

Wild

Little southern Ohio cities worth a look, too

Continued from Page G1

deep canyons and striking rim rock cliffs with up to 200 feet of exposed rock in places.

The rock gets its distinctive reddish color from an iron oxide called limonite. It also helped cement sand and pebbles into hard conglomerate rock.

The heavily forested gorge is actually a combination of lands starting with the Red River Gorge Geological Area, along with adjoining Natural Bridge State Resort Park and the federally protected Clifty Wilderness that covers 13,300 acres.

A 19.4-mile portion of the Red River from state Route 746 to Schoolhouse Branch itself is part of the federal Wild and Scenic River System.

The gorge, a National Natural Landmark, is also known for its unusual vegetation.

Motor tour

One way to see the gorge, especially for first-time visitors, is to get a detailed map and do a drive-it-yourself circular motor tour that will cover about 50 miles.

There are more than 60 miles of trails, some leading to specific arches and some connecting with other trails to create longer hiking and backpacking options.

Most of the 31 trails are short. In all, 36 miles of the trail loops - they are all named and numbered - have been designated the Red River Gorge National Recreational Trail.

The longest trail is a 12-mile section of Sheltoewe Trace National Recreational Trail that runs southwest to northeast for 269 miles through the national forest. Part of that trail winds through the Red River country.

Back-country camping is permitted away from trails, roads and rock shelters.

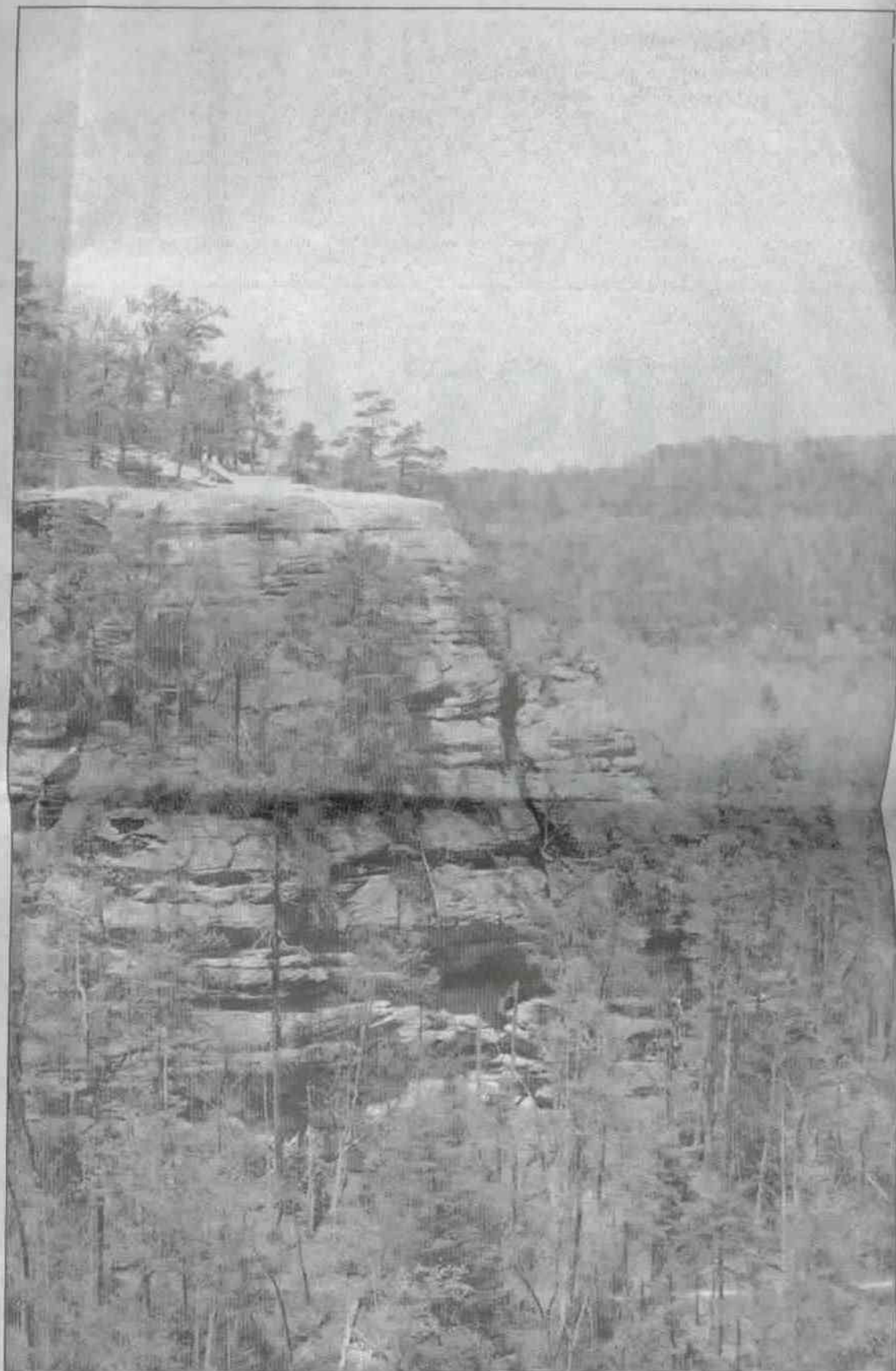
The Clifty Wilderness has an additional 20 miles of trails.

The gorge - it is about 50 minutes southeast of Lexington and six hours from Akron - is also a top attraction for climbers with its cliffs and rocky outcroppings.

There are plenty of archaeological sites in the gorge. Visitors are asked not to disturb any archaeological sites discovered. It is illegal to remove any artifacts from the gorge.

Plan your trip

The Red River Gorge is big



BOB DOWNING/Akron Beacon Journal

The sights reward you for your effort to get to them in the big and rugged Red River Gorge Geological area in Kentucky.

and then descend into a moist cove to the base of the arch.

Nearby is the D. Boon Hut Trail that will take you to a fenced off hut under an overhang that is reputed to have been used by Kentucky's favorite son.

Some of the arches are big and impressive. Others are small

The gorge became a tourist attraction by 1900, when the Kentucky Railroad brought tourists from Lexington and Louisville.

The area also has a history of mining, lumbering and oil drilling.

For more information, contact the U.S. Forest Service's

the arts and the environment.

The trips are designed to provide authentic, off-the-beaten path experiences for visitors in the once-thriving Hocking Valley coal region.

There are one-day guided tours of the Little Cities on July 10 and Aug. 14. The tours begin in Nelsonville and then head