

ACRES OF NAT

BY BRI KILROY • PHOTO BY RICHELLE KIMBLE

LUNCH BREAK

Whether you have a 30-minute pause or you need instant revitalization, these short trails rest within city limits and are prime for a brief, weekday visit with nature that doesn't compromise a lot of your time (after all, we have jobs).

BELKNAP PARK TRAIL (ALONG DIVISION AVENUE NORTH)

Its small length (less than half a mile) manages to surround you with trees lining a narrow, dirt path that leads to the baseball diamonds at Belknap Park.

GRAND RIVER EDGES TRAIL (W FULTON STREET TO THE WHITE PINE TRAIL)

You never leave the Grand River's side as you walk along this urban gem. The paved path welcomes bicyclists, runners, walkers and skaters and passes through downtown and Riverside Park.

HUFF PARK (2399 BALL AVENUE NE)

A paved path and a boardwalk that journeys through the marshland link for a loop that is just over a mile and surrounds you with cattails, songbirds, and the soft babble of the current below.

PROVIN TRAILS (2900 4 MILE ROAD)

Come closer to a mountain hiking experience with two miles of rolling dirt trails and the presence of a couple sand dunes. These trails allow you to temporarily escape the reminders of society among towering pine trees and abandoned teepee forts constructed by previous explorers.

AMAN PARK (0-1895 LAKE MICHIGAN DRIVE)

Another woody hike with moderate to challenging terrain (a couple steep hills and some narrow pathways) that crosses idyllic bridges over the river and weaves through the woods lining Lake Michigan Drive.

DAY HIKE

Explore the vast wilderness, cover miles in the double-digits, and take comfort in knowing you get to retire to your own bed at night. Prepare your pack for a daylong expedition at one of these Michigan favorites.

P.J. HOFFMASTER STATE PARK (MUSKEGON)

Miles of hiking possibilities rummage through woods and along the shoreline, lending breathtaking views of Lake Michigan at multiple destinations. Ascend the Dune Climb Stairway for an all-encompassing view of the lake and the dunes.

MANISTEE RIVER TRAIL (MANISTEE NATIONAL FOREST)

The trail, running along the east side of the Manistee River, lies across from a section of the North Country Trail (west side of the river). Combining the two creates a 23-mile loop recommended for overnight camping, but the Manistee River Trail alone offers an excellent 11-mile trek through uninhibited forest.

NORDHOUSE DUNES WILDERNESS (MANISTEE NATIONAL FOREST)

This adventure is southwest of the Manistee River Trail and offers challenging terrain among dunes and hills that meet an occasional service road or rail track crossing. Those looking for a long hike along the Lake Michigan shoreline find it here.

KENT TRAILS/MILLENNIUM PARK (GRAND RAPIDS)

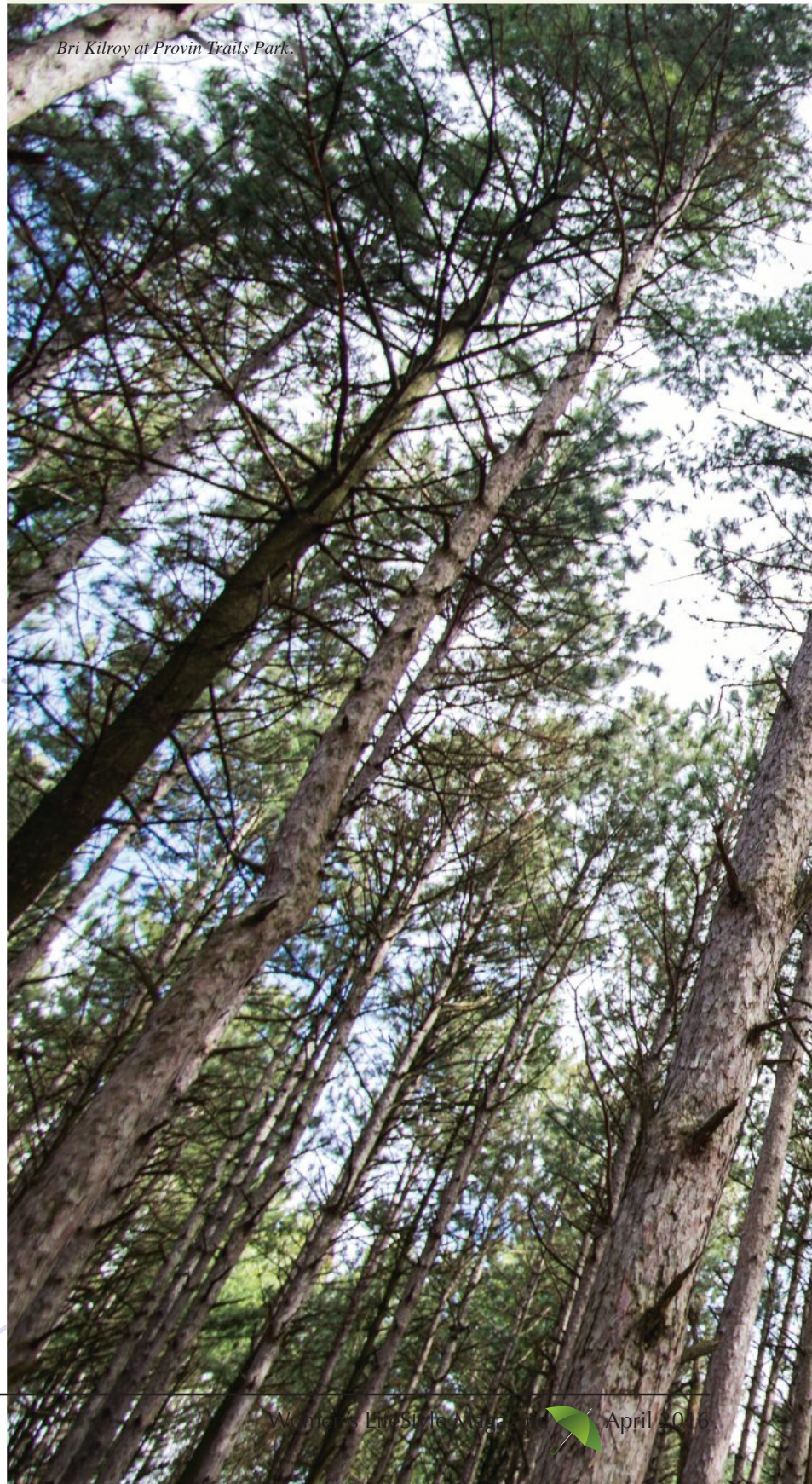
The paved trails connecting Grand Rapids to Byron Center make them a bike/hike favorite. Less than one-half mile from the trailhead off Butterworth Street, the trail splits to a path along the Grand River or through grassy meadows speckled with ponds. Both paths take you to Millennium Park, about three miles from the trailhead.

THE LEDGES TRAIL (GRAND LEDGE)

The Ledges Trail is an earthly treasure of rock formations in the luscious green woods along the Grand River. The trail's features welcome hikers, rock climbers, dogs, and those looking for a quiet salvation to gather their thoughts.

As the earth absorbs the final trace of snow, look to the hundreds of hiking trails weaving throughout Michigan for a breakaway that re-introduces spring and outdoor experiences. Take anywhere from a half-hour to a half-week and discover the cabin fever remedies residing in your neighborhood and your home state. Explore the following hiking suggestions and become inspired by nature.

Bri Kilroy at Provin Trails Park.



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OVERNIGHT HIKE

When you need to escape the modern world for two to three days, these trails provide refuge with rustic campgrounds to pitch a tent and miles of trails waiting to meet your hiking boots.

THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL (4,600 MILES, NORTH DAKOTA TO NEW YORK)

A large part of the NCT runs along the Upper Peninsula and down the length of Michigan providing entry points for hikers to complete a section like the 7.8-mile segment from Lowell to Fallasburg Park or the 8.5-mile segment along the Manistee River. More info at NorthCountyTrail.org.

JACK PINE HIKE-IN ONLY CAMPGROUND (LUDINGTON STATE PARK)

Backpacking begins as soon as you leave your car at the Pines campground as you hike one-half mile to one of the remote campsites. True seclusion is found during the off-season when you're likely to be the only (if not one of the few) campers out there. Spend the day hiking the rolling dunes and strolling along the Great Lake's shoreline.

SLEEPING BEAR DUNES (EMPIRE)

It's hard to slow down when the curiosity of "What's over that dune?" consumes you while exploring these sand-covered mountains. Modern to rustic campsites are available so you can spend days among the 35-mile stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline. More info at SleepingBearDunes.com.

