

Class: Natural Acts, Environmental studies and hiking.

Instructors: Colleen & Tom Hurst

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Location: Various areas within 20 miles of Berrien Springs. Home base GreenFire Gardens in Sodus.

Ages: 7 and up, must be good walkers.

Minimum 10, Maximum 16 students. Can adjust to accommodate families.

Time, Dates: Sunday afternoon 1:00 - 5:00PM.

September 10, 17, October 1, 15, 29. With a chance for weather make up date.

Description: This is a class where families are introduced to local natural areas. We will meet at a different spot each time. Hikes will be less than 4 miles and will include nature, forestry, geology and history instruction. A snack will typically be included. This is designed as a family participation activity where a parent joins the hike. We will introduce hiking and camping equipment, outdoor cooking and wilderness safety.

Younger children in carriers are encouraged. Sorry no strollers. Solid outdoor shoes are a must. We will send out specifics prior to the start of class. Emails will be sent out prior to each hike with instructions for location, parking, activities. We do need to be a bit weather flexible. Classes will not be held outside in dangerous conditions. We do have indoor nature activities available.

Our area is rich with many large parks and publicly accessible natural areas. From original forests to sand dunes and river walks. Berrien county is diverse. Past hikes have included. Love Creek, Ross Preserve, Warren Woods, Grande Meer, river valleys, Orchards, lake shores, and farm activities. Colleen & Tom have been exploring the outdoors and guiding trips for schools, family, youth groups and conservation organizations for over 30 years. Allow us to share with you some of our local favorites. Detailed directions will be shared by email prior to each class.

Week One. Grande Meer state park. Meet at the shelter on the south entrance.

This hike will start with an interest tradition to the program, expectations, dress requirements and food. We will hike the wooded trails of Grande Meer, discussion dune ecology, forestry succession, erosion and basic navigation.

Week Two. GreenFire Gardens, Saint Joseph river valleys. Meet at our home farm for an exploration of a climax hardwood forest, wooded ravines and remote riverside areas. Oak, maple, beech and tulip poplar forest. Study topics will look at the interactions between wild and agricultural lands. Will include an activity on local fruit preservation and apple cider pressing.

Week Three. Ross Preserve, Michigan Nature Conservancy. A 2000 acre preserve located in Covert township. Miles of trails, dune lakes and wetlands, mature beech and 2nd growth

forests and pine plantations. This is a little used gem in our area. Open to hiking and cross country skiing. Topics will include navigation, wooded dune ecology, the role of private conservation organizations. This will likely be our longest hike.

Week four. Warren Woods Natural Area. The last remaining block of old growth forest in Southwest Michigan. Huge oak, maple, beech, sycamore, poplar trees. Some of last remaining large tamarack trees in the state. In the Galien river watershed. Forest ecology, and river valley ecosystems will be a major focus. This area is a year round destination, the spring wildflowers are impressive, salmon run the river, ski trails in winter.

Week Five. Love Creek County Park, Berrien Springs. A recovering forest in the Love Creek drainage. Old trails with good access. The area is a mix of open prairie, dense woods and wetlands. A good location for study of biodiversity. This area includes hiking, mountain bike and skiing trails. We will also discuss nature programs offered by the park.