

Paddy Creek: Paddy Creek Wilderness and the Big Piney Trail

Located in the Mark Twain National Forest in the middle-south section of Missouri, the Big Piney Trail is an absolute gem. This trail has something for the overnight backpacker and/or ambitious day hikers.

Once used as a wilderness training area for troops from Fort Leonardwood, this loop trail offers either a two-day hike of a short eight miles or an invigorating seventeen-mile roundtrip. Thanks to some beautiful campgrounds and the lovely Big Piney Creek, this trail also lends itself to a nice overnight, eight/eight-mile split.

It has lots of wildlife, including deer, raccoon and even black bear.

The trailhead is located at Roby Lake, Missouri, near Roby, Missouri. Use this Google link (<https://goo.gl/maps/ni9Lk26aAQqDkmA96>) to put a pin in the map and find your way there. As you travel on Hwy 17, watch for a National Forest sign that reads "Paddy Lake Trailhead." This is where you want to go.

After passing the sign, go down the Paddy Creek Trailhead road (on the map it is Forestry Tr 274A) to Roby Lake and the circular drive trailhead parking.

We will meet at the circular drive at on Saturday, October 14, 2023, at 10:00 am. We will be on trail by NO LATER than 11:00 am, so please try to be on time.

Once we are ready to go, the actual "trail" trailhead is a short walk back up the same dirt road you just drove down - Look for a red metal gate on the right - here the hike begins.

This trail is poorly blazed, with minimum signage as well, so stay with the group.

If you would like, here is a map (here is an excellent one - http://www.ouachitamaps.com/picture_library/Paddy%20Creek/Paddy%20Creek%20Map.jpg) that, paired with a compass, should serve you well.

You can also find this trail listed on Alltrails (<https://www.alltrails.com/explore/trail/us/missouri/big-piney-trail>).

The Trail

In describing this hike, we will refer to the waypoints listed on the map linked above, as well as the mileage that you will find (give or take) if you are using something like Alltrails.

After you enter through the red gate, you will traverse an open field, move through a small stand of trees and cross a dirt road to register at the trailhead box. Continue North on the trail, and shortly, you will arrive at the junction of the North and South loop. We will take the South loop, so turn right at the junction, waypoint 003 on the map.

At around four (4) miles, at waypoint 006 on the map, go right, following the sign "Paddy Creek Campground." From here you will continue along the top of a beautiful ridgeline for about 2 miles.

The trail then plunges down to the junction of Little and Big Paddy Creek, just before waypoint 007. This is a great place to stop, with a small but very swimmable pool just to your left.

Be careful at this juncture - this is perhaps one of only two places on this trail where you might get lost. Although the trail goes down to Little Paddy Creek (look carefully at the map, just before waypoint 007) you do not cross Little Paddy Creek. Instead, be sure to follow the trail as it turns sharply to the right, then cross Big Paddy Creek at waypoint 007.

Once across Big Paddy Creek, the trail climbs over a hill and descends to Paddy Creek Rd, waypoint 008 on the map. Turn right on this road for the Paddy Creek Campground.

This is a developed campground (with room for some 23 tents) where we will spend the night. Relax at the campground, and even take a dip in the clear, cool Big Piney Creek.

The following morning, October 15, 2023, we will cross Big Piney Creek. Here is the second place that you could get lost on this trail. When you cross the creek, waypoint 009 on the map, look carefully for a cut in the trees on the other side. In the past, it has been marked by a small piece of pink plastic ribbon tied to a tree, but don't count on this to find the cut.

Once you find the cut, continue hiking parallel to the river (on your right) and a steep hillside/bluff rising up on your left. We affectionately call this section of the trail "the rose garden" because it is thick and overground with brambles and thorns.

Once you round the southwestern tip of the bluff, you will climb up to a great view of the whole wilderness (waypoint 010 on the map).

Enjoy the next two miles of the trail as it moves around a gentle ridge and even begins to descend back down towards Little Paddy Creek. The trail crosses the road to the Paddy Creek Campground (waypoint 011), and at waypoint 012 on the map, the trail is joined by the connecting trail that comes up from Little Paddy Creek. Shortly thereafter (at waypoint 013), the trail splits; go left to stay on the trail.

After point 013 the trail begins a series of “up/down” traverses, four (4) in all. Some of these will have water, and the last one, point 014 on the map, has a beautiful little waterfall and pool, perfect to rest up for the final push. When you cross this creek, the trail will turn downstream (going right) and shortly thereafter split, going either roughly straight or hard to the left and uphill. Take the hard left and go uphill. Look for the small (add to it please!) rock cairn on the left at this trail junction.

From that point forward, it is an easy walk back to the trailhead box, across the dirt road, and back to the red gate.

Remember to pack it in, pack it out, and walk worthy through this little hidden gem of a hike!