



Finzel Swamp Nature Preserve

Location: Garrett County, Finzel, Maryland

Address: 39.70008, -78.94601

URL: http://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Publiclands/Natural_Areas/Finzel_Swamp.asp
http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/usa/maryland_dc/placesweprotect/finzel-swamp.xml



SITE DESCRIPTION:

Finzel Swamp is a very unique property in western Maryland managed by the Nature Conservancy. Per the MD DNR website, "Located at the headwaters of the Savage River, Finzel Swamp is a biodiversity treasure chest containing more than 30 rare and uncommon species, and five globally and locally significant wetland habitat types. This remnant boreal fen has been left behind from the Pleistocene Epoch and is one of the few remaining refuges in Maryland where boreal species have persisted since the last Ice Age."

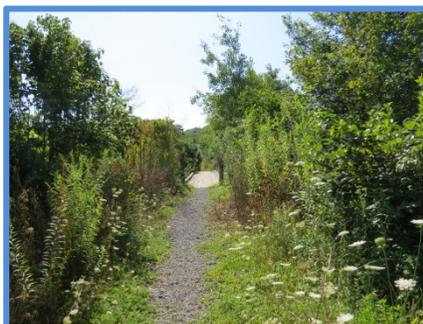
Directions: From I-68, take the exit for 546N to the town of Finzel. Go 1.8 miles, turn right onto Cranberry Swamp Road. Take the left fork and proceed to the parking area at the trailhead.

Rating: 

Upside: Beautiful natural setting; a single trail transverses the lower edge of the swamp; very few "improvements" means that the Preserve is pretty much as it has been for hundreds of years.

Downside: A single unimproved trail that has become quite overgrown; insects (ticks, etc.) can be a problem; no benches; isolated area; not accessible.

REVIEW: Finzel Swamp Preserve is like few other places on earth. Apparently, this spot of land is a remnant from the last ice age and includes plants and animals found nowhere else in Maryland. This is a "natural area" that is entrusted to and managed by The Nature Conservancy and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR). As a natural area, it is not a park or wildlife refuge that has been improved for recreational purposes with paved pathways, visitor centers, indoor bathrooms, or snack bars. The site is pretty much as it has been for the past few hundred years. While the trail ends at a meadow with fencing that would imply a farm was originally nearby, the swamp appears to have been left alone throughout the years. And that is a good thing....it is best thing because it has been preserved and is still in its natural state with birds, animals, butterflies, dragonflies and pretty much every other creature or plant that thrives in such wild places...which makes it a great place for birding and other nature-focused activities.



The trail is graveled, or it was at one time. There are four wooden bridges that cross over water along the trail. It is not a very long trail – possibly a mile in length. It does not loop so you walk out the same way that you walk in. According to the DNR website, the trail leads to a small lake. Either we stopped short of the lake or the area has become so overgrown that

we did not see the lake. We visited in August so the bushes along the trail were at full height and blocked the view of the swamp for the most part. In winter, the views may be considerably better looking out across the swamp. We walked the trail all the way back to the fence where there is a small sign denoting the area is managed by the Nature Conservancy. The trail continued through the meadow and further up the rise so it is possible that there was a lake just out of our view.

As this is an unimproved area, there are no benches although I would have liked to stop at the meadow and sit for a bit to do a little birdwatching. We did spot finches and sparrows and chickadees here. I have since heard that Black Capped Chickadees have been spotted in western Maryland so I would have liked to spend some time there to try my luck. I assumed that



the Chickadees we saw were the usual Carolina Chickadees so I didn't take more than a moment to identify them before we moved on (my loss, of course). But if I go back to the Preserve in the future, I might actually consider back-packing a small folding stool or chair to allow some time to sit and contemplate my surroundings, enjoy the peacefulness, and maybe give the birds time to find me.

And, of course, there are no bathrooms or other conveniences. The area is quite isolated. In fact, the directions given at the Nature Conservancy site were a bit confusing advising you to take the 2nd driveway of 4 near the ballpark and when you park, do not block the road or anyone's driveway.

The directions in this review are those taken from the MD DNR site and are much easier to follow. It appears that the road into the Preserve has been extended a bit to allow visitors to park (again, un-improved parking area) without having to block the driveway or road for that last house on the road before the Preserve. There are also signs that are quite prominent pointing the way. However, when you get to the small parking area, there really isn't a trailhead sign. The trail is relatively clear as a trail and leads away from the southeast corner of the area. Once you have walked about 50 feet on the trail, then you can begin to see the gravel so you know you are on the right track. We noted a trail of sorts at the north end of the parking area heading around the top area of the swamp and we considered taking it just to see where it lead but we decided it could just be an animal trail and not a good idea for exploring further. It could be a trail blazed by birders and naturalists but it was not very inviting

considering that August is the height of tick and chigger season...not to mention the possibility of bears in the woods in this part of Maryland.



Both the DNR and Conservancy websites recommend long pants, lots of bug spray, and good shoes. I concur with those recommendations wholeheartedly. It was a very buggy place and we were quite amazed that we did not have an encounter with ticks or chiggers. While we were looking for birds, it turned out to be mostly about the wildflowers, berries, and dragonflies on this day. We did see some birds but most of my photos from the day are of wildflowers.

As noted, the Preserve is very beautiful and peaceful but it is also very rustic. If you have accessibility issues such as arthritis, then this is not the place for you. I was able to make the walk without too much difficulty but I did stop to rest leaning against the support posts at the boardwalks. The location is quite easily found notwithstanding the confusing directions. The site is also known and reviewed on [MD Trails](http://www.mdtrails.com/trail/20030) (<http://www.mdtrails.com/trail/20030>) but, when I checked, the last entry was 2009. The Preserve is only about 20 minutes from I-68; it just cannot be any more convenient than that.

Birds Spotted: Cedar Waxwings Crows Catbird
 Great Crested Flycatcher Golden Finches Black Vultures
 Eastern Kingbird Chickadees

