Road Tripping - May 2022

This month we are going to visit several places in Carbon County. The first one is a county park that many people do not know exists. It is Mauch Chunk Lake Park. The park is located in the Jim Thorpe and Summit Hill boroughs. It is approximately 7 miles from the PA Turnpike Mahoning Valley interchange off Route 209 or approximately 15 miles off Route 80 by going south on Rout 93 then Route 209. It began as a flood control project that was completed in 1972, just 1 month before Tropical Storm Agnes. They estimate that the completion of the dam prevented over $2 million in damages to the local community. By 1974, the county decided the area could provide recreation and continues as such to this day. The park has facilities for camping, swimming, picnicking, hiking, biking, fishing, and boating. A daily admission to the beach and picnic areas is charged from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. For Carbon County residents the cost is $3.00 for adults and $2.00 for children. Non-county residents pay $10.00 for adults and $7.00 for children. No charge for children under 3, those with disabilities, and individuals 65 and older. The other areas of the lake are open year round with no admission charges.

The lake is 345 acres and provides year round fishing for large-mouth bass, small-mouth bass, walleye, crappie, bluegill, perch, chain pickerel, and catfish. Fishing and boating are available with the proper PA licenses. The park also has an Environment Center with nature trails, bird feeding stations, butterfly gardens, a waterfowl observatory and a boardwalk trail where you can view birds of prey that include Red-Tailed Hawks, Great-Horned Owls, the American Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle.

A map and more information about the park can be found at their website https://www.carboncounty.com/index.php/about-the-park. Hope you can go and have a great day at this Carbon County treasure.

The next place in Carbon County is the Bear Mountain Butterfly Sanctuary. This is located on Route 903. The address for GPS use is 18 Church Road, Jim Thorpe. It is just north of Jim Thorpe. The sanctuary is an education center with a “Flutterarium”, a live butterfly flight room, an exotic frog room, and great kid spaces (for those visits with grandchildren). But even the adults will enjoy the “Flutterarium”.

They will open on May 28,29, and 30th with a Welcome the Butterflies Back celebration. There will be indoor exhibits from 11:00 - 5:00 all three days. No reservations needed. All of the exhibits will be open those 3 days along with door prize fun. Saturday and Sunday of that weekend food will be available in the picnic area and Carbon County Environmental Education Center will be in the pavilion with exhibits and live animals 11:30 -3:00. Admission to this event is $11.00 for adults and $10.00 for kids 3-12. They also will have a plant sale and offer painted lady caterpillar hatching kits.

The sanctuary will open for the summer for regular walk-ins on Saturday June 11. Cost is $11.00 for adults and $10.00 for kids ages 3-12 and seniors 62+. They will be open for the Summer, Thursday through Monday 11-5 and Tuesday and Wednesday 2-6. Go out and see the many butterflies. They are fascinating to fly all around you. All exhibits are inside, so a great place to visit on a rainy day.

Finally, our roadtrip takes us to Jim Thorpe. If you have never been, it is well worth the trip. As you travel down Route 903, be sure to stop at the Jim Thorpe Memorial on the right side of the road. It is a few miles before getting to the borough of Jim Thorpe. Jim Thorpe was buried here in 1953, when the towns of March Chuck and East March Chunk merged, changing their names to honor his memory. You will be amazed by how many sports this athlete actually participated in and excelled. There is a wealth of information about this athlete, who actually had no connections to this area, but did to Pennsylvania. Yet the towns carefully saved nickels and purchased this mausoleum for Thorp’e remains.

The borough of Jim Thorpe is nestled in the Lehigh Gorge. It has a unique setting and the historic architecture is amazing. It is often referred to as Little Switzerland. Mauch Chunk, the original name, was started because of the anthracite cool, mined nearby. By Victorian times, 19 of America’s 26 millionaires had a residence in Mauch Chunk. The Switchback

Gravity Railroad trail that originally was used to get the coal off of the mountain is now popular as a hiking and biking trail. Some of the sites to see are the Asa Packer Mansion, Mauch Chuck Railroad Station (now used as the visitor's center), the Old Jail, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, and the Harry Packer Mansion. There are many shops, restaurants, pubs, wine-tasting, live entertainment, as well as the outdoor adventures.

The Leigh Gorge Scenic Railway is a 70- minute, narrated round-trip that follows the majestic Lehigh River over bridges, through Glen Onoko, and into the Lehigh Gorge State Park. High-rising cliffs, mountain scenery, and wildlife surround the train as you travel along. You even get to see a waterfall! The train runs 3 times a day (11:00, 1:00, and 3:00) from April through September. The cost is $20 for open air car, $17 for standard coach, $20 for crown-class seating, $35 for first-class dome car, and if you want to have an entire private caboose for up to 6 passengers, the cost is $180. Cost for children ages 3-12 is about half the adult price.

A trolley tour is also available in Jim Thorpe. This is a 70 minute town tour available daily starting the first of May. Cost is $25.00 for the entire day. You can get on and off as you want. It will give you a history of the early settlers and famous citizens and takes you to the "must see" points of interest such as Jim Thorpe Monument, Lehigh Gorge State Park, Downtown Historic District (visit the Mauch Church Museum by the opera house), Historic Opera House, Old Jail museum, Stabin Museum and Gallery/Cafe Arielle, and Mauch Chunk Lake.

I hope the this month's daytipper will encourage you to get out and enjoy the spring time in Carbon County.