

# Woldumar Nature Center

*a wondrous experience for all ages and all seasons*



## *Field Trips*

*By Alex Rossman*

Though the last Oldsmobile has rolled off the line and onto the road, automotive pioneer Ransom Eli Olds and his family have left an indelible legacy on Michigan that goes well beyond the automobile. One such place is Woldumar Nature Center in Lansing, which was founded in 1966 when R.E. Olds' daughter Gladys Olds Anderson donated the family farm to establish an environmental education center. Even today, his grandchildren continue to contribute to the nature center both physically and financially, sitting on Woldumar's Board of Directors and donating to numerous expansion projects.

Nestled along the Grand River with more than a mile of frontage, Woldumar Nature Center represents one of the most diverse ecosystems in the region. Surrounded by otherwise unfettered progress, Woldumar continues to provide a natural sanctuary for wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts

alike. It encompasses more than five miles of trails on 188 acres of woodland, prairie and pine forest, and attracts more than 40,000 visitors from across Michigan.

Through all seasons, the trails provide an opportunity to escape the trappings of modern life and experience everything nature has to offer. With well-groomed trails ranging from a half-mile to two miles, you just need to size up your desire, pick a path and go.

On sunny days, light dances across the river's roll, and in the marshes and lagoons, bumpy logs are dotted with crowds of turtles soaking up

the rays. Ducks swim in circles and streak in with wingspread splash-downs—both airplanes and paddleboats in their own private pools. Black-green bullfrogs mimic kids, doing “kerplunk” cannonballs into the pebbly creek bed as visitors creak across footbridges overhead.

The prairie is also abuzz as brilliant-hued dragonflies, butterflies and bumblebees float and hover amidst the milkweed and goldenrod. Grasshoppers jump in alternating arcs, apt to avoid the snapping beaks of birds as they dart through the brush. Be cautious not to catch basking garters under foot.

From the waist-high stalks of the prairie, the trail winds into the cool and quiet stands of pine. Paths converge upon a hiker's aisle through the pine pillars, rounding back to the prairie or extending towards the river. Here is the best spot to spy deer. The naive fawns will stop to stare before the nearby doe gives the warning stamp of her hoof, demanding attention from both sides of the path. The pines also play host to one of the most joyous occurrences of the spring when the does drop their fawns.

Other trails weave through forests and meadows, with wildflowers blooming beneath towering beech, oak and maple. Remnants of the property's original farm can be found, as wild vines cling to old fences and grasses and wildflowers grow in fields that once yielded bountiful crops. Sun-ripened apples, as golden and crisp as the autumn air, can be hand-plucked from the orchard trees, and in the winter, provide a much-needed food source for deer and other animals.



Though the grounds alone provide an environment for enlightenment, Woldumar also offers numerous outreach and environmental education programs for all ages, from Camp Discovery—which hosts nearly 600 kids each summer—to the Young at Heart seniors series. In addition, visitors are able to participate in ongoing programs such as special field trips, a ropes course and workshops on outdoor skills, plant identification and a host of others.

Woldumar also offers several annual events that provide fun for the whole family.

In September, the American Heritage Festival hosts pioneers, French voyageurs and Native Americans, with historic demonstrations and entertainment. The festival is given added authenticity with a visit to the Moon Log Cabin, an original 1860's log cabin relocated to Woldumar in the early 1980's.

Come Halloween, Woldumar's grounds come alive with ghosts and ghouls thanks to the talented techniques of the Sunsets with Shakespeare theater troupe, which also performs more universal theater fare throughout the year.

When Jack Frost ushers in Michigan's winter chill, the "Chili" Sleigh Ride warms cold bones with a chili dinner and a horse-drawn sleigh ride through Woldumar. The trails can also be enjoyed on foot, as Woldumar lines its trails with luminaries for candlelight cross-country skiing. Brisk breathing and the swish of skis as they flatten rabbit tracks are the only sound to disrupt the snowy scenery, making for a perfect way to enjoy the frosty evening.

In May, Woldumar returns to its pioneer theme with its Pioneer Pancake Breakfast, its longest standing event. The breakfast includes all-you-can-eat pancakes complete with homemade maple syrup, pontoon rides on the river, demonstrations at the Moon Log Cabin and live music. This year, the event is expanding to include an art show of works inspired by Woldumar.

For those with less of a keen eye and soft step, Woldumar's Visitors Center includes live creature displays to ensure everyone spies some wildlife. The animal residents awaiting your visit include a squirrel, native fish, frogs and turtles. The recently renovated R.E. Olds Anderson Rotary Barn, one of the property's original structures, will continue to be used for educational programs, and will also host exhibits, seminars and performances.

The Visitors Center is open Monday-Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Woldumar's trails are open dawn to dusk year-round. Directions and a map are available at [www.woldumar.org](http://www.woldumar.org). You can also contact them by phone at 517-322-0030. 📍

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