



## Elephant Trunk Rock – Ithaca (Hwy 58 North).

The Driftless Area of Wisconsin is famous the world over because it is completely surrounded by glaciated territory. It preserves a large sample of what the rest of Wisconsin was like before the Glacial Period. The Driftless Area is mostly in the Western Upland, but it also extends into the Central Plain and the Northern Highland. It covers an area of nearly 15,000 square miles, 13,360 square miles of which lie in Wisconsin with the remainder extending into Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois.

Writing in 1854, Edward Daniels, the first state geologist, described the Driftless Area as follows: "About one- third of the surface is prairie, dotted and belted with beautiful groves and oak openings. The scenery combines with every element of beauty and grandeur, giving us the sunlit prairie, with its soft swell, waving grass and thousand flowers; the somber depths of primeval forest; and castellated cliffs, rising hundreds of feet, with beetling crags which a Titan might have piled for his fortress."

The lack of glaciated terrain accounts for the high hills, bluffs, and ridges. Richland County is near the geographic center of this area and is one of the best locations to view these hills, bluffs and rock outcroppings. It's said that this area is unique to the world since none of the four great glacial periods ever ran what is now known as the Driftless Area. There really is nowhere else like southwest Wisconsin.

The LaCrosse, Kickapoo, Baraboo, Lemonweir, Pine, Wisconsin, Grant, Platte and Pecatonica rivers and their tributaries , over thousands upon thousands of years, created deeply eroded valleys that contrast the nearby peaks. Elephant Trunk Rock is located in a valley carved out by Willow Creek and its tributaries and is one of the most well-known rock outcroppings in the county.

Elephant Trunk Rock was not always known by that name. An article in the "Richland Democrat" from 1935 quotes the following told by a pioneer settler of the county that in a very early date it was called "The Devils Hitching Post."

"Children were told that when there was a death in the community, a man on a black horse tied his mount there and



wandered over the hills and valleys, bringing the death angel. Tradition says a man once saw the horse tied there and approached to investigate. The horse seemed friendly and the stranger advanced to inspect and admire the animal, when a man appeared above on the cliff and the horse turned and kicked, striking the investigator and bringing death. Such is the story told by mothers of the Devil's Hitching Post some eighty years ago to their children."

Elephant Trunk Rock's existence was threatened in 1923 when the owner, Peter Ruetten, was taken to court to argue the rock should be blasted out of the way in order to straighten the road, then a rutted, winding dirt road. A newspaper report of that time stated the argument was that "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and that all roads should be that shortest distance."

The article went on to say, "Transforming the crooked, sandy road, which curved between and around the interfering rocks, into a straight well-graded turnpike, was an accomplishment everyone approved until Elephant Trunk Rock was approached. When it became known it was the next obstacle to be removed, all residents in the vicinity rose against the plan. However, it was reported "Blasting was begun. A portion of the rock crumbled before agitation became so violent that the blasting was ordered to be delayed."

The article continued, "At last so much pressure was brought to bear that it was carried to the state highway commission which ordered Elephant Trunk Rock should remain. A sign bearing the name of the rock was planted near its base."

