

Volume 3, Number 5

September-October 1986 PLEASURES OF THE PARK BY CHERRY WURDERLICH

What's your idea of the best way to spend an autumn afternoon outdoors? A leisurely picnic? Some fast sets of tennis? A stroll through the woods to enjoy the fall colors?

All these pleasures—and many more—are just a short walk, bike ride, or drive away, thanks to Rock Creek Park.

Whether you have an hour or an afternoon, at any time of year the park will give you a taste of the country and varied sources of enjoyment.

Historic Tree. You'll find some Maryland and natural history at the Rockville Pike/ Beach Drive connection. The Linder Oak—called the Grosvenor Oak by some—is nearly 300 years old and more than 95 feet high. Its crown spread is more than 130 feet.

This huge White Oak is the largest in Montgomery County and the fourth largest in Maryland. In 1976 it was named the Maryland Bicentennial Tree. The plaque near the tree says, "It has stood its ground, survived the American Revolution, and continues to serve an appreciative nation."

The Bike Path...is enjoyed by bikers, walkers, and joggers from sunrise to sundown. Some neighbors take the loop around the Cedar Lane Hill to reach work at NIH of the Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Paved paths connect some neighborhoods to the bike path. More are planned. At an October 2 hearing the National Capital Planning Commission will decide on 3 projects—paving the short link between Saul Road and the current bike path, adding a hiker-biker lane or sidewalk along Beach Drive to Rockville Pike, and putting a path across the park to Grosvenor Metro.

Tennis, Too. North of Beach Drive and Knowles is the KenGar Palisades recreation center. Its two tennis courts have been resurfaced and renovated. The center also had a softball field, basketball court, recreation building, and playground with equipment for young children.

The recreation building serves up to 100 people and is available for rental for community groups, business groups, or family reunions. There's a kitchen, restroom, tables, and folding chairs. (Similarly, the Kensington Cabin building located at the park along Kensington parkway is available. It holds up to 56 people and has no kitchen). Call the Park Permit Office at 495-2525 for more details.

Picnics and Playgrounds. Playgrounds are near Puller Drive, the Beach-Cedar intersection, and along Jones Mill Road. Along the bike path you'll also find benches for sitting and relaxing and several areas with picnic tables.

The Vita Course. A series of wood and metal structures and small signs are spread along the path between Kensington Parkway and Jones Mill Road. This is the Vita Course, an exercise program with 20 activities or rings, chin-up bars, and other equipment.

More Attractions. The park goes much further north and south, of course, and has many more features. And the park system includes many other parks. Several nature centers schedule special events. You can read about them in the Nutshell News, a calendar of events sent to the public libraries.

-C.W.

FALL CAMPING

Time for one more CAMPING TRIP before winter? Here are two nearby parks with camping areas, both run by that wonderful bi-county organization with the mind-stopping acronym, the M-NCPPC. *

Little Bennett Regional Park in Montgomery County, out I-270 near the Frederick County line, offers camping through the end of October.

At Little Bennett you can enjoy relatively “civilized” camping in your tent or trailer. Each campsite has a parking pad, picnic table, and metal fire grill, with water nearby.

After a day of hiking along Little Bennett Creek, or down to the old Kingsley one-room schoolhouse, you can sing the dirt away with a shower at one of the modern comfort stations.

Campsites are available “first-come first served,” although you can call two weeks ahead if you really want to reserve a site. For more information call 972-9222.

Patuxent River Park in Prince Georges County offers a splendid opportunity to get away from it all (or most of “it”) with a 40-mile trip from home, around the Beltway and south of Upper Marlboro off Rt.301. (For those of us in need of a geography lesson: the Patuxent River forms the eastern border of Prince Georges county.)

Unlike Cabin John or Wheaton Regional Parks, Patuxent River Park is a “limiter-access” park. Visitors must stop at park headquarters at the Jug Bay Natural Area for a permit to use the park. Both day-use and overnight facilities are rather primitive.

You must reserve campsites in advance, and be prepared to drive-in or hike-in jugs of water. All campsites are primitive; some are strictly for backpackers.

If you’re not sure you’re ready to leave the comforts of home behind leave the comforts of home behind for 24 hours, come for the day – to enjoy fishing, canoeing (canoes may be rented by advance reservation), hiking along trails and boardwalks, and bird watching (Great Blue Heron, Osprey, and many more).

Park staff is unfailingly pleasant and helpful, and the scenery is peaceful and captivating. It’s hard to believe that the metropolitan area is so close.

For more information and reservations, call the park office at 627-6074.

–Martha Lawrenz