



# The SOLAR Ray

A Monthly Publication of the School for Outdoor Leadership, Adventure, and Recreation (SOLAR)

June 2008

## INTRODUCTION TO ADVENTURE RACING CLASS

by Pam and Lou Szakal

Back in March, 25 members took on the challenge of SOLAR's first ever Adventure Racing Class. The class met 4 times in Troy for classroom sessions covering basic navigation and plotting UTM points, equipment for racing, bike set-up and repair, the ins & outs of AR and more. Next they set off on three clinics, each lasting half a day and providing essential skills for Adventure Racing.

Clinic 1 was held at Holly Recreation area and was focused on land navigation, reviewing orienteering skills with hands-on practice. Students were challenged to a real AR exercise where they headed off on a 1.5 hour navigation course having to locate and punch 9 control points along the way.

Clinic 2 focused on Mt. Biking skills. Allen Duncan and Nancy McMahon led an intense session on downhill, uphill, obstacles, and tight turns as well as tire replacement. Students then navigated their way through the trails locating and punching all 6 control points.

Clinic 3 landed us at Heavner Canoe for the water portion of the class. Doug Lanyk, Matt Dalton and Margaret Martin (The Dream Team), discussed the various strokes, getting in and out of the canoe and all of the safety aspects of canoeing. Students then stroked their way to 4 control points. It was a fast and furious (wet) finish.

Clinic 4 will be held on May 31 at Kensington Metropark and will be a 2 hr. mini adventure race covering everything that they have learned.

All of this is preparation for the big race. The Stark Raving Mad Adventure Race to be held in Muskegon, MI on Saturday, June 14. Twelve teams from SOLAR will participate in a 6 hour Race putting together all of the skills they have learned. It is a beginners sprint race put together by Infiterro Sports as a short race to get people into the sport or as a start to longer races. The following SOLARites will be participating:

TEAM NAME	PARTICIPANTS
Smiley Riley	Lou Szakal & Pam Riehl Szakal
Curtozmo	Mark Bushor & Stacey Alguire
Rogue Penguin	Jeff & Jennifer McWilliams
Ram's Don't Moo	Mike & Mari Martinko
M & M	Chris Myers & Larry Mergentime
Dumb & Dumber	Brian McCown & Tim Davis
Path Finder	Willi Guttman & Rob Kempert
New Orienteer's	Don Wold & Mike Crossman
Walking Wounded	Dick Ebenhoe & Peggy Skaggs
Pierogi Girls	Kinga Gorzelewski & Gosia Brozda
Beginner's Luck	Jackie Ostrosky & Pam Esper
Mechatronic's	Grey Ivanov

Everyone is welcome to come out and enjoy the festivities and cheer the SOLAR teams to victory (or at least to the finish line). The race will be held at the Muskegon Winter Park and starts at 10:00 AM and the cutoff is at 4:00 PM. Let us know if you will be coming up and we will include you in our plans.

## RETURN TO THE JORDAN VALLEY PATHWAY

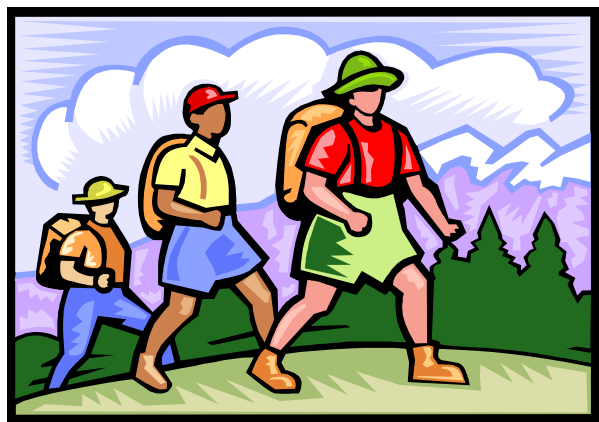
by Kevin Cotter

Three years ago eight of us had a wonderful time hiking the Jordan Valley Pathway in mid-October. This 18 mile loop is one of the scenic in the Lower Peninsula, with stunning overlooks, quiet and peaceful forests, and enough hills to give any backpacker a good workout. I have wanted to go back there, unfortunately state budget cuts have gotten in the way. The only legal camping along the trail is the at the Pinney Bridge campground, which was closed last fall due to budget cuts. That left no legal place to camp along the entire trail.

Now we are celebrating the grand (re-)opening of Pinney Bridge by having two weekend trips there. The first trip will be Friday, June 13 to Sunday, June 15; the second will be Friday, October 17 to Sunday, October 19. Both are SOLAR trips; you must be a current member to participate. Backpacking experience, preferably the beginning backpacking class, is required. Since we are hiking 18 miles in two days through hilly terrain, you should be in good backpacking shape. Cost is \$10 to cover the cost of camping for two nights.

The plan is to camp Friday night at the Pinney Bridge campground, then drive to the Deadman Hill trailhead Saturday morning. You can leave your tent and gear at the campground, or bring everything with you. We will then hike 10 miles back to Pinney Bridge to camp, then hike 8 miles on Sunday to Deadman Hill and our cars. This trail is very scenic and hilly; if you are going on an upcoming summer trip, the June date is a wonderful opportunity to train. The October date will hopefully bring fall colors, which are wonderful in that area.

I will be taking signups at the June meeting or you can email me at [solar@wowway.com](mailto:solar@wowway.com).



## INTRODUCTION TO KAYAKING

### Reduced Price and Time

by Matt Dalton

Kayaking is one of the best ways to explore Michigan's wonderful lakes and streams. It's also a great form of exercise and a great way to relax.

Introduction to Kayaking is a complete 3 hour beginner's class taught by Matt Dalton at Heavner's Canoe & Kayak in Milford, MI., on the clean, quiet and safe Huron River.

You'll be introduced to safe kayaking skills, basic paddling techniques and kayak equipment. This will assist you in choosing and paddling kayaks in the future. You'll learn about required and optional equipment and clothing. You'll learn the fundamentals of safe paddling, how to paddle fast and efficiently and how to stay in your kayak.

If you're thinking about trying kayaking for the first time or you'd like to learn how to polish you existing skills. This is a great class. Class size is limited to insure personal attention for each student, so please sign up early.

Sunday, June 8, 2008

Class starts at 2:00 PM and ends at 5:00 PM

Dinner after class

Cost \$45.00 includes everything you need.

Contact Matt Dalton at 248-360-0031 or by email at [mdalton@ameritech.net](mailto:mdalton@ameritech.net) to sign up.

## SOLAR ANNUAL "KICK OFF THE SUMMER" CAMP WEEKEND AND TRAILS DAY

by Carol McCrie

Join SOLAR for the "Kick off the Summer" weekend at Brighton Recreation Area on June 6th to June 8th

Whether you are a SOLAR member or you'd like a chance to get to know us better, join us for a fun-filled weekend.

Things to do include hiking, biking, canoeing or kayaking, or just hanging out with friends. We hope to also be doing some Trails Day work and will have more details as the date gets closer. On Saturday night, as is SOLAR tradition, we will have a potluck dinner and group campfire.

All you need to do to join SOLAR for this first weekend of the summer is go to [www.midnrreservations.com](http://www.midnrreservations.com) and make a reservation for the upper campground at Bishop Lake.

For more information, contact Carol McCrie at [cmccrie@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cmccrie@sbcglobal.net).

## SPOTLIGHT ON VIDA RUGGERO

by Rebecca Sweeton

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER OF SOLAR?

I think I have been a member for about four years now.

### HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH SOLAR?

I got involved with SOLAR because I was on a winter backpacking trip with The North Country Trail Association and someone on the trip said I should check out SOLAR because they do this crazy New Year's Eve Party at Nordhouse! I have never heard of this party since I became a member though.....

### HOW DID YOU START BACKPACKING?

I started backpacking a couple of years before I joined SOLAR. I was diagnosed with high blood pressure at a young age and decided to spend more time outdoors and hiking. I also eliminated any leadership positions at work and outside of work that I held. I was cured and my doctor was amazed! My first backpacking trip was to Jordan River Valley. I didn't know that you don't see much of the river so I was disappointed. Plus, I had new hiking boots and a pack that was too big for me! (live and learn!) I have been a life-long 'car backpacker.' My family used to drive out to our property in Mio and camp out in the middle of the wilderness.

### WHAT HAS YOUR FAVORITE TRIP BEEN SO FAR?

My favorite trip so far was to Yellowstone and the Tetons with my son., Carlo. We went with the Yellowstone Family Institute and it was a great trip. It was great to experience this great national wonder with my son. My favorite SOLAR outings are always the beach clean up at Nordhouse. It's always great to be on the beach and I love to watch the kids have 'old-fashioned' fun playing hide and seek, building forts, and making s'mores.

### WHAT WOULD YOUR DREAM TRIP BE?

My dream trip might be to Hawaii. I'd like to get off the beaten path and hike to some waterfalls in the tropical forest or to a secluded beach. But in the meantime, I will settle for the beauty of all the waterfalls in the Upper Peninsula and the undeveloped beaches at Nordhouse and the Manitou's!

### WHAT CLASSES WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD TO SOLAR'S CURRICULUM?

The SOLAR classes are so awesome I can't think of anything to add. I do have some ideas about how to make some of the classroom time more learner-friendly.

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE IN SOLAR?

My most rewarding experience in SOLAR has been the great people who love to talk about and experience the outdoors. You know, people who would rather spend a Saturday night out in the woods than in a smoky bar, people who would rather talk about the next adventure than their latest personal misfortune.

### HOW HAS SOLAR CHANGED DURING THE YEARS YOU HAVE BEEN A MEMBER?

I see SOLAR evolving each month as new members continue to show up. It was great to see some new faces in the leadership positions last year. I think it is neat when people can bring SOLAR into their own interests (like the U of M Sailing Club outing with SOLAR I organized last year) and people can bring their own interests to SOLAR, like the opportunity to volunteer at the food bank I read about in the last SOLAR Ray.

## TRIP LEADERS NOW NEEDED FOR EACH WEEKLY HIKE

by Kevin Cotter

What's missing from the weekly hike schedule? YOU! We are no longer scheduling weekly hikes in advance; only those hikes that someone has volunteered to lead will be listed. So far no one has volunteered to lead a hike in June. It's up to you to fill that schedule. You get to choose the dates, locations, and times. These hikes are a great way to train, get outdoors, and meet new people.

If you want to lead a hike, just give me the date, time, location, and where to meet, and I will post it on the hike schedule. Those will be the only hikes we will schedule. That means if you want more weekly hikes, hikes in your favorite area, or on your side of town, then pick your place and lead a hike!

Who is up to creating fun, fitness, and fellowship for SOLAR? Contact the Activities Chair at [activities@solaroutdoors.org](mailto:activities@solaroutdoors.org).



# SOLAR “SHAKEDOWN” WEEKEND FOR JMT BACKPACKERS

by Sara Cockrell



The rainy, cold forecast early week would not have simulated the John Muir Trail in California, which is reputed to have the “mildest, sunniest climate of any major mountain range in the world”. But, Mother Nature came through for our group of 12 SOLARites! Kevin Cotter and Bert Courson showed up early Friday afternoon to reserve space for our arrival at Red Bridge, with a deluge of rain, then clearing, as Jen and Ati Tislerics, Dave and Maureen DeFrance, Bill Lynch, Grey Ivanov and Sara Cockrell set up an interesting assortment of tarp tents. When Don Wold and Joanne Sarrasin arrived late, it was the beginning of a brief storm, with heavy rain, and then a TX tornado, pulling tent stakes anchored from the ground. By 11PM, all was quiet on the western front, as the peepers serenaded us to sleep, along with a Boy Scout troop from Allendale. It was a warm night and we rested well.

Saturday morning, we headed upstream, overlooking the Manistee River, from red clay and sandy bluffs, passing day hikers and other backpackers, pristine creeks and little waterfalls. Grey spotted a Massasauga Rattle Snake, before Lucky, the DeFrance’s beagle, trotted by. We arrived by 4PM at Seaton Creek Campground, beyond Hodenpyl Dam, as the temps began to drop. Grey quickly started a campfire in the fire ring, as JetBoils began the process of warming and refueling our well-worked bodies with one-pot meals. We sampled Dave’s “Lip Smackin” dehydrated dinner, and it was very tasty, with lots of veggies. Sara led some yoga stretches, then the usual stories were shared, as we moved around the campfire, being chased by the billowing smoke. Before everyone headed to bed, more water was boiled, so Nalgene bottles could be filled, for a little extra warmth, which was needed by most.

We awoke to frost on the ground, so got moving with the rising sun. It was a perfect day for hiking, following the river back downstream, for another view from atop the cliffs. After we completed our 20.4-mile journey, we met in Cadillac for lunch and a debriefing, sharing what we had learned, such as a warmer insulating top for the night, warmer sleeping bag, newer lightweight tent, boots better broken in, a shut-off valve for hydration pack, Nalgene for ease in filtering water, straps on pack for access to Crocks and other day-use gear, resolution to lose weight, set up tent for unpredictable, stormy weather, and each must hike their “own” pace.

It was a great time to bond for our upcoming adventure, learn from each other’s experiences and examine gear choices. For more on the Manistee River Trail, see <http://mrtassociation.com/default.aspx>. And, for photos of our group, see <http://ph.groups.yahoo.com/group/Solaroutdoors/photos/browse/d58d>.





# MOONLIGHT CANOE TRIPS

by Margaret Martin

Be whisked away through the waters in a canoe or kayak. Paddle into the sunset, then return into the moonrise.

This special night includes dinner, canoe or kayak rental, bonfire with s'mores, and other surprises. Kid and dog friendly. All skill levels welcome. Meet at Proud Lake State Park Canoe Rental at 2775 Garden Road, Milford, MI 48381. To make a reservation call: Heavner Canoe Rental, 248-685-2379, fax 248-684-7939 or e-mail: AlanHeavner@heavnercanoe.com

## Schedule:

Saturday, May 17: Dinner, 7:15 PM, Paddle 8:15-10:30 PM, Bonfire 10:30-???, Sunset, 8:48 PM, Moonrise, 6:55 PM

Saturday, August 16: Dinner, 7:00 PM, Paddle 8-10 PM, Bonfire 10:00-???, Sunset, 8:32 PM, Moonrise, 8:28 PM

Saturday, September 13: Dinner, 6:30 PM, Paddle 7:15-9:30 PM, Bonfire 9:30-???, Sunset, 7:46 PM, Moonrise, 6:53 PM

Sunday: October 12: Dinner: 5:30, 6:30-8:30 Paddle, 8:30-??? Bonfire. Sunset 6:56 PM, Moonrise: 5:39 PM

## Cost:

\$25 per person includes boat rental, pizza dinner, beverage, bonfire and s'mores.

\$15 includes pizza dinner, beverage, bonfire and s'mores.

\$5 includes bonfire, and s'mores

## Don't Forget!

Call in your reservation ahead so that your dinner and boat will be ready for you.

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## IT'S PARTY TIME

by The DeFrances

Come help us celebrate a couple of 'once in a lifetime' events. Maureen is retiring and Dave is turning 60. And many other good things are in the works.

When: Saturday June 21st (Also the first day of summer) at 1p

Where: Island Lake Recreation Area, Riverbend Shelter (no electricity) [http://www.michigandnr.com/Publications/PDFS/RecreationCamping/island\\_lake\\_map.pdf](http://www.michigandnr.com/Publications/PDFS/RecreationCamping/island_lake_map.pdf)

Line up of events:

- Swim
- Bike
- Hike
- Paddle
- Horseshoes and other games

We'll serve up the food at 3:00 PM. We are providing top round beef roast and ask that you bring a side dish and your favorite beverage.

No gifts please. Dogs and kids welcome.

We need your RSVP ASAP, please contact us at 517-552-3660 or moedefrance@comcast.net. Thanks!



# poetic nature

by Elizabeth Schwab

## Restful Forest

By Patrick O'Callaghan

Just walk within the forest deep  
Where timid little creatures leap,  
Where flowers nod, and shadows creep  
In Lady June's embraces.

Just find a little trail somewhere  
That leads you on and onward there  
Through fragrance sweet, and summer air,  
In calm secluded places.

Just journey to a lake that lies  
Forever 'neath a million skies,  
Where beauty lives, but never dies,  
Where there is always peace;  
And linger on the cooling shore  
Beneath the shading trees once more,  
And dream the dreams that you adore;  
There, fond dreams never cease.

Just watch the sun move slowly through  
A land of green, a sky of blue,  
While shadows slip away from you  
And hide behind the timber.  
A place to rest alone, and pray,  
And send your every care away;  
Then you have lived another day  
That's lovely to remember.

If you have a favorite poem relating to the outdoors that you have read or have written yourself that you would like to see here in a future editoin of the SOLAR Ray, send it to Elizabeth Schwab by email at: qes1339@yahoo.com. Include the source you obtained it from.

## BEGINNING CANOE PADDLING

by Margaret Martin

Learn the basics of flatwater canoe paddling! Spend the day at Proud Lake State Recreation Area learning these basic strokes:

Forward paddle, backpaddle, draw, and pry. For those who are ready to work on sternman strokes, the J stroke, rudder, and basic steering will be addressed. Additionally, these other skills will be discussed: safety, portaging, basic rescue, communication, and day trip planning.

Who: Anyone interested in learning basic paddling skills. Children under 16 should be accompanied by a parent.

Where: Proud Lake State Recreation Area Canoe Rental (Heavner Canoe Rental), 2775 Garden Road, Milford, MI 48381 For directions call Heavner Canoe Rental, 248-685-2379

When: Saturday, June 14, 2008 Time: 10:30 AM

Raindate: Sunday, June 15, 2008 Time: 1:00 PM

Cost: \$25 per person.

Wear: bathing suit, water shoes, hat, sunglasses, dress for the weather.

Bring: Water bottle, picnic lunch, dry bag, water bottle, suntan lotion, and bug spray.

Note: The group may decide to spend the afternoon paddling to downtown Milford for lunch and ice cream.

## SOLAR PROGRAM SCHEDULE

by Allen Duncan

### May3: Outdoor Weather Safety

with Richard Pollman, National Weather Service

#### Upcoming Programs:

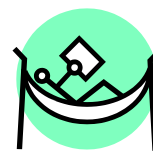
- July: Annual Gear/Book/Map Sale/Swap and Bar-B-Que!
- August: Oakland Land Conservancy, Donna Folland, Executive Director
- September: Successful Eco-system Management in the Serengeti, William Cowger
- October 7: "National Trail System," Derek Blount

**NOTE:** All programs take place at Colony Hall immediately following the SOLAR business meeting.

Do you have an idea or suggestion for a SOLAR Program? Please e-mail me: [programs@SOLAROutdoors.org](mailto:programs@SOLAROutdoors.org).

# THE RECUMBENT VOYAGER

by Winnie Chrzanowski



## Living on the Edged: Amazing Relationships in the Natural World

By Jeff Corwin

Rodale Books, 308 pages

ISBN 1-57954-792-3

Jeff Corwin's *Living on the Edge* probably never made the New York Times Bestseller List. Nevertheless, I borrowed the book from the library on a whim and began reading with my usual snobbery for books of this type. After all, how well could a guy who grips poisonous snakes in his bare hands with his fingers just inches away from their fangs write? It would seem that he's obviously more comfortable with creepy crawly critters in his hands than a writing implement.

After reading the glowing foreword written by Dr. Robert Ballard, Founder and Chief Scientist of the JASON Foundation for Education (his title sounded impressive), I felt compelled to learn a bit more about Corwin. I knew that Corwin hosts numerous television shows about wildlife, but I didn't realize that he speaks with authority. Somehow, his self-mocking humor and his inane antics led me to believe otherwise. A degreed naturalist (he majored in biology and anthropology), his formal education has been enhanced by his fieldwork around the world. As a media naturalist, Corwin is able to continue learning about the wildlife that he loves and sharing his passion for the natural world with his ever expanding audience. Although knowledgeable and educated, he doesn't take himself too seriously. "The Jeff Corwin Experience" is a broadcast phenomenon and has generated numerous books that he's co-written.

*Living on the Edge*, his only solo writing effort as far as I can tell, offers up observations on four amazing ecosystems—the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, the Savannah of Southeastern Africa, the Costa Rican Rainforest, and the Llanos of Venezuela. Visiting these places with Jeff is not only educational but also fun. He's an intriguing guide with an offbeat sense of humor and an engaging style. He illustrates the landscape and populates it with the plants and animals inhabiting its ecosystem. Once the reader is able to see and smell the place Corwin's describing, he lures us deeper into the unfolding story by focusing on the small and supposedly unimportant details of the location. In the Costa Rica segment, for example, Corwin begins with a strangler fig. From that fig, he moves farther into the rain forest and introduces the creatures and plants that inhabit it and shows how each small plant and creature interrelates within the ecosystem. Corwin spins out many different stories and knits them all up into a neat package so that what goes on in the ecosystem is understandable. It's like a soap opera—sex, death, war, etc.—and in the process Corwin describes his screw ups and makes fun of them. Describing a life lesson learned after being bitten by a coral snake in Costa Rica, Corwin says he "should probably be weeded out from the gene pool." I disagree. Corwin's approach to the natural world and his ability to make the average Joe realize what's going on in the wild is what we need to help us better understand the natural world and its symbiotic relationships.

Surprisingly, I enjoyed the book. Corwin tells a good story and though *Living on the Edge* is not new (published in 2003), the narratives communicate his passion for the wildlife he's studying and his concerns about protecting natural habitats around the globe. It's a message that can't be repeated too often in my opinion.



# JOIN IN ON A TRIP TO PARADISE!

by Moe DeFrance

Costa Rica is one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world - a true Garden of Eden. Let Costa Rica mesmerize you as we explore its rainforests, rushing rivers, pristine beaches and towering volcanoes. This trip combines world-class highlights with more remote areas for an authentic adventure experience.

## Day 1 Arrive San José

Arrive in San José at any time.

## Day 2-3 Puerto Viejo de Talamanca

Begin with an incredible bus ride over the mountains to Costa Rica's Caribbean coast. The picturesque village of Puerto Viejo de Talamanca's white and black sand beaches are surrounded by exotic tropical vegetation. Several optional activities are available, including bike rentals, snorkeling, and hiking in Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge.

## Day 4 Tortuguero National Park

Take a morning boat ride to Tortuguero, with spectacular wildlife viewing en route. The beaches here are nesting grounds of the enormous Green and Leatherback sea turtles.

## Day 5-6 Rara Avis (2B, 1L, 2D)

The journey is half the adventure as we begin by traveling along two rivers, the San Juan and the Sarapiquí, briefly crossing the border into Nicaragua. Back on land we board a unimog (all terrain truck) then a tractor-drawn cart to get to our special jungle oasis. We enter the primary rainforest bordering Braulio Carrillo National Park, where at 700m (2000 ft) above sea level, the climate is cool year-round. A naturalist guide leads us along nature trails, a butterfly farm and swimming spots at the twin waterfalls. There is also the option to climb to a viewing platform 30m (100 ft) above the jungle floor.

## Day 7-9 La Fortuna / Arenal

La Fortuna, at the foot of Arenal Volcano, is an excellent base for area explorations. Take a night hike around the base of the Arenal Volcano, accompanied by the sounds of monkeys and the distant rumbling of the volcano. Other optional activities include whitewater rafting, horseback riding, canyoneering (rappelling), a tour of the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge, or a relaxing soak in hot springs.

## Day 10-11 Monteverde

Climb into the misty mountain air of the Monteverde Cloud Forest. Weather permitting, travel by horse around Lake Arenal to Monteverde. Spend a couple of days exploring the town and the Cloud Forest Reserve, a true nature lover's paradise. Optional activities include a trail of suspended bridges through the canopy, a butterfly garden and a thrilling canopy zip line.

## Day 12-14 Quepos / Manuel Antonio National

8

## Park

Quepos is a small Pacific town perfect for relaxing at the end of your tour. A short distance away, Manuel Antonio National Park offers excellent hiking, spectacular views, and abundant wildlife. There are beautiful white sand beaches and the warm turquoise water is ideal for swimming, fishing, kayaking, boogie boarding, sailing or surfing. The nightlife in the area is also some of the best in the country.

## Day 15 San José

Return to San José for some last-minute shopping and a final night on the town.

## Day 16 Depart San José

### Included Highlights:

- Boat tour to Tortuguero National Park
- Rara Avis Rainforest Lodge excursion with guide
- Horseback riding trip from La Fortuna to Monteverde
- Guided visit to Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve
- Arenal Volcano Hiking and Hot Springs
- Optional zip lining

### Additional Information:

Group Size: Max 15, Avg 10

Group Leader: G.A.P Adventures leader throughout

Accommodation: Simple hotels (13), multi-share lodge (2)

Transport: Public bus, tractor, van, boat, horseback.

Meals Included: 2 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners

Meal Budget: Allow USD350 for meals not included.

Estimated Costs:

- \$250 to hold spot
- \$700 to GAP Adventures - November 2008
- \$250 Local Payment
- 0 to \$400 for optional activities
- \$280 - \$350 for local meals
- \$450 airfare
- \$35 to \$140 for medical/evacuation insurance

For more details, contact Moe DeFrance at moedefrance@comcast.net or by telephone 517-552-3660 or 517-294-2333.



## SOLAR-ITES JOIN US FOR THE ANNUAL MICHIGANDER 2008

by Caroline Kudwa

*Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance annual  
fund raiser, The Michigander Bicycle Tour*

- 6-Days starting July 13 - 18, 2008 with an option of 7-Days starting July 12, 2008
- Both Experienced and Beginner Cyclists 35 to 60 miles a day allows time to enjoy the countryside
- Two meals a days, breakfast and dinner, camping, shuttle service and rest stops are provided, cost is \$298.00. To be shuttled to the start point the cost is \$50 per person. Due date for payment is April 24. There is a late fee after May 1, 2008.
- All paved route for Road Bikes with a Single Track option for Mountain Bikes.
- 6-Day route starts in Muskegon, you take the Musketawa Trail to Rockford and pick up the White Pine Trail, then on the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail up to Edmore, then back to the White Pine Trail on to Cadillac with an over night stay in Big Rapids. From Cadillac we will be taking back roads to the Tart Trail in Traverse City, the final ending point. On the last day of the weeklong trip you have three choices: (1) a loop on the Tart and Leelanau Trail to Suttons Bay (2) on the Vasa Trail for the Single Track riders (3) a chance to just stay put and enjoy Grand Travers Bay.



## CAESAR CREEK STATE PARK

by Leslie Cordova

Come join us as we celebrate the July 4th holiday (July 3-6, 2008). This kid and dog friendly outing is close to home, only about a 4 hour drive, basically just South of Dayton Ohio.

Caesar Creek State Park is highlighted by clear blue waters, scattered woodlands, meadows and steep ravines. The park offers some of the finest outdoor recreation in Southwest Ohio including boating, hiking, camping and fishing.

There are 43 miles of hiking trails, 8.5 miles of mountain biking trails, a lake with a 1,300 foot beach and fossil hunting. Nearby is the Little Miami paved bike trail system with over 150 miles of trails.

There is also a bike rental, ice cream store and winery nearby. We are going to canoe or kayak the Little Miami River on Sunday and have a traditional potluck dinner on Friday night.

We will be camping at the Wellman Group Camp within the park. We will have the entire camp to ourselves. There are flush toilets, a picnic shelter and showers nearby (8 miles) at the main campground. Weather permitting there will be a campfire each night.

Cost:

- Camp and canoe \$40/adult
- Camp and kayak \$45/adult
- Camp only \$20/adult

If you are interested please contact Leslie Cordova at (248) 547-5626 or [lesliegene@aol.com](mailto:lesliegene@aol.com).

THANK YOU!

I just wanted to extend a thank you for all the contributors to the Ray over my past two years as Ray Editor, in addition to my assistant editors whose names are on the last page of the newsletter.



Rebecca Sweeton



# 5 DAYS OF SNOWSHOEING, SLEDGING, AND ICE EXPLORATION

*In the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore with The Michigan Bush Rats And Michael Neiger*  
by Gail Staisil



## Friday, March 7—A Good Decision

Just a week ago, I decided to join the Bush Rats for the annual winter sledge trip to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. Although I have joined the group countless times before, the March Pictured Rocks trip always tears at my heart. It's not the trip itself that causes me ambivalence, but the fact that it always falls in the same time period as one of my favorite cross-country ski races.

This year the Pictured Rocks trip won as it seemed like my intuition told me that it was the best choice this year. I'm sure I'll go through the same decision making process next year. I love skiing as much as I love winter camping but at least I'll have a reprieve from that choice for awhile.

An adventure to Pictured Rocks is always exciting even though I live rather close to the National Lakeshore and visit it often. The scenery is always outstanding every season of the year but the winter season offers the most variety.

What kind and how much of an ice shelf will there be? What kinds of ice sculptures will have formed from the wind and spray? What will my favorite backcountry waterfalls look like this year? The snow depth varies a lot and of course the trip weather can vary tremendously from one year to the next (and often one day to the next). All of these variables make it a new experience each time.

Our trip began with breakfast at the DogPatch in Munising. Our favorite waitress attended to all our needs (especially Michael's requests as he seemed to have had a syrup problem with his hands??).

Dave, Mary, Mary Ann, Josh, Milton, and I filled out our waivers for trip leader Michael and then we're off to obtain our backcountry permit from Pam at the park headquarters in Munising. Chris would be driving up later and catching up with us tonight.

While all of this official business was taking place, I struck up a conversation with climbers who were also heading out into the backcountry. The park's staff noted that it almost looked like summer in the office as there were eleven of us swarming the desk that is typically so quiet in the winter.

Permits garnered, we headed out with our various vehicles to the end of Chapel Road where the plow stops—it's usually a quiet place. That's where we would begin our journey, but cars had to be shuttled to the end point. While the rest of us waited with all of the gear strung out in the cul-de-sac, a county plow appeared. We quickly moved everything off the road so that it could do its job. :)

Dave had earlier passed out individual bags of homemade cookies for everyone to enjoy during the trip. His wife Caroline had generously spent her time making the oatmeal, peanut-butter cookies crammed with all sorts of yummy additions. As a cookie connoisseur and avid baker, I was pleasantly happy for the treat. I'm sure the others delighted in them as well.

When everyone was ready, we began our journey in the pristine white world by hiking a short distance on an old two track. I knew we would have to peel off of it shortly as we have traveled that area before.

We have taken various backcountry routes to our first objective but this year we would head through a cedar swamp, which ended up being amazingly thick. On the bright side, snow clung to the cedars making the journey very picturesque.

Milton was following an azimuth, which would head us in the general direction of the Amphitheater, a backcountry cave in the Miner's Basin. We would stop short of that goal tonight so that we could explore tomorrow in more depth.

We stopped for a late lunch along the way as soon as we found a clear or open space to spread out our belongings. Chatter was incessant as everyone caught up on each other's activities and trips that were taken in the last few months.

With the swamp behind us, the next hour or more was traveled through tall, open hardwoods with many deviations in terrain (rolling). A nice camp area was selected and we all began the process of setting up the first night's shelters.

Both Mary Ann and Josh elected to build snow shelters as the snow depth inland where we were traveling was at least three to four feet or more. Once Josh had sunk to the top of one of his thighs even while wearing snowshoes.

Michael offered a few tips to Mary Ann to perfect her snow shelter out in an open area. Josh elected to make his shelter amongst many small evergreens forming an effective windbreak.

The temperature was 12° F when we had started our journey, but now it felt much colder. Predicted lows were to be below zero for the first part of our trip.

As I was doing chores under my tarp, I thought I heard a distant sound. Within a few minutes, Chris arrived at camp. No one was expecting him before dark and it was only about 6:30 PM. Others said they had also heard something, which turned out to be Chris calling out. He thought it was funny that no one replied. Chris is called the “Night Blazer” for his night navigation skills so his early entrance was an unexpected but pleasant surprise.

The night was cold and quiet. It snowed lightly but it hardly amounted to anything.

## Saturday, March 8—Little Miner’s Falls Exploration



When I awoke, it was only -1° F. However, it quickly warmed up to 12° F and then remained on the cold side all day.

Early morning preparations always leave some of us ready before the others. I find that some days I am ahead of schedule and other days not. I’m sure it holds true for most everyone.

Anyway, while we were waiting for everyone to finish, many of us checked out Chris’s latest adaptations to his sledge. He is extremely creative and is always testing out new ideas. This time he had redesigned the front and back of his sledge with innovative guards.

We also checked out his “patent-pending” idea to eliminate the bulky brush guards that most of us have on our homemade wrist compasses. We joked about the “patent-pending” ideas as Michael had first brought the concept up on one of his inventions and Milton had questioned it.

While I’m on the topic of creativity, I might add that most of the group is very talented in fashioning new gear or doing retro work on existing equipment.

Mary Ann also had done a lot of work since the last trip.

She had created a new sil-nylon pack for carrying her gear for short treks away from our sledges and a new pocket pack for her waistbelt. She’d also retro-ed a pair of pants so that they could easily slip over her boots. A lot of time is involved for sure, to get ready for another excursion to the bush.

We left camp with Milton taking the lead to head for Little Miner’s Falls. We kind of took the long approach or roundabout way to get there as we first headed in a westerly direction through mainly hardwoods.

We soon bumped into a branch of the Miner’s River, so we traveled the ridge above it about two hundred meters partly north and west to find the spot where we usually descend over the cliff. Taking this approach at the end situated us in many tightly forested areas thick with evergreens before we again came out into open hardwoods.

Since we were going to leave our sledges with the majority of our gear on top of the ridge for several hours, Michael suggested that we all hang our food supplies. He hung a sturdy rope so that we could all use it.

Dave and Michael set up a belay/rappel rope so that we could traverse the steep slope. It never appears unduly steep at the top but parts of it are nearly vertical.

We all put on our climbing helmets, swami belts and had traction devices ready for the descent. I used my ATC device to lower myself down first. I headed over to the frozen waterfall so that the others could have a path to follow. Josh, Milton and Chris hadn’t been there before so they were quite impressed on their arrival.

Upon arrival at the waterfall, we also pulled on our basic over-the-boot crampons so that we could walk safely around the falls on the slippery slopes. Milton had full-fledged climbing crampons so he could walk anywhere on the steepest slopes with confidence.

We continued to wear our climbing helmets so that we would have some protection against falling ice, or a slip and fall. It’s not predictable for sure and there are always pieces of it on the icy ground surfaces that serve as testament.

After pleasantly exploring the intricacies of the ice formations, we sat in the sun on one of the ledges and ate our lunches before climbing back to the top.

We used prussik loops—friction hitches—for the return trip. Many of us agreed that although they work fine for the purpose, the task is somewhat tedious and requires a bit of upper body strength.

We gathered our gear at the top and then Mary Ann, Mary and I headed out along the ridge with the goal being Potato Patch on the Pictured Rocks Trail proper. Milton quickly caught up before we encountered a series of ravines to navigate.

The ravines held creeks that were only slightly frozen in many areas. We looked for spots that appeared to be safe

to cross. Mary was in the lead so she took the first route down. We all watched how her sledge tracked and if we needed to make any adjustments to the angle of approach, we tried a different one.

Most of the creeks were crossed without getting anything wet but I did build a snow bridge on one of the crossings so all that followed wouldn't have icing to deal with on the bottom of their sledges.

After we crossed the last ravine we took a break. Michael caught up to us then. Dave, Chris and Josh weren't far behind. We soon decided to camp or stay a bit inland to avoid the winds off of the lake.

We set up camp. Although the snow was certainly plentiful, we could tell we were much closer to the lake as the depth was much less than the previous night.

At dinnertime, the temps were about 3° F. Mary brought some carrot cake, which she shared with everyone. A touch of sweets always makes a good addition after dinner.

Silence at camp was interrupted by distant camper's voices coming presumably from Potato Patch. We're glad we had decided to camp inland from there. Clear skies prevailed and lots of stars covered the sky.

## **Sunday, March 9—Ice Forest**

Throughout the night, the skies remained clear with the temperature dipping to -4° F. Chris mentioned in the morning that he had seen the northern lights when he got up during the night.

Although morning temps were at about 7° F, it was enjoyable packing up our sledges as the winds were nonexistent.

After taking a few group pictures, we left camp and passed by the Potato Patch area. There were indeed a group of guys camping in the fringes of the forest there. Judging by the equipment they had with them (including big coolers), they were apparently base camping.

We headed towards Mosquito, some times using the narrow but deep trough that was created from a few past hikers. We often bushwhacked parallel to the shoreline path instead.

The lakeshore could now be viewed and it looked to be frozen quite a ways in the distance. A lot of frozen-ice seeps decorated the cliffs in shades of orange, brown and light yellow.

Before Mosquito, we belayed our sledges down the partially snow-covered but steep wooden steps. Near the bottom, we rested for lunch and got ourselves ready to go on the ice.

We lowered our sledges and then walked on either the high side or behind the stacks of ice. Parts of it become an intricate landscape of arches, caves and small mountains (well at least compared to the usual flat water of the other seasons).

We crossed the outlet of the Mosquito River and followed the shoreline around to the farthest east path that led to the campsites there. We weren't staying there but that is where we climbed back up to the elevated shoreline trail.

At the top of the ridge east of Mosquito, we encountered the wonderful ice forest that is a delight to view each year. It's highly different each year as it's created by water spray that is driven by high winds over the top of the high cliffs.

This year the forest was totally encased in heavy layers of ice (much more than I've seen before). We couldn't walk through it as normal but had to circumnavigate around the back of it to get back to the trail.

We still had a long push ahead for the day. By the time we reached camp, we were all tired and sweaty as all of the travel was uphill after we left the shoreline. Although the distances we travel aren't far compared to the other seasons, it takes a lot more work to deal with the terrain while pulling or belaying sledges.

After initial camp preparations, some of us wandered back to the cliff area around Indianhead to view the sunset even though our thoughts were with firing up our stoves and getting dinner. It could wait for a bit of splendor instead!

I happily took off my snowshoes. It was great to sit for awhile before the night's chores dominated my time. Another clear night followed a partly sunny day.

## **Monday, March 10—Chapel Beach**

It was about 8 degrees this morning. We had a great trek today with much fine scenery. There were many fine overlooks where we could admire the ice formations along the cliffs.

Eventually we had worked inland more so that we wouldn't have to follow the narrow trail. This was the hardest on those with wide snowshoes as the sides of them would conflict with the edges of the trail.

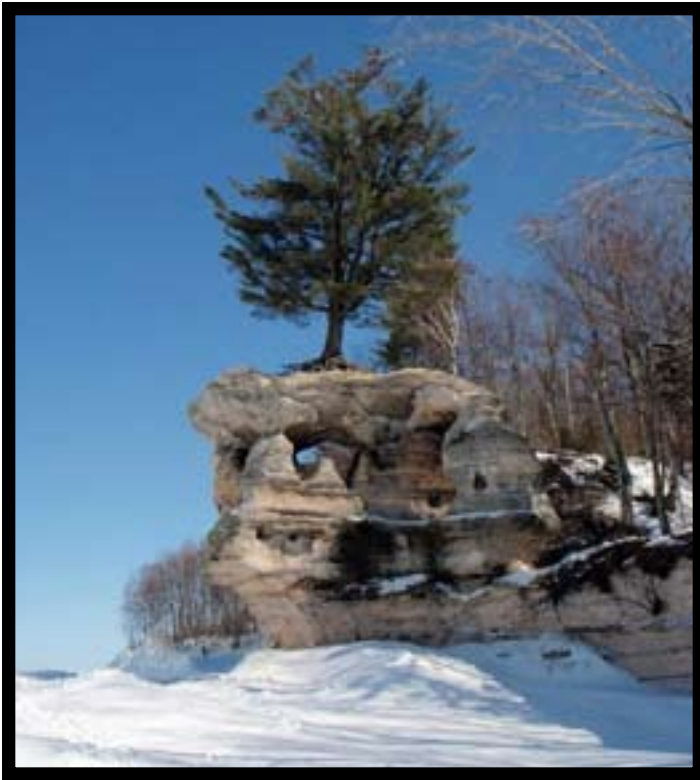
Traveling inland does have its advantages for making our own path but it is also a lot more work. Brush has to be constantly fended off and it takes more time for sure.

We eventually descended to Chapel Beach. The short cliffs on the west side of the beach were decorated with frozen ice seeps. The seeps had a frothy white frozen layer over the tops of them, presumably created by the freeze-and-thaw cycles.

The shoreline was filled in with pack ice but it looked to be unsafe east of Chapel Rock. We wouldn't be hiking on the ice after the big rock, at least not until later. That meant we had to climb again to the top of the cliffs but first we would have lunch in direct view of Chapel Rock on the east end of the shoreline. It was neat to see it from that perspective rather than inland.

The guys set up a 3-to-1 pulley system that worked great for our sledges. Chris left the group at this point, heading





challenge.

We slipped the sledges through the hole one by one and then we scooted through to a ledge about five feet above the ice. Since it was solid ice and nearly vertical, we used a handline to slide over the edge. What fun!

Once we were down on the ice with all of our equipment, we started making our way along the ice crust towards the Beaver Basin. There were many rewarding sights. Rock, ice, caves and cliffs make an interesting variety of formations to behold. Shades of crystal blue, yellow, brown and orange ice were draped over many of the cliffs and rocks.

We left the shoreline and headed down the foot trail to Beaver Lake where we had a light lunch. We crossed the frozen lake. By this time, the temperatures had been rapidly rising and it was now about freezing.

My snowshoes were responding to the warm temps by forming big clumps underneath them around the crampons. As I walked across the lake, I felt like I was on high spike heels. I stopped to clean them off and fell right over.

We headed off the lake into the regular campground and now we knew we had several miles of road walking. From past experiences, we knew the road was a serious grade seemingly ascending for the majority of the distance. However, it's easy to forget until you do it again!

I started off by wearing my snowshoes but due to the clumping and the fact that the road had been somewhat packed by snowmobiles at some point, I took them off and stowed them in my sledge. Most of the others did too, except for Milton and Dave who snowshoed all the way to the vehicles that were left along H-58. We all agreed that we were glad that the last push was over.

We quickly shuttled a few people back to their car and then we all went to the Woodlands Restaurant in Shingleton for a late lunch. As norm, talk reverted to next year's trip and what it would entail logistically.

Ice axes were suggested by those who already had them for more shoreline exploration. When I suggested that I needed a new vacuum cleaner more than an ice axe, Dave joked that I need to get my priorities straight...if I spent more time out here, I wouldn't need a vacuum cleaner—he is so right!

The trip as a whole was highly successful. We were able to accomplish our goals, experiment with new equipment, experience wonderful sights, savor the connectedness to nature and have fun. That's what it's all about!

down the east leg of Chapel. He would eventually hike the rest of the way out to the turnaround at the end of Chapel Road where he had left his car. He had a long journey ahead, both in the bush and on the road, to return to work tomorrow. I'm sure he would have rather stayed with us and we would miss his presence.

It was another long and hard day. Everyone was tired by the time we got to the Coves Group Site. The temperatures had been comfortable though, so when we had to stand around for any length of time (rigging up ropes), we were all content not to have to put on many additional layers.

Mary reheated some crepes she made at home prior to the trip and served them filled with instant pudding and fruit. Everyone enjoyed the sweet taste and the remembrance of real food.

## Tuesday, March 12—The Journey Back

Light winds continued throughout the night but the morning temps were relatively warm—low 20's F. We gathered our gear and prepared immediately to descend down more steep stairs with the ropes.

After my sledge was lowered and I descended, Michael asked me to recon for a suitable spot for us to further descend to the lake where there was a great ice shelf.

I explored along the coast west and east of the location but it mostly involved a big drop over icy ledges. I remembered from past seasons that there was a beach access of sorts further east. It actually is a hole that has eroded in the cliffs. It has overhanging roots connecting the trees above it. While it's an easy feat in the summer to slip through it to the shoreline, sledges and ice make it a bit more of a





## WHAT'S MISSING?

Your article!

Your pictures!

Your trip recommendations!

Email YOUR contributions to the SOLAR Ray to:  
[rayeditor@solaroutdoors.org](mailto:rayeditor@solaroutdoors.org)

# SOLAR 2008 CALENDAR

JUNE ACTIVITIES					
6/3	TUE	MONTHLY MEETING**	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	President@SolarOutdoors.org
6/3	TUE	PROGRAM: Outdoor Weather Safety: Richard Pollman, NWS**	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	Programs@SolarOutdoors.org
6/6-6/8	WKND	Summer Kick-Off and Nat'l Trails Day Campout **	Brighton State Recreation Area	TBD	TBD
6/13-6/15	WKND	Backpacking	Jordan Valley Pathway	Kevin Cotter	solar@wowway.com
6/14	SAT	North Country Trail Workday**	TBA	Allen Duncan	allenduncan@aggienetwork.com
6/25 - 7/1	MULTI	San Juan Mountains Hut-to-Hut Adventure**	Telluride, CO	Sara Cockrell	sarac369@charter.net
6/28-7/5	MULTI	Off-trail Backpacking**	Porcupine Mountain Wilderness SP	Michael Neiger (http://tinyurl.com/4jqzat)	mneiger@hotmail.com http://therucksack.tripod.com
JUNE CLASSES					
6/8	SUN	Introduction to Kayaking	Heavner's, Proud Lake State Park	Matt Dalton	mdalton@ameritech.net
6/14	SAT	Beginning Canoe Paddling	Heavner's, Proud Lake State Park	Margaret Martin	Mpluscat@hotmail.com
JULY ACTIVITIES					
7/3-7/6	MULTI	Car camping, hiking, biking, etc.	Caesar Creek State Park, Ohio	Leslie Cordova	lesliegene@aol.com
7/8	TUE	MONTHLY MEETING**	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	President@SolarOutdoors.org
7/8	TUE	PROGRAM: Gear Swap/Summer Bash**	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	Programs@SolarOutdoors.org
7/13-7/18	MULTI	Michigander Bike Ride	Muskegon to Traverse City, MI	Caroline Kudwa	Caroline.A.Kudwa@delphi.com
AUGUST ACTIVITIES					
8/5	TUE	MONTHLY MEETING**	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	President@SolarOutdoors.org
8/5	TUE	PROGRAM: Oakland Land Conservancy**	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	Programs@SolarOutdoors.org
8/15-8/31	Multi	Best of Yosemite Camping and Backpacking	Yosemite National Park	Kevin Cotter	solar@wowway.com
8/7-8/10	MULTI	North Country Trail Backpacking Trip	White Cloud, MI	Samantha Schafer	samantha2win@yahoo.com
8/15-8/31	MULTI	The Best of the JMT	John Muir Trail, California	Dave DeFrance	defranceomnexus@comcast.net
8/16	SAT	Full moon canoe paddle **	Heavner's, Proud Lake State Park	Margaret Martin	Mpluscat@hotmail.com
8/28-9/2	MULTI	Off-trail Backpacking**	McCormick Wilderness Tract	Michael Neiger	mneiger@hotmail.com http://therucksack.tripod.com
UPCOMING ACTIVITIES					
9/13	SAT	Full moon canoe paddle **	Heavner's, Proud Lake State Park	Margaret Martin	Mpluscat@hotmail.com
10/3-10/6	MULTI	Off-trail Backpacking & Caving**	Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore	Michael Neiger	mneiger@hotmail.com http://therucksack.tripod.com
10/5-10/11	MULTI	Fall colors in the Adirondacks	Lake Placid, NY	Don Wold	DWold12972@aol.com
10/12	SUN	Full moon canoe paddle **	Heavner's, Proud Lake State Park	Margaret Martin	Mpluscat@hotmail.com
10/17-10/19	WKND	Backpacking	Jordan Valley Pathway	Kevin Cotter	solar@wowway.com
11/7-11/10	MULTI	Off-trail Backpacking**	Hiawatha National Forest	Michael Neiger	mneiger@hotmail.com http://therucksack.tripod.com
12/5-12/8	MULTI	Off-trail Backpacking & Sledging**	Pigeon River Country State Forest	Michael Neiger	mneiger@hotmail.com http://therucksack.tripod.com
4/5-4/12	MULTI	Return to St. John	Maho Bay Camps, St. John, USVI	Jim Gessner	gessnerj@comcast.net

All classes and activities are limited to SOLAR members except for non-SOLAR events marked with \*\*. If you would like to help plan and/or lead a SOLAR activity, please contact Kevin Cotter at (248) 544-9637 or activities@solaroutdoors.org. If you would like to help plan and/or teach a SOLAR class, please contact Sarah Kirkish at education@solaroutdoors.org.

WHAT IS SOLAR?

SOLAR is a non-profit club with 400-plus members dedicated to the intelligent enjoyment of nature and outdoor pursuits.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is only \$40 a year per person (\$55 per family) and includes discounts to a number of retail outfitters, access to club-owned equipment, a monthly newsletter, and a chance to meet hundreds of other like-minded adventurers drawn together by a common love of pristine lakes, breathtaking vistas, virgin forests, scenic shorelines, and the experiences to be found there.

MEETINGS

Our monthly meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month in Southfield at the Colony Hall, 21780 Evergreen (between 8 & 9 Mile Roads) at 7:30 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend.

SOLAR RAY NEWSLETTER

The SOLAR RAY is a monthly publication of SOLAR and is available online at [www.solaroutdoors.org](http://www.solaroutdoors.org). To receive a copy in the mail, please contact Mary Price at [membership@solaroutdoors.org](mailto:membership@solaroutdoors.org).

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions for the SOLAR Ray are due on the Friday two weeks prior to the monthly Steering Committee Meeting (June 13 for the July issue). Electronic documents only, Word is preferred and please attach your images. If you have any questions, please contact **Pete Lamb** at [rayeditor@solaroutdoors.org](mailto:rayeditor@solaroutdoors.org).

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STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Steering Committee meets on the last Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm. These meetings are usually open to the general membership. Anyone who is interested in learning what topics are discussed, the decisions being made or contemplating running for a position on the Steering Committee, is welcome to attend. If you are interested in attending the Steering Committee Meeting, please contact Lou Szakal at [president@solaroutdoors.org](mailto:president@solaroutdoors.org).

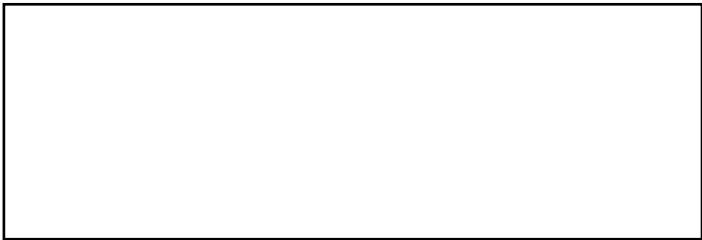
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