

EXPLORE MORE

Adventure in a Good Trail series part 3: Crystal Canyon Natural Area

By Eoin Donovan

For August 2021

*Reviewed by Editor, Amy Schultz (Sociability)

*Each month, Sociability offers its contributors an optional theme for their writing. August's theme is "family." I chose a park based on that theme, and as I began preparations for my story, I really thought and thought about what family means to me. As it turns out, what you see below is not that park or that story. To me, the concept of family includes an unwavering, unconditional love that allows grace and understanding, especially when faced with the obstacle of impatience. In order to be kind to myself and stay true to how I feel, I needed space from the overstimulation that last month brought me and decided to point my mind into another direction so I can allow myself the space to grow.

In this month of August, let's allow ourselves and our family members the grace, understanding, and space they have been needing so we can return with growth to share on our future adventures together.

Crystal Canyon Natural Area

Neighborhood: Northeast Arlington

Street Address: 1000 Brown Blvd., Arlington, TX 76011

Park hours: 5am-10pm

Website:

https://www.arlingtontx.gov/city_hall/departments/parks_recreation/parks_trails/park_finder/crystal_canyon_natural_area

I think there may still be a few people who remember back to the days they spent in a place they believed was called Crystal Canyon.

These memories might consist of friends walking beyond a fence in order to trek through rubble of destroyed concrete, hopping over a small stream, walking through a field of tall grass, and watching a train go by only a stone's throw away. On the trail, just beyond the tracks, they might remember a beautiful pond formed from the destruction of what seems to be a man-made structure that reflects the chaotic nature of the land in any angle you could try. I have a lot of fond memories of staring at the night sky, sitting by the pond, watching the train go by, and using the area to play all sorts of games with friends. The pond was the spot believed to have been the canyon which gave this area the name "Crystal Canyon" by this group of people. I know this because I was in that group that mistook it for the real thing.

It wasn't until I got older that I learned the real Crystal Canyon was located approximately 7 miles northeast of whatever that location was we explored all that time ago. I now know I had

driven by the real Crystal Canyon many times before, but I never made the time to actually look beyond the forested entrance. I hadn't seen what lies beyond the trails as I did in that Fake Crystal Canyon, and it really got me wondering what I was missing.

I had it in my head that I would spend lots of time this month walking the trails, practicing all sorts of mindful awareness as I looked around every corner of the park. Days then weeks went by, as if the stress of real-life miraculously grew a set of hands which at every turn reached out and grabbed me away from dedicating time there. Upon realizing my helplessness, I decided to make an intentional action in order to remedy the situation. I asked for help.

My friend Julia Manson agreed to meet me to explore Crystal Canyon. Together, we walked from the entrance of the park, where the winding pavement trails made one giant twisting loop (with a few diverging trails) leading back to the entrance. We got lost a few times and kept mistaking one bridge for the next since they were virtually identical except that each one had entirely different views. One bridge caught our attention. It seemed that some street artists had shared some of their graffiti art across the different bindings of the entire structure. Julia and I stopped to grab some fun pictures of the bridge before moving on to the next point of interest.

At this point, I felt like I was within the confines of a well-tamed trail, but I did not feel the satisfaction I wanted to feel in this adventure. Crystal Canyon is a fantastic name for a park, but I did not feel the magic that I did in the other place I used to call by that name.

As we moved on throughout the park, we found a dirt trail leading away from the pavement and further into the woods. We came across a small fork in the trail which would force us to decide on which way to go. Before we had time to process what to do, we noticed a big, naturally formed alcove in the side of a tall hill towering over a stream. We had to jump across the small stream to get to this spot, which we did, and we ended up making our way to the top of the hill. The top was home to a sturdy tree which protruded off the side of the hill's cliff. Within the wall of the alcove was the network of roots belonging to this tree. It was a sight to be seen. Each root stretching downwards painted a still scene resembling that of a raceway, with the roots as the racers and water in the stream as the finish line. It was honestly a great find, and I was very happy that we took a step off the defined trail because it felt like a step in the right direction. To me, the magic of nature always seems to be on the off-beaten trail.

Time was growing short, so we decided to head in a direction we hoped would lead us back to the park entrance. Honestly, I wasn't ready to see what we found along the way: a pond that flooded my head with memories. I thought for a minute I was in Fake Crystal Canyon, because it gave me the same feelings as the pond of my memories. The whole area was encased in trees, surrounded and hidden by nature. It was like we had found the source of the magic coming from the real Crystal Canyon.

I felt – and feel – inspired by this unexpected discovery on my adventure. It reminded me to keep having faith in the process ahead and continue practicing patience. I believe magic really exists. It doesn't usually jump out when you're looking for it, but instead it presents itself if

you're willing to stick it out and keep an open mind. As for the fake Crystal Canyon my friends and I frequented – I still haven't figured out its true name. Perhaps someday soon, I'll get a chance to return and find out.

I will be coming back to explore the real Crystal Canyon. For those wanting to spend an afternoon here, I believe bringing a water bottle, sturdy hiking shoes, some good company, and plenty of patience will suffice.



Crystal Canyon 1



Crystal Canyon 2



Crystal Canyon 3