (*low impact*).

The trail is marked with 2" x 6" white paint blazes. Please do not take short cuts; this will create a confusing pattern of trails (note ATV remark!).



