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GO!

TEN MUST-TRY WINTER WALKS

The Lookout Columbarium and Plaza at Woodland Cemetery, which overlooks the city of Dayton and the Miami Valley, features 200 acres of hills and grave-stones. CONTRIBUTED



Charleston Falls Preserve in Miami County includes a 37-foot waterfall. CONTRIBUTED

By Jim Bebbington
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Winter is a time for walks. It may not always seem that way as snow and slush piles up, not to mention the cold. But wintertime hikes are when people can have some of the most quiet, most peaceful walks of the year. Around Dayton there are hikes waiting for all levels of fitness.

Here are 10 great places in the Dayton area to take a hike.

1 Charleston Falls Preserve – (2535 Ross Road, Tipp City) 8 a.m. to sundown, 365 days a year. Between Tipp City and Huber Heights, this gem is perfect for folks with small children or those who are just looking for a two-mile stroll. Don't miss the waterfall. Go the day a hard-freeze hits just after a spell of warm temperatures and you're sure to see a beautiful cascade of ice across the 37-foot tall rock wall.

2 Germantown MetroPark (7101 Conservancy Road, Germantown) and Twin Creek MetroPark (9688 Eby Road, Germantown) Winter hours: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Closed Christmas and New Year's Day. This is cheating. These two MetroParks are so gigantic there could be a Top-10 list just within their boundaries. But now it's time to get lost. Germantown MetroPark features 16 miles of trail. Near-

by Twin Creek features 20. Just massive. Backpackers park at one and hike to the other. There is enough here that hikers could spend the whole winter exploring. Both hug the Twin Creek and are peppered with streams, so expect to get muddy. There are plenty of short spurs but to get the full experience bring a backpack with thermos of hot chocolate, extra socks, good binoculars and a sense of adventure. A day well spent.

3 Grant Park, Washington Township Park District (501 Normandy Ridge Lane, Centerville). Open daylight hours. The south suburbs are blessed with good walkabout space. Parks in Kettering, Centerville and the townships provide miles of good hikes, as does nearby Sugar Creek MetroPark. But this out-of-the-way space is a great way to get lost in the middle of town. Park behind Normandy Elementary School, and head down the trail and over a short bridge. The path goes either side and the hike is hilly through woods and prairie. The full outer loop is about three miles. A spur also runs along Holes Creek one mile and back. Bring your dogs – keep them on the leash – and take them home muddy and tired.

4 Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm (1000 Aullwood Road, Englewood) 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Sat-

urday; 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Cost: \$5 for an adult; \$3 for child, free to members (hint: join). Dayton's own hidden treasure includes six miles of trails with vistas that include forest, prairie, marsh and pond. When Marie Aull donated her land in 1957, it became the National Audubon Society's first nature center in the Midwest. Today it is considered the premier Audubon Center in the United States. Park at either the farm entrance on Frederick Pike or the Center entrance on Aullwood Road; a .8-mile path connects the two, and a network of short paths wind throughout the farm and woods.

5 Downtown Dayton (Riverscape MetroPark, 111 E. Monument Ave., to Island MetroPark, 101 E. Helena St.). Start and end in downtown. Take your time at Riverscape and read the signage; park planners put a lot of thought into this space. Take the Great Miami Bike Path to the east and north, cross over a pedestrian bridge, then up the bike path past Deeds Point to Helena Street and the start of the Island park. The paths keep going, mainly along the Great Miami, and can take hikers up to the Wegerzyn Garden MetroPark and beyond. Hikers back downtown can get warmed up at any of several downtown or near-downtown coffee shops, including Boston Stoker and Ghostlight Coffee.

6 Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum (118 Woodland Ave., Dayton). Gates close 6 p.m. The Dunbars, The Wrights, The Deeds, Erma. They're all here. Park on-street in the University of Dayton neighborhood and walk in the main gates and be ready for a special walk. The cemetery is very much a working cemetery. But the outer perimeter of the 200-acre complex winds over hills and past the grave stones of generations of Daytonians. Some of the largest Sycamore trees in the region are here.

7 Cox Arboretum, (6733 Springboro Pike, Miami Twp.). Winter hours: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. As an arboretum, this park is designed to shine in the spring, summer and fall. But give winter here its due. The three miles of paths through rolling woods are a perfect Sunday afternoon stroll. The observation tower is very striking and gives incredible views for the park below.

8 John Bryan State Park, the South Gorge Trail (3790 Ohio 370, Yellow Springs). The park has many paths, but this 1.2-mile south gorge trail is accessible only over a footbridge. Hikers have the southern banks of the Little Miami River all to themselves. The hike is a little strenuous and the return is also over a footbridge. Want more?

Another mile of hiking through the park gets visitors to downtown Clifton for the Christmas lights.

9 Downtown Troy. Honestly, this hike is just an excuse to eat at K's (117 E. Main St.; 339-3902). But it's worth it. Downtown Troy, especially at the holiday season, is pretty and there are a ton of small shops. Amble your way around the pretty downtown square, then go up Market Street to the shores of the Great Miami River and stroll along the paths atop the levy. But when done, go to K's for burgers and fries.

10 Caesar's Creek Loop Trail (857 E. Ohio 73, Waynesville). There are 11 miles of hiking trail around the southern basin of the Caesar's Creek Lake, and many miles more of bridle trails to the north. Some of the state park's trail system is part of the 1,400-mile long Buckeye Trail, the state-wide loop path around Ohio. The paths include gorgeous overlooks of the lake, glades and forests. The state park campgrounds are accessible with paths between all the camping spurs. A bonus is the spillway on the southeast corner of the lake. The area is a fossil paradise. No child who is into dinosaurs should miss heading out onto this long, rocky area, flipping over nearly any rock, and entering the mesozoic era.