

# LOCAL SPORTS

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## Outdoor Choices

# From Starry Nights to River Rambles: N. Michigan's Trekking Treasures

BY ERIN FANNING

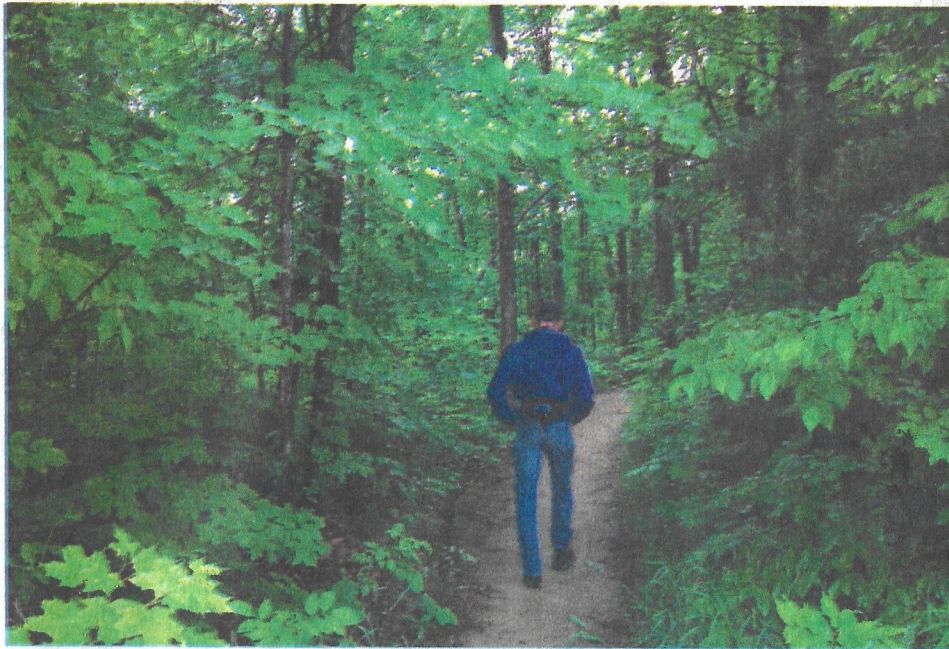
"This might be the prettiest place in Michigan," I told my husband Keith the first time I hiked the Empire Bluff Trail in the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Looking out over Lake Michigan, I watched clouds settle in a blue sky as the sun brushed my bare arms, and, although many years have passed since I made that statement, my feelings remain the same.

Yet, when it comes to hiking in Northern Lower Michigan, the 1.5-mile Empire Bluff, just outside of Empire, is only one of a seemingly endless list of trekking destinations. The variety is stunning, an infinite catalogue for adventure, so abundant that it's impossible to select the best trails, but you can't go wrong with the following list, a sampler to inspire further exploration.

### Great Lakes Views

*Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (Empire Bluff Trail)*

Sleeping Bear Dunes, for me, encapsulates what



Solitude on the Jordan Valley Pathway.

make Northern Lower Michigan special: Great Lakes, dunes, and trails snaking through dense forest. But come off-season if you can, when crowds are scarce, and you can feel the stillness of the forest, the only sounds coming from Lake Michigan waves. (<https://www.nps.gov/slbe/planyourvisit/trailempire-bluff.htm>)

*Thompson's Harbor State Park*

From the busy to the sleepy, Thompson's Harbor State Park, south of Rogers City, offers 6 miles of mostly flat trails, twisting along Lake Huron's sand dunes and rocky beaches. The best times to visit the park are in May to view the threatened dwarf lake iris or mid-summer for a chance to see the elusive Hine's emerald dragonfly. (<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/details.aspx?id=500&type=SPRK>)

### River Rambles

*Mason Tract Pathway*

Paralleling the South Branch of the Au Sable River, the Mason Tract Pathway, east of Grayling, stretches for about 10 miles through the George Mason River Retreat Area. It's a serene place, where anglers, hikers, and paddlers converge, and its birdsong and sparkling river will linger in your memory, even after only one visit. (<https://www2.dnr.state.mi>



Exploring Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (photo by Georgia Lomax).



One of many climbs on the North Country Trail.



## Great Lakes Views

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river, the Mason Pathway, east of Grayling, stretches for about 10 miles through the George Mason River Retreat Area. It's a serene place, where anglers, hikers, and paddlers converge, and its birdsong and sparkling river will linger in your memory, even after only one visit. (<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=73&type=SFPW>)

### *Brown Bridge Quiet Area*

Featuring about 8 miles of trails, the Brown Bridge Quiet Area deserves its name. Trails ramble through lowlands, along the Boardman River, and climb to ridge views, where, if lucky, one can spy ospreys or eagles. Located just outside of Traverse City, it's a retreat from the city's bustle, a reminder of the need for solitude and the importance of preserving nature's wild places. (<https://www.traversecitymi.gov/brown-bridge.asp>)

### *A Night Under the Stars*

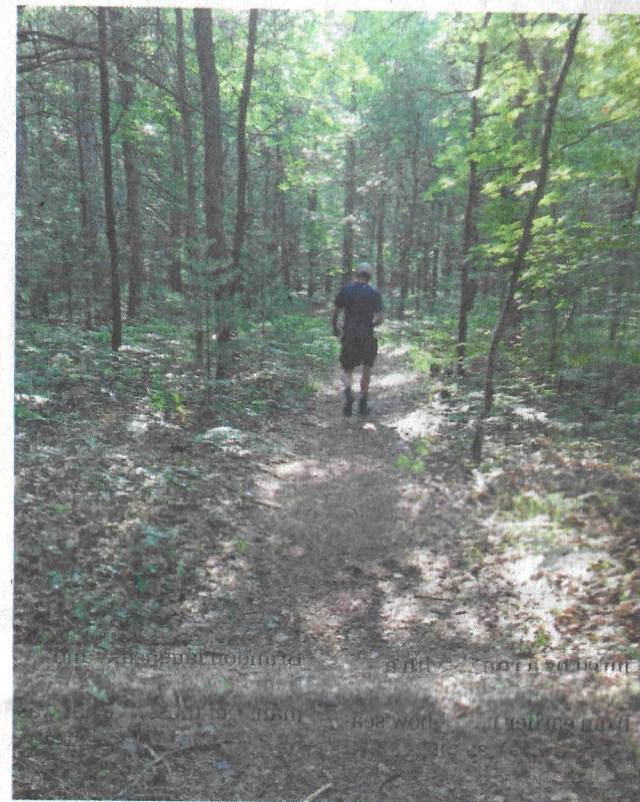
Northern Lower Michigan boasts several trails appropriate for backpacking, including the North Country Trail (NCT) and the Jordan Valley Pathway.

### *North Country Trail*

The NCT, a 4,700-mile trail, runs through eight states from North Dakota to Vermont with Michigan hosting more than 1,000 miles. Most of the NCT is out-and-back; however, a portion of the NCT con-



One of many climbs on the North Country Trail.



Early morning hike on the Mason Tract Pathway.

nects with the Manistee River Trail, creating a 23-mile loop. The trail, about 7 miles southwest of Mesick, hugs the hillside for endless views of uninterrupted forest and crosses a large suspension bridge. (<https://northcountry-trail.org/trail/michigan/northwest-lower-michigan/> and <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recreation/hmnr/recarea/?recid=18710>)

### *Jordan Valley Pathway*

The 18-mile Jordan Valley Pathway, about 8 miles north of Alba, climbs up

and down hills and along the enchanting Jordan River. It's a ramble through peaceful scenery from hill-top views and old orchards to watery babble and shadowy deep woods. (<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=43&type=SFPW>)

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Erin spends her summers hiking, biking, and kayaking across Michigan, sharing her adventures on [michiganbiyaking.com](http://michiganbiyaking.com). Visit [erinfinning.com](http://erinfinning.com) for more information about her writing.

# Blood Drive

Turn a new leaf  
Fall into giving

**Wednesday  
September**

**6**

**Noon to 6:00PM**

**Helpful tip:  
Make sure to eat a healthy  
meal and drink plenty of  
water before donating.**



## **Indian River Community Blood Drive Hosted by the Kiwanis Club of Indian River**

**\*\*\*LOCATION\*\*\***

Held at Tuscarora TWP Hall at  
3546 Straits Hwy, Indian River

Did you know every donation saves up to 3 lives in Michigan hospitals? Help us beat our blood drive goal of 27 donations by signing up now.

Share a Pint, Save a Life! Donate and receive a limited Versiti bottle koozie, while supplies last.

Sign up by calling 866-642-5663 or scan the QR code below!

