



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Addison Township Watershed Preserve

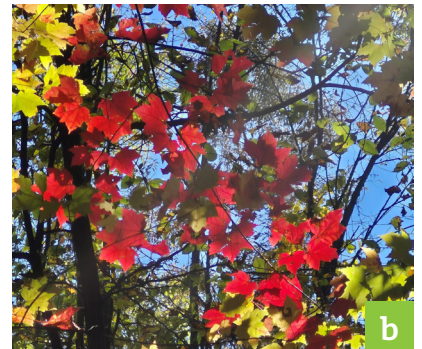
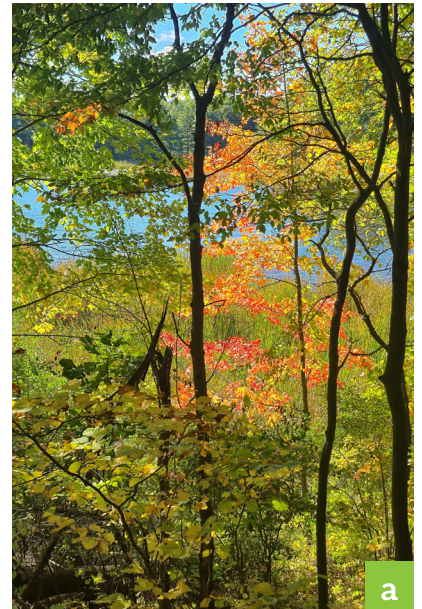
If you are looking for an exciting autumn hiking adventure in the northernmost section of our county consider the 231-acre Addison Township Watershed Preserve. It's a wonderful wetland embracing wildland and exemplifies the words "wilder side". The entrance to the preserve does not have any signage and is easy to miss; however, it is a few dozen feet away from a large easy to spot cell tower on the west side of Rochester Road roughly a mile north of the Village of Leonard. Adding the address 5757 Rochester Road to your GPS will help your navigation and takes you to the historic Arnold School House which is within the preserve parking area just yards from the trailhead.

A word of caution: It's very easy to get "turned around" while hiking at the preserve. Turned around is another way of saying "getting temporarily lost." If you want a well-marked trail system such as those you find in our Oakland County Parks, the preserve is not for you. The multiple hilly trails at the watershed preserve are not stroller friendly. Trail junctions have numbers and there are a few posted maps along the way that should give you a sense of place. That brings my second word of caution: Watch your time and know where you are. You don't want to be trying to figure out the trails or locating the parking area as dusk descends.

With those cautions out of the way the preserve is wonderful for those that enjoy nature embracing autumn explorations. The adventure starts the moment you arrive! Just a few dozen yards from the parking lot I was greeted by fiery red maple leaves as I watched a Bald Eagle soaring overhead. With the small lakes, abundant wetlands and forested habitat I would not be surprised if there is an eagle or osprey nest on the property. (b)

One of my favorite places to pause was at a duckweed covered small pond. As I approached the pond about a dozen wood ducks exploded into flight. It was also where I took in the scenery and scents of autumn as I leaned against a glacial erratic. (c)

I had no real destination in mind but found multiple places to just stop and look about. Wide open meadows are in one section and I stopped to listen to the flow of a small creek in another area where I encountered a dad and his two young sons. His boys wanted to know what I was looking at. I told them I'm listening to the water and then the four of us listened together for almost five minutes.



I am far from being a mycologist but enjoyed encountering both lone mushrooms and clusters of others I could not identify as they fulfilled their role as tree decomposers on downed trees. (d)

I stopped on the trek frequently just to appreciate the cloudless blue sky and to see what shrubs are growing along the trail's edge. Pokeweed thrived in several locations and robins feasted on their berries. Although pokeweed berries are toxic to humans, numerous species of birds feast on them. (e)

My meanderings near the lakeshore took me to an old wood duck nesting box with a baffle attached to keep raccoons from climbing inside. As I headed back up the hillside, I encountered a large glacial erratic and that's where I stopped again to just take in the scenery and the sound of leaves rustling in the wind. (f)

The trails have numbers to identify them; but even with that information it was difficult at times to figure out my exact location. I ended up on Trail #6 several times with no idea how that happened; a reminder to me and perhaps to you as well that taking a photograph of the large watershed preserve map near the old school house would be an excellent idea before you start your hike. I did that, as I left.

I wrapped up my exploration by reading the entry informational signs I missed when I started my hike and then sat on an old picnic table bench just taking in the sounds of rustling leaves amidst a few colorful falling leaves. That wrap up pause brought to mind one of my favorite quotes of Henry David Thoreau, "I wonder what the world is doing today." I found the northern Oakland County answer at the watershed preserve and it left me smiling.

Oakland County Parks staffer Jonathan Schechter is an avid "nature-embracing" hiker who follows phenology - the study of natural cycles of nature's way - to inspire his blogs.

