

About Wandering Rock State Natural Area

Enjoy an outing at Wandering Rock, a 162-acre nature preserve protected by Mississippi Valley Conservancy for you—and for the rich diversity of plant and animal life that makes this landscape their home. This remarkable preserve is a sanctuary for rare and imperiled habitats, including oak woodland, prairies, cliffs, and oak and hickory forest. These native ecosystems support species like the state endangered peregrine falcon, the amethyst shooting star, migrating songbirds, and native pollinators—many of which face increasing pressure from climate change and habitat loss.

In 2025, The Nature Conservancy donated this land to Mississippi Valley Conservancy to implement a long-term vision to restore and strengthen its natural resilience. Through pro-active habitat management efforts such as removing invasive species and conducting prescribed burns, Mississippi Valley Conservancy prioritizes the health of native plant communities and the wildlife they sustain. Wandering Rock offers a haven not just for nature, but for people—offering opportunities to hike, hunt, observe wildlife, and experience the beauty and tranquility of this bluffland overlooking the Mississippi River. Wandering Rock stands as a living legacy of conservation—made possible by people like you, who believe in safeguarding wild places for generations to come. Community members can support the effort to restore these rare habitats by volunteering at work parties or donating to support the long-term care of this special place.

Public Access

In order to protect native habitat, dogs and bikes are NOT allowed on this property.

Visitors must follow our Recreational Use Policy as well as all federal and state laws and local ordinances. Use the QR code or link below to see the policy:



MississippiValleyConservancy.org/resources/policies

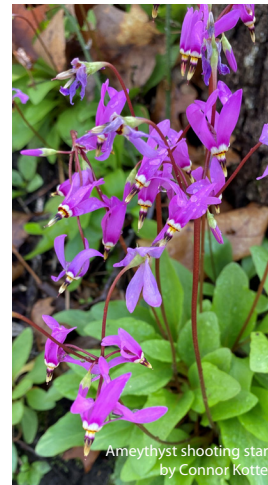
Please respect landowners near Conservancy tracts by observing property boundaries.



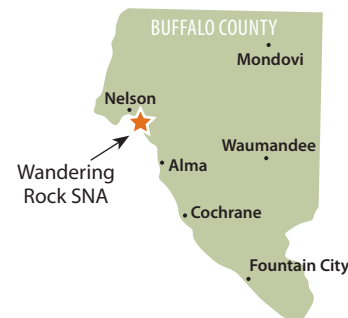
Peregrine falcon by
Dianne Mollers

Some wildlife seen at Wandering Rock

- ☐ Peregrine falcon
- ☐ Red-headed woodpecker
- ☐ Ovenbird
- ☐ Butternut
- ☐ Amethyst shooting star
- ☐ Bald eagle
- ☐ Ruffed grouse
- ☐ Gray treefrog
- ☐ Indigo bunting
- ☐ Wild columbine



Amethyst shooting star
by Connor Kotte



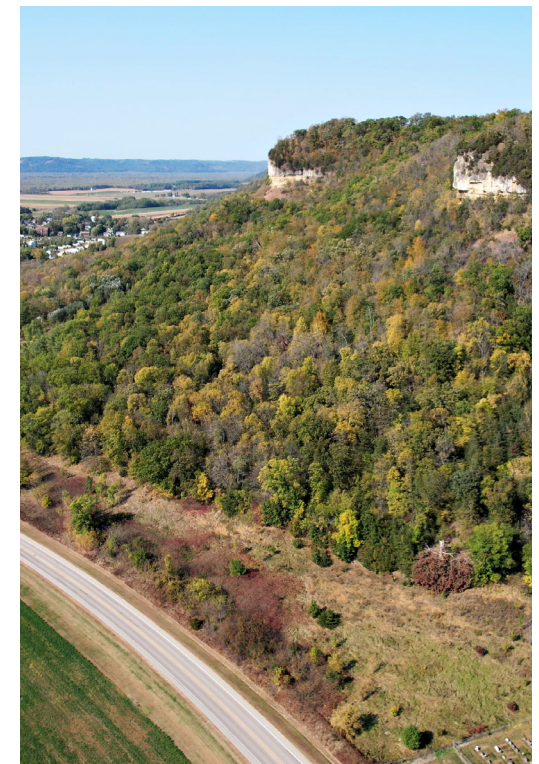
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TRAIL MAP

Wandering Rock State Natural Area

US Hwy 35, Nelson, WI



Key to Symbols

- P** Parking
- Main trail
- 1** Point of interest
- Tract boundary
- == Road

Please respect landowners near Conservancy tracts by observing property boundaries, and carry out what you carry in. **Both trails are moderately difficult.**

Wandering Rock State Natural Area (just south of Nelson, WI)

Directions from La Crosse: Follow US Hwy 35 N from La Crosse toward Nelson for approximately 67 miles to the trailhead, located just south of the Nelson Cemetery on the right side of the road. **Directions from Nelson:** Drive 0.7 miles southeast on US Hwy 35 S. The trailhead will be just past the Nelson Cemetery on the left. **GPS Coordinates:** 44°24'44.3"N 91°59'33.8"W

Trail 1 1.2 miles roundtrip Meander through the woods along a rustic trail as it makes its way to an overlook at the top of the bluff to view Lake Pepin to the north and Alma to the south.

Trail 2 1.6 miles roundtrip Become immersed in the sights and sounds of the woods as you head up to the top of the bluff. Then continue to trek south for a panoramic view of the Mississippi River Valley and a bluff prairie.



Scan for GPS
directions:



Base map: USDA 2022