

OAKLAND OUTDOORS:

Guided Lakeshore trail a haven for wildlife

By JONATHAN SCHECHTER Special to The Oakland Press

Words by environmentalist Aldo Leopold spring to life when hiking in the Holly State Recreation Area, "To those devoid of imagination, a blank place on the map is a useless waste; to others, the most valuable part." The nearly 8,000-acre parcel of public land is one of those "blank" places, and one of the most valuable parcels of public land offering easily accessible hiking in the county — 35 miles worth of trail trekking to be exact.

Early on the full moon evening of Labor Day weekend I tagged along with an eclectic group of 25 hikers (Hikingmichigan.com) under the leadership of Rob Golda as they set out on the Lakeshore Trail, a delightful 2 1/2-mile hike through woods and meadows that took us past a fishing dock and two picnic areas — with restrooms.

That trail was selected for two reasons: it is the only trail within this State Recreation Area that is dedicated exclusively to hikers and cross country skiers; and it's a trail that caresses the water's edge, affording excellent opportunities to see lakeside creatures. And for those who fish, pack a pole too and pursue the sport. It does not get much better than that.

Within seconds of stuffing my water bottle, camera, a tube of 30-percent Deet and snacks into my day pack, I met sixth-grader Brady Bentler and his accompanying adult companion Kim Hunt at the trailhead of the overlook parking lot, the meeting point for the group, and a trail head for both the Lakeshore and Wilderness Trails.

Budding naturalist Brady was not a shy kid. Munching on wild black cherries, he said, "This is my friend Mrs. Hunt. She's my neighbor."

I figured anyone who shared nature's wild offerings with strangers were the kind of people I would want to saddle up to for a hike. I figured right. Brady reminded me of myself as a kid — full of exuberance on the ways of nature. But unlike me, he stayed focused on the many trail wonders around him and calmly shared his knowledge with others.

"Frogs are the best parts of this hike!" Brady said as he showed off a green frog he captured and released back to the weedy shallows. And trip Leader Golda's enthusiastic comments on the special beauty the Lakeshore Trail offered were right on target, with the trail circling around two lakes, Wildwood Lake and Valley Lake.

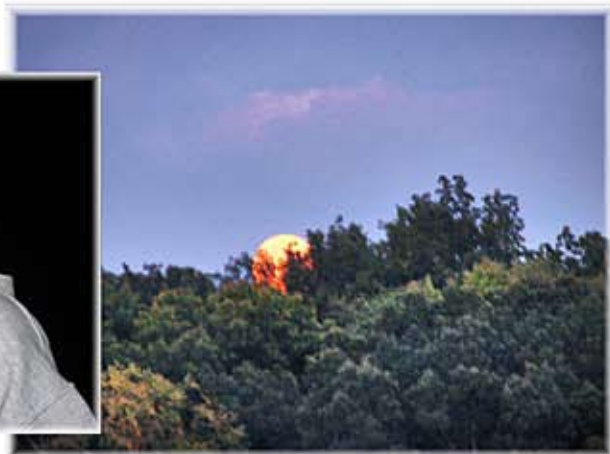
Kudos goes out to Park Supervisor Shawn Speaker and his staff for keeping this hiking trail wild in nature with a ban on mountain bikes because of the sensitive nature of this trail.

For mountain bikers reading my words, don't fret: you have great hills to pump up and zig zag down at the Holdridge Lakes Mountain Bike Area, a few miles west of Holly Rec's main acreage. Holly's Wilderness Trail, shared by hikers and bikers, offers woodland views with an up north feeling along its six mile route and is already flavored with an autumn feeling.

The Lakeshore Trail is well signed with standard trail markers, but poison ivy is present. Reclusive massasauga rattlesnakes live here too, but you would be exceedingly lucky even to see one. Sneakers work when the trail is dry, but I would opt for light hiking boots for this wildland; there are soggy sections.

Birdlife is abundant. Great blue and green herons stalk the shallows and a patient observer may spot a black-crowned night heron.

As the rising full moon set night shadows dancing and Brady shared his passion for flickering fireflies in the meadow, I remembered a hazard of hiking this trail: not wanting to leave. I bet you'll have the same problem. Brady would vouch for me on this point.



ON WALKABOUT

Local parks offer hikers paradise

BY BRAD D. BATES
C & G Sports Writer

Editor's note: This is the first story in Brad D. Bates' summer series, "Your own backyard." With money tight, many of our readers are no doubt skipping their annual summer vacations. But there are ways outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy a vacation-like atmosphere without going too far from home. In the coming weeks, look for stories spotlighting different local getaways.

For more tips on how to save during your stay-at-home adventure, and for blog entries on Bates' experiences on the trips, go to www.candgnews.com and click on the Sports link.

WHITE LAKE — Just because a vacation budget is a little lean doesn't mean it has to be any less green.

Nature enthusiasts who flock to Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula or its Upper Peninsula can experience the same breathtaking views and tranquil moments right in their own neighborhoods, including Highland Recreation Area in White Lake.

"Highland really is a nature park," Rob Golda, director of Hiking Michigan said. "You have to park your car, and you have to get on your feet to enjoy it.

"For me, it's 20 minutes from my house, but feels like Up North. There

are plenty of places similar to that with how unique they are in southeast Michigan.

"They have rolling hills, bubbling springs or a beaver lodge, and you have to ask yourself, 'Did I cross the bridge today?'"

Golda, 54, of Rochester has been hiking trails in Michigan for 35 years and heads Hiking Michigan's group trips and its Web site, www.hikingmichigan.com.

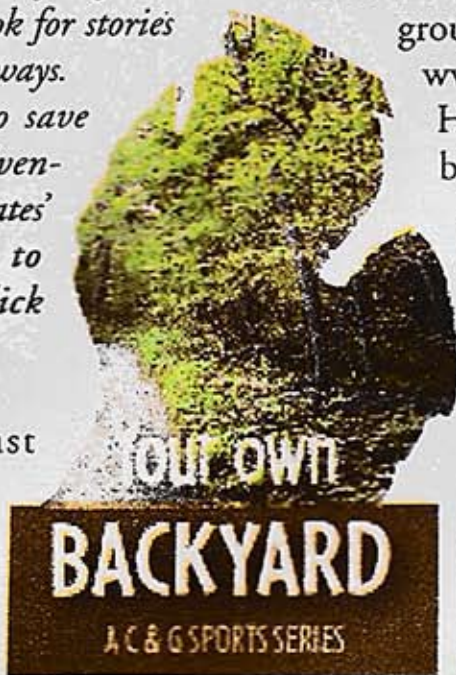
He also has authored a trail book "Hiking Southeastern Michigan," which is available in local libraries and on his group's Web site.

"Come on out and hike with us," Golda said of his group's mission statement. "If it entices just one person to come back out, that's good. I hope it's more than that, but just one is

a success."

A trail leading to the ruins of Edsel Ford's retreat highlights Highland Recreation Area's hikes, which can be accessed after purchasing a \$6 day pass or with a Department of Natural Resources \$24 yearly pass.

The main house of Ford's estate was destroyed by fire nine years ago, but the carriage house, remnants of the pool,



The hiking trails at the Highland Recreation Area are home to some of the most diverse plant populations in the state.

Hikers

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fireplaces and foundation are still there.

“That whole park was his estate, and it was private property,” Golda said, while noting that Ford kept much of the natural landscape intact.

“The preserves are a representation of every tree that grows in Michigan. When you go there in the fall and all the trees change color, every tree has a little different color. I’ve never hiked any trail in Michigan that has that variety.”

Located 15 miles west of Pontiac off of M-59, Highland is one of 23 state parks and one of a total of 49 parks or reserves from Huron County to northern Lenawee County Golda highlights on his Web site.

“I moved to Holly 11 years ago, and Holly is one of the epi-

Harbowy, who has been a member of Hiking Michigan since the group’s first hike six years ago.

“I had an hour lunch break when I worked in Troy, and I would go to a great park nearby, Riverside Park. I’d grab my lunch and hike that park before my hour was over.”

Hikes are also an option for families, and Golda said he has seen people start hiking solo with his group but eventually bring their spouses and children.

“I’ve never had an angry kid leave a hike, but I’ve had several show up,” Golda said.

“We had a family with three kids, and all three were grumbling before the hike. Five minutes down the trail, the 10-year-old is zigzagging looking at this and that; the 6-year-old sees a frog that is amazing; so 15 minutes into the hike, it’s better than Cedar Point.”



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Photo by Kara Missig

Sylvie Michielsens of Rochester Hills takes part in Hiking Michigan’s June 28 hike at the Highland Recreation Area.

Hiking Michigan founder works to expand trail system in state

By Elizabeth Shaw

eshaw@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6311

HADLEY TWP. — OK, so he's not exactly Daniel Boone, armed with nothing but an ax, cutting through forests and mountains to blaze the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap in 1775.

But Hiking Michigan founder Rob Golda — armed with paper maps, compass and GPS — is hoping his own trail-blazing efforts will be just as important to the future of southeast Michigan's parks.

Golda's group has become an increasingly familiar presence for nature hikes, educational events and cleanup projects at Holly State Recreation Area and other parks throughout southeast Michigan. He has self-published a guidebook of popular local trail systems and is helping to start volunteer groups for state-owned facilities including Proud Lake Recreation Area and Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park.

He's currently working on a plan to expand the trail system at Ortonville Recreation Area, straddling Hadley and Brandon townships at the border of Lapeer and Oakland counties.

"Volunteer efforts like his are almost critical in these times of dwindling budget dollars. When we can't stretch our dollars to accomplish all our purposes, having partner organizations helping us out like this is just vital," said George Lauinger, supervisor of Sanilac and Sleeper state parks.

THE FLINT JOURNAL



Golda, a retired Rochester-area electrician, began the hiking group in 2005 when 18 fellow nature lovers gathered for a casual afternoon romp.

"We go to the parks I've known intimately since my childhood camping days with my parents. These are special places where I've named the bushes, plants and rocks personally through the years," said Golda.

Two short years later, Hiking Michigan boasts a 700-name roster. Anywhere from a handful to dozens might show up for events sprinkled among 23 Department of Natural Resources parks, 11 Metro parks and several county parks from the tip of the Thumb to the Brighton Recreation Area near Howell.

"We try to float around in a circle so no matter where a member lives in southeast Michigan, at some point there's going to be a hike just outside your own back door."

Hiking Michigan has drawn a wide range of outdoor enthusiasts, such as equestrian Dee Pasquantonio, chairman of the Proud Lake Trail Riders Association.

"I love to hike, too, and now I have someone to hike with. He's got interesting programs and the hikes usually have a theme," said Pasquantonio. "I feel like

Trail: Founder works to expand trail system | ◀ C8

Golda wants to find a route for one main trail linking the smaller loop trails within the north and south sections of the western half.

"If you interconnect that daisy chain of circle trails properly, you could hike the entire outer edge in one gigantic loop," said Golda. "Some are little more than game trails now. Our goal is to re-establish the ones that provide the best route around at the least cost and work."

His vision also includes signage and primitive campsites for backpacking along the 8- to 10-mile loop.

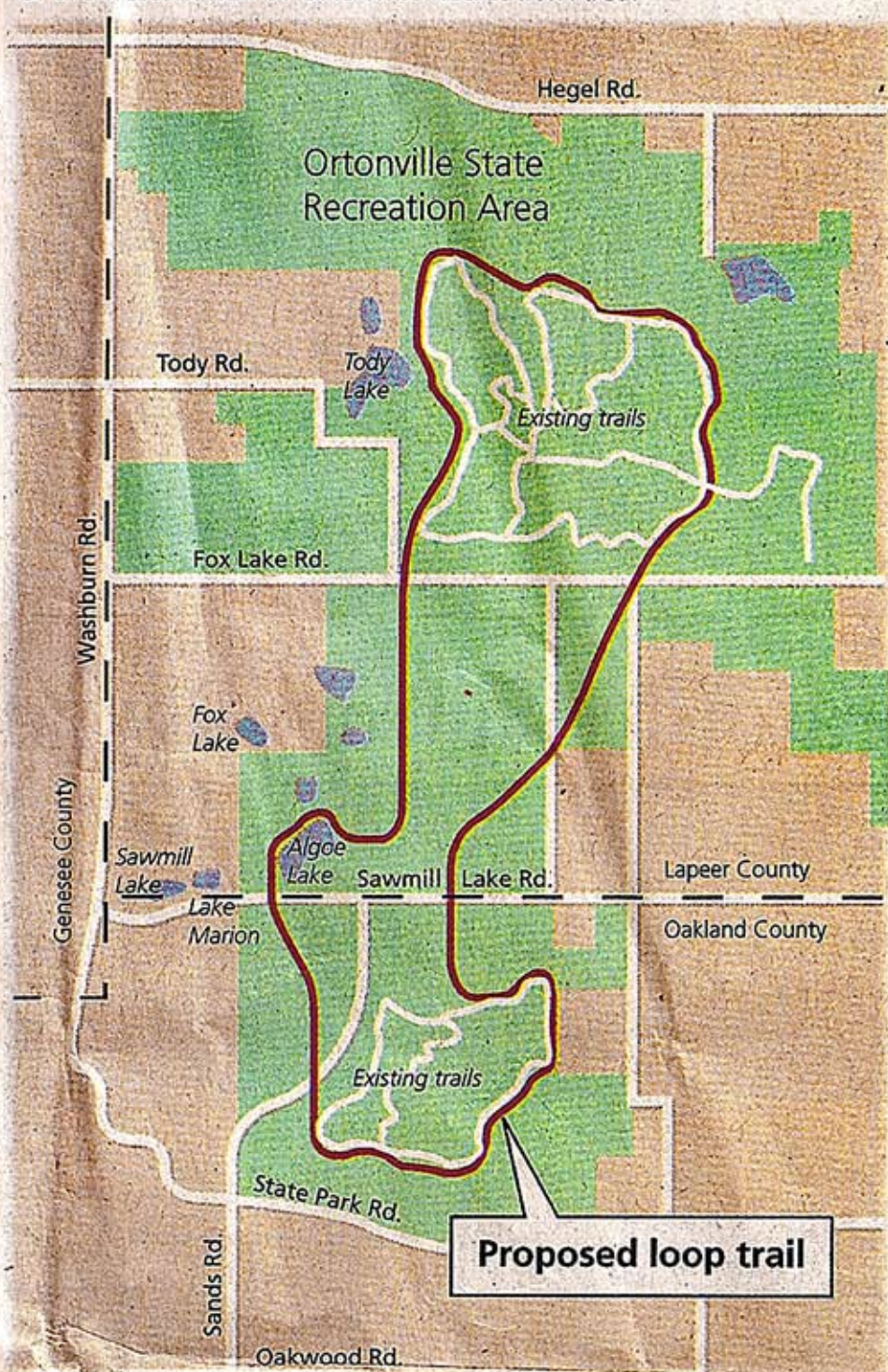
"This is some of the most unique, diverse and beautiful land left in the area. As progress moves north up I-75, Ortonville is prime for piecemeal selling," Golda warned. "If we can lock it up with trails and backwoods campsites, and people coming on a regular basis, no one will ever think of selling any of it."

Incompatible uses would still have to be separated from each other, such as horses and mountain bikes. But the expanded trail would benefit everyone from summer hikers to fall hunters and winter snowmobilers and cross-country skiers, said Dennis Wilson, DNR supervisor of Metamora-Hadley and Ortonville recreation areas.

"The more involvement we have with friends groups and local residents, the better. We're all about creating partnerships," said Wilson.

Proposed loop trail at Ortonville Recreation Area

The general route planned by Rob Golda of Hiking Michigan for a main outer loop linking existing trails in the north and south sections of the western half of Ortonville Recreation Area.



Golda hopes to complete his mapping this winter, then plans to present the proposal to the DNR. By then, he hopes a newly formed "friends" group will be ready to help put the plan in action. "One thing about me is

I have a mouth that doesn't stop, and that helps to get people pumped up," joked Golda, chuckling.

"Sometimes the hardest part is to get a spark started. We're trying to be that spark."