

Outdoor Enthusiasts Enjoy Greater Parkersburg

Kim Coram simply can't contain her enthusiasm when the conversation turns to outdoor opportunities in the Greater Parkersburg, W.Va., and Mid-Ohio Valley region. Her description is peppered with words like "phenomenal" and "amazing."

Coram, who created the website www.theopam.com ("oPam" is Online Physical Activity Magazine) and who teaches kayaking and mountain biking among other things, knows the inside story because she's part of it. The website features the specifics of activities and schedules available in the region.

She ticks off the litany of hiking and biking trails, kayaking and flat-water paddling opportunities, cross country skiing and sledding, rock climbing, and rowing. "It's just rich," she says. "There is lots of green space and rugged beauty. It is a natural phenomenon. There is so much to do that it is sometimes difficult to decide what you want to enjoy first."

Noted outdoorsman John Wiseman, a Master Naturalist, looks to the Ohio River and its tributaries as a primary attraction for the region. "If you can't find something fun to do here, you're not looking," he says. "We are fortunate to live beside the mighty Ohio River, and especially fortunate that in the last 25 years it has made a remarkable recovery from pollution."

"There are modern hiking areas with lots of scenic overlooks," says Wiseman.

He talks about the Ohio River Islands Refuge System, headquartered in Williamstown, W.Va., just a short distance from Parkersburg, and he points out that an effort is underway to create a scenic river way all the way to Pittsburgh.

One trek Coram undertakes begins with the North Bend Rail Trail, 72-miles of flat former railroad bed in a state park with numerous railroad tunnels. The trail bed is crushed gravel and will accommodate just about any type of bicycle, as well as walkers and hikers.

"We have rail trails, mountain bike, and road trails all over the area," she says. "There are additional trails that don't allow bikes, but there are eight to 10 mountain bike trails alone in the system. We have a lot of races and group rides. There are two strong bike clubs in the area for mountain and road bikes."

The hiking/walking trails range from entry level to basic to the difficult in the city, state, and county parks that dot the system. All the trails are listed on the website.

"You can come here for a week and hike a different trail every day," she says.

Coram talks about "human-powered boating" on the Ohio River and its several tributaries, which is so popular that it has its own festival, part of Park Day, which concentrates on healthy living in the area.

"North Bend State Park is one of the best kayaking waterways I've ever done," says Coram, "and I've done a lot of them."

“This is virtually a family dream vacation because it is readily accessible by major roads, close to population centers, and mostly free. There are great accommodations,” says Coram, “ranging from cabins to luxury hotels.”

And, as Coram stresses, “The ‘richness’ of the vacation is confined to the wealth of activities and not the cost of participating.”

For a free visitors guide or a complete list of upcoming events, call the Greater Parkersburg CVB at 800-752-4982 or visit www.greaterparkersburg.com.