

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

October 8, 2006

Introduce the family to nature at Lawrence's Den Rock Park

By *Larry Clafflin Jr.*

Pack up the car, grab a bottle of water and drive over to Den Rock Park in Lawrence for a relaxing walk in the woods or a longer hike. Den Rock's small size and varied trail system make it a good spot for people of all interests, especially families with free time on a sunny day.

The 120-acre park is circled by a 2.5-mile, blue-blazed trail that's mostly wide and smooth, perfect for a stress-free introduction to nature. This route, the King Fisher Trail, is named for a bird species native to the park. Red Tail Hawk, Great Blue Heron and Nut Hatch trails, all marked with colored, working birdhouses, round out the main system.

"The park has hiking trails for all levels of ability and interests - real easy, short routes for people who are interested in more relaxed walks with younger kids, and more strenuous, longer hikes for groups who want something more ambitious," said Maggie Super Church, Groundwork Lawrence's executive director.

Off these byways are smaller, single track trails. Here, it's easy to pick and choose where to walk, with routes intersecting often. The ground is free of debris and the park is a pleasant spot; it's obvious that Groundwork Lawrence, along with the Friends of Den Rock Park and the Lawrence Trails Committee, care for the property.

From the park's entrance on Stirling Street, walk up a wide trail covered with wood chips, then branch off to the left or right. This is King Fisher Trail, which carries you along a stretch of the Shawsheen River, past a wooden viewing stand, recently built by Groundwork Lawrence volunteers, that overlooks a beaver pond. It continues around Den Rock, an ancient outcropping of granite, which, according to Church, is one of the region's best beginner climbing spots.

"For anyone interested in doing a little climbing or bouldering, it's a great place to start," she said.

Den Rock was originally slated to be a cemetery, but was changed to a city park in 1896. With the constant din of traffic from nearby Interstate 495, the property is not necessarily tranquil, but it works as a place to visit if you want to get a taste of nature.

If You Go

What: Den Rock Park

Where: Stirling Street (Route 114), Lawrence, across from North Andover Plaza

How: Trail maps are usually located at the park's trailhead, or go to www.groundworklawrence.org