

February 2021

# Off the Beaten Path in Chelsea's West Lake Preserve



Chelsea Area Friends for Recreation

THE  
REC  
ROOM



In Michigan we are blessed with four seasons that offer a variety of recreational activities. While it may be tempting to hibernate through the winter months, it's actually a great time to explore the outdoors. Getting outside can help reduce your cabin fever that's likely amplified due to the pandemic.

Additionally, communing with nature has been shown to improve overall health & wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> I try to get outside as often as possible, since my day job involves sitting indoors for hours on end.

Therefore, it was no surprise when I asked my husband to join me for a Valentine's Day hike. We've explored many trails in our local area over the past 13+ years of living in the Chelsea area. Recently, we started to engage in the Chelsea Trail Challenge sponsored by the Chelsea Chamber of Commerce. I like to think of it as "hiking with a purpose".

During the month of February, the challenge was to find marker #13 on the West Lake Preserve trail.

Preparation, no matter the season, is imperative before you venture outside. Alfred Wainwright wrote in *A Cost to Coast Walk*, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing".

Preparation for the West Lake Preserve trail hike.

1. Food-Because who wants to hike on an empty belly? We decided to enjoy a huevos ole and coffee at Zou Zous. There were some "friendly" squirrels looking with envy at our breakfast as we ate under the makeshift outdoor seating.
2. Sunglasses-Yes, even during a Michigan winter the sun does shine occasionally.
3. Wicking underlayers-Helps with keeping you warm if you happen to have a more strenuous hike.
4. Hat, gloves & wool socks





5. Balaclava- Unless you've grown a full beard, the winter wind can really chafe the skin, plus it has the dual function of a face mask if you pass others on the trail.
6. Water bottle
7. Good winter boots- I like to wear my ice spikes that wrap around my boots for extra traction that help avoid slipping on icy patches while hiking.

With bellies full, we followed the GPS to our final destination. Along the way we passed by a couple who were snowshoeing and others cross-country skiing. We knew we must be close. The trail parking lot is well marked with a sign designating the West Lake Preserve trail. This was our first time on this trail system even though it was only miles from our home.

The preserve is known for birdwatching with numerous birdhouses marking the trails along the way. With most of the birds gone for the winter we weren't expecting to see many, however we were pleasantly surprised to hear them talking back and forth to one another and it was amplified by the quiet of a fresh snowfall. (insert video). We made several zig zags around the trails looking for marker #13 and finally found it.

We snapped our photo for posterity and then ventured onward. West Lake was our next stop with the trail meandering along the lake's edge. We could tell the depth of the lake was quite shallow as you could see the reeds & cattails poking through the ice.

The hike itself was great for beginners and fairly flat. In total we walked for approximately an hour, obviously at a reduced pace given the snow laden ground. We can't wait to go back in the spring and summer and experience it in another season. Check out the Chamber of Commerce for more trail challenges and also the Chelsea Area Friends for Recreation's Facebook page to find more fun ways to explore the areas just down the road.



- White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. et al. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Sci Rep* 9, 7730 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>
- West Lake Preserve <https://www.washtenaw.org/Facilities/Facility/Details/West-Lake-Preserve-30> Accessed February 14, 2021.
- Chelsea Chamber of Commerce Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/chelseamichamber>
- Chelsea Area Friends for Recreation <https://www.facebook.com/CAFRBOD>