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TRADITIONS CONTINUE WITH 53RD ANNUAL FALL HIKING SPREE

The largest and longest-running event of its kind in the nation – the annual Fall Hiking Spree – begins September 1 in Summit Metro Parks.

What began more than 50 years ago as a way to encourage people to visit a variety of trails, instead of always hiking the one closest to home, hasn't changed a whole lot since 1964. A first-time participant who completes eight hikes through November 30 will earn a hiking staff and metal shield. A veteran spree hiker will earn a shield. Hikes can be completed on a person's own schedule and at their own pace, or during a number of naturalist-led hikes offered by the park district.

Every year, an estimated 50,000 people participate in the spree, and between 11,000 and 12,000 hikers earn rewards. Last year, 12,738 people completed eight or more trails, and 2,710 were identified as first-year hikers. Five people have completed the spree every year since it began.

Summit Metro Parks spokesperson Lindsay Smith said the park district regularly sees new individuals and families beginning the spree, starting new traditions.

"We hear stories all the time – that someone did the spree as a child and now they're hiking with their kids, or Mom and Dad started the spree when their kids were little and the parents continue now, even though the kids have moved out," she explained. "There's no better way to enjoy fall colors and time with friends and family than the Fall Hiking Spree."

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Fall Hiking Spree rewards are free to Summit County residents. Out-of-county residents pay to receive rewards (\$10 for first-year hikers, \$5 for veteran hikers). Hiking forms are available online at hikingspree.summitmetroparks.org, at the visitors center at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm (1828 Smith Rd., Akron), the nature center at Liberty Park (9999 Liberty Rd., Twinsburg), and all Acme Fresh Market stores.

There are 14 trails from which to choose in 2016, and one Hiker's Choice option. Trails include a section of the Towpath Trail in Clinton; Oxbow Trail in Cascade Valley Metro Park in Akron; Redwing Trail in Firestone Metro Park in Akron; Rock Creek Trail in Furnace Run Metro Park in Richfield; Alder Trail in Goodyear Heights Metro Park in Akron; Gorge Trail in Gorge Metro Park in Cuyahoga Falls; Adam Run Trail in Hampton Hills Metro Park in Akron and Cuyahoga Falls; the Ledges Trail in Liberty Park in Twinsburg; Indian Spring Trail in Munroe Falls Metro Park in Munroe Falls; Cherry Lane and Fernwood Loop trails at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm in Akron; Deer Run Trail in O'Neil Woods Metro Park in Bath; Pheasant Run Trail in Silver Creek Metro Park in Norton; the Prairie Trail in Springfield Bog Metro Park in Akron; and Downy Loop Trail in Wood Hollow Metro Park in Hudson.

For information about the spree and naturalist-led programs that are good for spree credit, call 330-865-8065.

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Summit Metro Parks manages 14,100 acres, including 16 parks, several conservation areas and more than 125 miles of trails, with 22.4 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail. Annual attendance averages 5 million visits.

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