

Penn's Stewards

News from the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation



**Has this happened to YOU? Or IS this you?
Well, it CAN be you...**

Two hikers are halving the distance behind you on the trail. As they prepare to pass you by with a cheerful greeting of "On your left! Gorgeous day, isn't it?" You glance their way and immediately notice the heavily muscled calves, sprightly pace and... what's this now? Loads of smile lines and gray hair? Aren't people their age supposed to be home playing pinochle?

As it turns out, they can probably wipe the floor with you at pinochle but they're also spending a Wednesday morning doing what we all aspire to – enjoying a healthy retirement. Even after a grueling hike or hours of biking on a trail, active seniors will tell you that physical exertion is not work. Enjoying the outdoors is what they worked FOR.

One of the most famous hikers of all time was Emma Gatewood, an Ohio farmwoman who went by the trail name "Grandma Gatewood." She hiked the Appalachian Trail in 1955 at the age of 67, wearing Keds sneakers and carrying an army blanket, a raincoat, and a plastic shower curtain in a homemade bag slung over one shoulder. She became a familiar picture to Americans through articles in newspapers, a profile in *Sports Illustrated*, and an appearance on the *Today Show*. In addition to completing the Appalachian Trail, she took a 2,000 mile-walk (averaging 22 miles a day) following the route of the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to Portland, Oregon.

Of course, most of us can't chart a course based on the accomplishments of Emma Gatewood, any more than we could swim from Cuba to Florida like 63-year-old Diana Nyad or peak Mt. Everest like 80-year-old Yuichiro Miura. What we can do is continue to look forward to the chance to get outside, breathe some fresh air, and explore the beautiful state parks and forests in our own back yard. *continued on page 2*

SENIORS IN THE OUTDOORS... IT NEVER GETS OLD!



Peg Seidel on the trail with a friend.

SENIORS IN THE OUTDOORS *continued from page 1*

Boomers Lead the Way

The old cliché of the sedentary retirement years has been changed by a more modern trend reflecting the goal-oriented baby boomers entering their retirement years with a renewed appreciation for fitness. Geriatric physicians are adamant in their message: **Humans are not designed to sit.** Your body is designed to move, to be walking and running throughout your life. You can make profound changes for your health no matter what your age.

Many senior athletes launch into fitness only in midlife, prodded by doctors telling them they need to shape up, lose weight, and get their cholesterol under control.

Researchers know that when older adults do even light amounts of exercise — walking, strength training, and working on their balance and flexibility — the result is that they take fewer medications and go to the doctor less often. They're less likely to fall. They are hospitalized less often and recover more quickly from injury and illness.

Take It Outside

The New York Times published an interesting feature stating that emerging science suggests there are benefits to exercising outdoors that can't be replicated on a treadmill, a recumbent bicycle, or a track. In studies comparing the exertion of running on a treadmill and the exertion of running outside, treadmill runners expended less energy to cover the same distance as those striding across the ground outside, primarily because indoor exercisers face no wind resistance or changes in terrain, no matter how subtle.

A study last year of older adults found that those who exercised outside exercised longer and more often than those working out indoors. The science and the survey showed that the volunteers who exercised outside, usually by walking, were significantly more physically active than those who exercised indoors, completing, on average, about 30 minutes more exercise each week than those who walked or otherwise exercised indoors.

Studies haven't yet established why, physiologically, exercising outside might improve dispositions. A few small studies have found that people have lower blood levels of cortisol, a hormone related to stress, after exerting themselves outside as compared with inside. There's speculation, too, that exposure to direct sunlight, known to affect mood, plays a role.

But the take-away seems to be that moving their routines outside could help reluctant or inconsistent exercisers. "If outdoor activity encourages more activity, then it is a good thing," says Jacqueline Kerr, a professor at the University of California, San Diego, who led the study of older adults. While gyms have a role in our fitness regime, a mixture of indoor and outdoor exercise is ideal.

How to Get Out There

Walking and hiking are obvious activities for getting out there. Pick your location and put one foot in front of the other. In addition, other exercise and recreational opportunities are available in many of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests. We have some ideas for ways to choose and plan an activity or how to locate groups to educate you on the best ways to enjoy that activity at your current fitness level. *continued on page 3*



Photo credit: Dot Monahan

First catch of the day at Maurice Goddard State Park.



Photo credit: Dot Monahan

Volunteers in action at Oil Creek State Park.

SENIORS IN THE OUTDOORS *continued from page 2*

Before we get to specifics, you shouldn't overlook the best way to engage in the outdoors – become a volunteer at one of the Foundation's Friends group at a state park or forest closest to you.

The Foundation's Friends groups offer a wide variety of opportunities to put your own special skills to work, explore new activities, and meet new people. You can help with trail building or just offer to show up for what needs done. Pennsylvania's state parks and forests have a role for you.

To learn more, go the paparksandforests.org site and Click on "What is a Friends group?" to find inspiration from the efforts of your neighbors. Then click "Opportunities" and find out where and when you can connect.

Where to Go – What to Do

One of quickest ways to figure out which activities might be of interest to you is to check out DCNR's website (www.dcnr.state.pa.us) where you can search by either activity or location. For example, if you clicked on "What to Do," then by activity, such as "Winter Activities," then "Cross-country Skiing," you'll see a map that indicates all of the parks and forests that maintain the trails and a link to each park or forest.

You can search for many activities in PA's parks and forests, like bike riding, camping, fishing, hunting, swimming, hiking, horseback riding, geo caching, orienteering, rock climbing, scuba diving and many winter activities like skiing and sledding.

Join a Group or Club

Some of the most active members of local outdoor activity clubs are seniors. While the group may not be specific to seniors there are often subgroups within the club that focus on training and outings for novices of any age.

• Walking and Hiking

Like all hikers, seniors need to work within their stamina, personality, and fitness. There are many trails from flat to hill for walking and hiking pleasure.

• Canoeing and Kayaking

Have you always wanted to be in one of those sleek, silently moving kayaks or canoes winding their way down a sun-dappled stream or across the lake? It could be you. Many parks have concessions where you can rent watercraft or look for canoe and kayak demo days through your local outfitters.

• Bike Riding

Even seasoned bikers love riding the trails in state parks and forests. Away from the noise and hazards of traffic, there is no greater fountain of youth than reclaiming the pure joy of riding a bike.

And more good news: riding a bicycle is low impact and easy on the joints. It's aerobic, improving cardiovascular fitness and reducing the risk of heart attack and helps prevent obesity, colon and breast cancer, type 2 diabetes, mild depression, hypertension, and arthritis.

• Birding and Nature Observation

Kick start your outdoor fitness goals by combining with another activity like bird watching. There 2.5 million acres of state forest and park land available for birding and nature observation, so whether you are looking to take a walk in the wetlands, grasslands, or forested ridge tops, you will encounter many colorful and interesting species on state forestland.

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Resources to Find Outdoor Groups

Hiking:

- The Keystone Trails Association is a volunteer-directed organization serving as a federation of membership organizations and individuals. They can direct you to an active club in your area. Check their website at www.kta-hike.org.

Birding:

- The online Pennsylvania Birding and Wildlife Guide includes an interactive guide and map that features birding locations and a searchable database. web1.audubon.org/pabirdingtrails.org

Biking:

- The list of bicycle clubs is extensive, so you should "google" search "bicycling clubs in _____ (your city, county, or region)" to find a local club.
- The International Mountain Bicycling Association's website includes a "Near You" feature that allows you to locate a mountain bike club in your area. (www.imba.org)

For Women Only:

- For women looking to cultivate a new outdoor skill, consider participating in one of several women-based events in state parks. Chapman, Mt. Pisgah (August 9) and Black Moshannon (May 10) state parks are offer a day of classes in topics such as canoeing, kayaking, archery, woodworking, candle dipping, trapping, bluebird habitat, and more. For the specifics (dates, registration, program details) check with the state parks.

Canoeing/Kayaking:

- Harrisburg Canoe Club www.ccghpa.com
- Conewago Canoe Club (York) www.conewagocanoeclub.org
- Lehigh Valley Canoe Club www.enter.net/~lvcc
- Philadelphia Canoe Club www.philacanoe.org
- Three Rivers Paddling Club (Pittsburgh) www.threerivers.org

Equestrian Activity:

- You can find equestrian maps and trail guides at DCNR's Bureau of State Forests at: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/recreation/equestrian/equestrianmaps/index.htm
- For information about the PA Equine Council: www.pennsylvaniaequinecouncil.com or Bud & Gwen Wills at gwills@pennswoods.net

Trails:

- Find all types of trails at www.explorepatrails.com

SENIORS IN THE OUTDOORS *continued from page 3*

We caught up with a few of our senior outdoor enthusiasts to talk about their thoughts and experiences. YOU try and catch them – they are busy, active, and downright inspirational!

Meet Peg Seidel:

Do you have a favorite outdoor activity?

I love many outdoor activities like hiking, biking, camping, and water sports.

Do you have a group or partner for this?

I go on my own, with a friend, a group of friends, or with my grandson. It depends what we are doing, where we are going, and how long. When I am with others, we just plan to go for the time and distance that works for the group. We're not in it for endurance testing! Just to enjoy being outdoors.



Where are your favorite trails?

I have so many! One of my favorites is the Great Gorge Trail in Ohiopyle State Park. We have a tradition of going hiking over Mother's Day weekend and eating at the River's Edge Café in Confluence. I've camped with groups of friends at Ricketts Glen, biked the Great Allegheny Passage, and hiked trails all over.

Is there a particular experience or location in PA that you'd like to share?

I think it's worth mentioning that I moved to Pennsylvania from Michigan in 1991 because of how much I loved and used the Ohiopyle State Park trail system. The trails (in these gorgeous natural areas) offer something new to experience during every season. Spring on the Meadow Run Trail is full of wonderful wildflowers like jack-in-the-pulpit and trillium. In the fall, McCune's Trail takes you to an overlook of the Ohiopyle and Youghieny River Gorge — the foliage really is something to see.

Do you have advice for new retirees who want to become more active in the outdoors?

You really don't need fancy equipment — just locate a park and pick a trail. It's easy enough to identify the difficulty level of trails in the park and forest system. Most are suitable for novices and are not so untraveled that you feel isolated. I say — invite a friend and take your dog. You don't need a weekend or even an entire day. Take the time you have and find a trail.



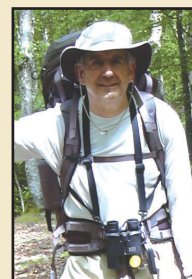
Photo credit: Pam Metzger

A healthy, happy group of seniors taking the Great PA Outdoor Challenge.

Meet Joe DeMarco:

How long have you been backpacking?

I've been a hiker and a fisherman most of my life. As I neared retirement, I asked my friend Bernie (a life-long backpacker), to establish a regular backpacking schedule. We were both in our mid-fifties when I started and we've been at it for nearly 15 years, going at least once or twice a year. In addition, our wives join us for five days cross-country skiing in (January or February) each year.



Do you ever hike with groups?

Bernie and I often include other family and friends. One of our recent hikes included Bernie's two sons and my son and a friend. On our last hike, my son and 14-year-old grandson (his first three night overnight) hiked along the Batona Trail in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey — 30 miles, three nights.

Where are your favorite hikes?

We've tried to do as many and as varied trails as we can over the years — Adirondacks, New Hampshire, and a lot in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has many wonderful trails. I've loved them all. Pennsylvania's public lands system and the trails within it impress me. And, I'm told, we are the envy of many states for the extent and the quality of our public lands.

I get particular pleasure hiking in places where I can indulge my passion of birding. I've done the Chuck Keiper Trail three times, because I've found the birding there to be great. I've done parts of the West Rim Trail many times.

Photo credit: Joe De Marco



One of the many areas Joe could access on his adventures.

How many days/and distance is your usual trip?

These days, we usually go 30-40 miles over 3-4 nights, 8-12 miles per day. Every year, it's more challenging for me, and I'm uncomfortable pushing it. Our longest outing was the 85-mile Susquehannock Trail. We stashed extra clothes and food at a halfway point, so our packs would be manageable.

Is there a particular experience you'd like to share?

I did a one night hike along the Loyalsock Trail with my grandson, who was 11 or 12 at the time...his first overnight. We spent the night at the Haystacks along Loyalsock Creek, a marvelous place. We saw a bear and a bobcat, exciting us both. We heard a Barred Owl. I'll never forget it.

Another memory I'll have forever is hiking the falls trail in Ricketts Glen, one of the most beautiful places I've been in Pennsylvania. I was with two of my grandsons. As we moved along, I heard the younger one call out to his brother...“Oh, wow, look at this. This is incredible!” He was stooped over, exulting upon finding an orange salamander, a creature he'd never seen before. I was thrilled.

Overall, I'm delighted to access areas one cannot get to without some serious walking. There are so many places in Pennsylvania to enjoy. I hope we keep them and avoid the crush of development. Once they're developed, they're gone forever.