

**APPENDIX L**  
**Portage Lakes State Park**

# Portage Lakes

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State Park

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The many waters of Portage Lakes State Park offer visitors a variety of outdoor recreational experiences. Boating, swimming and fishing are popular. The wetlands of the park attract waterfowl and shorebirds providing visitors enjoyment whether hunting or observing wildlife.

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## Nature of the Area

Although early Ohio offered the Indians and settlers vast water resources through Lake Erie and its major river systems, there were very few natural lakes or ponds in the state. Those that existed, including several of the Portage Lakes, were the direct result of glacial activity. These bodies of water were formed by huge chunks of ice which broke off the retreating glacier and melted in depressions forming kettle lakes. Many of the natural lakes in Ohio have aged into bogs or marshes.

Unique plants associated with these boggy areas can be found in the park. Tamarack trees, more common in northern boreal forests, are scattered through the park with patches of skunk cabbage and cranberry also present. Nice stands of beech-maple forest provide refuge for skunk, raccoon, white-tailed deer and many other animals. The wetlands of the park attract thousands of geese and waterfowl during spring and fall migration periods. Mallards, wood ducks and Canada geese nest in the wetlands each year. In addition, woodcock, heron, hawks, owls, red fox, beaver and muskrat are often sighted.

## History of the Area

Portage Lakes is named after the old Indian portage path which connected the Cuyahoga River flowing north to Lake Erie and the Tuscarawas River which through the Muskingum, flows south to the Ohio River. This proved advantageous for the Indians and early settlers as navigation from Lake Erie to the Ohio was possible with only one eight-mile portage overland. Portage Lakes State Park lies at one of the highest points of the state and on a major watershed divide in Ohio. Some water from the lakes reaches Lake Erie and some flows to the Ohio River.

The area became an important trading post for settlers and Indians. It was a recognized landmark during the War of 1812, serving as a rendezvous point of American troops. The old Indian portage path was part of the ancient boundary between the Six Nations and the Western Indians.

The city of Akron was laid out in 1825 and was first settled by Irish laborers and others working on the Ohio Canal. Once the canal was completed, the town flourished. Several important industries brought prosperity to the area including stoneware potteries, sewer pipe manufacturing, the match industry and, most recently,

the tire and rubber industry. At one time, the Blue Diamond Match Company in Akron used three million board-feet of white pine lumber per year for the manufacture of its matches.

Several of the Portage Lakes were built as feeder reservoirs for the canals to maintain the required depth of four feet. The lakes were used for this purpose until the canals were abandoned in 1913. The lakes were then used to meet the water needs of the local industries. Some portions of the remnant canals in the Akron area can still be boated.

The Ohio Department of Public Works maintained the canal lands for recreational purposes until 1949 when the Portage Lakes were transferred to the newly formed Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation.

### **Camping**

There are 74 campsites offering both sunny and shaded locations. Pit latrines and a dump station are provided. Pet camping is permitted on designated sites.

### **Boating**

Boats with up to 400 horsepower are permitted on the Portage Lakes. Eight launch ramps provide access to the lakes. Private marinas in the area offer boat rentals and fuel. Electric motors only are permitted on Nimisila Reservoir where sailing and canoeing opportunities are excellent.

### **Fishing and Hunting**

Anglers will find good catches of largemouth bass, walleye, muskellunge, pickerel, pan fish, channel catfish, bullhead and carp. A platform at North Reservoir provides fishing access for persons with disabilities. Hunting for waterfowl only is permitted in designated areas. A valid Ohio hunting and/or fishing license is required.

### **Swimming**

An excellent swimming beach at Turkeyfoot Lake provides recreation for swimmers and sunbathers. Parking, drinking water, change booths and latrines are provided.

### **Trails**

Five miles of hiking trails lead visitors to the woodlands and marshes of the park.

### **Picnicking**

Five picnic areas are scenically located around the park. Two shelterhouses are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

### **Area Attractions**

The Astronomy Club of Akron leases land within the park to operate a small observatory. Special programs are presented seasonally.

Nearby Akron offers various sights. The Summit County Historical Society maintains the Perkins Mansion and the home of John Brown. Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens, a Tudor showplace, is popular for tours of the 65-room manor house and gardens as well as for special events. The Pro Football Hall of Fame is located off Interstate-77 in Canton. The Goodyear World of Rubber, a museum depicting the rubber industry, offers guided tours throughout the year.

Quail Hollow State Park and Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area are located in the vicinity. Quail Hollow State Park in Hartville offers a variety of programs. The National Recreation Area includes 32,000 acres where hiking, picnicking, canoeing and bicycling are popular activities. Two visitor centers are open daily.

Several state nature preserves in the area offer glimpses of unique bog vegetation. Jackson Bog is open during daylight hours, while Triangle Lake and Kent Bog can be accessed by permit only.

For more information of local attractions, call the Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism at 1-800-BUCKEYE.

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**For additional information or questions regarding Ohio State Parks, send mail to:**  
**[parkinfo@dnr.state.oh.us](mailto:parkinfo@dnr.state.oh.us)**

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