

GREEN ISLANDS

Vol. 66 No. 5 / SEP-OCT '25

Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

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The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the

executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

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This magazine is mailed free of charge to Summit County residents. To join the mailing list, send your name and mailing address to marketing@summitmetroparks.org or call 330-867-5511.

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THE FALL HIKING SPREE® SHIELD ASSISTANCE

Is attaching the hiking spree shield more challenging than hiking the eight trails? Summit Metro Parks volunteers will gladly attach it for you at no charge on the dates below.

Hiking Spree Shield Assistance | 1 to 3 p.m.

Sunday, October 19

Liberty Park Nature Center

9999 Liberty Rd, Twinsburg 44087

Sunday, November 2

Summit Lake Nature Center

411 Ira Ave., Akron 44301

Saturday, November 8, 15, 22 & 29

F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center

1828 Smith Rd., Akron 44313

Sunday, December 7

Goodyear Heights Metro Park / Lodge

2077 Newton St., Akron 44305

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

IT'S MORE THAN DIRT

Improving your soil one native plant at a time

By Kasey Krok, Interpretive Naturalist

Dirt stains on your garden clothes? It's more interesting than you may think! The soil in your yard isn't just dirt — it's a hidden ecosystem with a carefully crafted composition. Planting native wildflowers, shrubs and trees is an effective way to revitalize and support that soil's health within your home landscape. These native plants can co-exist with natural fungal networks that together create a water, carbon and nitrogen highway system right beneath our feet. This microscopic exchange is crucial to getting nutrients to the plants that need it most without using storebought chemicals. It's best to leave out pesticides too; this "living" soil ecosystem needs small insects and other invertebrates to break down organic material, such as fallen leaves, and cycle nutrients back into your garden's roots. If your soil still needs an extra boost, consider adding homemade compost as a simple way to introduce nutrients while lowering your carbon footprint and reducing waste.

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PARK ARCHAEOLOGISTS DIG INTO THE PAST

By Megan Shaeffer, Supervisor of Cultural Resources

The Summit Metro Parks conservation department protects and manages not only the plants and wildlife within our parks, but the archaeological and historical sites and structures as well. Since 2016, SMP has had archaeologists and historians on staff to oversee our cultural resources. SMP was the first metropolitan park system in Ohio to have permanent staff dedicated to cultural resource management.

While the archaeologists are busy year-round, summers are earmarked for large fieldwork projects at significant sites within the park district. SMP's cultural resources staff is small, but careful planning and collaboration allows them to tackle larger projects while engaging with community partners and volunteers. This summer marks

the sixth year that SMP has partnered with The University of Akron to host their Archaeological Field School class. Here, students learn professional skills and get experience working on an archaeological site.

Since 2021, the Archaeological Field School has taken place at the Everett Knoll Complex Site, which is a large precontact (or prehistoric) site in the Cuyahoga River Valley. The site is on the National Register of Historic Places and dates to the Middle Woodland or “Hopewell” Period (about 1000 BCE to 450 CE). The site is very large — over 67 acres — and extends across part of SMP’s Riding Run Conservation Area as well as Cuyahoga Valley National Park property and property owned by private landowners. In the 1850s, a burial mound was discovered on a knoll on the site.

Unfortunately, that burial mound was demolished by the construction of a schoolhouse, and the artifacts associated with it are lost. Later archaeological investigation in the 1970s yielded further evidence of the sacred nature of the knoll, uncovering human remains and other ceremonial artifacts*. Indigenous occupation and settlement has been documented at archaeological sites all across the surrounding area, particularly during excavations carried out on National Park Service property throughout the Village of Everett.

On SMP property, the use of archaeological geophysical surveys in late 2023 and early 2024 helped identify possible locations of precontact activity. In 2024, archaeological testing and excavation revealed an “earth oven,” which is a place where food would have been cooked or roasted. This oven is at a surprisingly shallow depth, only a little more than a foot below the surface of the ground. It appears as a circular patch of darkened earth, charred wood and rocks which have been cracked from their exposure to the high heat of cooking. In 2025, the excavation was expanded to study this feature and to reveal a second feature nearby at an even shallower depth. The next step for the archaeological team is to send samples for radiocarbon dating and/or botanical testing. It is hoped that the testing will not only date the

archaeological site, but provide insight as to how people were living here and the environment they encountered and shaped so long ago.

While this work takes time, our archaeologists are excited for the chance to eventually discover more information about the past use of the land we now love as Summit Metro Parks. Understanding our past helps us protect, interpret and connect people to the parks in the present day and beyond.

- * These items are held at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, which is currently carrying out the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation (NAGPRA) process for these artifacts.

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MARVELOUS MONARCHS:

Witnessing the Magic of Migration in Our Metro Parks

By Reyna Askew, Community Engagement Manager

Monarchs complete a multigenerational migration. Most monarchs traveling north in spring and summer only live around four weeks, but towards the end of the summer, monarchs lay eggs for a super generation that flies south and lives eight times longer than their parents and grandparents — up to eight months!

As late summer blooms emerge, flashes of orange and black butterflies dance among goldenrod, ironweed, asters and bonesets. Each year, we have the incredible privilege to see one of nature’s greatest migrations: the monarch butterfly’s 3,000-mile journey from the U.S. and Canada — through Northeast Ohio — to the mountain forests of central Mexico.

Monarchs traveling through Summit County in late August to mid-September rely on our restored prairies, meadows and even home gardens for nectar-rich rest

stops along their journey. A few great spots in the Metro Parks to look for monarchs include Springfield Bog's Prairie Trail, Liberty Park's Bluebird Trail and the restored golf course turned floodplain meadow at Cascade Valley Metro Park's Valley View Area.

The arrival of the monarchs in Mexico has coincided with the Día de los Muertos celebration for generations. In this region, monarch butterflies have become a cultural icon, seen by many as spirits and symbols of ancestors returning.

Despite our collective admiration for monarch butterflies, they face threats from habitat loss and climate change. The species is currently listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and proposed for federal protection by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Summit Metro Parks supports monarchs through habitat restoration, naturalist-led programs and planting demonstration gardens. You can help by planting native milkweed, joining volunteer projects, reducing pesticide use, leaving eggs and caterpillars in the wild and participating in the Wild Back Yards program to protect native habitat at home.

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HERITAGE HIKERS MAKE IT A FAMILY AFFAIR

By Rachel Whinnery, Marketing Specialist

The Fall Hiking Spree has become part of life for many Summit County families. Every year they come together for eight hikes. That's eight adventures. Eight possibilities to learn something new. Eight opportunities to appreciate nature. Eight chances to have deep conversations. Silly conversations. Conversations about the past that will reverberate into the future.

From parents and their children to longtime friends and newlyweds to the solo hiker, the Fall Hiking Spree offers the chance to make lasting memories. Take Heritage Hikers Sam and Anne, for example. The couple started the spree in 1977 when they moved to Akron from Pennsylvania. Exploring Summit Metro Parks was a way for them to stay involved in their new community and learn about the area.

When their daughter was born, Sam and Anne carried her on hikes, and she received her hiking staff at 1 year old. They later had another child and, as a family, they hiked the spree every year until their kids moved out. These days they hike with their grandsons or another couple, continuing to make memories and share laughs.

When asked how she felt about having the title of Heritage Hiker, Anne said, "I don't need a title. I just like hiking."

Heritage Hiker Susan received her hiking staff and first shield as a child in 1968. Her family did the spree every year, bringing along friends or kids from the youth group her parents led. When she got married, her new husband went too. And, of course, when they had kids of their own, they joined the tradition. Their son, Chris, received his hiking staff at only 6 months old after enjoying the trails from a backpack. He now works at Summit Metro Parks as a park ranger.

Susan continues doing the spree and hikes year-round. As for the Heritage Hiker moniker, she says, "It feels kind of cool. It says something about the spree lasting so long, and I've been part of that."

Over decades, these families set aside time to complete the annual challenge together. And thousands of others do, too. We can only imagine the range of conversations that happen on our trails during the Fall Hiking Spree, and we're excited for you to share them with us this year.