

Donald County Park lies in the Driftless Area

Welcome to Donald County Park. Here you'll spend time in lands shaped only by wind and water, never by glacial ice.

WHAT IS THE DRIFTLESS AREA?

The term "Driftless Area" refers to the 10,000-square-mile region in southwestern Wisconsin left untouched by four glacial advances and recessions over several million years. The Driftless Area also extends into parts of Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois.

The region's name derives from *drift*, the word for the deep layer of sediments—silt, clay, sand, gravel and boulders—carried by glaciers, then left behind as glaciers retreat. Unlike surrounding Upper Midwest lands, this region lacks glacial deposits, hence the name *Driftless*.

A DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPE

In the Driftless Area, streams carve into rock surfaces, resulting in rugged topography and deep valleys. These features often made travel and hunting difficult for Native Americans and early settlers. Erosion-resistant rock towers and outcroppings dot the landscape, along with numerous caves and overhanging rock formations that sheltered hunters and travelers for thousands of years. Instead of the lakes and wetlands that characterize nearby glaciated areas, here springs and cold, clear streams abound. Streams deposit rich soil in the valleys, inviting homesteading and agriculture.

- ▲ Donald County Park has vistas of the steep wooded hills, deep valleys, farms and winding streams of the Driftless Area.
- ▶ Several of the park's overhanging rock formations and small caves show evidence of temporary early human use.
- ▼ Rugged terrain with rock outcroppings along a park trail. Throughout the park, rock formation micro-climates promote growth of exquisite ferns, lichens and mosses.



GLACIERS NEVER COVERED THIS AREA

Why didn't glacial ice scour and profoundly alter this land? One theory: the broad lowlands containing Lakes Superior and Michigan deflected southerly flowing ice.



The most recent glacier stopped near present-day Verona 10,000 years ago. Although it would have been visible from the park's highest points, the glacier didn't cover this area. As a result, Donald County Park's topography displays typical Driftless Area characteristics.

WIND AND WATER: THE FORCES AT WORK

About 550 to 450 million years ago, shallow continental seas laid down marine deposits which hardened into sedimentary rocks—dolomite, limestone and sandstone. For millions of years—continuing today—wind and water have slowly eroded and weathered these rocks.

A PLACE WITH SPECIAL MEANING

For the people who have for centuries traveled, visited and lived in Wisconsin's Driftless Area, its natural wonders have variously served as sacred sites or geographic reference points, excited curiosity or awe, and regularly provided the resources for survival. For many, these natural wonders instill a profound sense of place.

☐ Please visit the Friends website at donaldpark.org for information about area geology.

IMAGE CREDITS Driftless landscape: Courtney Laper. Sandstone ledge: Jeff Durbin. Rock outcrop: Ray Glew. State map: Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey.