

Editorial

Editor's note: You're holding in your hands a guide to exploring and enjoying the outdoors in Morgan County. There is information we think you can use, maps and some ideas for where you might want to go. It's just a tiny preview of the natural wonders contained in our area. We hope it inspires you to explore. Take a friend. Bring water. Be safe, and have fun.

Get out there any way you want

by **Kate Shunney**



Spending time outside is kind of the new cool thing to do. Doctors in Europe are prescribing walks in the woods as real medicine and the Japanese concept of forest bathing is a fancy trend. Scientists are studying how being outdoors, even for a short period of time, has all kinds of physical and mental benefits.

Basically, it's the new version of what your mother told you when you were five: Go outside and play.

You figured out, back then, all sorts of stuff in the yard, field and woods. That the branches of your maple tree were shaped just like handlebars and you could swing your legs over them and hang upside down until you got lightheaded. And

under the bright yellow forsythia bushes was a good place to hide from your brother, who had a handful of black walnuts and wanted somebody for target practice.

You discovered that worms really liked it in the cool dirt under the hedges, and that turtles picked up along the road never could be kept in cardboard boxes for too long.

When summer swung in, you watched the blackberry bushes for the signs that the berries were finally sweet enough to pick, then grabbed the plastic margarine and ice cream containers to fill up along the sunny edges of roads and fields. You helped pluck green beans and peas out of the garden, then sat on the porch to snap them while listening to the neighbor's stories.

Outside for hours, you found out where the good mud puddles were, and where the poison ivy grew. You spent hours hanging onto the metal chains of the swing set, pumping your feet back and forth, deciding whether to jump off from the highest arc or drag your feet in the dirt to slow down.

You swam in the river all day, figuring out that the current was too strong in the middle after a hard rain, and it was safer to stick close to the riverbank, even though you might come eye to eye with a snake there. You ran outside at the first signs of a rainstorm, spinning around to cool off from the summer heat, watching the dirt kick up in little splashes.

Outside, there was room to roll around and poke at stuff, and plenty of dirt and mud and rocks to build with. Every season had its own fruit or nut, acorn or leaf to inspect and collect. That's how it was when you were a kid, playing outside.

Spending time outdoors later in life is just like that, too. Don't let anybody tell you different.

Fishermen and hunters are serious about their pursuits, but they're out there because the water and woods are fun and peaceful and full of unexpected treasures. Even the most experienced among them tell stories with excitement and wonder in their voices. Same with us hikers, or the mountain bikers, or trail runners. All of us spend as much time as we can outside because out there, nothing is ever the same, even one day to the next.

Whether you're at the river or in the woods, or just walking along your field or driveway, each hour of the day outside is different. The sky changes from morning to night, the trees and shrubs move in the breeze, plants open their blossoms and form buds and fruit, and critters scamper all around us. Each day is different, and each season unlocks a new set of wonders.

There's no one right way to enjoy the outdoors. Nobody needs special equipment or a certain kind of body to do it. A jacket, and a pair of shoes, or a walker or a wheelchair, usually do the trick for most of the year. Some bug spray helps in the summer. Other than that, enjoying the outdoors is really and truly as simple as Mom said.

Just go outside and play.

Kate Shunney is the editor of The Morgan Messenger, the mother of two sons and a hiker who grew up in Morgan County.

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