

It's almost leaf-peeping time at Starved Rock

By **Kathy Rodeghier**

Daily Herald Correspondent

We wanted a walk in the woods. The first day of autumn had arrived last year, which had me itching to lace up my shoes and go rubbernecking for fall colors not too far from home. But where? And when?

day trip

The where proves easy: Starved Rock State Park, just 90 minutes southwest of Chicago. But predicting when the fall colors would be at their best has always been one of Mother Nature's favorite guessing games. Some leaves start turning there at the end of September, I'd been told, and sometimes the colors last into November.

When my husband and I couldn't coordinate our schedules for a couple of days off until after the usual peak in mid-October, I felt sure we'd miss the height of the fall colors. I booked rooms anyway and hoped for the best.

A scenic drive

The park is a straight shot along I-80, exiting at Illinois Route 178 and heading south through the small town of Utica. But I wanted a more scenic approach. We exited at Ottawa and drove south to Illinois Route 71.

The locals nicknamed Route 71 "Canyon Drive," a winding highway traveling west through some of



The archway entry of Council Overhang rock formation frames fall foliage at Starved Rock State Park near Utica, Ill.

the finest fall scenery in this part of Illinois. Soon after we passed the perimeter of the state park, we pulled into a parking lot and hopped out for a hike. The sun filtered through bright leaves, lighting up a well-trod path. In minutes, we reached one of the park's most famous rock formations, Council Overhang.

Our jaws dropped.

Rising alongside a canyon, this sandstone dome forms a natural band shell beckoning anyone passing to enter. Inside, the voices of hikers instinctively dropped to reverent whispers as if inside a church. The walls, dimpled and carved by erosion, rise to a dizzying height. We made our way to the back of the overhang, turned and looked out onto the canyon through the entryway. Its great stone arch frames a forest of golden leaves like a stained-glass window.

Mission accomplished. I could turn around and go home right now, satisfied that I'd had my fill of fall colors for the season.

But I didn't.

Canyons and bluffs

Council Overhang sits along one of 18 canyons in Starved Rock State Park, 14 of them with waterfalls, sometimes just a trickle when the weather is dry, but a torrent after heavy rains. The visitor center has maps for self-guided hikes of 12.3 miles of trails ranging from under half a mile to almost five and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
A waterfall trickles at the back of Kaskaskia Canyon in Starved Rock State Park. Fourteen of the park's canyons have waterfalls.

from easy to strenuous. Naturalists lead guided hikes at 11 a.m. on weekends.

Erosion carved the canyons through St. Peter sandstone, a deceptively soft and porous rock. Signs warning hikers to stay on marked trails should be taken seriously. Some who've ventured off have been injured or died when the rock crumbled beneath them. This is especially true on trails leading to the summits of bluffs overlooking the Illinois River.

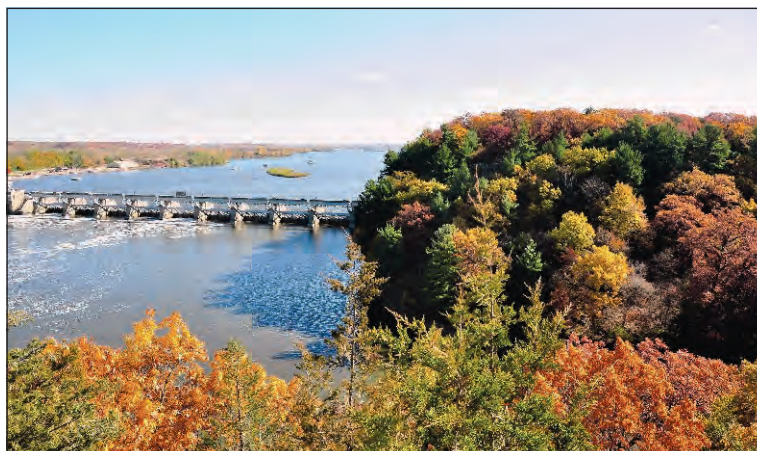
One such perch is Starved Rock. Visitors who stick to its sturdy set of stairs are rewarded on autumn days with a panoramic view of seasonal hues. Ash and cottonwoods, white and black oaks, maples, cedars, bur oaks and hickories turn from deep green to yellows and golds, oranges and bright reds.

Native American legend has it Starved Rock got its name after Chief Pontiac of the Ottawa tribe was stabbed by the chief of the Illini at a tribal council. A battle ensued and the Illini took refuge at the top of the rock. Surrounded in a siege, they perished from hunger.

Two legends compete for the naming of the park's other famous bluff, Lover's Leap. One story tells of an Indian maiden and brave who fell in love, but were forbidden by their chief to marry. They leapt to their deaths. The other says

See **STARVED** on page 11

Hikers have a view of the Illinois River and Starved Rock Dam from atop Starved Rock. The bluff is named for a Native American legend.



Starved Rock State Park

Visitor information: I&M Canal Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau, heritagecorridorcvb.com, (800) 926-2262

• Starved Rock State Park, starvedrockstatepark.org, (800) 868-7625

Where to stay: Starting rates for double occupancy in mid-October, rates may fluctuate. Rooms sell out early during fall color season.

• Starved Rock Lodge, at Illinois Routes 178 and 71, is a historic lodge inside the state park that has rustic rooms in the original 1930s lodge, more modern rooms in the circa 1989 hotel wing, and two categories of cabins in the woods. From \$125, two-night stay required on weekends. (800) 868-7625 or starvedrocklodge.com.

• The Willows Hotel, 325 Clark St., Utica, is boutique hotel about a mile north of Starved Rock State Park. From \$149. (815) 667-3400 or thewillowshotel.net.

Where to eat: The Main Dining Room, inside Starved Rock Lodge at Illinois Routes 178 and 71, serves comfort foods such as pot roast, ribs, chicken, fish and meatloaf and is known for Sunday brunch. (815) 220-7321 or starvedrocklodge.com.

• Cajun Connection, between I-80 and Utica at 897 U.S. Route 6, Utica, is an unlikely spot for authentic Cajun food — think jambalaya and alligator. It sits in an old single-family home in the countryside. (815) 667-9855 or ronscajunconnection.com.

STARVED

from page 9

an Indian maiden committed suicide by jumping after waiting for her warrior lover to return, only to learn he had fallen in love with another.

The story of the founding of the state park isn't quite so dramatic. Daniel Hitt purchased the land in the 1890s and built a hotel and dance pavilion for vacationers. The State of Illinois bought the property in 1911 as the first recreational park in the state park system. During the Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps set up three camps and built the trail system and Starved Rock Lodge.

Now a National Historic Landmark, the log lodge expanded over the years with the addition of an indoor pool, saunas and a hotel wing. Its Great Hall, with double limestone fireplace and log furniture, remains a popular gathering spot.

Peak season

With 2.1 million visitors a year, Starved Rock ranks among Illinois' most popular parks, and its busiest month is October when fall colors often peak. Snagging a room in the lodge at this time of year can be a challenge, so visitors look for other options, such as The Willows Hotel in nearby Utica.

Fall Colors Weekend, on Oct. 17-18, draws crowds, as does Utica's Burgoo Festival, on Oct. 11. The hearty pioneer stew simmers outdoors over wood fires while a craft show, flea market, music and family activities entertain those waiting for a taste.

The Starved Rock Trolley makes the rounds of the park on history tours from March through December, and in October it offers fall color tours. From May through October it combines a tour of the state park with a ride on a mule-pulled packet boat on the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal in nearby LaSalle.

The park's visitor center stays open year-round, except



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Fall foliage frames a visitor balancing on a fallen log in Starved Rock State Park.

major holidays, and has interactive exhibits, videos and a 400-gallon aquarium containing fish native to the Illinois River. It makes a good place to start a visit to the park. Staff at the information desk gives advice on hiking and trail conditions, fall colors and wildlife: deer and fox, possum and beavers, but no bears.

We picked up a trail map and began checking off our hikes — the bluffs, the canyons, the overlooks — until our legs gave out. Stiff and sore the morning of our last day, I was ready to drive home, but when I peered out the window of our lodge room, the sun was bright, the sky a deep blue and the trees shimmered in gold.

Just one more short hike, we decided.

St. Louis Canyon extends less than half a mile from the parking lot off the park's west entrance. Leaves littered wooden bridges over the stream flowing through the canyon, kids were climbing over fallen logs and at the back of the canyon a family posed for photos next to a waterfall trickling down layers of stone. We took a seat on a rock to drink in the moment, treasuring an autumn experience that will not come around for another year.

• *Information for this article was gathered on a research trip sponsored by the I&M Canal Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau.*

David Oyelowo talks Emmy nomination after Oscar snub

By Alicia Rancilio

Associated Press

NEW YORK — David Oyelowo, who played the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the film "Selma," says there's an interesting upside to not getting an Oscar nomination.

"In many ways I think we probably got more attention for not being nominated," he said in a recent interview. "I've actually found that people were so disgruntled by some of the love that 'Selma' didn't get with certain award shows that it makes their love for it even more vehement. When they hug me, they hug me real tight, you know?"

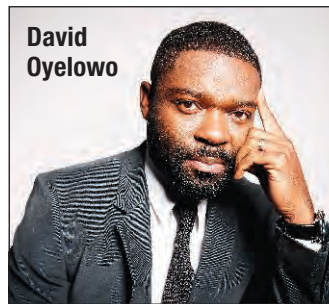
Certain award show snubs aside, Oyelowo is nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for his performance in the HBO TV movie "Nightingale," where he plays a man unraveling after committing a heinous act off-screen.

Next, he co-stars with Kate Mara in "Captive," opening Sept. 18. It's based on the 2005 true crime story of Brian Nichols, a killer who takes a young waitress hostage and the two connect on a spiritual level.

Oyelowo told The Associated Press about his work, being "a goofball" and what kind of film he'd love to do next.

Q. How has your career changed since "Selma"?

A. My career kind of changed



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from the moment it was announced that I may be playing Dr. King. That was in 2010. ... Until then, I was a British actor ... desperately trying to get my foot in the door and when Lee Daniels, who was the director attached at that time, chose me to play him, I think there was a lot of head-scratching as to why this British dude who we had not seen much work from (got the part.) But, Hollywood is a sort of heat-seeking industry. If there's something happening over there, the attention goes over there. ... What it's really given me the opportunity to do is get behind stories I want to see told.

Q. That must be a good feeling.

A. It's a great feeling because I gravitate toward stories that are a bit tougher. They don't immediately scream "box office."

Q. Would you ever do a big budget, popcorn-type movie?

A. I really want to do those kinds of movies. My thing is

that I would still want what I look for as an artist to be present and I don't think they have to be mutually exclusive.

Q. What about comedy?

A. Yeah, if I say I should be mixing it up I guess that should be the next thing, shouldn't it? It's funny. I'm a bit of a goofball.

Q. Does being nominated for an Emmy for "Nightingale" make up for not getting nominated for an Oscar for "Selma"?

A. When it comes to the Emmys, "Nightingale" is a tiny film we made for next to no money. We did it as independent (film,) we envisioned playing a couple of theaters. Probably have a bit of a life on Apple TV. Not HBO with billboards across the country of my fat head beaming down. Not these nominations. The lesson for me is at the end of the day it's all about the work.

Sudoku answers

9	7	6	1	4	5	3	8	2
8	3	1	2	6	7	9	4	5
2	5	4	3	8	9	1	6	7
3	2	7	6	1	4	5	9	8
1	6	8	9	5	3	2	7	4
4	9	5	7	2	8	6	3	1
6	4	3	5	7	2	8	1	9
7	1	2	8	9	6	4	5	3
5	8	9	4	3	1	7	2	6