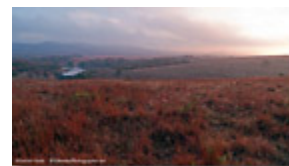


## Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma

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The central plains states are known for being flat. They are not known for vast tracts of public land. After all, this is the most fertile, productive farmland in the world. As such, one does not expect a great photography destination, let alone thousands of acres of public land. I can, however, tell you that the thundering plains still come alive in Oklahoma at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.



Yes, that's Oklahoma. If you have read my prior articles here on NPN, you know I like to photograph places that are the off the beaten path. The Wichita Mountains are another one of those places. Here is why it is a location you should know about.

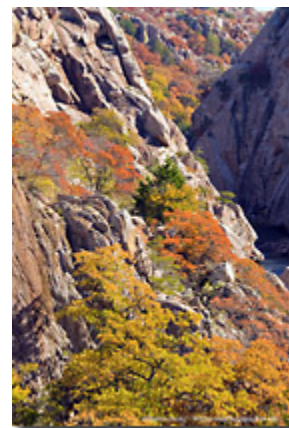


Let's start with mountains. Here on the south plains, a rocky granite range of mountains rises out of the prairie and runs across southwest Oklahoma. You might call them hills but some top 800 feet tall, and that is a big hill. It seems as if the Texas hill country had moved out to Oklahoma! This is an area of clear running streams, lakes, rocky outcroppings, canyons, big boulders, and small forested areas that get some nice fall color.



The refuge itself is over 50,000 acres and one of the largest tracts of public land in the plains states between the Red River and Canadian border.

There is also wildlife here. Bison, longhorn, and elk roam freely across the refuge. There are prairie dogs, deer, and birds as well that make this something of a Great Plains Serengeti. The large animals can be found in all parts of the refuge. The longhorn and buffalo are seen at a distance out on the grasslands and also found frequently next to the road. The elk can be found near water and in the rockier canyons and mountains. As always, exercise caution as these truly are wild animals. Use long lenses to get a closer view. There is a prairie dog town west of the campground where you can watch them up close all day long.



As a photographer you can see the wildlife and also find some of the nicest landscapes in middle America. The granite hills here are rugged and scenic. This is a ideal destination to hike and even backpack, making it an ideal destination for an extended weekend.

The refuge is located right outside Lawton, Oklahoma. It is less than two hours from Oklahoma City and only three hours from Dallas.

For accommodations, there are motels in nearby Lawton and the nice Doris campground in the refuge.



Paved roads dissect the refuge and offer easy access to several areas of interest. Some of my favorite places include:

**Elk Mountain** - A Wilderness Area of large boulders that offer some of the best landscapes in the park. Elk are often found high on this flat topped mountain at the west end of the refuge.

**The Narrows** - This narrow, zigzag canyon has some great fall color (even maples) and is popular with rock climbers too.

**Lake Jed Johnson** - This lake has a CCC-built stone tower along one side that looks like a scene right out of Scotland or maybe Tolkien. This is a great morning landscape location.

**Mount Scott** - You can drive to the top of this mountains and experience one of the best sunset locations in the Sooner State.

If you are planning a visit to the refuge, a few other nearby things of interest include neighboring Fort Sill. This fort is home to an artillery school so you may hear live fire exercises during your stay. The historic old fort, which includes Geronimo's gravesite, can also be toured. Lastly, make the short drive up to Meers and have a Meers Burger. You'll be glad you did.

Information on the refuge can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/oklahoma/wichitamountains/>.

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**Darren Huski** is a landscape photographer from Fort Worth, Texas. He photographs the far reaches of the Lone Star State and throughout the American west and midwest. He works with a 4x5 view camera and a modern digital SLR. His work and travels can be seen at [www.WildernessPhotographer.net](http://www.WildernessPhotographer.net) . Darren also blogs on his travels with a large format camera and those adventures can be followed at <http://thetravelingcamera.blogspot.com>.



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