



Trail Mix

Take A Hike In Trail Town Dayton

By Kristen Wicker – September 8, 2015
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Local hiking enthusiast Andy Niekamp begins his through-hike of the Buckeye Trail at Deed's Point

From downtown Dayton, you can walk to North Dakota. Or Vermont.

That's because the Dayton region is home to a portion of the North Country Trail—a 4,600-mile National Scenic Trail, the longest in the United States—and the 1,444-mile Buckeye Trail, the nation's longest circular trail. The BT/NCT share the same path for more than 800 miles,

including the miles that run through Taylorsville, Island, Deeds Point, Eastwood and Huffman MetroParks.

In 2011, Andy Niekamp hiked the BT in one journey, starting at Deed's Point MetroPark and finishing there 88 days later.

"Just a year earlier, I had finished hiking the Appalachian Trail for the third time and was looking for a different challenge," says Niekamp, chief adventure officer for Outdoor Adventure Connections and section supervisor for the portion of the BT/NCT that stretches from Fairborn through Dayton and on to Piqua. "A hike on the BT is not a wilderness adventure—it's about discovering Ohio. The trail goes through big cities and small towns, on bike paths and paved and gravel roads.

"The BT far exceeded my expectations," he adds. "I was overwhelmed with the beauty of Ohio and kindness of the people. Hiking the BT is about the people, places, present and past. It's about Ohio's incredible history and what we have today. Experiencing it on foot, you can really take it all in."

One of Niekamp's favorite places on the entire trail is right here in Dayton, on the section of trail running from Eastwood MetroPark to downtown Dayton.

"It's a spectacular walk, especially the mile of trail in the woods along the Mad River," he says. "It's a really beautiful sight walking into Dayton."

Indeed, the largest city on all of the NCT is Dayton, designated a Trail Town by the Buckeye Trail and North Country Trail associations. This designation showcases Dayton as a hiking destination offering quality trails, maps and resources.

In 2013, Luke "Strider" Jordan became one of only five people to through-hike the NCT. (Through-hikers such as Jordan and Niekamp complete trails in a continuous hike, while section hikers complete trails a piece at a time.) Jordan will give a presentation about his hike at The Adventure Summit, presented by Five Rivers MetroParks and Wright State University, Feb. 13, 2016.

"I became fascinated with the idea of hiking the NCT because, even though the trail had been around for 30 years, few people had through-hiked it," Jordan says. "The NCT is very diverse compared to other long-distance trails. I started in a prairie and made my way to the north woods then to urban areas in Ohio, including Dayton, and the foothills of Appalachia. You finish in the Adirondacks in New York. Ohio had the most history and culture right on the trail."

For those training for a long-distance hike—or those looking for a weekend or day trip—Five Rivers MetroParks' facilities are home to 75-plus miles of hiking trails with varying terrain and distances suitable for all fitness levels and everyone who would like to experience the outdoors. Great places to experience fall color and get in shape for longer hikes are listed below:

Englewood MetroPark: Hike the green trail to visit the park's waterfalls.

Germantown and Twin Creek MetroParks: Home to the 22-mile Twin Valley Backpacking Trail, trails in these more remote parks cross a variety of terrain and habitats and offer scenic views.

Sugarcreek MetroPark: Hike the green or orange trails to visit the Osage Orange Tunnel and Three Sisters at this park with a variety of trails, including a paved wheelchair-accessible loop.

Taylorville MetroPark: The trails in East Park offer spectacular views of the Great Miami River, a rock outcrop and more.

“Every year, we hear dozens of examples of people training in Five Rivers MetroParks for a long-distance hike or a weekend trip in another location,” says Brent Anslinger, outdoor recreation manager for Five Rivers Outdoors. “The Twin Valley Trail offers the opportunity to backpack and have a great introductory hiking experience, test your skills, try out equipment and see if you want to take on a longer trip.”

Learn more about hiking and backpacking at the Midwest Outdoor Experience, Oct. 2-3, at Eastwood MetroPark. Relax out around a campfire and in the hammock lounge at the Osprey Backcountry Zone. Take classes in camp cooking and map and compass basics at the REI Outdoor School. Follow the blue blazes that mark the BT/NCT and hike part of these long-distance trails, which run through the event site.

“The BT and NCT are tremendous assets, and I often see people coming to Dayton from other cities to use our local trails,” Niekamp says.

Five Rivers MetroParks’ trails are color-coded and most are loops. Maps are available at metroparks.org and trailhead kiosks.

The second series of hikes comprising the MetroPark Every Trail Hiking Challenge, led by avid local hikers Brian and Michelle Coleman, will be held Sundays Nov. 1, 2015 through March 13, 2016. Register in advance at daytonhikers.org, as the hikes are limited to 60 people. Earlier this year, more than 40 people completed the challenge, hiking the trails in every Five Rivers MetroPark.

For more information about Five Rivers MetroParks, please visit metroparks.org/getoutside. For regional trails: outdoordayton.com. Buckeye Trail Association: buckeyetrail.org. North Country Trail Association: northcountrytrail.org. Midwest Outdoor Experience: outdoorx.org. The Adventure Summit: theadventuresummit.com.

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