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(Neb.)-The Iris Are Blooming At Agate Fossil Beds National Monument



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 06/12/2013 12:49 PM

(HARRISON)-Officials at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument say the Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) are now blooming along much of the Niobrara River that runs through the park. The wetlands will be dotted with these yellow blooms in numbers that can be seen from the road. However, visitors' services assistant Lil Mansfield contends that the best way to view the iris is to walk down the Fossil Hills Trail to the bridge crossing the river, which is a ¼ mile walk from the visitor center. She says whether visitors just amble to the bridge or walk the entire trail to the historic excavation sites with views overlooking the valley, it is a pleasant way to spend time on the prairie.

Mansfield explains that James Cook's father-in-law, E. H. Barbour, loved iris and brought bulbs to the Agate Springs Ranch around 1906. He planted them near a pond behind the ranch house, and they have since migrated all the way through the park, a distance of eleven river miles or three road miles. Many local visitors make a yearly excursion to view the spring blooms, while others who happen by are pleasantly surprised by the scene.

Though pretty, the park is evaluating the aggressive spread of the plant to see if it is displacing native plant species. Although the locally dry spring has caused a change in the numbers of wildflowers and time of blooming, there are still many varieties to see. Mansfield encourages visitors to save some time to see the park's visitor center and relax while watching the movie and enjoying the exhibits.

Mansfield said she is not even going to guess how long the blooming iris will last, because they are blooming sooner this year than she thought they would, considering the late spring the area has seen. She did say that "usually they'll bloom for about 2-3 weeks...usually." They've already been blooming about one week, so if visitors want to see them, Mansfield encourages, "Do it now."

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is located 22 miles south of Harrison, or 34 miles north of Mitchell, on State Highway 29, then east on River Road for three miles to the visitor center. The visitor center is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and admission is free. The park's two trails are open from dawn to dusk. For more information, visit <http://www.nps.gov/agfo/index.htm> or visit Agate Fossil Beds on Facebook.

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