

Outdoor

Nov/Dec 02 \$3.00

INDIANA

APOTHECARY GARDEN

TIPPECANOE RIVER

URBAN FORESTRY

GREENE-SULLIVAN

Summit Lake

By Angela Herrmann

Geese appear to rule Summit Lake State Park—easily outnumbering park visitors. Coots, gulls, and other waterfowl frequent the lake's many quiet coves and islands, while spring and autumn attract migrating birds.

Within the birding community, Summit Lake in Henry County ranks as a must-see destination, especially during migrations.

At Summit Lake State Park, the footprints along the trails reveal more traffic from birds and mammals—especially deer, than humans. That's because the majority of the park's visitors travel to Summit Lake to cruise its waterways by boat or canoe to fish for bluegill, crappie, bass, walleye, catfish and perch.

While the lake serves as the primary attraction for many, the land surrounding the lake offers a glimpse of Indiana at its best.

The man-made lake—dammed in 1980—serves as the backdrop for the flora and fauna, which inhabit or visit the surrounding 2,680 acres of park land.

Habitats around the lake include former farm fields, woodlands, and wetlands. I noticed an area where the Department of Natural Resources is establishing a new forest of tulip trees.

The park, formerly known as the Big Blue River Recreation Area until it was sold to the state in 1988, has three trails, with distances of one-half, 1.25 and 2 miles.

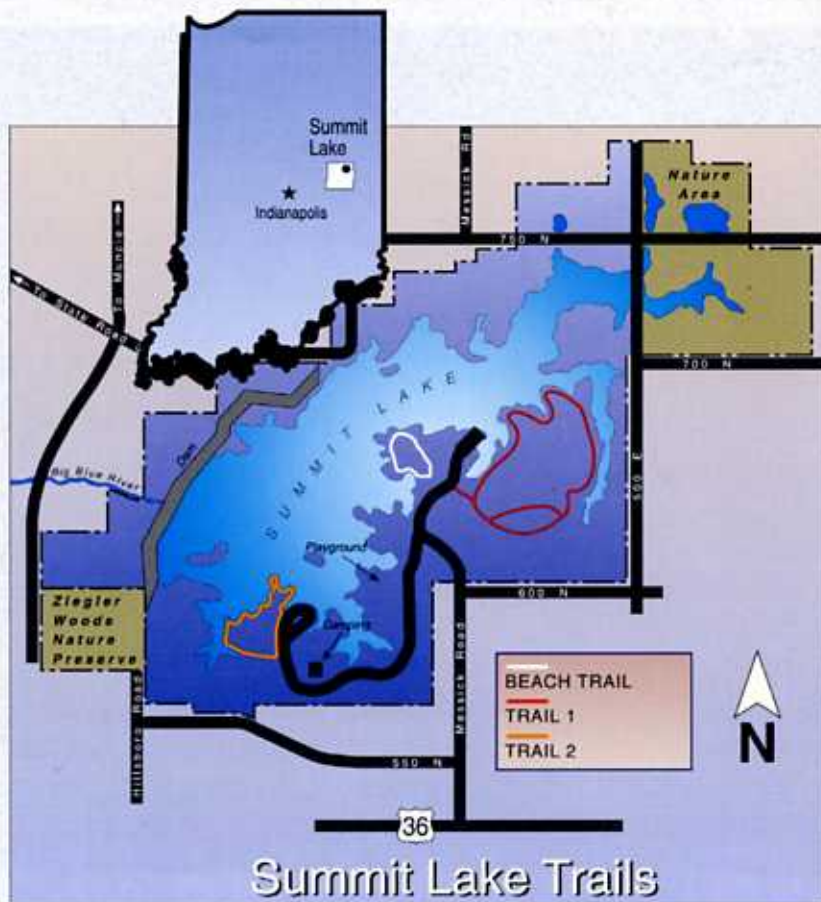
If you're looking for easy hiking, you could hike all of the trails within a couple of hours. However, if you're like me, you'll spend more time on the trails stopping for animal sightings and flower gazing.

The 2-mile trail traverses each of the park's habitats.

Within the forested area of the 2-mile trail, a number of Indiana native plant species thrive, including May apples, Virginia creeper, stinging nettles, trillium and Solomon's seal.

In the spring, patches of phlox flourish on the forest floor, like Pied Pipers for the olfactory; they create one of the most aromatic trails I have ever hiked. Within the prairie areas, as many as six goldfinches would light upon low-growing scrubby shrubs near the trail.

The 1.25-mile trail, accessible from the camping area, is a bit more rugged and passes through mostly forested terrain. A pair of wood thrushes seemed to guide me along the trail and out of the woods.



Summit Lake Trails

Summit Lake in Henry County

Sections of the longer trails and most of the beach trail pass along Lake Summit's shoreline offering great views of the lake. However, those sections can become quite soggy. I recommend high-topped, water-repellent hiking boots for park trails when rain has been abundant. I slogged through as much as an inch of water and mud in a couple of spots.

Summit Lake also boasts Henry County's only nature preserve, Ziegler Woods, which was donated to the state by The Nature Conservancy. No public trails pass through this area.

Summit Lake offers Class A camping throughout the year. However, water is not provided during the winter months.

A children's playground is located near the camping area. Parking throughout the park appears to be plentiful enough for the fishing crowd, hikers and picnickers.

Summit Lake, Indiana's 19th state park, is located just north of New Castle, about an hour northeast from downtown Indianapolis. It is the highest elevated DNR property at about 1,000 feet above sea level, although the surrounding, mostly flat, terrain might lead you to believe otherwise. ■

Angela Herrmann is a freelance writer living in Rocky Ripple in Marion County.

Water and sky can become a big, purple, moody blotch at Summit Lake State Park when early morning fog lingers near trails and campgrounds.