The largest of Louisiana's state parks, Chicot is situated around a 300-acre, mature beech–magnolia forest for variety of such outdoor activities as fishing, hiking and camping.

Story by Judy Stanford

He is far enough to go to find the old-growth forest, famed with 250-year-old trees and lush foliage, temptingly.

Well, there's a place just like that. It's a few miles off I-40 near Ville Platte, Chicot State Park is a great day trip destination, or it can be an overnight, if you'd like. And it can be an unpretentious as a civilised as you choose. And while you're there, you might as well visit the Louisiana State Arboretum next door.

The strike of woodland area known as Chicot State Park surrounds the nearly 300 acres of land in the 250-acre park, you can fish, explore the area by boat, or hike through the woods for birds and other wildlife.

"Wildlife and Fisheries Department has stocked nearly two million bass fingerlings (young fish) into the lake," said interagency Jane Anderson. "And there's a brown, raccoon, opossum, and other from other species water.

Even if you don't like to fish, you might want to visit the park by foot. It's like a loop of cypress and tupelo groves and you can see a little of everything. It's another Anderson said: "There are some sections where there can go a little bit faster, in the sun."

Water dripping from the leaves of the hardwoods placed by tree trunks. It's not allowed to be in the lake because of alligators, but it's a beautiful, serene forest. It's available for those who like to take a hike.

You can launch your own boat or one of the three boat launches in the park or you can rent an aluminum boat for a small fee on your own notice for the aluminum boats." Anderson said. "Or you can use the pads that come with the boats.

Although canoe are not available for rent, seven canoes are available for reservation in large groups free of charge, since they're paid the 10 percent fee to get into Chicot.

And you get a guided nature tour during the barges. Anderson will go along to act as a guide and to point out the flora and fauna.

It's just one of the many areas to help you learn about the area. There are various programs scheduled throughout the year, like "Braving Wildlife Butterfly's, Birds, Bats and More," which will be held July 10. As Anderson said, it's a great introduction to the park, groups, family, friends and others.

"A bunch of people came up to me and said, 'I want to learn to fish. For instance, we can offer that,' she said. 'But it's only one person, so it's by reservation.'

"If you want to go away from the crowds, you're also come to the right place. There are plenty of web activities available.

"There are some 300 feet pieces that go out over the water." Anderson said. "You can rent them, have some lunch or just relax and enjoy the beauty of the lake."

And then there is the almost simulable trail that goes around the lake and, in places, up and down gentle slopes. Volun- teers have been working very carefully that trail that was damaged in par, taken away, and restored, and volunteers do "It was needed."

"There are lots of places to hike.

"These are miles of trails," Anderson said. "through a beautiful, natural forest. It's all shaded, except for a few areas, with pine and upland beech, magnolia and different varieties of trees.

You can bring lunch and eat at one of the picnic shelters, and let the kids run on one of the playgrounds in the park. There are smoke and beverages at the concession stand. Or you can leave the park for lunch and reenter on the same day with your receipt. There are plenty of restaurants and fast food places about 6 miles away in Ville Platte and Byun's Chicot.

And if you want to stay overnight, you have choice of accommodations.

Or you could stay at one of the 28 cab- in, five lodges, or six group camps. Right now, indoor accommodations for the weekends are booked until September, so there's a chance you might get a cabin on weekdays.

If it's just trees you're after, you might want to visit the Louisiana from Arboretum located adjacent to the park. "It's a mature beech–magnolia forest," said interagency ranger Gary Bistro. "There have been growing from 300 to 350 years old and more than 120 different species of plants that have been catalogued.

You can hike on your own or around a total of these three miles of trails. "There had been a bridge, and where you can watch birds or just take a break." Bistro said. "It's a lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake, and the lake.

You can attend one of the scheduled nature programs held throughout the year, which includes walking tours, nature programs, and private tours or programs for groups.

The area has some great views between the Louisiana prairies and the rolling hills of north Louisiana. "We have a great vantage point," Bistro said. "Trails are up and down, but the steep parts have steps. The highest point in Louisiana's state-owned preserve area is about 30 feet above the lowest point.

The main attraction, of course, is the trees. The Magnolia Bloom in April, but they're beautiful year-round.

"They're very large trees," Bistro said. "They've been growing since the beginning of the world."

And if you stay overnight, you have choice of accommodations.

If you like to rough it, backpack to the primitive camp area where there is no water or electricity. Some of the sites are accessible by foot or canoe and there's a small fee for camping.

Among the 700 trees on the grounds, there are some with water, electricity and shower houses. Some campgrounds accommodate RVs and one location has a launderette.

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THE DAILY LEADER

LAFAYETTE, LA.

Day Tripping

Chicot State Park

Winter: Sun 1 to March 31: 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.
South Louisiana: June entrance is open from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Spring: April 1 to June 30: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Summer: July 1 to August 31: 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.
Fall: September 1 to December 31: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.
All areas are open seven days a week.
Cost:
Day use $2 per car or four occupants, with 50 cents for each additional person per day.
Best rental $6 per day, plus a $100 deposit.
Camping: $30 to $35 per night; backpackers, $25 per night per person per night.
Dine, lodge and group camps (indoor) ranges from $30 to $50 for a group camp that accommodates 112.
For information, call (800) 886-7744 or send an email to chicot.statepark@la.org.
Louisiana State Arboretum

Chicot State Park and the Louisiana State Arboretum will be the site of a Web site of www.alt.usa and chicotstatepark.net, the choice List of State Parks and Commemorative Area in the Chicot State Park or chose State Parks Association for the arboretum.