



Hikers walk over a footbridge that crosses a stream in the Old Man's Cave area of Hocking Hills State Park in south central Ohio.

KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal photos

Natural spectacle

Hocking Hills State Park near Logan one of Ohio's signature attractions

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LOGAN:

Ohio has a secret, an enchanted spot in the woods where folks can immerse themselves in a stunning panorama without having hopped on a jet or driven clear across the country. It's miles from any expressway, but still relatively easy to reach.

Tucked away in the Appalachian foothills between Columbus and Athens, Hocking Hills State Park is one of the Buckeye State's signature scenic attractions, a place worth seeing in every season just to take in the different displays of nature's majesty.

Visitors can see an impressive collection of waterfalls that turn into magnificent scepters with winter's icy touch, or wander unhurried along a forest path jeweled with wildflowers on a

PLACES TO STAY

No shortage of cozy accommodations in Hocking Hills. Page G4

dewy spring morning. They can hang out beneath palatial sandstone overhangs that shave away blistering degrees from the hottest summer days. Or they can perch atop a cliff to view the dazzling crown that autumn places atop a breathtaking gorge.

All along, park guests are never far from feeling they have the wide-open gorges and fresh-air forests all to themselves.

"A lot of people think of it as their own special place; it becomes their secret," said Randie Adam, executive director of the Hocking Hills Tourism Association.

When the visitors are tallied, though, it adds up to quite a number of people who are in on the secret. Hocking Hills attracts more than 1.5 million visitors annually, said Pat Quackenbush, the park's naturalist and spokesman.

Yet with so many natural spectacles spread out across the park,



Inside of Rock House, a tunnel corridor midway up a 150-foot cliff in Hocking Hills State Park.

he said, there's more than enough personal space for all outdoors enthusiasts. While the secret continues to spread, the recent boom in guest accommodations hasn't put a strain on the park or eroded the region's natural allure.

The park's picturesque tapestry is interwoven with peculiar folkways; several of its landmarks

carry curious misnomers from settler days.

For instance, a grove of trees inspired pioneers to christen one popular site as Cedar Falls, but those trees were later found to be hemlocks. Also, two of the park's best-known sites - Old Man's Cave and Ash Cave - aren't real