



The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Most of my hiking and nature exploring in Oakland County tends to occur in the northern section of our county. However, there are some really great parks in the southernmost section of Oakland County that I've been overlooking. That will change!

Today I'm sharing a look at one of those southern "urban surrounded" wildland gems; Carpenter Lake Nature Preserve, a 42-acre preserve managed by the City of Southfield. About four years had passed since my last visit and so last week I headed back to Carpenter Lake on a beautiful sunny morning. It was a pleasantly busy park!



The park is easy to find. The entrance is located at 27225 West 10 Mile Road, just a few hundred yards east of Inkster Road. Park permits are not required. Dogs are permitted, but they must be leashed at all times and owners must clean up after their pets. Interpretive signs along the trail explain some of the natural features including vernal ponds and 'lake plain forest' habitat.

As soon as you enter you will notice an impressive array of large boulders immediately adjacent to the parking area. I was too slow with my camera for a video but was treated to watching a pair of Turkey Vultures flying low over the boulders; perhaps soaring the thermals created by the warmth of the boulders. An interpretive sign shares information on the boulders. "Welcome to the Boulder Garden at Carpenter Lake. The rocks assembled here were collected directly from the bedrock of the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Wisconsin SE Ontario, and from local glacial deposits at the Ray Road Quarry near Oxford, Michigan. They range in age from one to 2.7 billion years old and provide remarkable evidence of the early geological evolution of Michigan and the Great Lakes region including a record of explosive and submarine volcanism, the former existence of Himalayan-sized mountains now eroded to their roots, the evolution of the atmosphere and oceans, the formation of important natural resources, and the ice age glaciation of Michigan. Please be careful as you explore and do not climb on the rocks!"

The explosion of spring wildflowers is over, although I did find remnants of fading Trillium along the park's one-mile trail. And a large swath of the land adjacent to the trail is presently carpeted with Lily of the Valley. I suspect the habitat is excellent for other species including Round-Lobed Hepatica and Bloodroot that would have bloomed earlier.

I knelt down in one location to photograph the bright red leaves of an emerging red maple sapling and noticed raccoon tracks in a nearby muddy area. There were quite a few trees in the area with large cavities which would provide excellent denning areas for raccoons or perhaps even habitat for a screech owls.





Once at the lake, you might want to take advantage of the easily-accessible fishing and viewing platforms. Although I did not see anyone fishing during my visit, with the exception of a Great Blue Heron and a Great Egret stalking the shallows, I've been told it's a popular fishing spot with neighborhood children.

The meandering trail is 'stroller' friendly with one exception. If you want to climb down towards the lake overlook, there is a series of steep wooden steps; which obviously could not be navigate with a stroller. However, if you hike down the steps and go a bit further you will have a great view of the backside of the dam that was built in 2006 to create Carpenter Lake. A bit of fact checking revealed it's the Ravines branch of the 127-mile Rouge River that flows into Carpenter Lake.

There have been significant upgrades since my last visit including the addition of a 16' x 20' open air shelter and modern bathrooms adjacent to the parking lot. Bike racks are in place; note bikes are not permitted on the trails.

If you are looking for a fun place to explore with your children, have a picnic or just seeking a pleasant place to meander on a mostly level woodland trail, consider the Carpenter Lake Nature Preserve. You won't be disappointed and it's not likely you will be hiking alone.

Oakland County Parks staffer Jonathan Schechter is an avid "nature-embracing" hiker who follows phenology - the study of natural cycles of nature's way - to inspire his blogs.



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