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Burr Oak State Park - Backpack Trail

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Burr Oak State Park Backpack Trail

County: Athens, Morgan

Nearest town: Glouster

Total distance: 21.2-mile loop or 23.2 for Burr Oak Cove camping option

Hiking time: 2 to 3 days

Trail conditions: Well established and well blazed

Blazes: Yellow

Water: Available seasonally from April 1st to November 1st at campgrounds, April 15th to October 15th at boat docks

Highlights: Lakeside hiking, beautiful lake vistas, easy for beginning backpackers

Maps: USGS 7.5': Corning; ODNR Burr Oak State Park map; BackpackOhio.com eTrailsOhio

Contact info: Burr Oak State Park, 10220 Burr Oak Lodge Road, Glouster, Ohio 45732, phone: 740-767-3570

Internet: www.ohiodnr.com & www.burroakstatepark.org

Getting there: State Routes 13 and 78 are coincident through Glouster for nearly one mile. From the split of SR 13 and SR 78 just north of Glouster, drive east on SR 78 for 4.0 miles to the park entrance and turn left. In a short distance where the road forks you'll reach an old ranger station building and parking for the trailhead. As of this writing the old ranger station building is vacant but may be used as a gift shop in the future. The trail can be accessed at numerous other points in the park; however, the park has designated this location as the official trailhead.

Trailhead coordinates: 39.5290°N, 82.0265°W (WGS84); UTM 17 411765E 4375771N (NAD27); UTM 17 411779E 4375988N (NAD83)

Background

The Burr Oak Backpack Trail circumnavigates the 664-acre Burr Oak Lake--the main attraction of Burr Oak State Park--created in 1950 when the Tom Jenkins Dam was constructed to control flooding on Sunday Creek. Rising up at water's edge, wooded hills provide a pleasant backdrop to this picturesque park, which sits in stark contrast to an earlier 50-year period of tumultuous coal, oil and iron ore extraction, which ended in the 1920s and took a heavy toll on the landscape in the Sunday Creek and nearby Monday Creek watersheds. Although forests now cover many of the scars left behind by the mining boom, many of the local towns still exist, covered not by trees, but by shadows of boarded up buildings and memories of a more prosperous time. In recent years, the region has seen a push to restore some life to these "Little Cities of the Black Diamond" by developing the area's rich mining history as an attraction for tourists and a base for local artisans.

The forests of the Burr Oak region consist mainly of oak, hickory and beech trees. The namesake bur oaks, though largely wiped out due to logging, still reside in much smaller number on these hills. Elevation relief in these foothills struggles to reach 300 feet, averaging more in the range of 200 to 250 feet. State Route 78, also known as the "Rim of the World" highway, follows a higher spine of hills just to the east of the park heading in the direction of McConnelsville in Morgan County. Highpoints along the Rim highway top out at over 1100 feet, or 400 feet above the lake, and offer some of the areas best vistas.

The lake and its fishing, along with many other improvements including a beautiful timber-framed lodge, cottages, developed campgrounds and picnicking, make Burr Oak a popular destination for many non-backpacking Ohioans. Fall colors are spectacular here, displaying a palette of deep reds, brilliant yellows and burnt oranges.

The Trail

A trip on the winding loop of the Burr Oak Backpack Trail is a scenic journey up, over and along the wooded hills and ridges that define the shape of the lake's shoreline. For the majority of the trip, the trail is not far from water's edge. Some stretches of the trail are near lake level, but most are anywhere from a few feet to over 100 feet in elevation above the lake. Ascents are generally short and mild with only a few exceptions, making this a nice trip for

beginners. Timing is key to taking the most advantage of the regions beauty and solitude. A late fall through early spring hike opens up many spectacular views of the lake and surrounding hills from numerous highpoints along the route. An off-season or midweek trip will surely limit you encounters with other people and greater your chances of spotting wildlife, like deer and beaver.

Because the trail lies almost entirely within the confines of Burr Oak State Park, the exception being a segment near the USACE maintained Tom Jenkins Dam, expect to visit many state park improvements along the way in the form of boat docks, campgrounds and more. Most of these improvements are separated by sections of wooded trail many miles in length. In fact, you may find the spacing of these improvements convenient and use them for planned rest stops or water refueling stations (seasonal). You will most likely use at least at one of them in order to camp, as state park rules dictate. More on camping below.

The main backpack trail is blazed with yellow, and for nearly half the distance along the south and east side of the lake, is blazed with blue as well, indicating a shared route with the Buckeye Trail. The North Country Trail and the American Discovery Trail follow the same route the Buckeye Trail follows through the park. A few shorter state park trails and a horse trail or two also share the main path for short distances, so expect to see blazes of other colors as well, mainly white and red. Some sections of the Backpack Trail are named, probably for the benefit of park visitors and day hikers. You'll see these names on some signage.

As previously mentioned, camping within the state park is restricted to state park improvements. You'll find 11 campsites at Boat Dock 2 on the south side of the lake, 5 sites at Boat Dock 3 at the northern end and over 80 sites at the attractive Main Campground on the western side of the lake, with sites 70 through 81 offering the most privacy. A 65-acre group camp is located on an open hilltop just above Boat Dock 3 and offers the most potential for primitive camping and finding seclusion of any of the state park campgrounds. Scout and church groups use the group camp regularly in summer and some weekends during shoulder seasons so a pre-trip call to the park office might allow you to determine the number of other campers to expect in the area. Given the large size of this camp, you should still be able to find your own quiet corner to camp, even on those busy weekends. The group camp is the cheapest state park camping option for backpackers—free.



Lower Main Campground

Boat Docks 2 & 3 have potable water and pit latrines. In addition to potable water, the Main Campground has a shower house, flush toilets, telephone and a seasonally operated camp store. All campsites contain a picnic table and fire ring. Water, pit latrines, a few picnic tables and a shelter house are available at the group camp. Water is shutoff from November 1st to April 1st at the campgrounds and October 15th to April 15th at the boat docks. In the off-season, use the many points of trail access to cache water.

Campsite registration is required at all campgrounds, except the group camp. Camps at Boat Docks 2 & 3 have self-registration kiosks. If open, registration can be completed at the camp office for Main Campground sites. During the off-season, self-registration envelopes are provided outside of the office. Reservations at the Main Campground can be made in advance by calling 866-OHIOPARKS or online by visiting www.odnr.com. Camping fees range from \$19 to \$25 per night depending on the campsite and the time of year. As mentioned above, the primitive group camp is free to backpackers. You can drive to any of the campgrounds pre-hike to register and guarantee a spot, if you choose.

Two other possible options for camping exist in nearby Wayne National Forest. The first option is the Wildcat Hollow Trailhead on County Road 58. A short road walk on CR 58 from the very northern point of the Burr Oak Backpack Trail is required to reach it. Camping is free here and there is a pit latrine at the back of the parking area. No water is available, but it could be easily cached here prior to hitting the trail, time permitting. A grassy area at the trailhead parking area has room for many tents. Several wooded campsites are located a short hike up the Wildcat Hollow Trail and offer more privacy. This whole area should be avoided during deer hunting season.



Trailhead parking

Secondly, Wayne National Forest's Burr Oak Cove Campground, connected to the backpack trail via a 1.0-mile white blazed connector trail, is a very nice 19-site campground on the west side of the lake above the dam. Each campsite offers a fire ring, picnic table and level tent area. Water and pit latrines are located in the campground as well. Burr Oak Cove is a drive-in campground but sites 3 through 7 are walk-in sites offering a little more privacy. The campground is closed to car camping from December 15th to April 15th each year. Walk-in camping is allowed year around. As of this writing, a \$10 nightly fee is required to camp here, or \$5 when the water is shutoff from late fall to April 15th. A self-registration kiosk is located near the beginning of the campground road. Because Burr Oak Cove is a smaller campground and away from state park developments near the lake, expect to find it a quieter place to camp than say the Main Campground.

If you wish to truly backpack camp, consider camping along the connector trail to Burr Oak Cove Campground. The entirety of this trail is located on Wayne National Forest land so dispersed camping is permitted. Flat areas suitable for camping can be found about 0.5 mile up the connector trail from the lake in a hollow the trail

traverses before heading uphill to the campground. The stream in this hollow flows seasonally and water from it can be treated or filtered if needed. Consider, though, that water can be retrieved in non-winter months with a little additional walking from Burr Oak Cove Campground or from a small picnic area at the dam.

The official trailhead for the backpack trail is located at the old state park ranger station on the east side of the lake where the park entrance road forks left to the lodge and right to the cabins. As of this writing this building is vacant but may be used as a gift shop in the future. Several parking spaces are available in front of the building. Registration to use the trail is not required. This site was selected as the trailhead because of its location in a high traffic area, making vehicle safety one less thing to worry about. For the aggressive backpacker completing the trail in just two days, the trailhead location is good, dividing the trail's mileage into almost equal distances both days with a night's stay at the Main Campground.

For backpackers making this trail a three-day trip, reviewing the enclosed map reveals many camping options dispersed along the trail. Also note on the map two other beginning points, which are worthy of consideration. These are Boat Docks 1 and 4. Either one may fit into your per day mileage/camping desires better than starting at the official trailhead. Overnight parking is permitted at both locations. These areas are well lit and generally receive a lot of use from April through October. If parking at either location, a quick call to the park office to let them know your vehicle will be parked for a couple nights is a good idea.

A trip begins from the parking lot of the old ranger station on the east side of the lake. Signage across the road serving the rental cottages will direct you to the trail's beginning. The trail immediately enters the forest and will soon begin a very winding course in and out of hollows en route to Boat Dock 3 in 4.4 miles. The straight line distance to Boat Dock 3 from the trailhead is only 1.5 miles. This first section to Boat Dock 3 is shared with the Buckeye Trail and is well maintained by BTA volunteers. Your first view of the lake will come around the 0.5-mile mark, downhill left through the trees. More lake views and a nice section of trail along a hillside above the lake are enjoyed closer to Boat Dock 3. The balance of this section is spent climbing in and out of several rocky hollows. The hollow bottoms will be overgrown in summer.



Lake vista from the trail

A shorter, more direct route of 2.0 miles can be taken to Boat Dock 3 from the trailhead using the Buckeye Loop Trail. The Buckeye Loop Trail forks from the backpack trail 0.3 mile into the hike. The junction where they split is marked by signage. The backpack trail and the Buckeye Loop Trail will intersect a couple more times before reaching Boat Dock 3. Just before reaching Boat Dock 3, the backpack trail will pass near the Group Camp. The trail does not directly enter the camp but rather passes just below it, staying in the trees. Short paths running between the backpack trail and the camp will be passed on your right around the 4.2-mile mark. During non-foliage seasons, the large open fields of the camp can be seen from the trail. The Buckeye Loop Trail passes directly through the Group Camp.

Boat Dock 3 is reached at the 4.4-mile mark. In-season water, pit latrines and picnic tables make this a convenient stop for a rest or refuel. If camping here, you'll find self-registration forms at a wooden kiosk near the latrines. The trail travels through the dock area and reenters the woods past the boat ramp parking area. Within the first 0.5 mile the trail crosses a long wooden boardwalk and an interesting metal bridge en route to a less secluded section near homes and a short road walk on County Road 15.

After the trail's brush with some of the areas rural residences, it soon arrives on an old road and a junction where the Buckeye Trail forks and heads for points farther east. From here, a short descent takes the trail into bottomlands along the East Branch of Sunday Creek. Near the 6.9-mile mark, the trail arrives at the location of a washed out footbridge. The trail has been rerouted to County Road 58 to take you around the washed out bridge, but the creek can be forded at the old bridge location in drier weather. The current reroute onto CR 58 is not well marked once you step onto the road. Once on the road, you'll want to go left for 100 yards and then another left onto a service road that runs along the west side of the creek. To reach the Wildcat Hollow Trailhead, go right on CR 58 at the point where the rerouted trail emerges onto it.

For the next 3.0 miles, the backpack trail is shared with a horse trail, so expect muddier and rougher trail conditions in periods of wet weather. This section of trail all the way to the Main Campground is wooded and secluded. Many nice lake views are present along the way. A couple short but very steep ascents will get your heart pumping. The second will lift you quickly to near ridgetop level and one of the highest points of the entire trip.



Campsite at the Main Campground

As the trail approaches the Main Campground, a host of other trails intersect the main trail. Stay true to the yellow and you'll be okay. Before making the final ascent up the campground ridge, the trail makes a seemingly unnecessary lengthy journey up one side and out the other of an unnamed hollow below the Main Campground. Finally, from lakeside, the trail travels up numerous wooden steps and emerges from the trees at an amphitheater and then onto the Main Campground road. You have put to rest 11.4 miles of trail at this point.

If you are camping in the Main Campground, you will either go left or right to find your campsite. If you did not register a campsite before hitting the

trail, you'll first choose a site and then visit the camp office/camp store located in the shower house building to register and pay for your site. The shower house building is located to the left and downhill from where the trail enters the Main Campground. Hint: Camping sites 70 through 81 located on a one way loop road off the main camp road will offer the most privacy. Water and latrines are located across the road from these sites.

From the amphitheater, the backpack trail follows the campground road to the right (northerly direction) for 0.25 mile before forking left and downhill on an old road. Along the campground road, trees and road signs are blazed along the left side of the road. At the left fork, the trail travels straight downhill for 100 yards and emerges onto Park Road 4. Follow PR 4 as it curves away from the beach parking area seen on the left. PR 4 soon arrives at water's edge and nice views of the resort lodge are seen across the lake. Private homes can be noted to the right. After nearly 0.4 mile of lakeside road walking on PR 4, you'll arrive at the marina and Boat Dock 4. For hiker needs, the marina offers restrooms, picnic tables and an in-season commissary. Follow the road through the marina and continue on the trail as it reenters the woods at the back of the marina. A large sign will direct you.

Once you've reentered the woods, a pleasant 3.0-mile stretch of trail lies before you. This section is also named the Lakeview Trail on the official state park map. At the end of this segment sits the Tom Jenkins Dam, the reason this lake exists in the first place. This section of trail stays close to the lake and offers many nice lake views. This is also a popular section of trail for day hikers in the summer months. Two miles up the trail from Boat Dock 4, one highpoint offers you your first view of the dam, although you may miss it completely during summer foliage. Closer to the dam, you'll note a white blazed side trail forking uphill to the right. This is the 1.0-mile connector trail to the Burr Oak Cove Campground. As the backpack trail continues, it passes through an attractive lakeside pine plantation. Your final approach to the dam is met with picnic tables and a covered shelter. Restrooms and water are also found at this small developed area on the north side of the dam.



Tom Jenkins Dam and a

The backpack trail continues by crossing the dam. At the start of the dam, the Buckeye Trail joins the trail and will remain coincident until the end of the hike. Lake views from the dam are scenic. The same cannot be said for views in the opposite direction, which consist mainly of maintenance buildings and a filtration facility. The trail leaves the dam through a gap in a guardrail and curves slightly downhill through some pines. The trail soon passes through the dam's emergency spillway. Two miles ahead waits Boat Dock 1.

When open (typically from April 15th to October 15th), Boat Dock 1 offers the hiker restrooms, water and a few refreshments sold at the dock office. The trail travels past the dock house and through the parking area before reentering the woods at the back of the dock area. A large sign and blue and yellow blazes will guide you. In just under 1.0 mile from here, the smaller Boat Dock 2 is reached, but not before travelling over a couple sections of boardwalk and through the front yard of a private home. Be sure not to miss the sharp left turn heading steeply downhill via wooden steps at the far end of the private home's yard.



Campsites at Boat Dock 2

Boat Dock 2 will come into view from a lakeside section of trail several minutes before actually reaching it. The trail will travel up the mouth of an unnamed hollow for 0.1 mile before curving back and emerging onto County Road 111. The trail will take CR 111 into the boat dock area. On the right, before reaching the dock, sits an 11-site campground. Each site contains a picnic table and fire ring. Pit toilets, water and a self-registration kiosk are located near this small campground. The campground sits in an attractive area but each site offers very little privacy from the neighboring one; however, it is unlikely you will ever find this small campground full. Two sites at the very back of this offer slightly more privacy.

The trail continues past Boat Dock 2. A sign will guide you. You'll learn from the sign that this upcoming section of trail is also called the Ravine Trail by the state park. Soon after leaving Boat Dock 2, private homes can be seen on a hill to the right. For backpackers parked at the official trailhead, this is the final stretch of trail, and a nice ending to the hike. Classic views of the lake are just ahead and a visit to a small recess cave ahead as well. Close to the lodge the trail emerges onto the parking area of a small boat ramp and continues uphill in the woods on the other side. The trail finishes in a somewhat confusing fashion as two other state park trails are intersected within a half-mile of finishing. These two trails are named the Chipmunk and Red Fox Trails. We clarify this intersection in the trail notes and mileage section below. Lastly, the trail emerges onto the road serving the lodge. Unless you are severely dehydrated at this point, you will see the old ranger station building and trailhead parking just ahead.

Burr Oak Trail Notes and Mileage

0.0 Start at the old ranger station building on the east side of the lake. Walk north from the parking area and watch for a sign across the road reading "Back Pack Trail".

0.3 Arrive at an intersection with the Buckeye Loop Trail (white blazes). Go left to stay on the backpack trail. Go right to take the Buckeye Loop Trail and a more direct route to Boat Dock 3

0.5 Note your first lake view downhill to the left.

- 1.2** The red-blazed Tanager Trail forks to the right.
- 1.9** The Buckeye Loop Trail joins the backpack trail and follows it for a short distance before forking to the right.
- 4.1** Near the lakeshore, a short spur trail heads to water's edge. The backpack trail curves right and goes uphill.
- 4.2** Pass just below the Group Camp. Short spur trails fork right from backpack trail and enter the camp.
- 4.3** The Buckeye Loop Trail rejoins the backpack trail.
- 4.4** Arrive at Boat Dock 3. The trail continues through the dock area and exits past the boat trailer parking area.
- 4.6** Cross a wooden bridge and long boardwalk.
- 5.0** Cross an unusual metal bridge.
- 5.4** Cross an ATV trail.
- 5.7** The trail emerges into a reclaimed field and travels straight across; white PVC pipes marked with yellow tape will guide you.
- 6.1** The trail emerges onto County Road 15. Go left and follow the road for approximately 0.1 mile and then reenter the woods from the left side of the road. An ATV trail will soon be crossed in the woods.
- 6.6** On an old roadbed, the Buckeye Trail forks to the right. Go left to stay on the backpack trail.
- 6.9** Emerge onto County Road 58 after a stream crossing. Go left for 100 yards and then make another left from the road onto an old service road mark by a post and a "No Vehicles..." sign. Trail blazes are sparse in this area. This short section of road walk on CR 58 serves as a detour around a washed out footbridge over the East Branch of Sunday Creek approximately 100 yards to the south. Parts of the remaining bridge are visible from the trail on each side of the creek. The creek can be forded in dry weather at the bridge location. To reach the Wildcat Hollow Trail trailhead, go right on CR 58 for 0.25 mile.
- 7.0** Just past the washed out footbridge, watch for the trail to make a sharp right turn and head away from the creek.
- 8.2** A red-blazed horse trail enters the backpack trail from the right.
- 8.3** At the top of a steep climb, the backpack trail circles to the left as the red-blazed horse trail continues straight.
- 8.8** A horse trail merges in from the right and then forks right from the trail after crossing a wooden bridge.
- 9.3** Intersections with a couple of horse trails.
- 10.0** Junction with a red-blazed horse trail. Stay left.
- 10.4** Cross a wooden footbridge and arrive at a junction with the white-blazed Campground Trail. Use the Campground Trail to reach the upper section of the Main Campground. Go left to remain on the backpack trail. This section of the backpack trail is shared with the Campground Trail.
- 11.0** Pass blue blazes of an unknown trail.
- 11.4** Arrive at the Main Campground by an amphitheater. The trail continues right on the campground road. If camping here, consider camping at any one of the sites 70 through 81 as they offer the most privacy. The camp office and small camp store are located downhill to the left in the shower house building.
- 11.6** The trail forks left from the campground road near a stop sign at the end of a one-way loop road serving additional campsites. Follow the one-way road for approximately 100 feet and then go downhill through the woods on an old road.
- 11.8** Emerge onto Park Road 4. Follow PR 4 as it curves away from the beach parking area seen to the left.
- 12.4** Arrive at Boat Dock 4 and the marina. Follow the road through the marina and resume the footpath at the far end. A sign will guide you. The upcoming section of trail to the dam is also called the Lakeview Trail.
- 15.2** A white diamond marked trail leading up to Wayne National Forest's Burr Oak Cove Campground forks to the right. Stay left unless camping at Burr Oak Cove.
- 15.5** Arrive at the Tom Jenkins Dam. The Buckeye Trail joins the backpack trail. The trail continues by crossing the dam. The trail leaves the dam at the opposite end through a break in a guardrail, over a chain, and then curves right into some pines. Note the osprey platform after exiting the dam.
- 15.9** Cross the dam's emergency spillway.
- 16.3** A small pioneer burial site marked by small wooden crosses is located approximately 100 yards off the trail to the left.
- 16.9** The trail makes an unmarked sharp left turn from an old roadbed.
- 18.1** Arrive at Boat Dock 1. Walk through the dock area and reenter the woods at the back of the parking area. Parking area light poles are blazed yellow. Signage marks the trail's reentry into the woods.
- 18.6** Pass through the front yard of a private home. At the far end of the yard, the trail makes a sharp left and heads steeply down a slope via numerous wooden steps.
- 19.1** Emerge onto County Road 111. Go left. Boat Dock 2 is just ahead on the left. An 11-site campground is just ahead on the right. The trail continues at the back end of the dock area. A sign will guide you. The upcoming section of trail to the lodge is also called the Ravine Trail.
- 20.3** Pass by a recess cave and weave through large boulders.
- 20.7** Emerge onto the parking area of boat ramp below the lodge. Continue straight across the parking area where a sign guides you. The Chipmunk Trail and Red Fox Trail are also indicated on the sign.
- 21.0** Arrive at a junction where signage points the Chipmunk Trail in two directions. The trail is blazed yellow both ways. Go right.
- 21.2** Emerge onto the road serving the resort lodge. The old ranger station building is in sight straight ahead.

Day Hikes

Because the backpack trail consists of one large loop around the lake, just about any day hike will have to be of an out-and-back nature. There are only a few other state park trails intersecting the backpack loop that could be used to create a looped day hike, the most notable being the white-blazed Buckeye Loop Trail. It intersects the backpack trail 0.3 mile north of the trailhead and follows a more direct route to Boat Dock 3, actually rejoining the backpack trail just shy of the boat dock. The total distance for this popular loop hike is approximately 6.0 miles. The Buckeye Loop Trail is shown on the enclosed map. Another popular stretch of trail with day hikers is the section between the dam and Boat Dock 4. It's scenic 6.0 mile round-trip hike through beautiful forests with many postcard lake views.

Because of the many access points around the lake, you'll have a limitless number of options for day hikes of varying distances, just as long as you don't mind returning the same way you went.

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Burr Oak State Park Backpack Trail

SYMBOLS

- | | | | |
|--|--------------|--|-------------------|
| | Trailhead | | Water |
| | Parking | | Park Office |
| | Camping | | Point of Interest |
| | Picnic Area | | Beach |
| | Restroom | | Boat Ramp |
| | Telephone | | Camp Store |
| | Shower House | | Amphitheater |

Trail w/Mile Marker

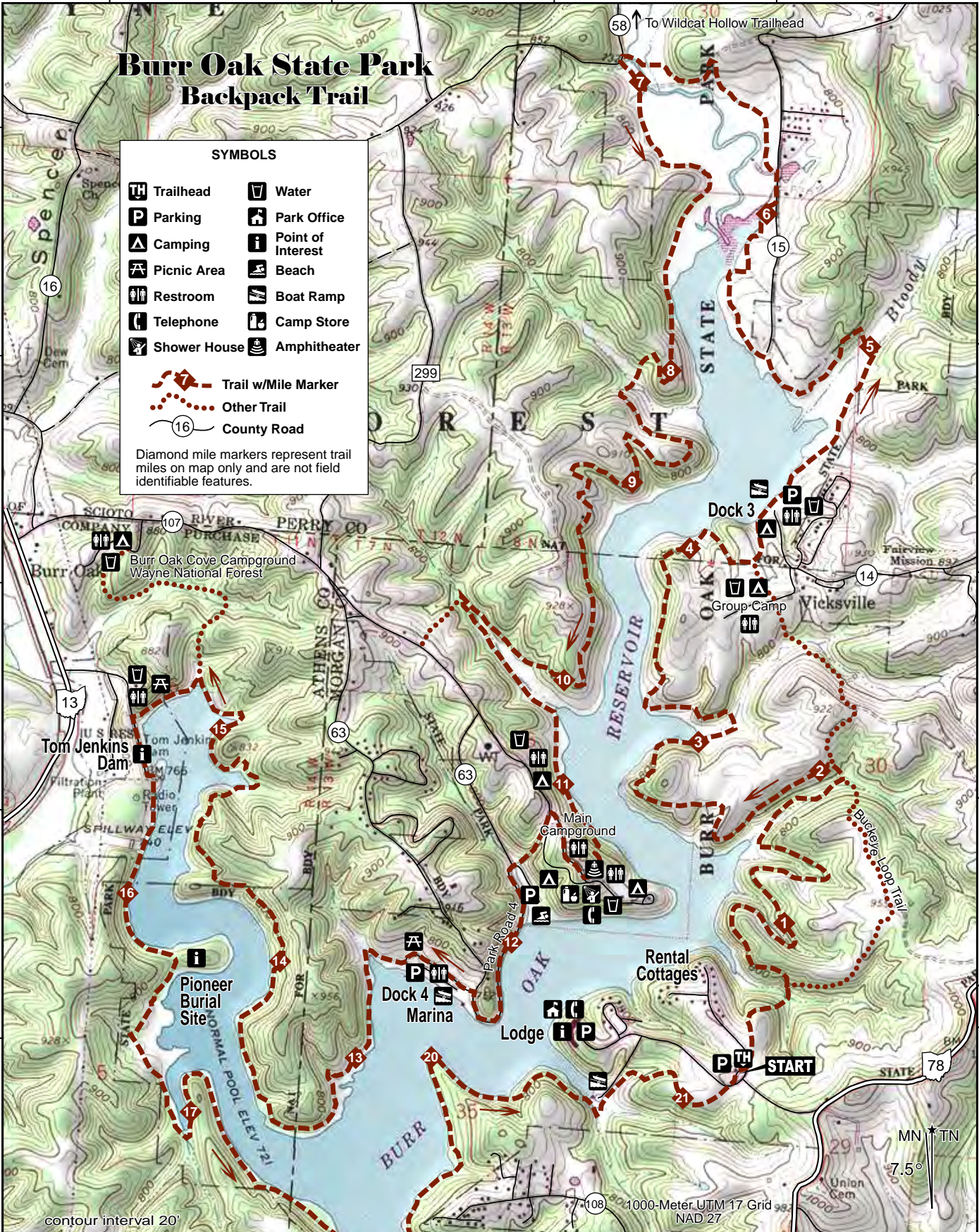
Other Trail

County Road

Diamond mile markers represent trail miles on map only and are not field identifiable features.

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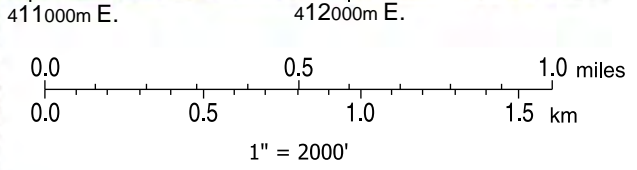


contour interval 20'

1000-Meter UTM 17 Grid
NAD 27



Base map created with TOPO!
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409000m E.

411000m E.

412000m E.

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