

Hiking trails abound throughout northern Michigan

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outstanding views and picnic spots, especially if you park and walk the short distance to the viewing platforms.

MANISTEE NATIONAL FOREST

You can also have an enjoyable jaunt in the Manistee National Forest in Wexford and Manistee counties. While no specific fall activities are planned by the National Park Service, information on self-guided tours can be picked up at headquarters in Cadillac.

HARTWICK PINES

Hartwick Pines State Park near Grayling offers a winning combination of great hiking and intriguing history at the Lumbering Museum. Maps for the foot trails are available at the Visitors Center, which is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can choose between a one-mile, two-mile and three-mile loop. On Sept. 28, Ralph Peterson will be at the Visitors Center at 1 p.m. to talk about his new book,

"Wolves of Isle Royale, a Broken Balance." And on Oct. 5, you can combine hiking with a stop at the Visitors Center to see demonstrations by the Manistee-AuSable Fiber Guild.

GRASS RIVER NATURAL AREA

If you would like to go on a hike with someone who actually knows something about nature, you have numerous options here. By the way, all of these guided hikes are "low maintenance," which means if you can walk from your kitchen to your couch without perspiring, you can handle these walks.

Naturalists at the Grass River Natural Area near Bellaire offer a "One O'Clock Walk" every Saturday and Sunday at, yep, 1 p.m. These walks last anywhere from an hour to 90 minutes and cover a distance of less than a mile. The naturalist will point out interesting plants and talk about the history of the Grass River and the importance of wetlands. Boardwalks are built

over the squishy areas, making the hike handicapped-accessible.

Grass River naturalists also lead color driving tours, usually on a bus. For more information, call the Grass River office during the week at (616) 533-8314. The nature center is open weekdays only from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through the end of October.

GRAND TRAVERSE CONSERVANCY

Five free fall events are being planned by the Grand Traverse Conservancy in Traverse City. Two are set for Saturday, Sept. 21, starting with the 9 a.m. Pyatt Lake Preserve Hike, followed by the Antrim Creek

Natural Area Hike from 1-4 p.m. On Saturday, Sept. 23, the conservancy is offering a guided Palmer Wilcox Gates Walk in Antrim County at 4 p.m. Another hike to put on the calendar is the Oct. 12 Seven Bridges, Fall Colors and Wildlife Hike beginning at 11 a.m. The final hike, the Grand Traverse Commons Fall Walk, is on Oct. 19 at 9 a.m.

Those wishing to participate

should call the conservancy at (616) 929-7911 for reservations and details.

LEELANAU CONSERVANCY

The Leelanau Conservancy offers a plethora of fall activities, including free interpretive hikes. On Wednesday, Sept. 11, wildlife artist and avid birder Tom Ford will help hikers interpret the natural history of the Whaleback area. Meet at the conservancy, 105 First Street in Leland at 6 p.m. to car pool.

On Wednesday, Sept. 18, hike the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore's Pyramid Point trails with Pam Lea, environmental biologist from the Great Lakes Environmental Council. Meet at the Pyramid Point hiking trail on Port Oneida Road at 6 p.m.

At 6 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 25, local resident Eric Leimbach will lead a "Port Oneida Historical Walk" and share stories of the unique past of this beautiful area. Meet at the old schoolhouse on Port Oneida Road.

A special treat is in store for

nocturnal hikers with the Thursday, Sept. 26, Full Moon/Lunar Eclipse Hike. The Farmer's Almanac predicts an eclipse at 9:54 p.m. on the eve of this full moon. Hikers will climb to the top of Pyramid Point to try to catch this rare phenomenon in action. Meet at 8 p.m. in the Pyramid Point parking lot, two miles off M-22 on Port Oneida Road.

On Saturday, Oct. 7, combine hiking and work by attending the Whaleback Work Bee. Enjoy fall colors and views of Lake Michigan while helping conservancy staff with trail maintenance. Meet at the conservancy office at 1 p.m. For details on these and other Leelanau Conservancy events, call Molly Grosvenor at 256-9065.

LITTLE TRAVERSE CONSERVANCY

The Little Traverse Conservancy in Petoskey offers occasional field trips and events, but a definite fall schedule was not in place at press time. For information, phone (616) 347-0991.

Scenic bike tours offer great riding

By MIKE TERRELL
Special to the Record-Eagle

Autumn's cooler days are great for bike riding. The roads are less crowded, and the pesky deer flies are finally gone from the woods.

Of course, a real bonus is the fall color. It's one of my favorite times of year to be outdoors.

The following are some of my favorite fall rides...both road and mountain biking. Pick a sunny day, grab your camera and enjoy. Old Mission Peninsula is one of my favorite tours any time of year, but fall is breathtaking. The best riding is north of Marquette. Park at the market and ride north. You can go up either side of the Peninsula to the 45th parallel and return via Center Road. It's a beautiful blend of earth, sky and water. Autumn's warm reds and shimmering yellows add a rich

enhancement.

Crystal Lake is one of my favorite circle tours (around a lake) in the area. It's 24 miles of mostly easy riding. The portion along M-115 west from Benzonia does provide a couple of good hill climbs.

I like to start in Beulah and ride the tour clockwise. The colorful wooded hills of Benzie County frame the beautiful blue waters of this large inland lake.

Cross Village and its "tunnel of trees" is probably one of the most famous rides in northwestern Michigan. It's been written about numerous times, but it's always worth riding, especially in the fall.

The tunnel turns scarlet and gold, which enhances the breathtaking vistas of Lake Michigan from M-119's high bluffs. I like riding from Good Hart east on Robinson Road over to Old State Road, north to

Cross Village and returning via M-119. The tunnel occurs along this seven-mile stretch, although the entire ride is about 18 miles round-trip.

Rapid River and Valley Road may be one of the least known color view rides in our area, but one of the prettiest. Park at the rest stop along M-72 at the Rapid City cut-off. Head over to Rapid City, pick up Valley Road east, ride to M-72 and return. It's approximately 18 miles round-trip.

The ride passes through the beautiful Rapid River valley flanked by towering hardwood hills. You pass by Seven Bridges, a scenic spot to walk along the Rapid River, and a little further south, picturesque Antrim Pond - great spots for color viewing.

The North Country Trail through the Manistee National Forest provides lots of scenic opportunities for color viewing. Some of the best areas to mountain bike are the sections between Baxter and Harvey Bridges along high bluffs overlooking the Manistee River valley, the Odell Hills just south of M-55 and the Ward Hills just north of U.S. 10 near Baldwin.

Hardwoods abound along these sections of the trail, and the overlooks are some of the best along this multi-state pathway. You can obtain maps from the U.S. Forest Service office in Manistee. Maps for the portion of the trail that runs through the Pere Marquette State Forest can be procured from the Cadillac DNR office.

The VASA Trail based in Acme meanders through the beautiful Pere Marquette State Forest. The pathway and miles of adjoining single-track roll through pristine, wooded uplands splashed with broad strokes of reds and yellows.

Mike Terrell is a Record-Eagle columnist and author of "Mountain Biking Michigan: The best trails of northern lower Michigan."



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