

Cassettes provide eyes for blind naturalists

Observer

SPOTLIGHT

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Getting back to nature has become the thing to do in the '70's. Camping equipment sales are climbing, parks are servicing record crowds and the area's metroparks highlight their nature trails over the usual recreational fare.

The metroparks, however, have made no provision for an often ignored segment of society, the blind. The University of Michigan-Deerborn (UM-D), however, is trying to give them the same access to the outdoors that most other people have.

Several years ago, the Deerborn Naturalist Association (DNA), a UM-D student group, was searching for ways of improving the nature trails which wind through the 70-acre environmental study area.

An organization for the blind suggested a "braille trail" and the McGregor Foundation donated \$2,500 to finance the original path.

That original path has been expanded and improved, though, through the efforts of DNA students Patti Young, Peter Westcott and

Kathy O'Brien. They doubled the length of the trail to 600 yards and added additional guide wires which lead visitors around the trail and back to the starting point.

University Relations Director Dick Reynolds says: "Before, people said they enjoyed the trail but added, 'When we end up, we don't know where we are.' " The DNA remedied that by changing the open-ended trail into a circular one.

An added feature is the use of cassette recordings to more fully describe the trail's flora and fauna. "In order to get the full benefit of the

trail, you really do need the cassettes," says Reynolds.

The cassette offerings have also been expanded to make the trail more meaningful to different age groups, according to Westcott. Small children listening to the elementary tape are guided along the trail by a squirrel telling a story. The intermediate tape offers general information and the advanced tape delves more deeply into biology and botany.

Along the trail are 17 listening posts. At each of the stops more nylon guide wires lead visitors directly to plants being described on tape for more exploration.

Reynolds said cassette tapes and recorders may be borrowed at the Fair Lane Conference Center, located near the trail entrance. Persons with their own tapes and recorders may have the nature tapes copied at the UM-D Library.

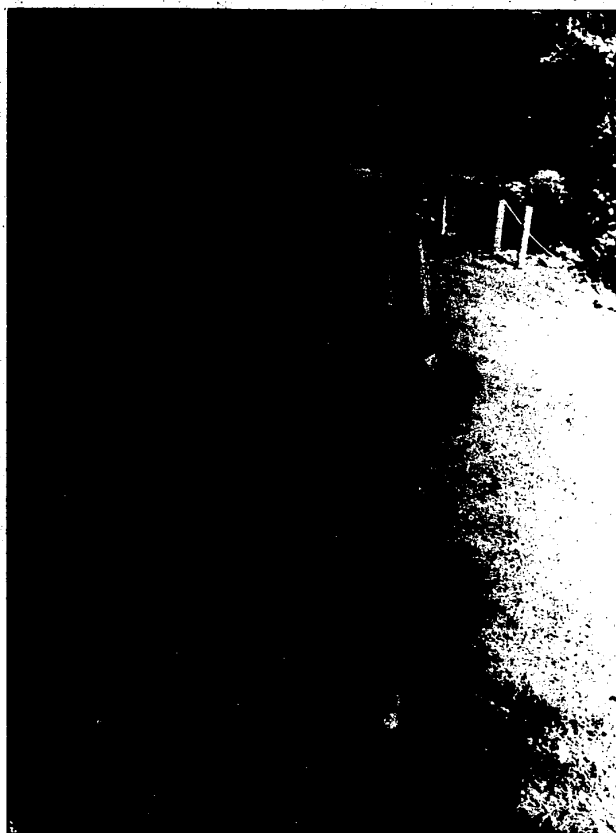
Reynolds added that sighted people are invited to enjoy the tour and suggested that for a total experience they may even borrow blindfolds from the Conference Center.

Use of the braille trail is free and open to the public. The trail is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The UM-D Environmental Study Center is open from sunrise until sunset daily. For more information call 271-2300.

Staff
photos
by
Bob Woodring



Stopping before she starts is Kathy O'Brien, who learns a bit about the area donated by the Henry Ford family to UM-D.



Patti Young follows the nature trail path at UM-D which was designed with the blind in mind. Using the line as a guide and the cassette recorder, she gets the feel of the nature area.



Comparing notes before they begin, Patti and Kathy stop before Fair Lane, home of Henry Ford.



Patti and Kathy bond for the first of 17 stops along the way.

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