

Hiking club forms for Raccoon Creek State Park

By Shannon M. Nass /

A new club is being organized to explore more than 40 miles of hiking trails nestled among more than 7,500 wooded acres in Raccoon Creek State Park near Hookstown.

Members of the Raccoon Creek Hiking Club will make their maiden voyage from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday along 4 to 6 miles of the park's trails.

"People are driving miles to go hike and get out into nature," said Joe Kapopoulos of Ingram.

"They don't know that Raccoon is only 25 miles from town and it's the most under-utilized park. So many people don't even know that it exists."

Mr. Kapopoulos volunteers at the park and will be leading the hikes, which will be free.

When not working as a full-time delivery driver, he and a group of other volunteers spend their free time maintaining the park's 44 miles of hiking trails.

It was while performing trail maintenance that Mr. Kapopoulos said he encountered numerous hiking clubs taking advantage of the trail system.

Realizing the park didn't have a similar club of its own, he presented the idea to Patrick Adams, environmental education specialist for the park, and the hiking club was born.

Mr. Kapopoulos' familiarity with the trail system and extensive work maintaining it has given him an in-depth knowledge of the plants and wildlife that make their home along the trails.

In an effort to share this knowledge, he plans to coordinate each hike to coincide with seasonal blooming wildflowers.

Participants can look forward to seeing one of many harbingers of spring in all of its splendor -- snow trillium.

It is one of the earliest wildflowers to bloom in woodlands and gets its name from the fact that snow can

often be found on the ground when the flowers bloom.

If they tread lightly, participants may also be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of beaver, muskrat, turtle, wood duck, goose and deer.

Hikers also will pass by historical sites such as the remains of the 1800s Frankfort Mineral Springs Resort, old homesteads, and a springhouse dated 1846.

Mr. Kapopoulos said the terrain is hilly at times, but that beginner to moderate hikers should have no problem completing the hikes.

He described them as more of a walk and said the group will take breaks as needed.

"It's not a marathon and it's not a race to the finish," he said.

He even encourages parents to bring their children.

"We have to get that younger generation interested in conservation and taking care of the park also," he said.

"The only way to get them to enjoy it is to get them out in it."

The hikes will be held once a month throughout the year so participants can witness the metamorphosis that takes place on the trails with each passing season.

"I really hope it helps the numbers for the park and just boosts the usage of the park," said Mr. Kapopoulos.

"I want people to get out and enjoy nature and see what I see because I'm out there all the time. Just to take in how beautiful the park really is."

The group will meet at the main park office on Route 18. Information: 724-899-3611 or paadams@pa.gov.

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