

Green Lake's Winnebago Trail is a gem

by Tom Schultz

Are you interested in a relaxing hike along one of the few relatively pristine portions of Green Lake's shoreline?

Along the Winnebago Trail, on a quiet sunny morning, one can easily imagine how the lake might have appeared hundreds of years ago.

This well-worn lakeshore trail provided a pathway for Native American travelers during millennia past.

The special property that includes a section of this ancient trail lies along the north shore of Green Lake, and is called the Winnebago Trail Nature Preserve.

It was purchased from the Green Lake Conference Center in 2009, and consists of over seven acres of sloped forest below Hillside Drive toward the south — roughly the area between the road and the lake. Driving west from the main conference center buildings and beyond the Ves-

per Circle, this conservancy starts in the area where two stone walls that date from the Lawson era stand along both sides of the road.

The main entrance to the hiking trail is further west, just beyond the end of the stone wall and the historic "Teen Tower" on the left side of the road.

Beginning at the trailhead near the large conservancy sign, the west access trail will take you down the wooded slope along a series of switchbacks until you reach the actual Winnebago Trail, which follows the lakeshore.

At this point you will be above a steep limestone cliff that drops about 25 feet down to the waters of Green Lake.

Hiking eastward along the trail on a quiet morning, one is surrounded by the peaceful solitude of nature — perhaps with only the sounds of the rustling leaves, the lapping of the waters, and the birds in the trees.

Here one can easily imag-

ine what the landscape might have been like many years ago, when ancient travelers walked this same section of shoreline.

Toward the southwest lies the Sugarloaf peninsula, jutting out into the lake beyond Norwegian Bay.

Although mostly wooded, there are places along the shoreline where relic prairie and cliff-top plants still survive, including shooting star, birds-foot violet, bergamot, yellow star-grass, violet wood-sorrel, and big bluestem.

The scene is ever changing during the course of the growing season, so visits at any season are encouraged.

Even winter can be a wonderful time to investigate this beautiful property to see the thick blanket of snow on the ground and overhanging branches — especially prior picturesque prior to mid-January, while the waters of the lake may yet be unfrozen.

Due to the great depths of Green Lake, the waters freeze



VIOLET WOOD-SORREL along the Winnebago Trail.

submitted photo



THIS PHOTO SHOWS the view toward Sugarloaf from the Winnebago Trail.

submitted photo

much later than other nearby lakes and streams.

Unfortunately, invasive plants like common buckthorn and oriental bittersweet have gotten a foothold and threaten the native plant species of this area, but efforts have been underway to control and remove these aggressive invaders.

Done primarily by volunteers, this work mostly takes place during the autumn months, and helpers are always welcome.

The morning work sessions provide a great opportunity to meet and socialize with friendly, like-minded lovers of nature, and the work can always be tapered to match one's abilities.

As the hiker reaches the eastern end of the Winnebago Trail, the east access trail will swing off to the left, and begin angling back into the

woods.

Not far ahead one can look up to see the majestic arch of the large stone bridge that supports Hillside Road.

The pathway continues beneath the arch and further along bends to the right.

Signs will then lead one back to Hillside road, which one can follow back to the trailhead.

For more information about this and other conservancy properties, most of which are open to the public, please visit the Green Lake Conservancy website at www.greenlakeconservancy.org.

Property maps and other specific details are available, as well as information about how to make a donation to this worthwhile organization.

Tom Schultz is a member of the Green Lake Conservancy board.

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