

Frigid weather can't stop nature lovers

Cross-country skiers explore Apple Island

Nearly 70 nature-loving cross-country skiers braved near-zero temperatures Saturday, Feb. 10 to explore Orchard Lake's Apple Island in winter. Co-sponsored by West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation and the Friends of Apple Island, the excursion was led by Friends board member and cross-country ski instructor, Carol Pink. Despite the frigid temperatures, those on the expedition saw signs of winter activity — animal tracks in the snow and fat buds on the leafless trees. Cranbrook naturalist Jon Schechter

says Apple Island is the home of many animals. The only one which hibernates in the true sense of the word is the woodchuck, Schechter said. He spends all seasons cataloging the island's flora and fauna. Participants in the Feb. 10 excursion were likely to catch sight of a red squirrel or a fox squirrel or perhaps a chipmunk. But the majority of the island's animals are nocturnal — one reason why people may think they are hibernating,

Schechter said. "Part of the fun of a trip like this is to find out what happened the night before," he said. TRACKS IN the snow are one key to the cast of a winter night's drama on the island. With a keen eye and the help of a guide, visitors might identify a straight line of dog-like footprints made by the red fox or the tiny four-toed footprints of the meadow mouse. Signs of digging around a rotted log

would suggest that a skunk made a midnight meal on grubs. Even without checking the tracks, a careful look at a thicket of smac might reveal that two kinds of night visitors find its branches a tasty winter diet. Rabbits chew the branches at the ground level, while white-tailed deer nibble them higher up. While most insect eating birds go south for the winter, a glance upwards might reveal a woodpecker at work. Seed-eaters are in evidence, from the tiny chick-a-dee to the pheasant, which

leaves a distinctive single file of pitch-fork-shaped tracks. A trail of tiny footprints may end abruptly where wide wing prints have brushed the snow, showing that an owl had swooped down and carried away a mouse the night before. Both great-horned and screech owls live on the island. "BELIEVE IT or not, insect life is also in evidence in winter," Schechter pointed out. If a winter day is warm, an island visitor might catch sight of a mass of snow flees, looking like sprinkled pepper on the snowy south side of a big tree. You might even see a bee if the temperature is above freezing.

Schechter explained that winter is also an excellent time to take a good look at the "artsy designs" which the bark beetles have created on the trunks of trees. Each kind of bark beetle leaves a distinctive mark, made by the larvae as they tunnel away from the grove under the bark where the female lays its eggs. When the bark peels off a dead branch or tree, the marks become apparent. Even plant life has a special story to tell the winter nature lover. Waxy coats on young tree branches reveal nature's special way of sealing in moisture in cold weather. A careful look for buds distinguishes the dead from the living trees. If the day is above freezing, sap will already be dripping from a winter wound on any of the island's sugar maples — a place where a branch has been broken off from a winter storm, for instance.

Artistic talents bloom at WLC

Pete Vierger comes from a family of tusk football players. But Pete was "too skinny to make it on the football field," he says, so he turned to music. Now a senior in high school, Pete releases energy not by tackling and running on the football field, but through the music and lyrics he writes and performs on guitars. David Lienewer is also interested in music, particularly in stringed instruments and their history. This 17-year-old recently completed a lengthy study on guitars from Bach to the Beatles, and has taught himself how to play a myriad of stringed instruments. Pete and Dave are two of the 17 talented students in a class at Walled Lake Central High School where they have the chance to let their individual artistic talents bloom. The class is a basic humanities class but teacher Marilyn Kirk has a unique way of approaching the subject. "This is a year-long class for students interested in learning about and explor-

ing the arts," she said. "But we have found that we can explore the arts through the talents we have right here in the classroom." "Each one of my students has their own particular artistic talent that we try to share with each other and learn from," she explained. For Ms. Kirk's students, final exam projects become labors of love. At the end of each semester, the students put together presentations dealing with their own areas of interest and present them to a very interested audience — the rest of their class. For example, Carla Hanson is fascinated by mime. For her presentation, she did a mime routine for the class and afterwards discussed why mime should be considered an art form. Kyle Galbraith and Tim Jackiewicz like to spend their spare time weaving. Tim's specialty is weaving into ceramics while Kyle not only weaves but cards and dyes her own wool. Their project included displaying their work and discussing the history of weaving.

Anne Boomer drew on her piano background and performed four different types of Beethoven compositions followed by a discussion of Beethoven's effect on music. The students in Ms. Kirk's class all say they have a compelling need to express themselves artistically and a real desire to study the arts that goes beyond a grade on a report card. In addition to looking at the world

from different points of view, the students spend a great deal of time asking themselves questions such as "What does it mean to be human? Who am I? Where am I going? Does truth change or are some truths for all time?" Although they don't always arrive at answers to those questions, one thing is for certain, according to the teacher — there's rarely a boring moment in this class.

Correction

An incorrect phone number was listed in Thursday's Farmington Observer. The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency will assist Farmington residents with free income tax assistance in Walled Lake. For information, the number is 924-5528.

MSU students get all A's

A total of 563 students at Michigan State University achieved a straight A average during the fall term. Of these outstanding honor students, several are from Farmington and Farmington Hills. They are: William Cline, Matthew Czerniak, Carolyn Demattia and Patrice Wylie of Farmington. Brian Adelman, Dorothy Albrecht, Keith Dreyer, Sina Hameci, Karen Kalajian, Karen McDevitt and Paul Wilkie of Farmington Hills.

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