

## **Green Portage: Experience fall in the parks**

Author: Nancy Stillwagon, Portage Park Foundation member



I grew up next door to a wonderful park in the Youngstown, Ohio area, Mill Creek Park, known for its interconnected lakes, fields of daffodils in the spring, and picturesque bridges and rolling hills. The park was very much linked with my early life; I would hike, bicycle, sled, and ice skate in various areas of the park. The greenspace was a place to be alone with my thoughts, to rejuvenate, to connect more deeply with myself. So, after I moved to Kent in 1971 I gradually became acquainted with all the Portage Parks, one by one. Once I learned of Towner's Woods I realized that it is a gem in our county. This experience whetted my appetite to explore other county parks.

Autumn is one of the best times of the year to experience our Portage parks. Northeastern Ohio is home to many species of maples that produce a glorious display of color that tends to peak around mid-October. One of my very favorite spots to observe the fall color show is the Indian Mound in Towner's Woods. As you stand near the mound looking out at Lake Pippen you'll see the tree forms on the opposite shore reflected as a mirror image in the water. The sight can be one of rainbow proportions, especially on a clear day with a blue sky as a backdrop. You might see a bald eagle soaring over the water. There's also a mature oak forest at the western end of this park where you can spot black, red, scarlet, and some white oaks. And, there is an interesting wetlands area in the south portion of the park visible from the adjacent bike trail.

If you prefer biking to walking or hiking, there are two good bicycle trails to choose from. The Headwaters Trail runs from Mantua Village to Garrettsville Village along an old railroad bed. This trail is a good place to start out into the countryside, taking in the crisp fall air, perhaps smell a wood fire burning, and cool off from the summer heat of the previous months. It also might be a good place to do some birdwatching. You could also bring a picnic along or have a bite to eat in Mantua or Garrettsville.

The second bicycle path is the PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail which is a slightly longer trail extending from the east side of Ravenna to Kent with a branch through Kent State University. You can take the trail farther with a western connection to the north leg of Summit MetroParks' Bike and Hike Trail from the Franklin Connector Trail segment of the PORTAGE. This is an invigorating ride toward Brandywine Falls, much of it along an old railroad bed. You'll see the rich colors of autumn, gold and orange, in the fields you pass. As these trails run through areas inaccessible to cars you'll be better able to sense being surrounded by nature.

Dix Park on State Route 44 in Ravenna Township is a good place to locate tulip poplars and their gold fall foliage. The park also contains a headwater stream and the uncommon shellbark hickory tree. The area north of the parking lot has been planted with numerous species that bloom in the early fall: black-eyed Susan, Indian blanket, lavender asters, goldenrod, and Purple top, to name a few.

Autumn colors may not be as brilliant or vibrant as the ones seen in spring and summer; however, the subtlety of the fall experience seems somehow richer, more precious, and more ephemeral knowing that winter is not far distant. So, before winter arrives, pick your favorite park and have your own adventure in some of our over 2000 acres of Portage County Parks. For further information and maps of the Portage County Parks you may call the park office at 330 297-7728 or visit them online at [www.portageparkdistrict.org](http://www.portageparkdistrict.org).