

Chautauqua Watershed Notes  
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy  
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Oh! The Places to Go and the Things to See  
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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



*Hikers pause to appreciate the beauty of a waterfall on a recent Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy hike along Chautauqua Gorge in Westfield. (Photo by Susan M. Songster-Weaver.)*

For teachers, like myself, summer is a time to rest and recharge. But when the sun starts getting up later and the early mornings break with a chill, we know it's over and it's time to go back to work. Bathing suits are packed away and alarm clocks are set, fortunately none of that is happening at my house this year. I retired. Not going to work will take some getting used to, but I think I'm up to the challenge and willing to give it a whirl.

September and October are beautiful months that I've never fully appreciated. They can be cool, but the warm days are all the sweeter because summer is teasing you with one last kiss before she leaves for good. Retirement will give me time to enjoy the burnt colors of autumn with a quiet kayaking journey up the Chadakoin or cross-country skiing in the restful stillness of winter at Long Point or hiking through the leafless woods to witness the long-awaited reawakening in early spring. Sounds good doesn't it? Yep, and I'm starting out by hiking in the Chautauqua Gorge.

The Chautauqua Gorge, located between Sherman and Mayville, extends into Westfield and ends at Lake Erie in Barcelona. It is a ravine cut by Chautauqua Creek after the last glaciers receded some 15,000 years ago. Mother Nature created a masterpiece here with vine-covered rock walls, tumbling waterfalls and a clear stream meandering along a bed of shale for all to enjoy.

My first experience in the gorge was this summer when the Patterson Library and the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy co-sponsored a hike on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Jay Stratton, of

Westfield, led about 30 hardy souls on a two-hour adventure. Unfortunately, a gully-gusher had traveled through the area during the night and the stream was muddy and swollen. It didn't take any of us long to get our feet wet! The high water made the trek a bit of a challenge and I was glad I had my Nordic walking poles.

Jay provided us with many interesting facts and tidbits about the gorge, its history and the present day situation. Becky Nystrom, from the CWC, was there too and she is a joy to hike with. She pointed out various types of plants and cheerfully answered my never-ending barrage of questions. Everyone had a great time, slipping and sliding along, sharing laughs and stories as we helped each other along. It was an absolutely wonderful experience and I was smitten.

After getting more information and checking maps, I returned to the gorge area a few weeks later. This time, I accessed it from the Chautauqua Gorge State Forrest on Hannum Road. I drove to the parking lot at the end of the dirt road and followed the trail to the left. It was a steep but easy descent into the creek bed. What a magnificent place! The stream was much lower and the rock hopping a lot easier. I could have hiked for hours but other commitments were calling and I had to leave, still hungry for more.

My next expedition into the gorge will probably start on Summervale Road. I'll pick up the Fred J. Cusimano Westside Overland Trail and hike the 1.5 miles to its end in the state forest at Hannum Road. Maybe, I'll pack a lunch and spend some time in the creek contemplating my next great adventure. Ahhh, retirement – oh, the places I'll go and the things I'll see!

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake's shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake's most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!