

Local Travel

Hocking Hills: Ideal getaway for nature lovers

By Aaron Leventhal

With the coronavirus pandemic in full force, my wife Beth and I decided our summer vacation should be close to home. Fortunately, just 60 miles southeast from our German Village home lies the exquisite natural beauty of Hocking Hills State Park. In August, we rented a lovely cabin in the woods just off State Route 664 South and enjoyed a long-weekend, family getaway that wonderfully combined relaxation with adventure, fun and quality time together.

The scenic wonderland offers extraordinary sandstone gorges, lush green hillsides, abundant wildlife and a serene solitude that has beckoned visitors since the Adena and Hopewell mound builders inhabited the land thousands of years ago. We delighted in the myriad recreational options — wooded hiking trails through splendid sandstone caves, canoe liveries, fishing in well-stocked rivers and lakes, hilly golf courses and a number of premier attractions.

We began each day with a hike through one of the nearby sandstone caves — Old Man's Cave, Ash Cave and Cedar Falls. There are nine trails in Hocking Hills State Park ranging from 1/4-mile and handicap-accessible route to a challenging six-mile hike. After lunch, we selected an activity for our entire family.

The attractions listed below are all owned and skillfully managed by locals, demonstrating that small business entrepreneurship is alive and well in and around Hocking Hills. They take pride in their beautiful, natural surroundings and Appalachian heritage and have instilled in their staff the importance of providing visitors with quality service. All are fun-packed for both young and old at a reasonable cost.

High Rock Adventures offers ecotours on the pristine, private property of founder, director and trainer Steve Foley. He is a graduate of Franklin University and was the director of Hocking College's Ecotourism and Adventure Travel. On the ecotours, all of his guides combine nature education with challenging, low-impact experiences, including cliff and canyon

rappelling, climbs through natural sandstone canyons and information on edible and medicinal plants.

Tours last approximately three hours and are available March-November; reservations are required. 740-385-9886, www.highrockadventures.com, on State Route 374 in Rockbridge.

Hocking Hills (aka Fox's) Canoe Livery delivers one of the region's most popular outdoor recreational activities. Established in 1996, the livery is owned and managed by Cindy and Aaron Fox. Visitors are transported by bus about five miles north and then paddle canoes, kayaks and rafts down the Hocking River for about two hours back to the livery. Primitive campsites and rustic cabins are available on the premises. Walk-ins are welcome, but reservations are recommended, especially on weekends. Open April-October. 740-385-0523, www.hockingriver.com, at 33 East and State Route 664 in Logan.

Butterfly Ridge Conservation Center is owned and operated by Christopher Kline and wife Chris on 21 acres they have designed as a natural butterfly habitat, where their motto is, "Making the world a little better place, one butterfly at a time." Visitors can explore the mile-long, scenic trail through wetlands, prairies and pine forest groves that are home to species ranging from Swallowtails, Blues and Skippers to Sulphurs, Whites and Brushfoots. Chris spent several years at Franklin Park Conservatory working with its "Blooms and Butterflies" exhibit, where he was affectionately known as "The Butterfly Guy." He decided to devote his life to creating a unique butterfly sanctuary and in 2017 opened Butterfly Ridge on property owned by his family since 1863. Visitors can join professionally guided tours or hike the trail on their own. Open April 15-October 15, Thursday-Monday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Admission is only \$5, and dogs and picnic lunches are welcome on the grounds. 740-204-5372, www.butterfly-ridge.com, on State Route 374 in Rockbridge, between Conkle's Hollow and Rock House.

Due to limited time, we were unable to experience many other popular attractions, including: **Hocking Hills Canopy Tours** for zipline thrills;



Dani Leventhal ReStack rappels down a cliff on a High Rock Adventures ecotour.

Photo by Sheilah Wilson ReStack

Jack Pine Studio, where Jack and other skilled crafters create exquisite, blown-glass designs and offer live demonstrations; **Blue Moon Acres**, for guided trail horse rides; **John Glenn Astronomy Park**, where visitors can observe "zillions of shimmering stars," 24/7, 365 nights a year; and **Main Street in Downtown Logan**, where dozens of shops, galleries eateries and attractions line the quaint, small-town avenue.

Dining: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, we ate most of our meals in our cabin or at a picnic table in the

back yard surrounded by towering pines and sandstone ridges. We went only to restaurants that had patio seating and welcomed our Labrador retriever Lily. All were open for lunch and dinner.

Millstone Southern Smoked BBQ prides itself on being a locals' favorite, with exceptional BBQ, ranging from Kansas City baby back ribs to Texas beef brisket, along with meatloaf, Portobello mushrooms, char-grilled ribeye steaks, smoked chicken and

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Christopher Kline, owner and guide, shares fascinating information at his Butterfly Ridge Conservation Center.
Photo by Shayne Leventhal

shrimp, and a variety of salads, sides and desserts. In addition to patio seating, there is a large grassy area with picnic table seating. 740-385-5341

Urban Grille Pub, overlooking the 18-hole Hocking Hills Golf Club, offers exceptional food and service at very reasonable prices. The menu includes dozens of appetizers, fresh

salads and sandwiches, flame-grilled steaks and burgers, seafood and chicken, along with homemade desserts and dynamite cocktails. Prime rib is available Friday and Saturday after 5 p.m. 740-385-8766

Hocking Hills Visitor Information, 800-462-5464, ExploreHockingHills.com. Your first stop should be



Beth Ervin Leventhal and granddaughter Rose kayak down the Hocking River with kayaks supplied by Fox's Canoe Livery.
Photo by Sheilah Wilson ReStack



Exploring Old Man's Cave is fun for young and old.
Photo by Beth Ervin Leventhal

at the Welcome Center on State Route 664 South for maps, brochures and personalized staff recommendations.

Travel writer Aaron Leventhal from Columbus is a frequent contributor to The Catholic Times.




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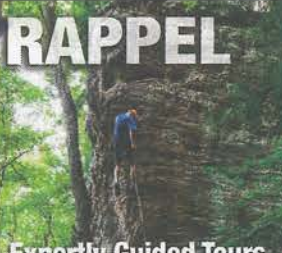
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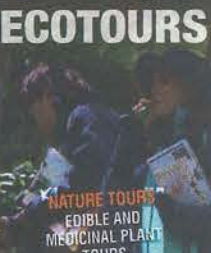


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