

# Put your best foot forward... Fall Hiking Spree



Joyce Murphy

*The seasons are changing again. For those who don't get excited about hiking in the warm, mosquito filled days of summer, then fall is your time to start hiking! Cooler air, less bugs, beautiful color, what's not to enjoy? This is a grand time to hike! If you are not convinced, consider that hiking is great exercise, especially in the outdoors. Here, one can enjoy nature while at the same time, enjoying the company of family or a good friend; or maybe you prefer the solace of hiking alone, which still provides the opportunity to just listen to nature's symphony. What ever your preference, or type of trail, this is a season not to be missed!*

Let us introduce you to some hikers that have done plenty of exploring on District sites as well as other destinations. All of these folks are great inspiration for hiking. David Gates of Crystal Lake is an accomplished long distance hiker who caught the hiking bug to the extent that he has hiked both the Appalachian Trail (2,176 miles) and the Pacific Crest Trail (2,650 miles) on his own. This summer and fall, he is working toward hiking all of the Conservation District's trails.

"Hiking has become a way of life for me. It brings me peace and solitude in the ever increasing fast paced society we currently live. It doesn't matter if I'm out for an hour or out for six months at a time. I simply love to hike and would recommend it to anyone," said Gates. To catch some of his enthusiasm, check out his website: [www.thefuzzymonkey.net](http://www.thefuzzymonkey.net) where he posts videos, pictures, journals, and stories of his treks.

Another team of hikers are Salvador Islas and Kimberly Kobo, who over the years have hiked many District trails with both of their dogs, Canita and Sasia. In fact, if you come by Prairieview Education Center you will see their names on our Century Hiker's Plaque, not once, but twice; for hiking 2,000 Conservation District miles! They are out in all weather conditions and all seasons. One of their favorite places to hike is Lyon's Prairie and Marsh.

Pat Heald of Wonder Lake is another of our avid District hikers, and a volunteer steward as well. "For me hiking is both

mental and physical; being out amongst nature and clearing my head, surrounded by the beauty is great!" said Heald.

For those who enjoy hiking with others, the Conservation District has some regular opportunities for you to join: **Strolling for Seniors** is for those wishing to get moving and enjoy nature with those who share the same interests and speed (page 26). Another opportunity is **Nature+Fitness = Good Health** program. This is a way to get your exercise outdoors and get some insight into nature's seasonal occurrences (page 10). These are staff led hikes accompanied by a certified personal trainer to help you get more from your nature walks health wise. Additionally you will have a chance to learn more about the site it is offered at and the natural history for that time of year.

Additionally, the District offers the **Century Hikers** program (page 26). This is an independent opportunity to hike on your own on the many district trails. Simply keep track of your miles and at each milestone (100, 500, 1000) you are eligible for an award. Join on your own, or with a friend. There are many Century Hikers with lots of mileage on their boots in McHenry County! Call Prairieview Education Center for more information, (815) 479-5779.

Another resource is the American Hiking Society, [www.americanhiking.org](http://www.americanhiking.org). This site is full of great information for short and long distance hiking.



## Where's your favorite destination?

In the coming months we'd love to hear about your favorite Conservation District Destination and the neighborhood spots that make your visit more enjoyable. Email your choices and recommendations to [MCCD@MCCDistrict.org](mailto:MCCD@MCCDistrict.org) and we'll post them on the District's Facebook account; or if you have an account you can post them yourself. This season we'll feature some great hiking outings.

Whether you choose to saunter, ramble, walk, or hike we hope you will do so on our great District trails. Take a fall hiking spree, just for you - listen, relax, renew, be energized and love this land we share!



# DESTINATIONS

## FALL HIKES

Don't let a little nip in the air deter you from catching the last vestiges of foliage before all the leaves fall. Grab a jacket and take a jaunt in the woods, stroll along the water's edge or hike down a prairie trail — revisit a favorite Conservation District site for a fall frolic. Sample one of these and you've earned your mug of hot apple cider:

**Pleasant Valley's** 2,079 acres is a mosaic of woodland, high-quality oak savanna, and never-plowed wetland and prairie. This special combination of habitats creates one of the most biologically diverse, stunningly beautiful, and locally accessible sites in the county. Located just west of the intersection of Routes 47 and 176, visitors to Pleasant Valley Conservation Area can take in the whole valley, as the ground drops off to the south and west.

Pleasant Valley is home to a variety of plant and animal species, including hawks, turtles, salamanders, fox, deer, warblers and 274 native plant species (13 of which are rare). Plants such as the northern bog violet, short green milkweed, prairie star sedge, prairie buttercup, swamp thistle and prairie Indian plantain help give this area a high ecological rating, while sunflowers, milkweed and wild black cherry are more commonly seen. After recent wetland restoration, water now flows more naturally over the ground as a shallow marsh, sedge meadow and wet-prairie complex, creating an attractive visiting place for herons, cranes, terns, rails and blue-winged teals.

Visitors can trek down 5 miles of looped trails that wind through prairie and savanna, including two nature trails; a 1.5 mile trail and another .8 mile trail that travels along Laughing Creek.

The diversity of habitats at **Lyons Prairie and Marsh** and the adjacent **Hickory Grove Highlands** in Cary create a great refuge for wildlife and a favorite hiking spot for visitors. Located on Hickory Nut Grove Road, north of Crystal Lake Road, the site was dedicated by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, for its high quality wetlands and is throbbing with phenomenal numbers of flora and fauna. Vast sedge meadows burst with sedges, rushes, cattails, big bluestem and bluejoint grass. Common wildflowers include marsh phlox, swamp aster, blue iris, meadow anemone, orchids and Turk's cap lily. A rich array of 297 different plant species (276 of which are natives that depend exclusively on the types of habitats at Lyons) as well as 27 butterfly, 7 fish, 4 frog, 4 turtle, and 65 bird species, this area is a rare treasure, and a not-to-be-missed treat.

A 1.6 mile trail within Lyons Prairie along the backwaters of the Fox River offers a view of a variety of wetland, marsh and sedge meadow plants and wildlife. On the northern end, a .5 mile one way trail travels to the Fox River and guides a hiker along the river's edge connecting with the Silver Creek Conservation



area for those looking for longer treks. To the south, a 1.2 mile looped trail runs through upland hickory forest and skirts the central wetland.

### NOT TO BE MISSED

**Coral Woods in Marengo** is a favorite fall colors hike by visitors who enjoy the blaze of red, gold, yellow and orange painted hues throughout the 297-acre maple forest. Visitors can choose from a 1.2 mile foot trail that is more rustic in nature, the 1.2 mowed grass trail that leads through open meadow and forest, or the .4 mile maple sugar loop.

**Glacial Park in Ringwood** offers the most spectacular scenery and the most extensive trail network. Wander on the 1.1 mile Marsh Looped Trail that travels over a bog by boardwalk. Park at Keystone Road Landing and meander the .8 mile (one way) mowed trail that runs along Nippersink Creek to the river bridge. Follow the 1.2 mile Coyote Loop Trail or the more challenging 2 mile Deerpath Trail that offers an option to climb the steep hill of the Camelback Glacial Kames to view the panoramic view of the 3,200 acre site and the Nippersink Valley. Sit and breathe deep as you watch the hawks soar or listen to the sound of various waterfowl announcing their migratory departure.

Maps for these sites are available to download at [www.MCCDistrict.org](http://www.MCCDistrict.org)

