

A Natural Bridge in the Midwest?

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Most people, when they hear the term "Natural Bridge" have a vision of an arch in say, Nevada, bare as a Mexican Hairless Dog, and void of any growth. It is sort of in contrast to a wire-haired terrier, with its generous growth of hair.

Maybe this example is a little flawed, but when you look at the photo accompanying this article, perhaps it is not such a strange comparison. This Natural Bridge is covered with fern, moss, saplings, and a dozen other growths common to the woods in Sauk County. And rightly so, for this Natural Bridge is right here in amazing Sauk County, only a few miles from Baraboo or Sauk-Prairie.

From the County Seat, take Highway 12 south over the bluffs. Across from the remains of the Badger Ordnance Plant, turn West onto County Highway C. Stay for about ten miles or so with what becomes a rather winding road. Watch then for Natural Bridge signs between Leland and Denzer. The bridge is in a wooded area a short walk from the parking lot.

Here the comparison to the hairy dog becomes evident, for the huge and ponderous arch is covered with plant growth. It is a living anomaly of nature which escaped the landscaping effect of the glacier, which stopped in the Devils Lake area some 10,000 years ago. Much of Sauk County was spared, and is called the Driftless Area.

The rather small 530 acre state park there is administered by its much larger big brother, the Devils Lake State Park, and is open for skiers in winter. The main feature of the park is the rather large Natural Bridge. The arch opening is some twenty five feet high and 35 feet in length. A carbon dating analysis of the floor shows it to be one of the oldest sites for man in the entire Midwest.

This significant addition to the State Park System also features a self-guided nature trail through the largely Oak woods, with native prairie grass and wildflowers. Birds are plentiful in the two mile hike. Facilities are limited, though there is what the park commission calls a non-flush or pit restroom.

First written mention of the site was by the Old Settlers Association in 1874, after which there are mentions of occasional visits from school picnics and class visits, as well as old May Day and other holiday celebrations.

The area was greatly improved with its designation as a State Park in 1973, but it is still a generally quiet and sparsely used area. It is a great place to reflect on its 10,000 year human history, and to speculate on those who came before us. It is another of the many geologic treasures of Sauk County.

An Early Photo of Natural Bridge in Sauk County

Sauk County Historical Society

