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Nature Trails for Resorts and Camps
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Miles D. Pirnie, Robert McIntosh, Conservation
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NATURE TRAILS

For Resorts and Camps



TRAIL BUILDING



TRAIL MARKING



EXHIBITS



LABELS

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MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

Agricultural Experiment Station • Cooperative Extension Service

EAST LANSING

Try a Nature Trail!

Make the beauties of your resort or camp come to life with a nature trail! They are usually inexpensive, yet create a real attraction. Point out some of the commonplace natural things which are about you every day – but which others just won't see unless you help them. You'll be surprised how folks honestly appreciate and enjoy trails. This is a mighty fine way to make your resort or camp more appealing, more interesting, and more successful!

Most trails are easy to build, require little upkeep – but deserve careful planning.

Trails are very useful for access to other parts of your property. For example – a trail is essential for fighting fire, for hiking, and use by fishermen and hunters. It can be used in general maintenance and service operations such as hauling wood, gravel or sand, or trees and shrubs for transplanting.

Of course, the trail will have its greatest usefulness in delighting folks of all ages with its winding paths, scenic views, and occasional glimpses of wildlife. A lifelong love of the natural environment can be encouraged by providing trails.

Family parties and groups of youngsters can make good use of the trails. Organized groups should have qualified leadership to help them see

Many Have Already

Since publication of our first circular R-703 "Nature Trails for Resorts" in 1951, quite a few resorts have tried such trails. Most have been very successful. Many guests have expressed appreciation of these trails and this is the true measure of success. Here are just a few resorts that have nature trails: Forest View Resort, Au Train; Blaney Park Resort, Blaney; Limberlost, Paulding; Deertrack Village, Marquette; Phil DeGraff's Lodges, Trout Lake; The Homestead, Glen Arbor; Sunnyslake Ranch, Glennie; Michillinda Beach Lodge, Michillinda; and Johnson's Rustic Resort, Houghton Lake.



the many things of interest which would otherwise be overlooked.

Learning to enjoy the trails will become a wholesome enrichment of each person's vacation experience. This, of course, builds good will and increases repeat patronage. Former guests will tell their friends – which is the best kind of advertising for either resort or camp.

So, enhance the beauty and appeal of your resort or camp with a nature trail! You will always be glad you did.

If you'd like to consider a trail, please write us and we'll be glad to give you additional suggestions.

—MILES D. PIRNIE, *Professor of Fisheries and Wildlife, Division of Conservation*

—ROBERT W. MCINTOSH, *Extension Specialist, Tourist and Resort Service, Division of Conservation*

MAKING THE TRAIL

Planning the Trail

Existing lanes or old logging roads can be converted into nature trails on your area. Try to locate old railroad grades, trails used by hunters, and routes which border streams and lakes.

Trails should contact points of special interest such as large trees, beaver ponds, blueberry marshes, clearings visited by deer, and observation points with the best views. Also, they could connect with fishing and hunting locations for double service.

If old trails are not available, perhaps you can find a competent local person to help you explore your area to discover points of major interest. Trail planning then calls for connecting these spots by routes which follow *easy* grades. It pays to follow contours, not only to provide easier walking, but also to make for low-cost construction and maintenance.

The tentative routes should be sketched on a homemade map as illustrated, or on a large-scale air photo of the area. If possible, the trail should cross a wide variety of habitats — mixed timber, marsh border, clearings and brush areas. The greater the assortment the more interesting the trail will be. One of the simplest trails to establish is the “botanists’ trail.” Trees and plants often are the main points of interest.

Laying out the trail may require cooperation of adjacent land owners. The total good to the community that comes from visitors enjoying themselves should point up the benefits of such cooperation.

When tentative routes have been chosen, the real test is in laying out the trail. It is important to avoid long or difficult crossings of bogs or marshes. Trails should avoid poison sumac, briar patches, or tangles. Remember that a winding trail is far more interesting than a straight one.

Plan also for short trails which loop back to headquarters. In a half mile one can find many plants and other items of interest. These features should be quite close together so that visitors will not lose interest in the trail. Be sure that most of the trail lies in or near shade. Few people like to walk long distances in the hot sun.

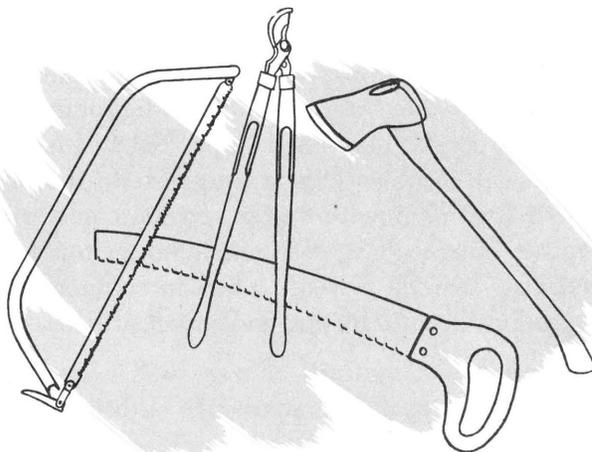
Building the Trail

If existing roads or lanes connect some of the main points of interest, building a nature trail will be easy. Where new trails must be cleared, it will help greatly to stake out the new route. At times stretching binder twine or a white string as a guide will help the clearing crew keep on the trail in crossing brush patches or thickets. Paint may be used as a temporary blaze on shrubs or trees to be cut and may be used to mark the route to be followed. Axe blazes should be used only on saplings and trees which are certain to be removed.

- **Width of Trails** — Trails should be widest near the headquarters where they will be used by the greatest number of people. This avoids crowding as groups meet on the trail. Other parts of the trail can be single-file width, but should not be so narrow as to make it necessary to dodge branches. Multiple-use trails should be wide enough for trucks or tractors for fire fighting, hauling wood, and such purposes.

Where new trails cross dense growths of shrubbery or saplings, it may be desirable to clear the trail a rod wide, or even as much as 20 feet. Such procedure will encourage ferns and other low plants. Be sure to cut close to the ground; and control new growths promptly.

- **Clearing and Brushing** — Actual trail building does not always require the removal of trees. Some sawing is likely to be necessary in cutting through windfalls or to remove leaning and dangerous



MAKING THE TRAIL

trees. It is not necessary nor desirable to remove all dead trees or stubs. These are a part of the natural exhibit itself. A wood duck or sparrow hawk may nest in a hole in such a stub, and squirrels and raccoons may use the hollow parts of the trunk or limbs for their homes.

The more natural you leave the trail the better it will be. Proper trail building leaves the area without evidence of recent construction. Your guests should marvel at the natural appearance of the trail and its borders.

Brush should be cut close to the ground both for safety and for good looks. Fall or winter is a good time to do cutting, but not in deep snow. The most useful clearing tools will be the pruning saw, bow saw, a power saw, stout pruners, and axe. No brush piles or similar accumulations of debris should be left next to the trail.

- **Controlling New Growths** — Some shrubs and trees will send up dense clusters of sprouts after the main stem has been cut. Use chemical controls rather than allow these sprouts to grow into dense clumps which could be in the way and eventually require hand cutting. The fresh-cut stumps can be sprayed with a mixture of 2, 4-D ester and 2, 4, 5-T ester, using $\frac{1}{2}$ pint each in 10 gallons of kerosene or fuel oil. This method can be used at any season of the year and will prevent new sprouts from appearing. Your county agricultural agent will assist you in obtaining and using these chemical brush control materials.

- **Grading** — Avoid extensive grading if possible. Try for trails along grassy wood borders and through short clearings. People do not like to hike in mud or loose sand. Clay and boggy places might require corduroy or perhaps a topping of sawdust or dead leaves on a fill of cinders or gravel.

Steeper slopes may need steps. Slabs of native stone, wood, or hewn logs are suggested. If wood is used, treatment with water repellent and preservative chemicals is recommended. Untreated wood lasts scarcely 5 years when in contact with the ground, because of rot and insect attacks.

- **Plantings** — Plantings of trees will eventually supply scenery as well as shade. In addition, leafy accumulations help prevent soil erosion. For added variety, plant native species.

- **Bridle Paths** — Bridle paths should not follow hiking trails. Horses leave deep hoofprints when the trail is soft. Upon drying, these make the trail uncomfortable for walking. Also, erosion and washouts are more likely to occur when bridle paths lead up and down the slopes.

- **Seats, Benches, Rest Spots** — Provide natural seats or benches by reshaping fallen logs, or by trimming off stumps at comfortable heights. Rustic benches made of split logs will be appreciated.

Long trails should have spurs leading to sanitary facilities. Springs or other "approved" drinking water should be on the route if possible.

- **Trail Names** — Try to select a name for the trail which catches the imagination and is inviting — such as "Birch Trail," "Old Logging Trail," "Beaver Pond Trail," "Botanists' Trail," or even "Lover's Lane."

Marking the Trail

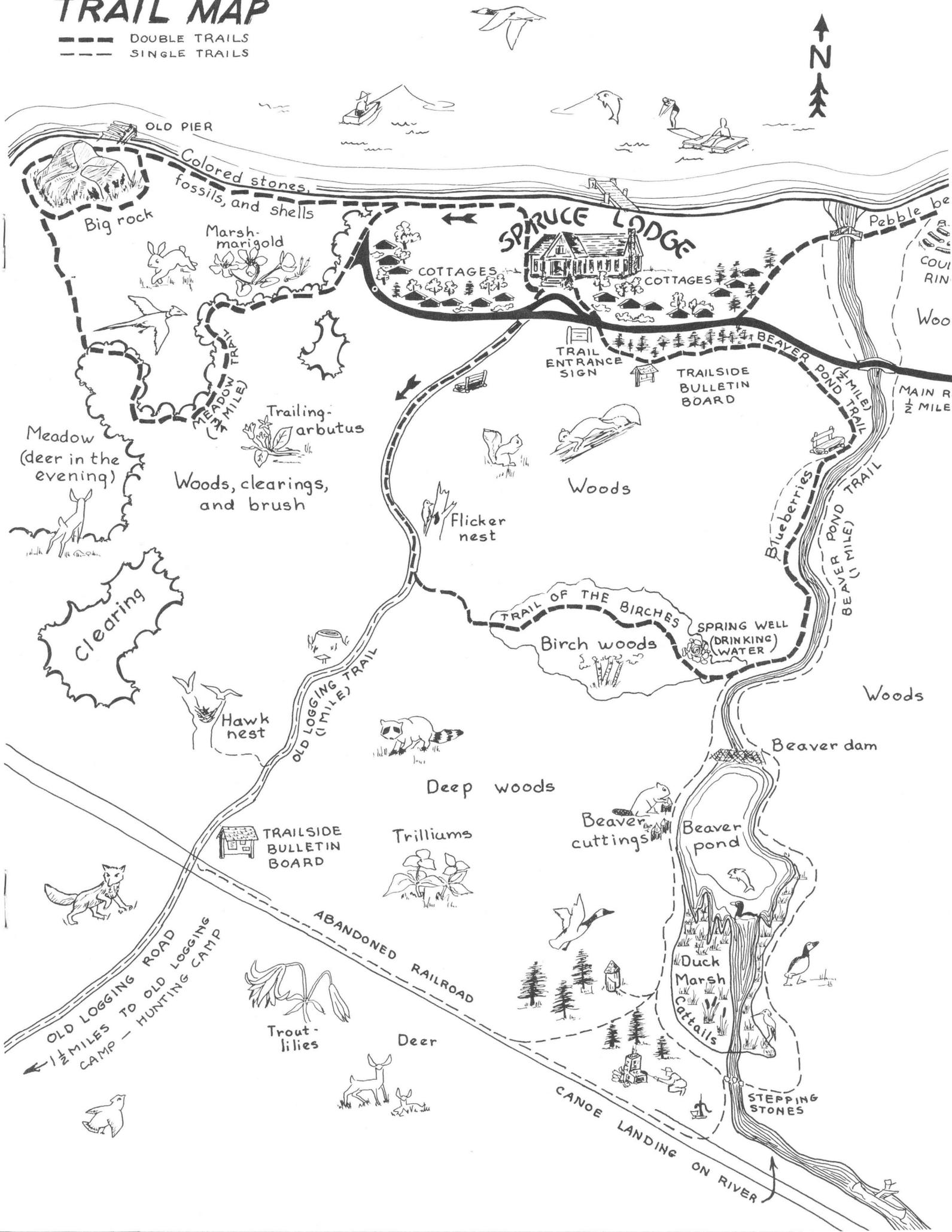
It is very important to mark the trail adequately so that no one will get lost. Many choices of trail markers are available to you. Markers of painted wood or metal on posts or trees are probably the simplest method. Cut-out arrows, lettered signs, and symbols are also satisfactory. Plywood, pressed wood, or old lumber can be used. All markers should be durable and easy to see. They should be planned and located so as to make the less-venturesome guests feel at home.

Luminous paint, tape, or reflectors have merit in marking trails which may be followed early in the morning or after dark. Where trails cross bogs or confusing deer trails, the markers should be closer together. *Be neat in all markings.* Attach markers to trees with non-rusting nails or copper wire.

Marine plywood or white pine is recommended for trail markers. The wood should be treated with water repellent to lengthen its life. Sign letters may be painted on the board, grooved into the wood, or cut out separately and nailed or glued. The surfaces of raised letters are easy to paint. However, you may need a skilled sign painter for designing and painting your larger signs for the trail entrances.

TRAIL MAP

--- DOUBLE TRAILS
- - - SINGLE TRAILS



SPRUCE LODGE

COTTAGES

COTTAGES

TRAIL ENTRANCE SIGN

TRAILSIDE BULLETIN BOARD

Blueberries

TRAIL OF THE BIRCHES

Birch woods

SPRING WELL (DRINKING WATER)

Hawk nest

OLD LOGGING TRAIL (1 MILE)

Deep woods

TRAILSIDE BULLETIN BOARD

Trilliums

Beaver cuttings

Beaver pond

Beaver dam

OLD LOGGING ROAD
1/2 MILES TO OLD LOGGING CAMP - HUNTING CAMP

ABANDONED RAILROAD

Trout-lilies

Deer

Duck Marsh

Cattails

STEPPING STONES

CANE LANDING ON RIVER

OLD PIER

Colored stones, fossils, and shells

Big rock

Marsh-marigold

MEADOW (1/2 MILE)

Trailing-arbutus

Meadow (deer in the evening)

Woods, clearings, and brush

Flicker nest

Woods

clearing

Woods

Pebble beach
COURT RIN
Woo

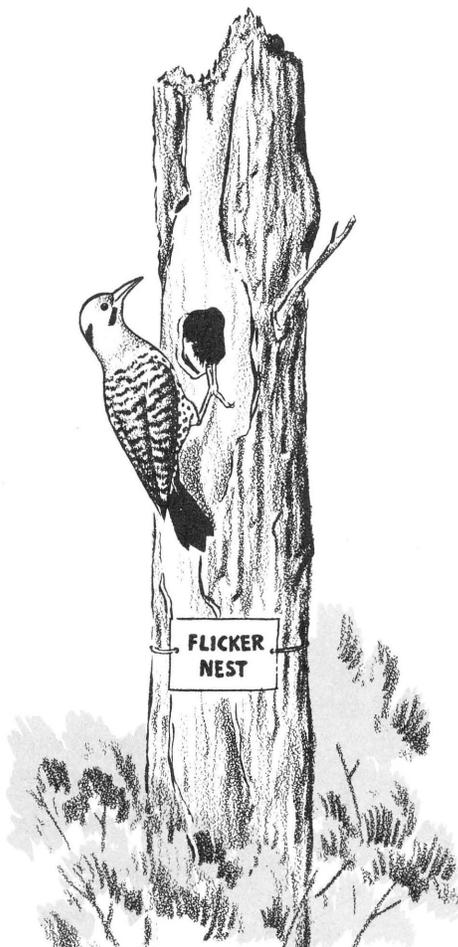
MAIN RIVER
1/2 MILE

TRAIL LABELS AND EXHIBITS

Labels

It is advisable to place along the trail permanent labels to explain such features as the names of trees, flowers, rocks, soils at exposed banks, old logging history, or historical points. Some exhibits are of interest only at certain times of the year and they should be labeled only at that time. Labels can be purchased or homemade of board, waterproof plywood, or pressed wood. The legend is written on the board. White enameled letters on dark or natural-finish material make a durable and easily read label. The board can be screwed to a diagonal cut across a stake, or it can be attached to a steel rod by a clamp. Also, the sign can be fastened to the object by means of copper wire or aluminum nails.

A very easy and simple temporary label consists of an ordinary heavy paper shipping-tag upon which the legend is written. Tags can be tied to trees or other exhibits, or fastened to sticks pushed



into the ground near the object being labeled. All legends should be easy for children to read. About 3 feet above the ground is high enough. Try to locate all labels and signs so they do not intrude upon the scene to spoil the natural appearance of the trail.

To add variety, numbers can be used to designate flowers, trees, and rocks along a trail. Those walking along can jot down identification of these and then check the numbers and correct answers in the guide leaflet (see below) or on the back of each label.

- **Some trails don't need labels** and are very effective with just an occasional trailside exhibit. Need for labels can be determined by analyzing the features of the trail.

Trail Exhibits

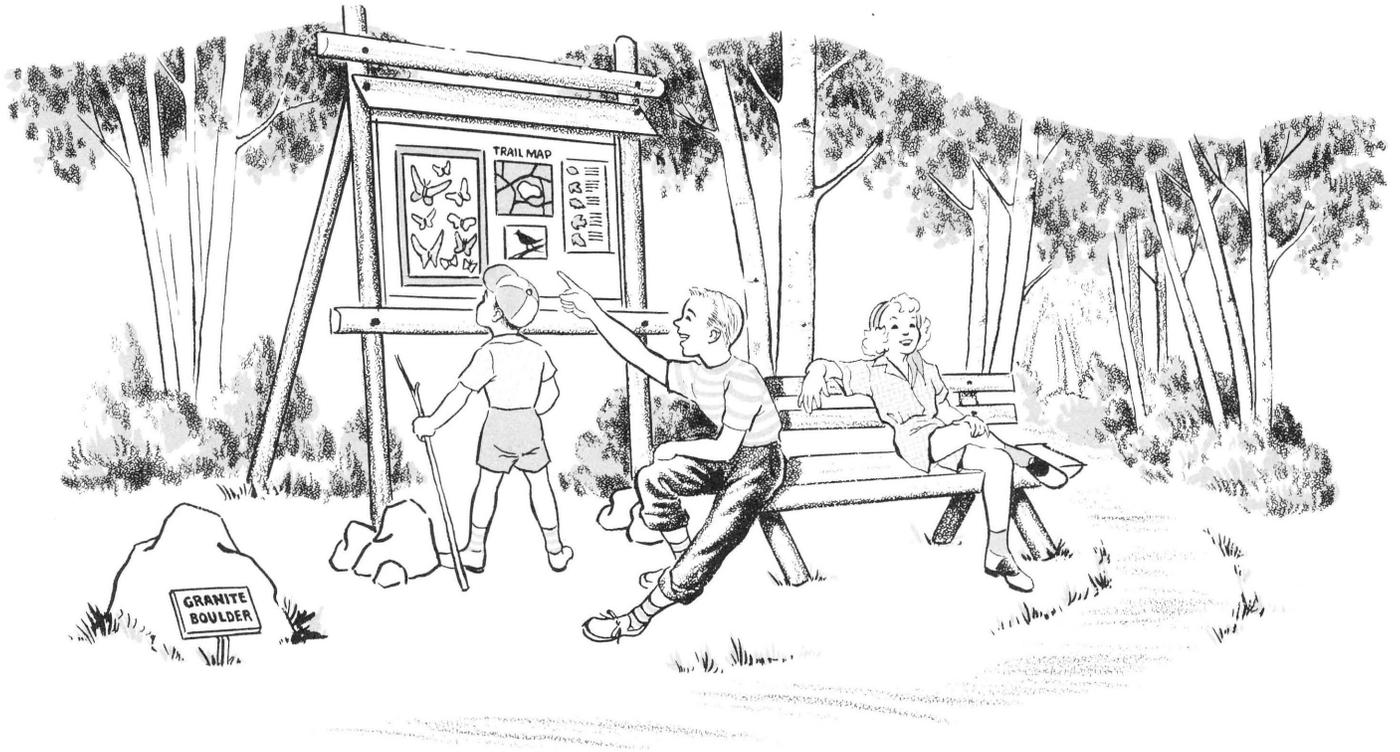
- **Bulletin boards** at strategic points will enhance the trail a great deal. One of these boards should be located where the trail begins. Such a board is a good spot to post the trail map showing major points of interest and the approximate distance around each trail. Included on the board can be samples of leaves, flowers, rocks, insects, or pictures of wildlife or flowers to be found along the trail (see sketch on p. 7). A fire-prevention poster can be placed on the board, also.

- **A trailside museum** is another possibility. Just a simple rustic lean-to shelter can house certain displays which rains and wind would destroy if left in the open.

Prepare exhibits at headquarters of such things as rocks, minerals, logging relics, old hunting and fishing equipment, mounted birds and animals, and similar items.

- **A trail map or leaflet** will arouse interest in the trail (see p. 5). The leaflet or map should be so prepared that it will create a desire to venture out on the trail. Trail exhibits to be shown on the map may include animal dens, beaver cuttings, club mosses, wild flowers, berries and edible wild fruits. You could also spot rock formations, the best place to hunt for fossils or stones, or to see deer or spawning trout. Nests of the osprey and eagle may be seen from a distance without harm

TRAIL LABELS AND EXHIBITS



A bulletin board points out items to be looked for on the trail.

to the birds or their young. Additional items for the guide leaflet are the points-of-interest beyond the trail area but in the vicinity of the resort or camp.

- **Animal exhibits** or animals in captivity are of great interest, if they are displayed properly. Consult your conservation officer as to state laws or regulations which apply to such exhibits.

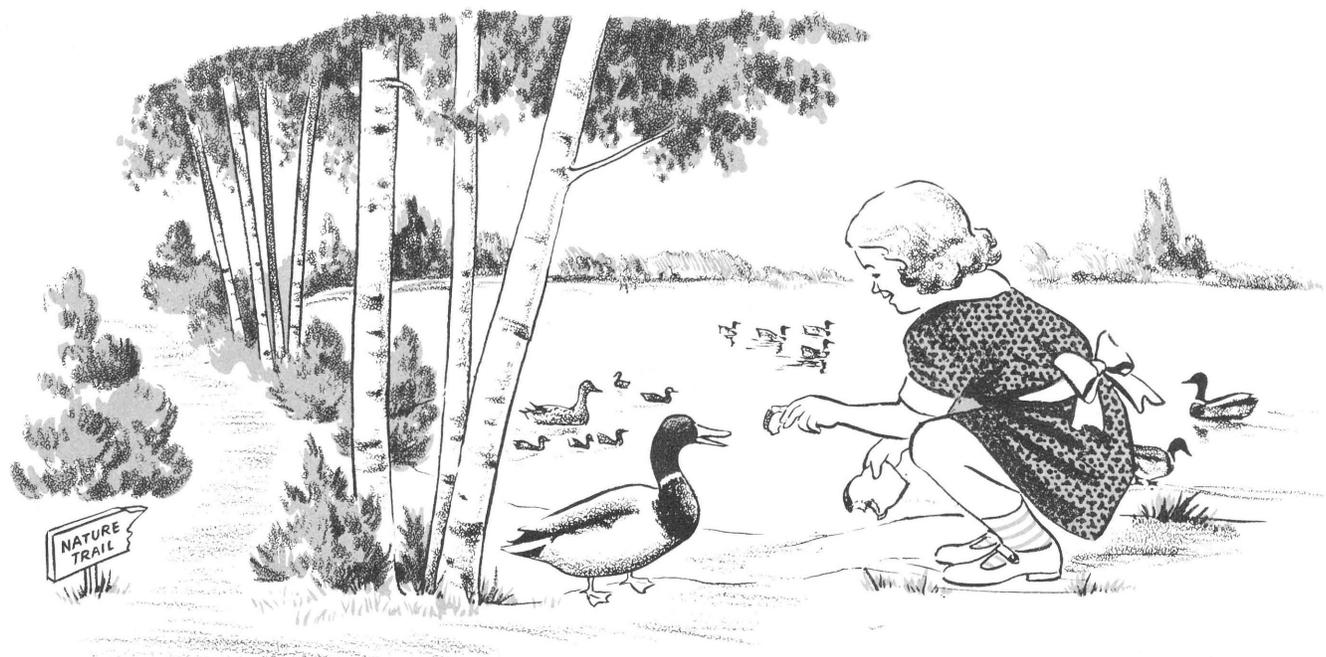
Auto Tours

Every resort or camp has nearby scenic and natural features such as wildlife, marsh habitat, waterfalls, quarries, mines, beaver dams, berry patches, good fishing spots, sand dunes, and many others. People enjoy seeing or visiting such places. These attractions can be linked together with an auto tour. Maps are useful in locating each point.

Arranging such tours is one of the finest means of building good will and appreciation for your resort or camp.

Guides

If you are fortunate enough to have someone who knows the names of local plants and wildlife, then by all means use him as a guide. Guides can greatly increase enjoyment of the trail. Perhaps local high school students who know the area well could be contacted for guide work. Another source of help may be local people who are older or retired but capable and willing to do guide work. They should know the good fishing and hunting locations, and where to see wildlife and outstanding scenery. They can help on auto tours as well as trail hikes.



Try mallards or Canada geese for semi-wild exhibits. (See your conservation officer.)

Maps

Your guests will be interested in a large air photograph of the area. These are ordered from Michigan Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee, 200 N. Capitol Ave., Lansing. A complete legal description of your property as shown on your tax receipt is required when writing about aerial photos. Enlargements on scale of 660 feet to the inch in a size about 30 inches by 30 inches are convenient for wall display.

Camera Enthusiasts

Plan good use for the cameras which your guests are sure to bring. People are always interested in wildlife, so tell them where they are likely to find good photographic possibilities. Wild-

flowers are a favorite subject for color photographers. Your suggestions in this regard will be greatly appreciated.

Library

Start a library on things of nature — rocks, fossils, soils, trees, birds, insects, fish, reptiles, game animals. Suggestions and book lists can be obtained by writing to Education Division, Michigan Department of Conservation, Lansing; National Audubon Society, 1130 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.; American Museum of Natural History, 79th St. and Central Park W., New York, N. Y. A few good sporting magazines are welcome; also *Michigan Conservation* magazine of the Michigan Department of Conservation.

For further information, call on your county agricultural agent, or write to Department of Land and Water Conservation, Michigan State College, East Lansing, Michigan.