TOM DORMAN State Nature Preserve is more than 900 acres encompassing majestic 220-foot limestone cliffs and the surrounding forested bluffs and bottoms. Located near Camp Nelson, the preserve is situated on both sides of the river in Garrard and Jessamine Counties.

The Kentucky River Palisades are considered to be the most outstanding natural feature remaining in the Bluegrass Region due to the presence of many rare species and several unusual natural communities including caves and rocky cliffs. There is a high diversity of wildflowers, at least 25 mammal species and 35 reptile species that are found throughout the palisades. The Nature Conservancy and the Kentucky River Authority were involved in the acquisition of the original 356 acres that were dedicated on December 20, 1996. The preserve was opened to the public on October 16, 1997.

The lofty palisade cliffs rise 220 feet above the Kentucky River in mosaic shades of yellows, grays and white. Between 400,000 and 1 million years ago the river began cutting through the limestone, exposing the layers of rock visible today. Laid down hundreds of millions of years ago, these rock layers are full of marine fossils dating back to when this part of Kentucky was at the bottom of a warm, shallow sea. At 450 to 500 million years old, the Ordovician limestone here is the oldest exposed rock in the state.

A moderately strenuous two-mile loop trail follows an old stage coach route through the forest that leads down towards the river and back up. Oak, hickory and sugar maple occur on the higher slopes. Rare wildflowers, including starry cleft phlox, peek out among the limestone slabs strewn along the hillsides. Tufted hairgrass occurs at the tops of the preserve's cliffs, one of only two populations of this species in Kentucky.

A half-mile spur trail hugs a contour and provides spectacular views of the river gorge below. Hidden behind a leafy curtain in summer and fall, the palisades are best viewed in winter. Gleaming white in the afternoon sun, they first appear in the distance through the trees and remain in view as the trail descends the bluff. From the riverside view of the towering palisades red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures can be seen soaring above the cliffs. Bats, including the rare Indiana and gray bat, may be sighted skimming the river along the forest edge for insects.

Remnants of an old homestead dating back to the turn of the century can be observed in the highest terrace of the flood plain. Hikers can pick up the short Knight's Ferry loop trail that runs from the homestead to the river bank and affords the best views of the cliffs. During periods of high water, this trail is not accessible.

The preserve shows a different facet of its beauty each season, from the striking images of bare tree limbs and cliffs against a swirling winter sky, to the lush colors and bustling activity of a summer day. Whether you are a well-studied naturalist or just enjoy being immersed in nature, this preserve is sure to soothe your senses and excite your curiosity.

Due to fragile habitat, hazardous cliffs, and limited access, the preserve is open to the public only on the Garrard County side of the Kentucky River. Please stay on the trail and do not collect anything you may encounter. The preserve is open to foot traffic 365 days a year from sunrise to sunset for your enjoyment. Rock climbing, ATV's, hunting, camping, bicycles, pets and horses are not permitted. Please be sure to pack out anything you bring in.

Owner/Manager:
* Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
* The Nature Conservancy
Purchased with Assistance of:
* The Nature Conservancy
* Kentucky River Authority
* Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund

For more information please contact:
Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
801 Schenkel Lane
Frankfort, KY 40601
502.573.2886
naturepreserves@ky.gov
naturepreserves.ky.gov

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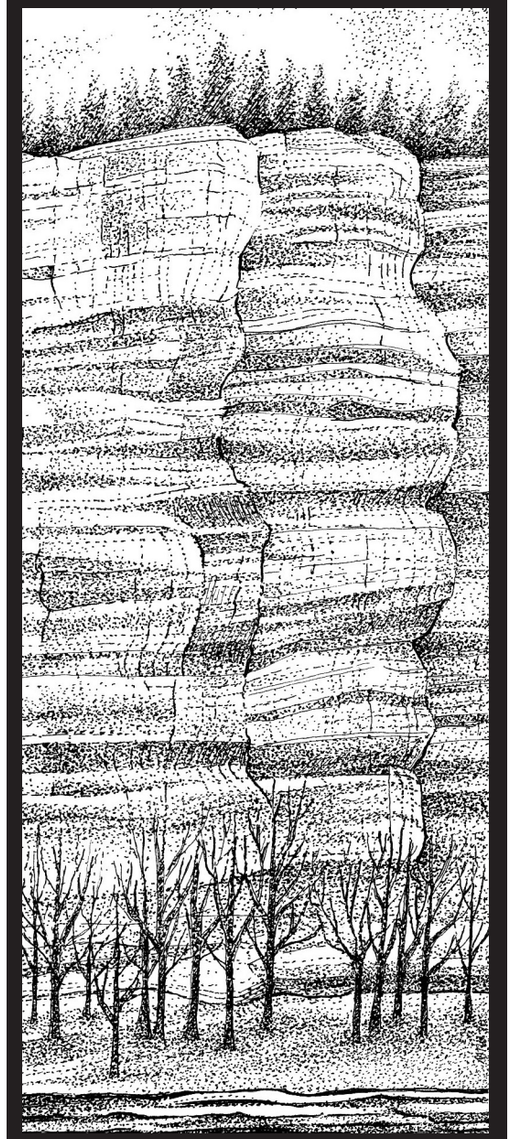
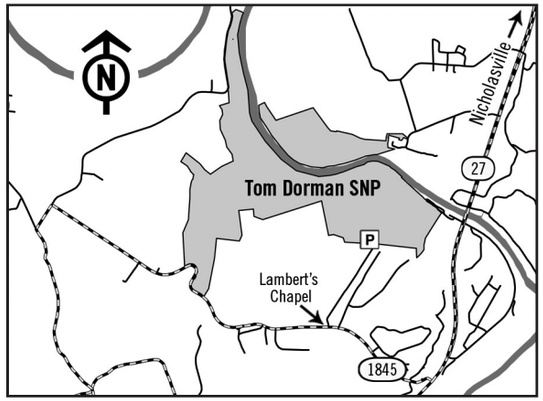
cover artwork by Mary Walter

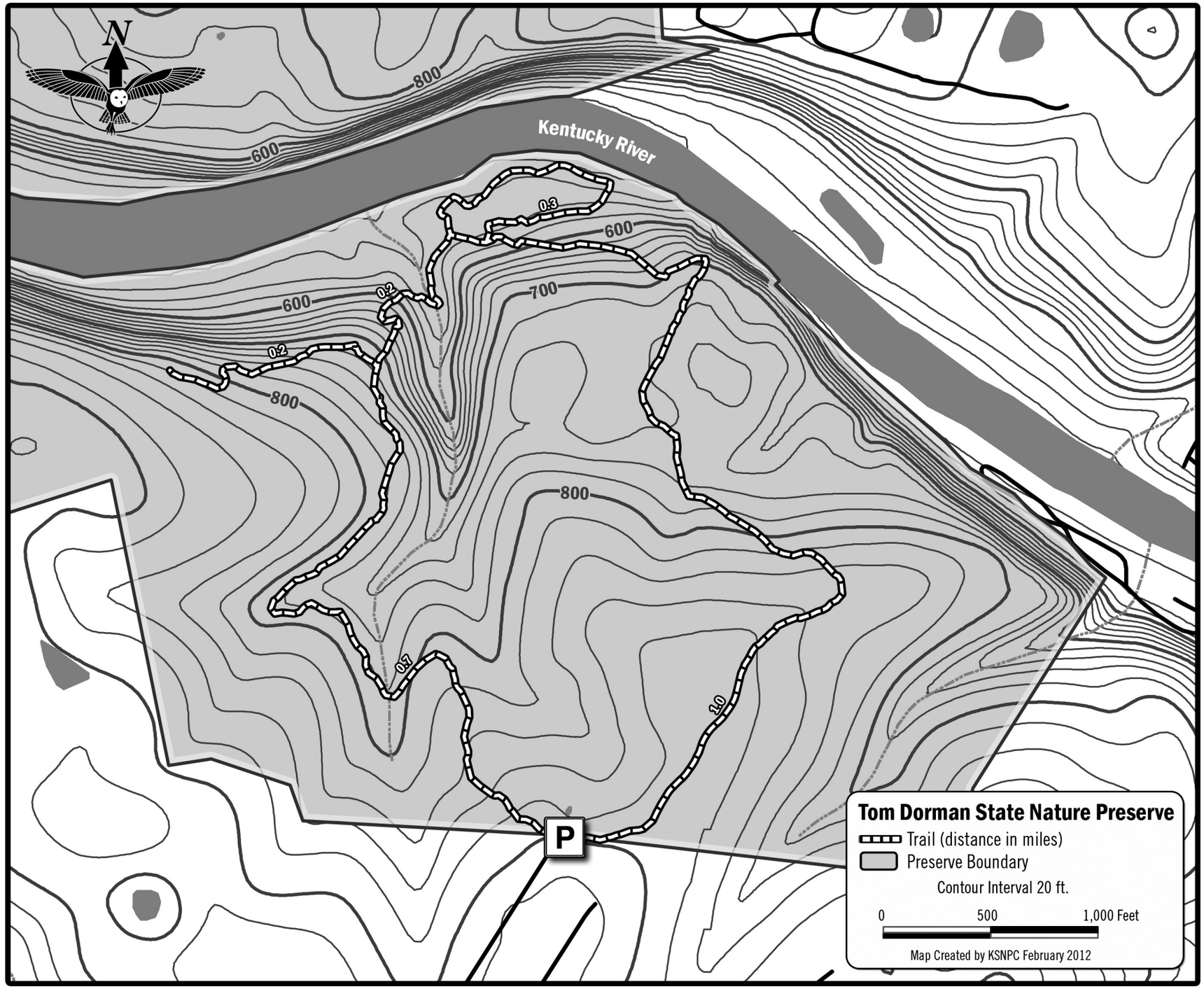
TOM DORMAN
STATE NATURE PRESERVE





Garrard County. From Nicholasville, go south on US 27 for approximately 9 miles. After crossing the Kentucky River into Garrard County, continue south on US 27 for an additional 1.25 mile. Turn right onto KY 1845 and travel 1 mile. Turn right onto Jess Brim Road next to Lambert's Chapel. Travel ¾ mile to the parking area/trail head at the end of Jess Brim Road.

By observing the rules for State Nature Preserves, you will be helping to protect Kentucky's natural heritage.

1. Preserves are open sunrise to sunset.
2. Trails are open to foot traffic only. The established trail system provides you with the safest and best way to travel through the preserve. Visitors must not re-route or shortcut the existing trail system.
3. Horses, bicycles, climbing and rappelling are not permitted in nature preserves because of their destructive impacts to the trails and natural features.
4. Motorized vehicles are not permitted.
5. Possession of drugs or alcohol is prohibited.
6. Collecting plants, animals, rocks, artifacts or wood reduces those things that are needed to maintain nature's delicate balance. Therefore, collecting, hunting and trapping are prohibited on dedicated state nature preserves.
7. To ensure the natural beauty of each preserve and to promote visitor safety and enjoyment, camping, picnicking, building fires, audio equipment and pets are not permitted.
8. Remember to carry out your trash.

THESE RULES ARE ESTABLISHED BY 400 KAR 2:090. ANY PERSON IN VIOLATION OF THIS REGULATION MAY BE LIABLE FOR A CIVIL PENALTY OF $1000 PER DAY AND POSSIBLE CRIMINAL PROSECUTION AS PROVIDED FOR IN KRS 224.