

Fall Colors Tour Guide

Curt Cable, Deputy Director/Biologist

One of the most captivating experiences that occurs each year is the vibrant display of colors produced by deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves each year). This experience can be shared by everyone, but location and timing are major factors in what your experience is. For some, it happens on the streets of the city they live in, while others seek out special places for fall color viewing.

If you search online for fall color tours, there are companies that specialize in providing you the best experience possible. You can take train tours to see the aspens on the foothills of the Rocky Mountains or the oaks and hickories of the Great Smoky Mountains. These train tours will set you back \$3,000 and you will be stuck on a train for 8 days.

If you don't want to leave Iowa, there are websites that will show guided routes with places to stop and see the fall colors. Many sites list the Loess Hills in western Iowa and Yellow River State Forest in northeast Iowa as must-see areas during peak fall colors. I do not disagree, as I have been to both locations in the fall and they truly are beautiful areas. If fall is a busy time for you, as it is for many people, you do not have to go far to have similar experiences.

The Raccoon River Valley in Dallas County is a stunning area to see in the fall. Many DCCB-managed areas have picturesque trails that can accessed by foot, by bike, or even by boat.

Foot:

- Kuehn Conservation Area needs to be on the top of the list. This could be made into an all-day adventure by hiking trails on nearly 5 miles that meander through the prairies and forested areas along the South Raccoon River. Some of the more popular trails are the "Waterfall Creek Trail" and the "Maria Pearson Spirit Mounds Trail." Kuehn has four primitive campsites that are only $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the parking lot. There is also one campsite located in the next to the South Raccoon River which is a roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ mile hike from the parking lot. Trail maps can be found on our website or by using the QR codes at the main parking lot.
- Voas Nature Area is another area that has become more popular in recent years. With over 6 miles of trails, there are various routes that can be hiked. Many of the trails weave through the vast prairie/wetland complex that sits atop the North Raccoon River valley. There are a few trails such as the "Savanna Loop" and the "Chinquapin Overlook Loop" that will take you through forested areas. There is a picturesque vista on the southeast end of the "Chinquapin Overlook Loop" that is a must see during peak fall colors. Trail maps can be found on our website or by using the QR codes at the main parking lot.
- Sportsman Park's short "Woodland Nature Trail" leads you to an area that overlooks the North Raccoon River. Sportsman Park has 10 modern campsites, 5 primitive campsites, 2 cabins, a lodge, and an open shelter. There is also a small playground for kids to play on after the hike.



- Hanging Rock has a few unnamed trails that are located near the restrooms and main shelter. You can also take the RRVT trail spur and walk down towards the Middle Raccoon River, where you can sit in front of the massive outcrop of sandstone hanging over the river. If you are feeling adventurous, you can drive around to west side across the river where you can explore over 125 acres of wildlife refuge. There are no developed trails on the west side of the river, so you may need to find a deer path to follow.
- DCCB has several other areas such as Glissman Conservation Area (lodging available), Big Bend Wildlife Area, and Crellin Wildlife Refuge that are just as beautiful areas during peak fall colors as the ones listed above.
- **Some of the areas listed above are open to hunting during the fall. Be sure to look at area maps which can be found on our website.*

Bike (Raccoon River Valley Trail (RRVT) and High Trestle Trail (HTT):

- The RRVT from Adel to Ortonville is an area surrounded by old growth forests which include oak and hickories, providing contrasting shades of red and yellow as you ride through.
- The RRVT from Redfield to Linden is another area with old growth forests similar to the section above. ***However, you will have to wait until the Fall of 2024 to see this area as it is under construction and will be closed until further notice.***
- Much of the RRVT and HTT is sheltered by trees, offering beautiful sights no matter what section you ride.

Boat:

- There are boat ramps along the North, Middle and/or South Raccoon River which are easily accessible. You will float along some stunning areas with spectacular views. Remember to keep in mind that river levels fluctuate, which may make travel by canoe or kayak difficult in some sections. Water trail maps can also be found on our website or picked up at our office.

Peak fall colors for areas in Dallas County typically occur around mid-October. You can track the progression of fall colors throughout Iowa on the IDNR's website. Click on the "Conservation" tab followed by "Forestry" and then "Fall Color".

So grab your pumpkin spice latte, set your fantasy football lineup before you leave, strap on your boots, grab your binoculars and camera, and get out there to enjoy Mother Nature's brilliant display of colors.