

outdoors

# Easy to spot deer on a quiet day's hike

By Lem Meese  
outdoors writer

We — that's the wife and I — just had to get out of the house last weekend. "Cabin fever" was starting to take hold.

There were no doubts as to where we were headed, either — Kensington Metropark, just off I-96 in western Oakland County.

Kensington, like all of the metroparks, is usually crowded during summer with young people who flock to the beaches and picnic areas for a day in the sun. Parks can get mighty crowded on weekends in May, June, July and August.

Well, last Saturday, quite a few others seemed to have the same idea we did — yet there were no hordes of people.

Ice fishermen were scattered on Kent Lake, and a large, friendly gathering was clustered at the toboggan and sled runs. Adults, teens and young children were getting along magnificently.

A FIRE was roaring in the shelter near the sled hills. Some families were even picnicking, roasting hot dogs on sticks over the open fire.

Cross country skiers and ice skaters were enjoying one of the finest days we've had for outdoor activities since the first of the year.

We like to take leisurely walks on nature trails on the west side of the metropark. This time, we saw two white-tailed deer, a gray squirrel, cardinals, blue jays and chickadees.

We were the only people on the Aspen Trail, one of several at Kensington.

A naturalist at the center told us it's a lot easier to spot deer along nature trails during winter months than in summer. We've never been disappointed on the Aspen Trail. There's a large herd in the western hills of the park property, but most people never see a deer.

You have to walk gingerly, hold talking to a minimum and keep a sharp lookout. All the deer we've seen were on the first half of the 1 1/4-mile trail.

IT HELPS to stop every now and then just to take in the overall scenery — hear the winds rustling through trees, see empty bird nests perched in tall oaks and maples, spot deer tracks in the snow and observe small animals scampering in the underbrush.

A naturalist at the center said this has been the

harshes winter in several years. The pond near the nature center where Canada geese and ducks winter has frozen over, even though the underwater aerator has been working.

That's how cold it has been and how much snow we've had.

Don't worry, though, because there are a couple of small openings where the waterfowl can drink. Attendance has been down since the first of the year, the naturalist said, but that isn't all bad if you like solitude on your nature walks.

Then, too, there aren't that many people warming around the fire in the nature center after completing their walk.

FISHERMEN have a saying about winter: "First ice is best."

That's true this year, as our DNR reports indicate. The heavy snows and thick ice have slowed most fishing to a slither.

"Frost" is the word the conservation officers have for activity on Lake Erie. "Extremely slow" is the word from Oakland County lakes, except for Heron Lake in the Holly Recreation Area, which is producing crappies and bluegills. "Very poor" is the message from Lake St. Clair.

In the heavy snow, rabbit hunting is difficult, and few gunners are out.

The best time is being had by snowmobilers.

## Outdoors show opens Friday

Outdoororama, the annual show of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, starts Friday at the State Fairgrounds, Woodward south of Eight Mile, Detroit.

"For 10 days, we'll be presenting a variety of seminars, clinics, movies and stage shows designed for outdoor sportsmen and their families," said Tom Washington, MUCC executive director.

Monday, Feb. 22, will be archery night, with guest speaker Tom Jennings, one of the original developers of the compound bow.

Feb. 23 will be master angler night; Wednesday, big buck night; Thursday, sporting dog night; Friday, "Michigan Outdoors" night; Saturday, wildlife discovery day, and Sunday, travel day.

Some years they have only 10 good days. This year has been one long field day.

We were, however, distressed to see some field damage by snowmobiles in the Island Lake State Recreation Area.

CROSS COUNTRY skiers will start an "owl prow" from 7:30-9:30 a.m. Friday at Independence Oaks County Park, Sasabaw Road 2 1/4 miles north of I-75, Clarkston.

Meeting at the boat house, the gang will use lights to view the owls. Naturalist Kathleen Dougherty says owls will respond to tape-recorded sounds played on the trail.

Dress warmly, plan to hike if snow conditions are poor, and call Ms. Dougherty to register at 858-0903. There's a park admission at the gate.

DRAYTON PLAINS Nature Center will hold its annual buffet dinner Saturday evening at the Oakland County Sportsmen's Club in Waterford. Besides helping the center, it's a delicious chance to sample wild game hors d'oeuvres, roast beef main course and homemade desserts.

Buzz the nature center at 674-2119 for ticket reservations and directions. Base price is \$6.50.

METROPARKS programs for the week ahead:

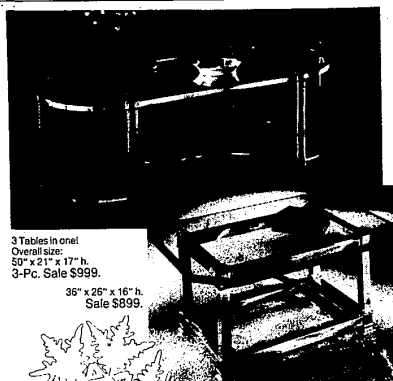
- "Farm Chores" at 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 20, at Kensington Farm Center. Young and old can feed and water the animals in this 1 1/2-hour session. Dress warmly. Call the park office at 665-1561 to register in advance.

- "Winter Highlights," a nature center walk at 10 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 21, at Stony Creek Metropark northeast of Rochester. Register in advance by calling the park at 781-4621 and dress warmly.

- "Enjoying Nature with Your Tot," at 2 p.m. Sunday at Kensington. Naturalist Julie Cerbus will guide parents and 3-5-year-olds on a short walk. Call to register.

- "A Nature Cross Country Ski Tour" at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 21, beginning in the Kensington nature center parking lot. Naturalist Mark Szabo will lead the 2 1/2-hour trek. Call to register.

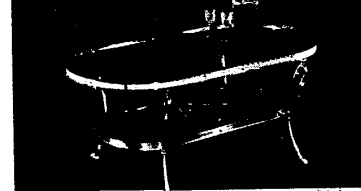
- "Weaving Wool" at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 23, at Kensington Farm Center. Interpreter Lori Anderson will discuss history of the craft and basics of weaving in a 1 1/2-hour program. For this one, there's a \$1 charge. Call in advance to register.



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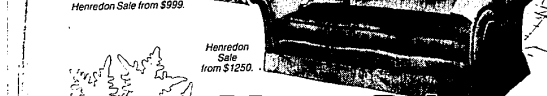
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