



The Observer & Eccentric *The Good Life*



Staff photos by Barbara McClellan at Drayton Plains Nature Center

Nature trails lead to outdoor learning

By ETHEL SIMMONS and SUE ROGERS

Let's take a walk. Anytime is a good time to explore nature, but in the summer you've got sunny weekends (mostly) to venture in the out-of-doors.

Getting back to nature is becoming increasingly popular. State and regional park systems offer walks along their nature trails. Environmental centers are springing up or expanding, with nature hikes available in addition to indoor programs.

The Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority's Metroparks system offers Sunday morning guided nature walks for you and your family. These begin at 8 a.m. on scheduled dates at Kensington Metropark near Milford and at Stony Creek Metropark near Ulica/Rochester.

THOMAS H. SMITH, chief naturalist for the system, explains: "The naturalist takes advantage of the season of the year and what's available if

Twenty-Six Mile Road out off the Van Dyke Freeway and following the directional signs to the Nature Center. Smith explains the booming interest in nature. "With increased populations, industrialization and urbanization of our land, people are reaching out to regain an understanding and appreciation of what a good, clean, healthy environment is. Certainly more leisure time is available to enjoy the out-of-doors."

THE DRAYTON Plains Nature Center for Environmental Education is privately owned, by its membership. Douglas Covert, director and naturalist, and naturalist Kathleen Dougherty alternate conducting Sunday morning walks for one to a dozen persons.

Walks leave at 9 a.m. sharp from the Interpretive Center, 2125 Denby Road, Drayton Plains (take Dixie Highway to Hatchery Road, to Edmore Street, to Denby). Walks are open to members, but

the environmental education program covers five basic nature resources: Life, climate, water, land use, and minerals or geology.

There are also riding trails on horseback.

ANOTHER ATTRACTION is a man-made ecologically balanced pond community, with turtles, salamanders, frogs and snakes.

The environmental center is located at Edsel Ford's former country retreat, Haven Hill Farm, or Lodge. The property became part of the 5,402-acre Highland State Recreation Area in 1943, and the lodge was opened as a conference center in 1969.

The one-mile nature trail opened along with the environmental center in February of this year. So far, 5,635 persons have visited the nature center and walked its trails.

Thornton says, "The trails are open seven days a week, all the time, even in the winter. In bad weather, we have an inside program."

THE NANKIN Mills Nature Center at 33175 Ann Arbor Trail in Westland is located in the Middle Rouge Parkway, Wayne County.

The William P. Holiday forest and wildlife preserve is adjacent to the nature center and has about 12 miles of trails. Guided nature walks are available by reservation for groups only, of 20 persons or more.

There is no admission charge to the nature center, which is open all year Tuesdays through Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. Visitors can observe natural features of the area, see a variety of native birds and wildlife animals and enjoy more than 2,000 acres of parkland.

The historic Nankin Mills building was built before the Civil War. It served the community for many years as a gristmill and was used as a stop for the underground railroad.

REMODELED BY Henry Ford in the 1920s, it again became useful to the people of the area as a factory and a source of electricity.

With its flowing millrace, turbine and hand-hewn beams reminiscent of the past, the mill now serves the community as a natural history museum.

Nankin Mills naturalist Mary Elsworth is available during center hours for questions on wildlife and artifacts found in the center and museum.

For more information and reservations, write the Wayne County Road Commission Parks Division, 418 Clifford at Bagley, Detroit 48226.

THE CRANBROOK Institute of Science, 500 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills, has opened its nature center to the public on weekends for the summer.

Naturalist David Radcliffe or volunteers from local Audubon and botanical organizations lead nature hikes from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays. Hikers can expect to see mushrooms, nesting birds and blooming Jack-in-the-pulpit flowers in July.

The center covers three acres of natural land at the Cranbrook Educational Community. Nature activities are free with museum admission.



you were to go on every walk, theoretically, you would see something different. This time of year, the naturalists deal a lot with insects—mosquitoes—and plant life of the area."

Kensington's trails have been open since the park was built around the 1850s. Stony Creek's trails opened in 1964.

"You can see dried-up stems of plants from last year and new ones just starting to come up, such as the wild cucumber vine," Smith adds.

UPCOMING DATES for walks along Kensington's four trails are July 13 and 27 and tentatively, Aug. 10 and 24 and Sept. 14 and 28.

The three Stony Creek trails can be hiked during the next months on July 13, Aug. 10, Sept. 14 and 28.

In addition to the two-hour Sunday walks for individuals or families, Kensington and Stony Creek offer group field trips by appointment Tuesday through Sunday.

At Kensington, a toll booth leads to the Nature Center. Only charge is \$5 annual fee for a car to enter the park, or \$1 a day. At Stony Creek, there is no toll booth to the Nature Center.

FOR DO-IT-YOURSELFERS, maps are available at the Nature Center, or you can trek the trails alone. "The trails are well marked," Smith says. "You can't get lost." He adds, "They are open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to dusk."

To get to Kensington, take I-96 to the Kensington Road exit. Stony Creek is reached by taking the

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