

Trails of the Western Reserve

Jay Abercrombie

The lure of walking through woods, by streams, and along city and village paths is being discovered by more people every year. What used to be a necessary form of transportation has become the most common outdoor recreational activity. Nationwide, about 73 million Americans walk for exercise. The people of the Western Reserve mirror this trend. A 1992 survey by Lake Metroparks found that walking is "the most commonly desired activity that park users expect to enjoy." The 34th annual 1997 Fall Hiking Spree sponsored by Metro Parks, Serving Summit County is expected to attract 28,000 walkers.

Providing trails and open spaces for Ohioans to wander is a challenge for land use agencies. The seven counties in the heart of the Western Reserve (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, and Summit) rank first in the United States in the amount of parkland available to the public. A 1994 Citizens League Research Institute study showed that nearly nine percent (more than 94,000 acres) of the region is composed of federal, state, and locally owned parkland.

Hikers in the Western Reserve need not go far to find good walking trails. The Reserve has 3 national parks, 1 national estuarine research reserve, 1 national heritage corridor, 4 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation areas, 16 state parks, 3 state scenic rivers, 1 state wild river, 21 state nature preserves, 17 wildlife areas, 85 county or metro parks, numerous city, village, and township parks, and several private holdings that provide public access. Urban landscapes that feature distinctive architecture, community gardens, and greenways give city residents everyday opportunities to enjoy outings on foot.

New trails are being developed and old trails are being improved to provide more and better recreational lands. The story of the Western Reserve, its people, and its trails is an unfinished book. The path ahead still harbors unpredictable and refreshing surprises. It still leads us on.