

Families enjoy recent winter wonderland hike

By Carroll Ritter Special to the Hoosier Times
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Sandwiched between extraordinary weather events we've had lately, a rare and perfect day last Sunday, Jan. 26, provided a great opportunity for a fun winter hike.

Sycamore Land Trust hosted its annual Winter Wonderland hike at Yellowwood Farm in Brown County. This 120-acre farm owned by Herb Hoover is one of the finest examples of cooperation between landowner and a land trust. A conservation easement on 80 acres protects it in perpetuity.

Contrasted with the large-scale timber harvest just north of this property in the Yellowwood State Forest, you will always see a mature forest with towering oaks and hickories. The picturesque stream flowing through will remain free of sediment and a delight for children to wade in as they look for wiggly creatures and collect crinoids.

I led 25 folks, eager for a break from the unrelenting winter confinement, ventured out. The hike was for all ages but attracted several young families with children as young as 4 years.

Following an old road bed to the north and across a snow-covered field, the group met the beautiful creek with ice shelves interspersed with flowing water. Children were able to see the delicate patterns of snow and ice with exposures of the shale and gravels below. Then they encountered the steep slopes of the Norman Upland and entered into the realm of the mature forest. It was here that children could look up under bark of the hickory tree to imagine finding a bat in the summer. The sheer size of big old white and black oaks inspired everyone. Arriving at an old rustic cabin on a ridge top, the group was greeted by a warm fire, hot apple cider and homemade cookies.

After much sharing and warming, everyone was instructed to go outside for a special event. All children were provided with small cups and spoons to collect snow and ice crystals. Then each child was to place their little sample on a plate. A field microscope attached to a laptop computer was placed over each sample. Everyone could see magnification of the beautiful crystalline structure and witness live melting as a perfect droplet of water formed on the edge, glistening with iridescence.

Here, then, they had the experience of arriving where science, nature and art inspire. The final leg of the day was all downhill and, after crossing the creek on rocks, the group returned happy, renewed and committed to preserving nature.

Carroll Ritter is the environmental education coordinator with Sycamore Land Trust.

out_hike snow sample pic

