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Take A Hike

The Dayton region has plenty of well-maintained trails for outdoor adventures.

Eric Spangler

Hiking has always been a part of Beavercreek resident Patty Sorrell's life. But that love of hiking has now become a very important part of her lifestyle.



Charleston Falls Preserve near Vandalia

It's a lifestyle that started with a simple application download called Meetup. The Meetup application helps connect people in the same region with similar interests. In Sorrell's case, she joined a group called the Dayton Hikers who meet for hikes in the Dayton region.

She then signed up for the MetroPark Every Trail Challenge series in which participants meet and hike every trail in each of the 19 Dayton Five Rivers MetroParks.

That's where Sorrell's story started. "When I signed up for the challenge last year I didn't know it at the time but I was about to be diagnosed with breast cancer," she says.

"I went on my first hike and then by the time I went on my second hike I had just learned news that I had been diagnosed with breast cancer," Sorrell says. She talked to the group organizers, Michelle and Brian Coleman, and explained that she wanted to finish the challenge but because of her cancer treatments she would have to make some of the hikes by herself.

"I hiked with the Dayton Hikers as much as I could and then when I got into my treatment program I had to step back because I just couldn't do the hikes," Sorrell says. "You know you're too tired and all that."

says. Along the way she met a lot of new friends and is now "super connected" into that group of hikers, says Sorrell.

She also has an important lifestyle connection to hiking. She completed her cancer treatments and all her scans in November showed no signs of cancer, she says. Although doctors can never say whether cancer will come back or not, Sorrell says one thing her doctor stressed was the importance of exercise.

That's where hiking has become not only a recreation for Sorrell, but also an important part of her life. "I really think, for me, the hiking is now part of a wellness program for me."

It's a program that is easy to maintain because of the numerous parks and trails in the Dayton region. Kettering's Andy Niekamp would know. He's the local expert on hiking and the founder of the Dayton Hikers group.

Niekamp has hiked the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, the world's longest hiking-only footpath that runs more than 2,100 miles from Maine to Georgia, three times—and a plethora of other national footpaths.



Taking a rest in Germantown MetroPark

Niekamp says there are plenty of good hiking trails in the Dayton region. “The Dayton area is blessed with an abundance of parks and places for hiking and outdoor recreation. We’ve got a lot of places to go,” says Niekamp, who also is the owner and self-proclaimed chief adventure officer at Outdoor Adventure Connection, which provides guided backpacking trips and workshops.



A viewing platform of the Charleston Falls

So what destinations in the Dayton region are the best to enjoy nature with a healthy hike? “Probably No. 1 on the list when it comes to scenery would be Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve,” says Niekamp. A close second and third, which just happen to all be located in the Yellow Springs area, are John Bryan State Park and Glen Helen Nature Preserve, he says.

Not only are all three of those parks scenic, but they also have easy trails for beginners and families with young children, says Niekamp. And because all three parks are connected, experienced hikers can combine the trails in each for a nice 7 to 10-mile hike, he says.

Those three are also on the top of his list because there’s water, the Little Miami River, flowing through the parks, which has cut cliffs and gorges through the rocks. “It’s the closest thing you’re going to

find to a canyon here in Dayton, Ohio,” Niekamp says.

Another nice place to hike with a scenic waterfall, says Niekamp, is Charleston Falls Preserve, near Vandalia, which is part of the Miami County Park District.

The stream, which creates the park’s 37-foot tall falls, originates from underground springs to the east of the park, says Amanda Smith, marketing administrator for the park district. “It’s pretty impressive,” she says.

The 216-acre park has nearly 4 miles of hiking trails that take visitors to the waterfalls, a limestone cave, a pond and a tall grass prairie, she says. “Everyone from Miami County obviously likes to go down there and hike,” says Smith. It’s the most visited park in the district with an average of more than 200,000 visitors per year.

Waterfalls are also part of Michelle and husband Brian Coleman’s favorite place to hike—Englewood MetroPark. Why? “Because of the waterfalls, because you can put together about 11 miles of trails with a few good hills, waterfalls, and amazing scenery,” says Michelle Coleman.

For those just starting out hiking Michelle Coleman recommends Hills and Dales MetroPark. “Because you have the trifecta for newbies—beautiful scenery, a few challenging hills, and 3.2 miles which can be a challenge for a newbie,” she says. “Cox Arboretum would be our second favorite for newbies.”

Other great places to hike that Sorrell, Niekamp or Coleman recommend include Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark, Aullwood Garden MetroPark, Germantown MetroPark, Twin Creek MetroPark, Taylorsville MetroPark, Sugarcreek MetroPark, Grant Park, Sweet Arrow Preserve, and, for the adventuresome hiker who likes to backpack, the Twin Valley Trail. “It would have to be southwest Ohio’s premier backpacking trail,” says Niekamp.

Regardless of where one chooses to hike in the Dayton area the abundance of scenic environments and well-maintained trails ensures that a good walk will never be spoiled.

“Five Rivers MetroParks offers a lot of programs,” says Niekamp. “Centerville-Washington Park District and Bellbrook [Sugarcreek Park District], they all have programs that involve getting outside and doing some hiking so just go do it. That’s my best advice.”

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