



Tecumseh Lake Trails:

An Interpretive Hike of Coal, Community & Conservation

Welcome to Tecumseh Lake! This guided hike will take you on a journey through a unique part of Ohio, here in the Wayne National Forest. Coal mining was once the economic engine of this region including in the nearby village of Shawnee. For a century miners dug and blasted their way into these hills and extracted the region's famous "Black Diamonds". However, once the coal was mined out and the mines closed this area evolved into a place for wildlife, forestry and outdoor recreation. It was acquired by the US Forest Service in 1934 and today is public land owned by you, me and every other American.

This tour discusses the legacy of this land, the mining, the reforestation and the work of the community that went into changing this place from an industrial site to the beautiful forest that exists here today. We will travel around the lake, up the hill and into the forest on a 2.5 mile journey with an interpretive sign every quarter mile. We will also highlight the features of this forest, its resiliency and complexity which provides an immense resource for people and wildlife alike.

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Tecumseh Lake Loop Trails



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1 Tecumseh Lake is a reservoir constructed in the 1950's. After the completion of nearby Burr Oak Lake, the townspeople of Shawnee wanted a lake for their own community, so they decided to make one themselves. For the first time the local Protestant and Catholic churches worked together to complete this ambitious project. They built the dam you will walk across which includes the old railroad grade that formerly ran a train back to the XX Coal Mine. Today the lake is a great resource for fishing, kayaking, canoeing and birding.

2 You are leaving the Tecumseh Lake Loop Trail and entering the 2 mile Wood Thrush Loop. This compacted cinder path gives way to a primitive hiking trail. Where you are standing is close to the former entrance of the XX Mine which closed down in the early 20th century. If you look to the left and right of the trail here you can see part of these hills are actually piles of "gob", or coal slag, that was tossed aside when the more valuable pieces of Kittanning No. 6 coal were mined. This gob is a reminder of the industrial site that formerly occupied this location that has regenerated into mature forest you are walking into.

3 Looking up the trail to your left there are excellent examples of mine subsidence, known as sinkholes. These craters were formed when the roof of abandoned underground coal mine collapsed and filled in the excavated room below leaving the pillars. Yes, there are mines underneath the ground you are now standing on. The resilience of the forest can clearly be seen here, as trees have grown up out of these craters.

4 You are now deep into the Wayne National Forest. You may notice many large oak, hickory, and beech trees along the way. Looking down the hill to your right is a textbook example of natural forest disturbance and succession. This is a canopy gap; a place where a once mighty oak tree was taken down one stormy night. The resulting hole or gap in the forest canopy allows sunlight to reach the forest floor. This direct sunlight creates competition where many young trees are now racing to fill the gap in the canopy. This thicket of young trees creates quality habitat for small mammals and nesting songbirds. In the end, only one or a handful of these trees will win this competition. Who do you think it will be?

5 If you turn around towards the way you came and look uphill you can see many fallen logs on the ground. Fallen logs are extremely important, affecting forest health, biodiversity and stream quality. Creatures like insects, spiders, and salamanders love the cool moist climate underneath of rotting logs; while the logs themselves act like sponges during rainstorms, absorbing flowing water and preventing flash flooding. Look under a rotting log and see what you can find!

6 You are crossing over an intermittent stream, or a small stream that does not flow year-round. These streams are the headwaters of larger streams and rivers. This water will eventually end up flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. When water is flowing during seasonal rainy periods, these little creeks are hotspots for biodiversity teeming with life. Look for crayfish, aquatic insects, two-lined salamanders and larger dusky salamanders under the rocks.

7 Ahead and to the left of the trail we see another canopy gap, only here natural succession is being hampered by an invasive species. Invasive species come from other parts of the world and become established in our environment. This invasive, called multiflora rose, is a prolific plant that is covered in hook shaped thorns and forms a dense low-lying bramble patch. This dense thicket can totally shade the ground here and prevents new trees from growing.

8 You are about to enter a pine forest. The majority of these pines are white pine, a species not native to SE Ohio. They were planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930's during a time of reforestation and reclamation efforts in the region. Many stands of white pine were planted at this time for their value as a fast-growing lumber tree and erosion control. Though not native, these pine stands provide habitat for certain songbirds, woodpeckers, owls, and squirrels. Look and listen here for Ohio's largest woodpecker species, the pileated woodpecker. It will be crow-sized with a large red crest, black body, and maniacal laughing call.

9 To your right you can see sunlight penetrating into the forest from a cleared edge. This is a wildlife opening that is maintained by the Wayne National Forest. Periodic mowing prevents trees from growing here and allows grasses and wildflowers to thrive. The tall grasses and wildflowers provide browse for animals like white-tailed deer and attract large amounts of insects that are eaten by many bird species including wild turkeys. These openings create diversity in heavily forested landscapes and increase the overall value for wildlife.

10 As you come down the hill and approach Tecumseh Lake notice how the forest has changed from farther up. The oaks and hickories that dominate the ridge-tops have given way to species that like it a little lower on the slope. You may have also noticed that this is an area with more sinkholes. The tree species that can be found here include: wild black cherry, American elm, slippery elm, black maple, and black walnut. As you continue down the hill you will soon come to Tecumseh Lake, hang a right and backtrack a short distance along the lake to continue your guided hike.

Passing point 2 again you will cross the stream that feeds Tecumseh Lake. Sitting on the timber bench across the creek you are looking out over a natural beaver meadow. How does a beaver meadow come to be? When the beavers built a dam here, they created a pond that was the meadow you are looking at today. Any trees that may have been growing here were killed due to this flooding. The beavers left this site several years ago and it wasn't long before the water carved a channel through their unmaintained dam. This drained the pond; however, within only a year grasses, wetland plants and wildflowers moved into the area and created this beautiful meadow. Trees are now beginning to re-colonize the area if the beavers don't come back soon it will only be a matter of years before this meadow once again becomes a young forest.