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LOCAL



Tribune Photo/REBECCA BELLING

Digging in the sand is one of the joys of visiting the beach on a hot summer day. Indulging in this fun pastime recently at Washington Park Beach in Michigan City were, in back, Brenton Holley, 9, and from left, Jackie Kopsha, 7; Jonathon Cunningham, 9; and Bryan Cunningham, 9.

Beaches of Lake Michigan provide summer fun

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Those steamy summer months are here, and with them, prospects of lazy days spent basking on warm sand accompanied by that oh-so-familiar aroma of rotting fish and suntan lotion.

Fortunately, there's plenty of beaches in the area to choose from.

In addition to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, which contains well-known recreation areas such as Indiana Dunes State Park and Mount Baldy, this area boasts Washington Park Beach, New Buffalo Beach, Grand Mere and Warren Dunes.

Of these, perhaps the Indiana Dunes State Park offers the widest variety of outdoor activities.

The Dunes, in Chesterton on Indiana Route 49 just north of Interstate 94, is an ideal choice for a weekend getaway or day trip.

The park provides nearly 400 acres of beach, including a guarded swimming area and several miles of undisturbed sand dunes.

Although Lake Michigan's waters normally don't warm up to comfortable swimming temperatures until mid- to late-June, the park's beaches are popular spots for Frisbee-throwing and volleyball games.

The naturally sculpted dunes are also fun for those with the energy to scale them.

Snaking in and around the beach is a network of hiking trails which range from easy to rugged and cater to both walkers and runners.

The park includes a paved bike trail which links to adjacent parks, a horseback riding trail, picnic areas, a campground, a nature center, a cafeteria and a gift shop in the beach's bath house.

Entrance to the park is \$2 for Indiana vehicles and \$5 for each out-of-state vehicle.

Nineteen-year-olds Mindi Rue and Holly Whiteneck agree that the Dunes are a great place for summer relaxation.

Off from college for the summer, the two Chesterton natives took advantage of a free Wednesday afternoon earlier this summer to work on their tans at the Dunes.

As the park is only about a five-minute drive from their homes, Rue and Whiteneck say they usually make several trips to the park each week during the summertime. Whiteneck says she enjoys jogging

Michiana beaches



Tribune Graphic/SHELBY SAPU

on the trails.

Although the two mentioned a large number of weekend visitors from the Chicago area who crowd the beach, they say they often come to the beach at night to escape the crowds.

They also said they feel the present beach closing time of 11 p.m. should be extended.

Mount Baldy

As its name implies, Mount Baldy, just off U.S. 12 in Michigan City, is a mountain of sand, offering a view of Lake Michigan that's worth the long climb.

There is no entrance fee at Mount Baldy, but to reach the beach from the parking lot, visitors must scale the massive dune. Fortunately for the less hardy visitors, a flight of stairs serves as an alternative to climbing the steep side.

Mount Baldy is an unguarded beach, so visitors swim at their own risk.

Washington Park Beach

Less than two miles northeast of Mount Baldy lies Washington Park with its harbor full of boats and a picturesque lighthouse extending from the shore. The catwalk leading out to the lighthouse is a popular place for fishing. The nearby park is equipped with two playgrounds, tennis courts and a skate board rink.

Jennifer Kimble, 17, and Stephanie Woodruff, 18, both of Michigan City, spent a Tuesday afternoon work earlier this summer at Washington Park's beach "getting some sun" and hanging out with friends.