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DEFINITIVE
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The Woodlands Conservancy

Crocodiles, armadillos, WWII magazines and more

By Brittany Kennedy

The flat terrain and often intense climate in these parts don't make for the best hiking. While there's ample green space for walks and runs, there aren't a ton of hiking trails that offer a diversity of terrain or wildlife. A notable exception, however, is just a short jaunt over the Crescent City Connection near English Turn, and our mild spring weather is the perfect time to explore another great outdoor activity.

The Woodlands Conservancy is a wooded wetland forest with easy to moderate hiking trails. The "conservancy" part of the forest began in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when storm damage caused previously introduced invasive species of trees to propagate at an alarming rate, thus reducing the storm protection and water drainage capabilities. A group of volunteers began removing the species and introducing native plants. In the past several years the nonprofit has partnered with local schools and universities to help maintain



and develop more native plants, and they've added a bird observatory as well.

The result is a forest canopy that offers shade but that lets enough light and air to filter in to keep most bugs at bay. While you

don't need "hiking" gear per se, long pants and a shoe with a grip are probably your best bet (although, in full disclosure, the author wore running shoes and was fine, just a bit muddy). The Bottomland trail is the most

direct and unobstructed route post Hurricane Zeta and takes about an hour and a half going at my 8-year-old's pace.

When arriving at the first turn-off as the LA Recreational Trails Bridge, we were shocked to see one of the largest gators I have ever seen in the wild – even bigger than ones I've seen at the Barataria swamp. However, the biggest draw in terms of wildlife are the armadillos. The Woodlands is home to a large number of armadillos that scavenge for food throughout the brush of the trees. We saw four that day, both large and small, and they seemed less bothered by us than by our Border Collie. (Note: Dogs are welcome but must remain leashed at all times.)

At the end of the trail, hikers find a relic from our city's military history: a series of 10 World War II magazines that were used by the United States government for ammunition storage. The military occupied about 5,000 acres of the peninsula as ammunition was shipped



in and out by ship and rail. The magazines are built into the landscape and covered by grass now, but most of them are open for exploration.

In addition to hiking trails, there are also equestrian trails for folks wanting to bring horses. The trail that follows the edge of English Turn, however, is another walking trail that has more obstacles and mud (especially after our active storm season) than the Bottomland trails, and it takes about 20 minutes longer but at least offers a different view heading back

to the parking lot.

While the space is free to visit, they do offer memberships to help further promote their mission. Although it may not be the type of hiking that people are accustomed to thinking about, the Woodlands Conservancy is a wonderful example of preserving our native habitat to protect our environment from further flooding and erosion while creating an outdoor space that can inspire adventure while learning a little bit about the city's World War II history. ♦



➔ Just the Facts:

449 F. Edward Hebert Blvd., Belle Chasse

Free from Dawn to Dusk every day.

(Note: The Turn off Sign is hard to see and faded. Turn by the SPCA)

Directions: From downtown New Orleans, take the Crescent City Connection to the Westbank. Take the General DeGaulle East exit (9B). Merge onto General DeGaulle and travel 2.9 miles, continuing over the Intracoastal Canal. Enter the traffic circle at the end of the bridge ramp and exit left to go under the bridge. Drive 0.6 miles on Highway 406/Woodland Highway to the caution light. Turn left at the caution light onto F. Edward Hebert Blvd. Continue 0.6 miles. The entrance is on the left. Drive on the dirt road along the canal to the parking area at the trailhead.