

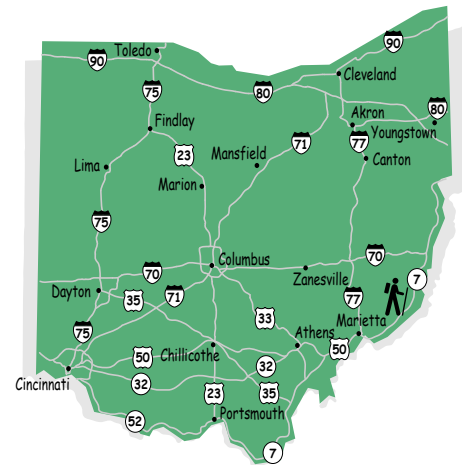
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Wayne National Forest - Archers Fork Trail including the North Country Trail Connector to the Scenic River Trail



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Wayne National Forest - Archers Fork Trail

Including the North Country Trail Connector to the Scenic River Trail

County: Washington

Nearest town: Marietta

Total distance: 9.8-mile loop, 2.6-mile connector via the North Country Trail to the Scenic River Trail's northern trailhead

Hiking time: Approximately 4 to 6 hours, or 2 days for overnight

Trail conditions: Well established

Blazes: Yellow diamonds; blue diamonds mark the North Country Trail connector to the Scenic River Trail

Water: No potable water available along trail; water drawn from Archers Fork, Jackson Run, Irish Run or feeder streams must be treated or filtered first

Highlights: Seclusion, spring wildflowers, wildlife, Irish Run Natural Bridge and other rock outcroppings

Maps: USGS 7.5': Rinard Mills & Raven Rock; Wayne National Forest Hiking and Backpacking Trails map; BackpackOhio.com eTrailsOhio

Contact info: Wayne National Forest – Marietta Unit, phone: 740-373-9055

Internet: www.fs.fed.us/r9/wayne/

Getting there: Take State Route 26 northeast from Marietta, Ohio for 25 miles to State Route 260 and turn right. Travel 2.9 miles on SR 260 and turn right onto Shay Ridge Road (T-34). In 1.4 miles turn left on a gravel road marked by a North Country Trail Parking sign. Travel this road a short distance and park in front of the cemetery. Do not attempt to drive past the cemetery.

Trailhead coordinates: 39.5239°N, 81.1806°W (WGS84); UTM 17 484464E, 4374712N (NAD27); UTM 17 484478E, 4374929N (NAD83)

Background

The Archers Fork Backpack Trail is located in far southeastern Ohio in the heavily forested and sparsely populated northeast corner of Washington County, which is part of the Marietta Management Unit of Wayne National Forest. Archers Fork is farther from Ohio's major metropolitan areas than any other trail in the state. Getting to the trailhead may not be as convenient as some other hikes, but to experience this trail in hardcore Appalachian Ohio is worth the trip. Walking the Archers Fork Trail is a glimpse into the natural, mineral and human history defining this region.

The name Archers Fork is both the name of a stream draining the area and a very small community about a mile south of where the trail crosses the stream. Archers Fork (the stream) empties into the Little Muskingum River and forms at the confluence of two smaller streams: Irish Run and Jackson Run, which lie at the center of the trail's loop. The Macksburg oil and gas field underlies this entire region, so expect to see results of active and historic exploitations of these resources. The area's rocky ridges attain an average elevation relief of approximately 350 feet.

Archers Fork offers more than just a hike through the forest. Along the way you will see many rock formations in the form of caves, cliffs, overhang shelters and even a natural bridge. The Irish Run Natural Bridge is located near the trail and worth a few minutes of your time to explore. A large cave, named the Great Cave on trail signage, is located just off the trail near the St. Patrick's Cemetery trailhead. A network of lightly used connecting trails threaded through contiguous tracts of federally owned land extends miles beyond the Archers Fork Trail and offers the opportunity for multi-night trips.

Although not old growth by any means, the forests in this part of the Wayne are still stately with oak and hickory forests dominating upland areas. A mixed forest type of cherry, tuliptree, walnut and ash can be found on many slopes. Sycamore and beech are found in wetter bottomlands. This middle-aged forest is home to an abundant variety of bird and mammal life. As the sun fades, it's not uncommon to hear a pair of noisy barred or great horned

owls or the unmistakable call of the whip-poor-will. Coyotes roam these hills and their howls are often heard at dusk as well. It is not out of the question to spot a black bear passing through the area, as they are known to populate this part of the state. This is also copperhead and timber rattlesnake country, so a little extra caution should be exercised in warmer months. Of course, deer and turkey are well represented here as well.

The Trail

A hike on the 9.8-mile Archers Fork Trail loop starts at a small parking area in front of St. Patrick's Cemetery. You'll walk about 0.1 mile down an old township road heading downhill past the cemetery before actually beginning the official trail. Yellow diamonds mark the main trail. Since the western half of the Archers Fork loop is shared with the North Country Trail, you'll also see blue diamonds marking that trail. Due to a history of oil and gas development in the area, expect to sporadically encounter old oil and gas wells (some still operational) and old steel and plastic pipelines (some leaking) lying on top of the ground and across the trail. A portion of the loop is maintained by the River Valley Mountain Bike Association (RVMA) so efforts of their ongoing maintenance program may be noticed along the way, too.



Cemetery at trailhead

Since this is Wayne National Forest, camping is allowed anywhere on forest land. There are no WNF established campsites on the trail, and, as of this writing, only a few sites have been established by backpackers before you, most notably: two near the halfway point of the trail in consecutive hollows (second and third camp symbols on the map). There are other potential campsites located in the hollows near the halfway point, which are in addition to the two established sites noted above. The hollow bottoms are flat and provide the option to treat water from streams flowing through them, or from nearby Jackson Run. Expect these areas to be lush with seasonal growth in the summer. The next ridgetop past the hollow camps also provides some flat ground suitable for a small camp. One potential campsite was noted on the North Country Trail connector to the Scenic River Trail.

If treating water trailside is not an option for you, then your potable drinking water will have to be carried in. Caching water, or even gear, is a possibility near the campsites mentioned above at the 5.0-mile mark along a gravel road (Jackson Run Rd.) that travels through the valley of Jackson Run, but your trip to here and then back to the trailhead would greatly delay your start, as there is no direct route between the two locations. Cady Run at the 0.6-mile mark of the North Country Trail connector to the Scenic River Trail is the most reliable source of water along that stretch of trail.

Archers Fork is located in a very rural corner of southeastern Ohio. Gravel roads in this region often cross streams without the use of bridges, thus making such crossings impossible during storms or in a low clearance vehicle. Additionally, many roads still appearing on some maps (paper or Internet) and perhaps in-car navigation systems are deeply rutted and impassable, and even some now abandoned. Unless you are familiar with this area, it is advisable not to venture on roads away from the route to the trailhead. The many miles of old, muddy roads throughout the area are a weekend draw for ATV and off-road 4x4 enthusiasts.

As mentioned, the North Country Trail and the Archers Fork Trail share the path for several miles. From the Archers Fork loop, there are also connector trails to the Covered Bridge Trail, the Ohio View Trail and the Scenic River & Greenwood trails. Multi-night trips are an option using this network of lightly traveled trails. Hiking a 2.6-mile connector to the Scenic River Trail via the North Country Trail creates the most exciting possibility for an extended trip. From the Scenic River Trail's northern trailhead, a loop hike of an additional 10.6 miles can be completed. This loop utilizes most of the Scenic River Trail and the entire Greenwood Trail. These two trails offer beautiful, rocky scenery and are exceptionally well designed. A separate eTrailsOhio product is available for the Scenic River & Greenwood trails.



Irish Run Natural Bridge from above
on the opposite side of the ravine.

If time, weather or vandals haven't damaged it, a wooden sign reading "Natural Bridge/Great Cave" will mark your left exit point from the old road downhill from the cemetery. Approximately 50 yards down the trail off the road, before crossing over the Great Cave, is an intersection where the trail goes straight or right. You will want to go right and head south, staying on the west side of the adjacent hollow. The trail returns to this intersection from straight ahead at the end of the hike. In 0.6 mile you will arrive at the Irish Run Natural Bridge. A sign points left where a short side trail forks and heads downhill to the bridge. You'll want to take some time to explore this interesting formation. The official trail stays on the same elevation and swings around the head of a ravine above the bridge. Optionally, you can hike over the top of the bridge and join the main trail

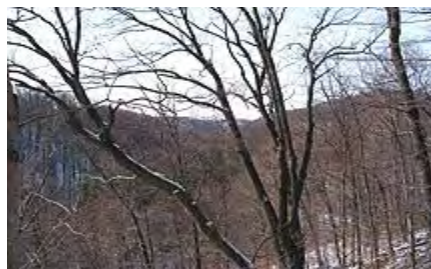
In just under 1.0 mile past the natural bridge, the trail descends into the valley of Archers Fork. The trail will stay in the valley to the right of Archers Fork and Upper Archers Fork Road for nearly 0.75 mile, utilizing a powerline

right-of-way for part of the way. This stretch of valley trail is heavily overgrown in summer, so consider walking the road to the 2.5-mile mark and rejoin the trail as it crosses the road. Near the end of this section of valley walking, a marked connector trail leading to the Covered Bridge Trail will fork to the right. In 0.1 mile, 2.4 miles into the hike, the main trail will cross Archers Fork. Soon after, the trail crosses Upper Archers Fork Road and heads uphill, passing over a cave in the process of rising over 350 feet in 0.5 mile.

Once at the ridgetop, the next 1.0 mile of trail travels on gated Forest Road 4346 until the trail forks left and heads downhill. The North Country Trail exits the Archers Fork Trail to the right at this point. After passing through a rock outcropping on the descent, the trail arrives at the first location suitable for camping; this is near the halfway point of the loop. In the next 0.3 mile, there are two additional Jackson Run side hollows suitable for camping, each with water (stream) and an optional bed of pine needles. After the third hollow, the trail will ascend approximately 200 feet in elevation through a rock outcropping to a flat ridgetop with an additional location or two suitable for camping. Day hikers can enjoy a break with a view from atop the flat rocks located at the top of this ridge.

After a 0.5-mile ridge walk, the trail will drop into another hollow and arrive at a junction with the Ohio View Trail, which goes both left and right. Left will take you to an unmarked parking area on Jackson Run Road along Jackson Run.

Past the intersection with the Ohio View Trail, enjoy another ascent, this one with a gain of approximately 250 feet. The trail soon crosses Jackson Run Road at the loop's 6.8-mile mark and follows a ridge for 1.0 mile before dropping into the valley of Irish Run, by way of a rock outcropping covered in mountain laurel. In the valley, the trail crosses an unmaintained section of Irish Run Road before arriving at a junction with the North Country Trail, and then a stream crossing. After the stream, the trail heads uphill yet again. As quickly as the trail ascended, it descends and crosses McCormick Hill Road before arriving at yet another climb. At the crest of the ridge, the trail passes through a pine plantation, and in approximately 0.25 mile it passes over the Great Cave and returns to the old township road where the hike began.



Vista from trail

Archers Fork Trail Notes and Mileage

0.0 Start from St. Patrick's Cemetery and walk south down an old dirt road.

0.1 The official trail starts on the left at a sign—if still standing—reading “Natural Bridge/Great Cave”. Wooden posts block motorized vehicles from entering the trail. 50 yards past the road, the trail will fork just before crossing over the Great Cave. Take a right, staying on the west side of the ravine.

0.7 Reach a short side trail forking left and leading to the Irish Run Natural Bridge. A sign announces your arrival. Take time to explore this unique rock formation.

0.9 Reach a crossing of same old road the hike started on back at the cemetery. Just before crossing, the trail will make a sharp right and parallel the old road for 100 feet. At the crossing point, the trail continues straight across.

1.8 Reach the valley of Archers Fork and cross a side stream.

2.0 Pass a campsite situated in a pine grove.

2.3 Arrive at a junction with the Covered Bridge Trail marked with sign. The main trail swings left.

2.4 Cross Archers Fork stream. If needed, go upstream 50 yards to find an easier place to cross. After crossing the stream, the trail takes aim on Upper Archers Fork Road. Be careful not to get sidetracked on any of several unofficial paths in the floodplain of the stream.

2.5 Emerge onto Upper Archers Fork Road. The trail continues straight across the road and starts a long uphill climb utilizing an old road grade. The trail passes in front of a hillside cave and then swings sharply left, leaving the old road, to pass directly over the cave.

3.0 The trail emerges onto Forest Road 4346 by an old well and storage tank.

3.2 Road and trail make a sharp right. An old well site is located to the left.

3.8 Walk around an iron gate, if closed. Continue straight, remaining on the forest road.

3.9 Reach a junction where the trail leaves the forest road to the left and the North Country Trail forks to the right. Follow signs and trail markings.

4.5 The trail descends through a rock outcropping and into a side hollow of nearby Jackson Run. The hollow floor provides a potential camping site.

4.6 Arrive in another hollow and note the established campsite situated in the pines.

4.9 Arrive at yet another hollow suitable for camping. A small established campsite was present here as of this writing. Just past a pine grove the trail crosses a stream and an old township road.

5.3 The trail weaves through a rock outcropping on a ridge ascent. Flat rocks here provide a nice view and an ideal spot for a water/snack break. Just past the rocks, the nearly level ridgetop could be used to pitch camp.

5.7 A flat area for camping sits 20 to 30 feet in elevation below the north side of the trail. A small stone fire ring can be seen from the trail.

- 6.2** Arrive at a junction with the Ohio View Trail. Continue straight, crossing a stream and then soon ascending a ridge. Flat ground in this hollow is suitable for camping.
- 6.8** Emerge onto Jackson Run Road. The trail continues straight across the road.
- 8.2** Emerge onto an unmaintained section of Irish Run Road. Cross the road and then arrive at a junction with the North Country Trail. Cross a wooden bridge over Irish Run soon after.
- 8.9** Cross McCormick Hill Road.
- 9.6** Arrive at the Great Cave and the junction where the loop started. Walk straight to rejoin the old road leading back to the cemetery.
- 9.8** Arrive back at the parking area in front of St. Patrick's Cemetery.

The North Country Trail Connector to the Scenic River Trail

The 2.6-mile North Country Trail connector to the Scenic River Trail begins at the 3.9-mile mark of the Archers Fork Trail. The connector trail travels through a peaceful section of Wayne National Forest. Rock outcroppings are noted on the descent into the valley of Cady Run near the 0.5-mile mark and then again in the last few tenths of the hike. Two streams, Cady Run at the 0.6-mile mark and an unnamed one crossed near the 2.0-mile mark, are the most reliable sources of water if treating or filtering. A streamside flat area at the second stream crossing has the potential for camping.



Vista on the NCT connector

From the 3.9-mile mark of the Archers Fork Trail on Forest Road 4346, The North Country Trail will fork to the south and begin to descend into an unnamed hollow. Near the 0.5-mile mark, the trail descends even more, steeply in places, until arriving at the floor of a peaceful valley containing a small stream named Cady Run and narrow Cady Run Road. The road becomes nothing more than an ATV path to the left of the trail crossing. A large sandstone outcrop can't be missed on the right as you descend into the valley.

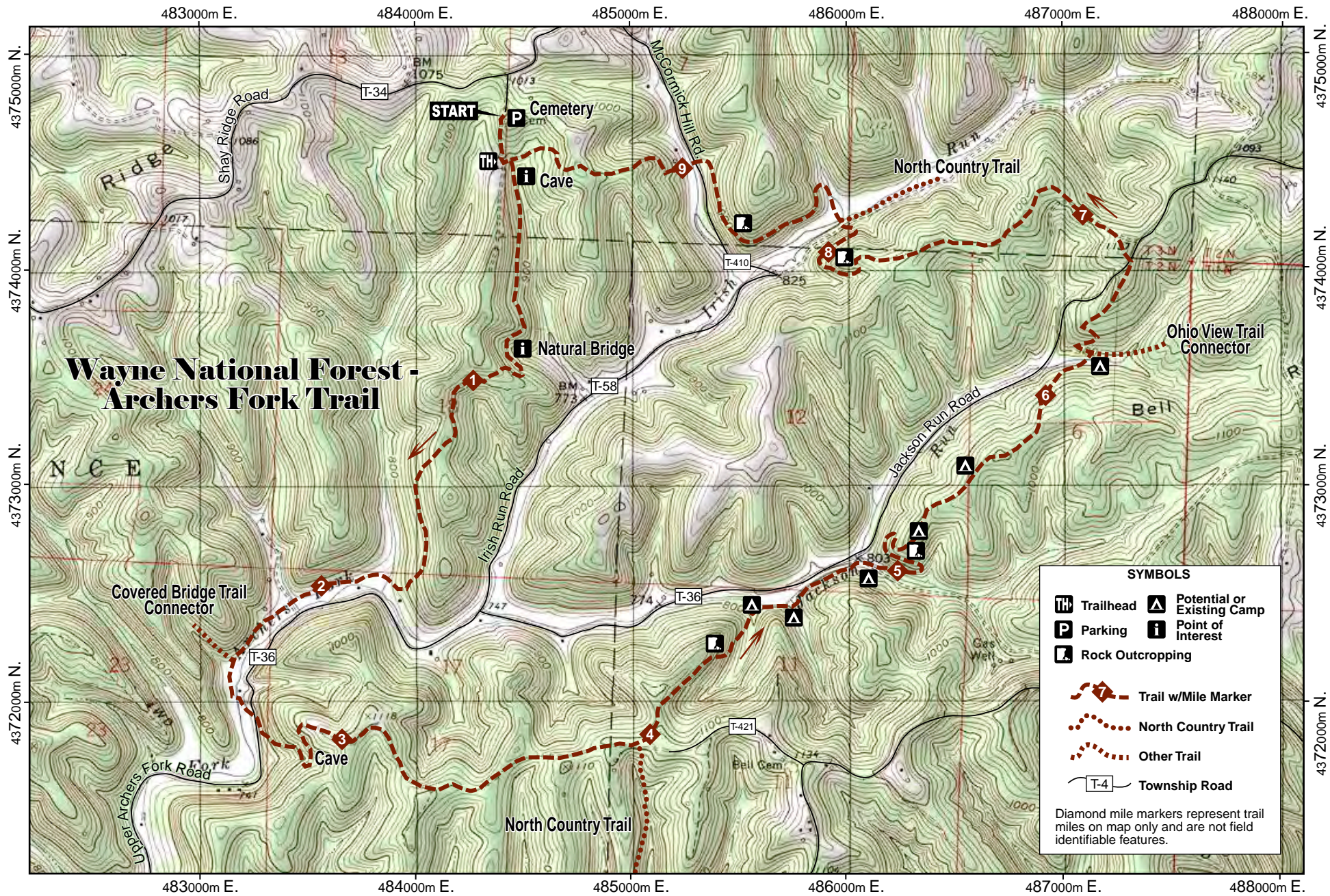
The trail doesn't waste any time in the valley and quickly begins to climb the opposite slope. Near the 0.9-mile mark, the trail passes under a high voltage powerline close to County Nine Road and then levels out for nearly the next 1.0 mile at an elevation 100' +/- below ridgetop level. In non-foliage seasons, nice vistas off to the right looking into Cady Run valley can be enjoyed from this stretch of trail. As the trail approaches 2.0 miles, more rock outcroppings appear and soon a stream is crossed. A potential campsite is located to the right just before the stream crossing. The connector trail approaches its end with a long ascent toward County Nine Road, passing more rock outcroppings along the way. The trail will emerge onto County Nine Road and cross it, next entering a short gravel driveway leading to a small parking area and a trailhead for the Scenic River Trail. Signs make it difficult to become lost or confused.

The North Country Trail Connector to the Scenic River Trail - Trail Notes and Mileage

- 0.0** Start at a junction of the Archers Fork Trail and the North Country Trail on Forest Road 4346. This junction is located at the 3.9-mile mark of the Archers Fork Trail, hiking counterclockwise.
- 0.6** Cross Cady Run and Cady Run Road in a peaceful valley. The valley offers flat ground for camping, but it is near the road.
- 0.9** Pass under an electrical transmission line. Watch for an unofficial trail forking left into the powerline right-of-way approximately 40 yards after the official trail crosses it.
- 1.1** The trail crosses an unofficial ATV trail, but will first run coincident with it for 20 yards. Watch for trail markers.
- 1.5** Pass under a telephone line.
- 2.0** Cross a stream and note the flat area on the right for its camping potential.
- 2.6** Cross County Nine Road and enter a short gravel driveway leading to a small parking area and a trailhead for the Scenic River Trail.

Day Hikes

The Archers Fork loop is an attainable day hike for fit hikers; it would require 4 to 6 hours of time to complete. Because the trail crosses several gravel roads, it is possible to create your own loop hikes of shorter distance. An easy out-and-back hike of approximately 1.5 miles is all that is required to visit the Irish Run Natural Bridge. Visiting the natural bridge is what brings most visitors to Archers Fork, but most don't venture too far past it. For a little longer hike of just under 4.0 miles, continue past the natural bridge to the crossing of an old road, actually the same old road walked for a short distance at the start of the hike. In the Trail Notes and Mileage section for the Archers Fork Trail, this crossing will be at the 0.9-mile point. Instead of following the trail across the road, turn left here and follow this old road downhill for 0.3 mile until it intersects with Irish Run Road. Turn left and walk Irish Run Road for 1.0 mile until you rejoin the main trail at the 8.2-mile mark, passing McCormick Hill Road on the left in the process. Finish up the hike on the last 1.6 miles of the main trail.



Wayne National Forest - Archers Fork Trail

SYMBOLS

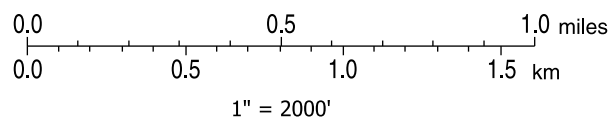
Trailhead	Potential or Existing Camp
Parking	Point of Interest
Rock Outcropping	

Trail w/Mile Marker
 North Country Trail
 Other Trail
 Township Road

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



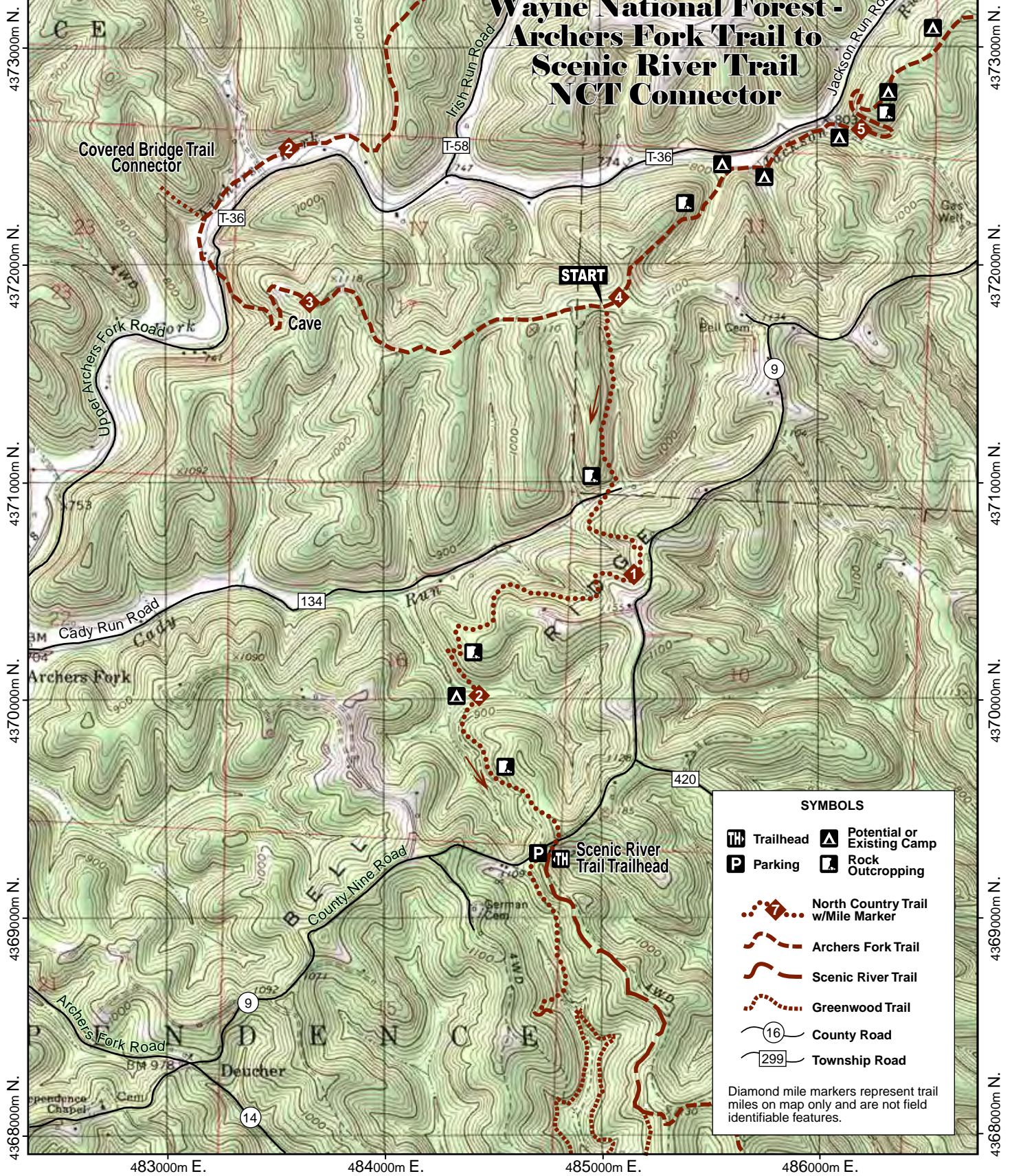
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1000-Meter UTM 17 Grid
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Wayne National Forest - Archers Fork Trail to Scenic River Trail NCT Connector

START

Cave

Scenic River Trail Trailhead

Covered Bridge Trail Connector

SYMBOLS

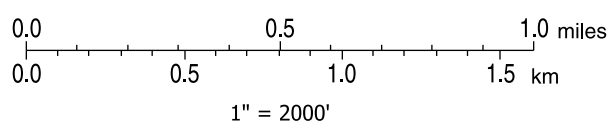
- Trailhead
- Potential or Existing Camp
- Parking
- Rock Outcropping

- North Country Trail w/Mile Marker
- Archers Fork Trail
- Scenic River Trail
- Greenwood Trail
- County Road
- Township Road

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