

The History

The Branson area was first homesteaded during the mid-1800's. More than one settler laid a claim on this land which was prized because of its beautiful view, and the access to the waters of what was then the White River (now Lake Taneycomo). One of the original claims to this land was settled as one of the homesteaders traded it to another for "a mule and a barrel of molasses."

One of the highlights of the Lakeside Forest Wilderness Area is a cave, known as Old Soldier's Cave, which served as a hideout during the Civil War. The cave is in the lower levels of the 250 foot high Branson Heights bluff along Lake Taneycomo, and can still be reached today along the Taneycomo Trail. The cave consists of a single oval-shaped room about 20 x 35 feet in size, but high enough to stand up in. During Civil war times, local gunsmith Calvin Gaylor, age 38, sought refuge in the cave for several months rather than "helping the other side" during the war, when there was a real threat of being forced into service. His wife Cassandra would make the dangerous trip to the cave after dark to bring him food and supplies.

Wilbur Winchester built a vacation home on the property using local rock in 1911. Upon his death in 1933, the home and approximately 90 acres were sold to Lyle Owen, a 27 year old Branson native, for \$14 an acre. Dr. Owen would spend many years as a professor of Economics at the University of Tulsa. He moved his parents to the site, and later retired there himself in the 1970's, where he lived until the late 1990's. Unfortunately, a fire in October 2015 destroyed the original home pictured below.



About Lakeside Forest

The City of Branson acquired the original 133 acres of what is now Lakeside Forest Wilderness Area from Dr. Lyle Owen in 1998. The remaining seven acres, including the home and barn area, were acquired from the Owen family in 2010. Located at the corner of Highway 76 and Fall Creek Road, the park offers a welcome reprieve from busy everyday lives. Since the area was acquired, there have been significant changes made to the park. The addition and extension of trails throughout the park have created a large trail network that offer many different levels of difficulty ranging from easy to difficult. Other recent improvements to the park include a nature themed playground that was installed near the parking lot area. This playground is the first of its kind in the Branson area. Additional improvements include a pavilion, located adjacent to the playground, providing a perfect family location for a picnic. A covered porch area has also been added near the original home site that utilizes existing stone columns from the home.



The Trails

Stonewall Trail circles the property where Dr. Owen made his home in this Ozark Mountain paradise. Much of this trail parallels the stone walls built by Dr. Owen, as well as more areas where the wall was never completed. The highlight of this trail is the view of the White River Valley and Lake Taneycomo from the Bluff Gardens (notice the College of the Ozarks on the far side). Also note the hand-built retaining walls which hold the Bluff Gardens. These were filled bucket-by-bucket, carried up by Dr. Owen and his kids, with the rich soil from the bottom lands. This trail is considered easy in difficulty.

Owen Drive Trail is wide and fairly level, and leads directly to the Owen Homestead. In fact, this was the driveway to the home, back when it was occupied by Dr. Owen, despite the fact that he rarely owned or used a car. This trail continues past the homestead area and out the south end of the yard until it meets the Ridge Trail. A portion of this trail leads past the hand-crafted stone walls, built by Lyle Owen and his family in the 1930's. This trail is considered easy in difficulty.

Lakeside Forest Wilderness Area



Located at the corner of Fall Creek Rd & Hwy 76

The park is open daily from sunrise to sunset.



For local information, contact **Branson Parks & Recreation Department**

1501 Branson Hills Parkway
Branson, MO 65616
417-335-2368

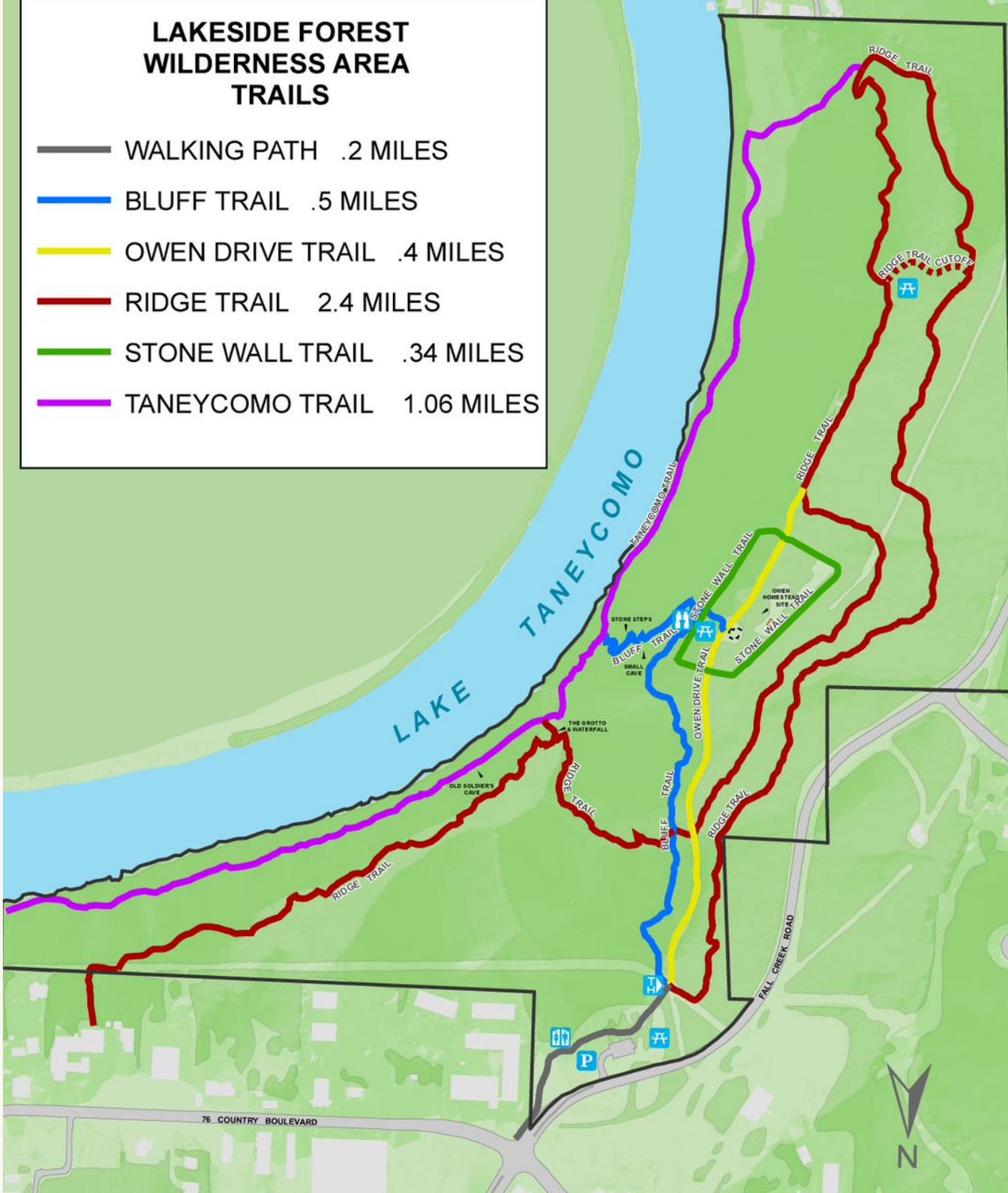
www.bransonparksandrecreation.com



Use the QR code to launch an Interactive Trail Map

LAKESIDE FOREST WILDERNESS AREA TRAILS

- WALKING PATH .2 MILES
- BLUFF TRAIL .5 MILES
- OWEN DRIVE TRAIL .4 MILES
- RIDGE TRAIL 2.4 MILES
- STONE WALL TRAIL .34 MILES
- TANEYCOMO TRAIL 1.06 MILES



Bluff Trail starts through an upland forest where mature trees dominate and the fairly level trail makes for an easy walk. As the trail reaches the base of the Bluff Gardens and the Owen Homestead, a set of 338 hand-lain stone steps lead down toward Lake Taneycomo. Fairly steep in design, this part of the trail takes some agility, along with a good pair of lungs and comfortable walking shoes. The steps were built from August 1936–August 1938 by Mr. Owen, his brothers and some friends. Inscribed in mortar on a step near the bottom are the building dates and the names of the workers, along with this testament of their hard work, “Let those who tread here not forget, that these steps were not made of stone and mortar alone, but of sweat, blood, and agony.”



Ridge Trail winds its way through forest and glades, making a large loop back to the Owen Drive and Bluff Trail. This fairly level trail best suits families and is considered easy to moderate in difficulty. Oak-hickory forest makes up much of the woodlands, and during the spring, blooming Eastern Redbuds and Flowering Dogwoods enhance the landscape with their striking contrast to the stark forest. Also, note the large cedar-like trees with multiple trunks called Ashe’s Junipers. A new addition to the trail can be located behind Branson United Methodist Church. This portion of the trail is considered moderate in difficulty.

Lake Taneycomo Trail provides a more difficult hike through rougher terrain right along Lake Taneycomo. Accessed by taking the steps down from the Bluff Trail or connecting from the Ridge Top Trail, this trail includes the Grotto, a large rock cutout which forms a spectacular waterfall during rainy periods. Continuing north, you should look out for the two caves located within the Wilderness Area, including Old Soldier’s Cave. This trail is considered moderate to difficult. **Pictured Below:** Old Soldier’s Cave

