



# BEST TENT Camping

2ND Edition

# OHIO

YOUR CAR-CAMPING GUIDE TO SCENIC BEAUTY, THE SOUNDS  
OF NATURE, AND AN ESCAPE FROM CIVILIZATION



Robert Loewendick



**MENASHA RIDGE PRESS**

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

A detailed map of the Midwest United States, including parts of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. The map is overlaid with a network of roads and highways, many of which are labeled with their respective numbers. Fifty numbered blue diamond markers are placed across the region, representing locations for a scavenger hunt. The markers are numbered 1 through 50. Major cities and towns labeled on the map include Ann Arbor, Detroit, Chatham-Kent, Dearborn, Toledo, Sandusky, Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Youngstown, Lima, Springfield, Westerville, Columbus, Zanesville, Dayton, Hamilton, Cincinnati, Florence, Athens, Parkersburg, West Virginia, Huntington, and Frankfort. The map also shows the Great Lakes, with Lake Erie and Lake Michigan visible. A north arrow is located in the bottom right corner.

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# INTRODUCTION

## A WORD ABOUT OHIO TENT CAMPING

*Ohio's diversity of recreational opportunities* is as varied as the state's geography. From fishing Lake Erie to hiking the Hocking Hills Region, from paddling the Little Miami River north of Cincinnati to touring wineries of the northeast, Ohio is a legitimate travel destination. Exploring Ohio's treasures while tent camping puts visitors one on one with a landscape and culture that appreciate life's simple pleasures.

The Muskingum Water Conservancy District manages several lakes in the east-central region that attract boaters and anglers. Salt Fork State Park, Ohio's largest, is a grand park for sure. Just about every outdoors activity you can think of happens there. The Wayne National Forest covers nearly half of the southeastern region. From auto tours that follow the Little Muskingum River, to paddling tranquil lakes that lie in the valleys of the rugged hills, this corner of Ohio presents an inviting tent-camping experience. Primitive camping enthusiasts will appreciate American Electric Power's Recreation Lands, which are reclaimed coal mining lands that host more than 350 ponds and four primitive campgrounds.

The hills meet the flatlands in the southwestern corner of the state. Slip into Shawnee State Forest, nicknamed The Little Smokies for good reason. Great Seal and Scioto Trail State Parks are in the heart of American Indian lands, and several parks present American Indian culture with burial mounds and museums.

Some of the most scenic camping in the state is on the Lake Erie Islands. South Bass Island puts campers on sites with vistas overlooking the great lake. Reachable by ferry, the islands are a summer vacation destination. If the island campgrounds are full, or mainland camping is your preference, East Harbor State Park campground provides an enjoyable tent-camping adventure.

For an adventurous blend of river, rugged hills, and primitive camping, the Mohican-Loudonville area between Cleveland and Columbus is the place. Clear Fork Gorge is a photographer's dream. Large hemlocks, rock outcrops, and waterfalls are the backdrop to this camping region.

The camping season in Ohio stretches from April to November at most campgrounds. Most Ohio State Parks are open year-round, but most shower houses and water supplies are turned off during winter; this depends on the individual park, so check the descriptions. If you're geared up correctly, spending a night in Ohio's winter landscape is refreshing. Winters can last a few months, so as soon as there is a hint of spring in the air, campers come out of their dens ready for some outdoor recreation. In spring, it's a good idea to make a reservation or have a plan B if you are using the first-come, first-serve method.

Summer camping vacations are a common practice in Ohio, so you will find a few popular campgrounds occupied in the middle of the week. Ohio summers feel like Florida during July and August because of the high humidity that blankets the state with temperatures in the 90s. Plan to pack a lot of ice to keep food safe and to create plenty of drinking water. Wooded

# NORTHWEST



Forests and lakes are rare treats of Ohio's flat Northwest landscape (see Kiser Lake State park, page 12).

# Kiser Lake State Park

Beauty ★★★ Privacy ★★ Spaciousness ★★ Quiet ★★★ Security ★★★ Cleanliness ★★★

*The glaciers shaped Kiser's diverse landscape of wetlands, forest, and lake.*

This quiet, smaller park (531 acres) offers big benefits to campers wanting to get away. Surrounded by wooded hills and diverse wetlands, Kiser State Park is a wildlife viewers' gold mine. This varied landscape was created by glaciers that left deposits of boulders, sand, and gravel. Much of the sand and many of the boulders were gathered by the glaciers as they headed south from Canada. The rocks found lying around the short hills and washes surrounding the lake today are those same rocks from the glacial period.

This area was also the home of Tecumseh, the great Shawnee warrior. Hiking the 11 miles of park trails reveals the natural amenities that supported the American Indians of the area. For anglers, five stone fishing piers are placed around the lake near various forms of game fish habitat. Kiser Lake is off limits to boats with engines, so feel free to paddle away without any wakes to contend with while trying to get that close-up water photo.

A diverse campground starts at the lake's southern shoreline and extends up into the woods. Arriving from the south, the campground entrance is on the right after passing a stately row of weeping willows. The lake is on the left, and along its shore are 14 sites sprinkled about the 50-yard distance from the road to the lake. In the main section of the campground you will find sites 30–51 in orderly rows in full sun. Slide through that group and find tent-only site 29 as the campground lane curves along the southern edge and heads toward a wood grove. Sites 23–28 are on the right as you approach the wood grove, and although they're a bit small and close to the park road, all are comfortable and have a woodland backing.

Hikers can explore Kiser Lake's surrounding forest on the Red Oak Trail.



## KEY INFORMATION

**LOCATION:** 4370 Kiser Lake Road  
St. Paris, Ohio 43072

**CONTACT:** 937-362-3565,  
[parks.ohiodnr.gov/kiserlake](http://parks.ohiodnr.gov/kiserlake)

**OPEN:** Year-round; limited facilities in winter

**SITES:** 56 nonelectric, 20 electric

**EACH SITE HAS:** Picnic table, fire ring

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Sites 39 and 40 are  
ADA-accessible.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Walk-in sites first come,  
first served; others may be reserved at  
866-644-6727 or [ohiostateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://ohiostateparks.reserveamerica.com)

**REGISTRATION:** Self-registration station at  
campground entrance

**AMENITIES:** Pit toilets, camp store, boat

rental, sports courts, playground, swimming  
beach, nature center

**PARKING:** At each site

**FEE:** \$22 nonelectric, \$26 electric;  
deduct \$3 in winter

**ELEVATION:** 1,108 feet

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### RESTRICTIONS

**PETS:** On leash only

**QUIET HOURS:** 10 p.m.–7 a.m.

**FIRES:** In fire ring, which must not be moved

**ALCOHOL:** Prohibited in public areas in every  
state park but may be consumed within the  
confines of a rented cabin, cabin site, lodge  
room, or campsite

**VEHICLES:** 2/site

**OTHER:** Gathering firewood prohibited;  
maximum 6 people/site

Sites 12–22 line both sides of the 200-foot paved lane leading through the center of the wood grove. Sites 21 and 22 are tent-only sites and are reservable, not walk-in sites. The Ohio State Parks system titles non-reservable sites as walk-in sites. The term *walk-in* may mislead campers to think that a walk-in site requires a short trek to reach the site. However, a walk-in site at Ohio State Parks means the site is available for anyone walking in to the campground in need of a site. At the cul-de-sac at the head of the wood grove are sites 15 and 16, which are great tent sites because they're enveloped in the trees and require a short walk (10 yards) to reach them. The Red Oak Trail passes by site 18 and connects with the Boardwalk trail to the west.

The Boardwalk trail guides visitors through the Kiser Lake Wetlands—a 51-acre state nature preserve. The Boardwalk is also accessible from a small parking area 0.2 mile south of the campground entrance. The wetlands include two prairie fens that are home to numerous rare plant species, animals, and insects. The giant swallowtail butterfly and the northern ravine salamander are two residents you may see while walking along the 0.6-mile, looping Boardwalk.

Across the road from the main campground are those waterfront sites. Directly across from the main campground entrance are sites 66–71 spread around a small, paved circle; sites 67–70 are tent-only. Site 71 is the closest to the water, but it is also heavily visited by Canada geese, which leave behind unpleasant droppings that you must avoid stepping on or pitching a tent over. Sites 72–75 are across a drainage ditch to the north and accessible from their own paved road. Each of these sites has a shade tree and a wide view of the lake. Just to the north are sites 76–79, also separated by the same drainage ditch. Site 79, the only one with shade in this group, sits on the water's edge. During midsummer, expect mats of lily pads parked along the shoreline, which can make it tough to fish from the campsite.



## Kiser Lake State Park



### GETTING THERE

From Piqua, at Exit 82 on I-75, travel east on US 36 for 12.3 miles to OH 235 and turn left. Follow OH 235 north 3 miles to Possum Hollow Road and turn right. Go 1.5 miles to Kiser Lake Road, turn left, and follow it 0.8 mile to the campground entrance on the right.

**GPS COORDINATES:** N40° 10.979' W83° 56.934'

# NORTHEAST



Be sure to visit the swimming beach at Tappan Lake (see page 49).

# Beaver Creek State Park

Beauty ★★★★★ Privacy ★★★ Spaciousness ★★★ Quiet ★★★ Security ★★★ Cleanliness ★★★

*Explore the home of the Little Beaver Creek State and National Wild and Scenic River.*

Coming from the north, it's soon apparent to visitors that they have arrived on the doorstep of the Appalachian Mountains. Beaver Creek State Park covers 2,722 land acres and only 4 miles of river, but the river is the main attraction. Little Beaver Creek has been designated a National Wild and Scenic River and rightly so. Slip a kayak into its clear waters and shoot over a few, short rapids for some whitewater fun, or simply lean back and admire the cliffs that contain the river. At the center of the park is a pioneer village that relied on the river to turn millstones during the early 1800s. An iron bridge crosses the river at the village, which is also where the park office is. South of the village, 0.87 mile on Echo Dell Road, is the park's Wildlife Education Center, which features live animals and 300 mounted specimens. The center is open May–October on the weekends, 1–5 p.m.

Beaver Creek's family campground offers the picture-perfect place to pitch a tent. As soon as you pull into the campground, your mind will instantly transition to relax mode. Site 42 is the first one on the left; it's only a dozen yards beyond the entrance, but its appearance and layout resemble a campsite in a western forest, with big pines spaced far enough apart to make it feel open and a plush carpet of pine needles underfoot. After passing site 42, a road to the left leads to the best sites of the campground—sites 43–55. All are reservable.

Beaver Creek's beauty has attracted tent campers for centuries.



# SOUTHEAST



The American Electric Power campgrounds are some of the best in the state (see page 56).



# Barkcamp State Park

Beauty ★★★ Privacy ★★ Spaciousness ★★★ Quiet ★★ Security ★★★★★ Cleanliness ★★★★★

*This friendly park is one of eastern Ohio's best and is worthy of multiple visits.*

The hills of Belmont County were frequented by settlers during the early 1800s, and many times their presence caused conflicts with the American Indians, who treasured their land, and rightly so. Today, the beauty of the region and the bounty of natural resources still exist, and it's evident why so many people wanted to claim this region as their own. After the settlers became regular inhabitants of the then heavily forested area, logging became a lucrative business and a necessity for the newcomers to set roots in the wild land. Barkcamp State Park gets its name from the de-barking facility that prepared logs for transport here a century ago. Inside the campground is a display of those pioneer days, complete with a variety of buildings and antique implements. The paved Pioneer Hiking Trail guides visitors through the collection of historical pieces. This trail is wheelchair-accessible, as are the showers and restrooms of the campground. Pausing next to the hand-hewn log cabin with a horse-drawn wagon parked next to it, it's easy to imagine the past. Interpretive signs placed around the pioneer displays reveal some interesting facts. The park has received several awards for its cleanliness and the staff's dedication to delivering exceptional service.

The focal point of the park is 117-acre Belmont Lake, which allows electric motors only. Of course, paddling is allowed and recommended. To find the boat ramp, turn right out of

Placid Belmont Lake is very canoe-friendly.



# SOUTHWEST



The gently sloped campsites at John Bryan State Park (see page 120) are perfect for tent campers.

# Germantown Metropark

Beauty ★★★ Privacy ★★★★★ Spaciousness ★★★★★ Quiet ★★★★★ Security ★★★ Cleanliness ★★★

*Spend a night immersed in this park's beautiful landscape.*

Only 20 minutes from Dayton, this chunk of wilderness contains deep, scenic ravines and Twin Creek, a tributary of the Great Miami River. A dam on Twin Creek controls any flooding issues and offers a great view of the park. Fossil-hunting is permitted below the dam, and you can launch your canoe there too—just follow the signage. The 2,665-acre Germantown Metropark is a natural icon for many children of the region who visit frequently on field trips. You can explore the park on foot via 16 miles of hiking trails, or drive the paved park road that courses through an old-growth forest featuring clean Twin Creek. The park road is on the west side of Conservancy Road, just north of the dam, and has several pull-over areas that lead to a fishing pond and a scenic overlook.

Spending a night immersed in the metropark's beautiful landscape is icing on the camper's adventure cake. There are two options for car camping, and both offer a rare method of doing so, as there are no individual sites; instead, there's only one open site with a 6-foot-wide steel fire ring in the center of the camping area. On the eastern side of the metropark is Old Mill Campsite, not far from the Germantown Dam. A small, paved parking area that can handle only four vehicles is next to Old Mill Road. Also in the parking area is a small firewood supply shed, with free firewood for campers' use. Across the road from the parking area is a signpost marking the crossing of the Twin Valley Trail (TVT). The TVT is a backpacking trail that connects Germantown Metropark with Twin Creek Metropark to the south.

At Germantown, you'll find easy access for paddling Twin Creek, which leads to the Great Miami River.





# CENTRAL



Some campsites at Delaware State Park (see page 145) are spacious enough for two tents.



## A. W. Marion State Park

Beauty ★★★ Privacy ★★★ Spaciousness ★★★ Quiet ★★★ Security ★★★ Cleanliness ★★★★★

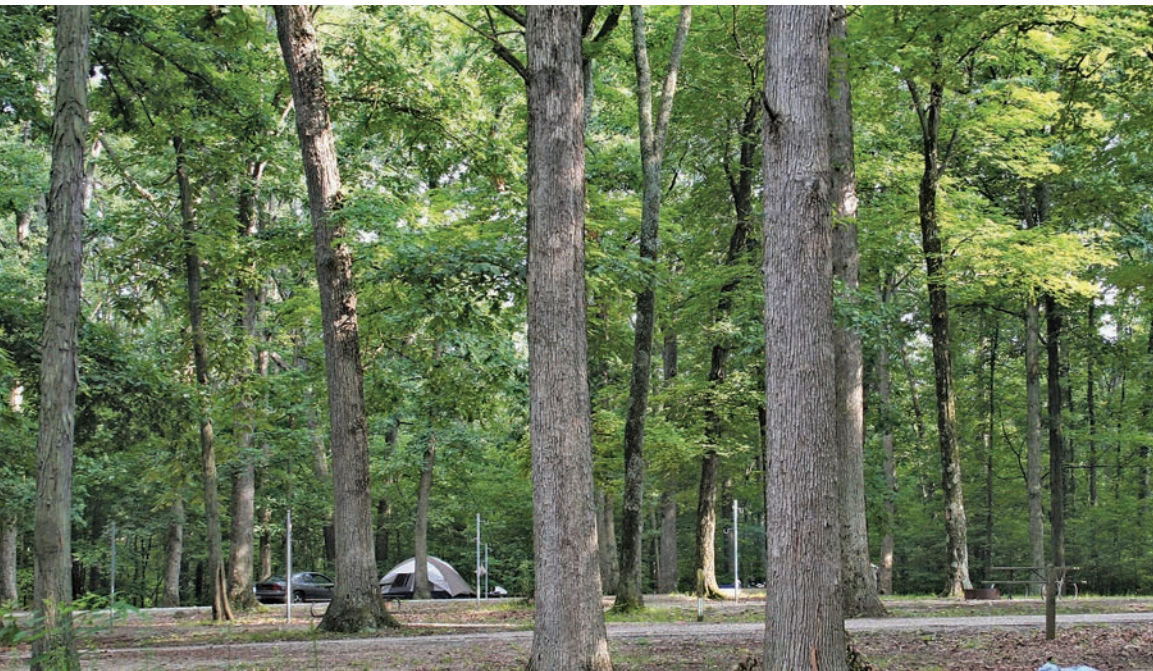
*Big fun awaits at small, tranquil Hargus Lake.*

An accurate example that great things come in small packages is A. W. Marion State Park and its pleasant little lake. The park covers 309 acres, and its main feature, Hargus Lake, takes up half of that space with 145 acres. The park's fertile soils continue to annually produce some of the most vibrantly colored wildflowers in the state. To see the botanical diversity of the park, cinch up your boot strings and set out on the 3.9-mile Hargus Lake Perimeter Trail that passes through the campground. This hiking trail explores the hills and hollows surrounding the lake, but it doesn't prove too stressful for the average hiker.

Hargus Lake is best explored by boat, and the lake allows electric motors only, so there are no wakes to worry about. Boats are available for rent at the small but well-maintained marina on the west shore, across the lake from the campground. There are three small islands and two peninsulas to explore. The lake was drained in the early 1980s and received fish habitat improvements and was restocked. One lap around serene Hargus Lake in a canoe or kayak will leave you wanting another.

Sprawled out on top of a ridge above Hargus Lake is the park's isolated campground. During summer, the lake is hidden from view by the trees, but in autumn, when the leaves

Campsites at A. W. Marion State Park are scattered throughout the mature forest.



# LAKE ERIE REGION



Adventurous campers can set up at the cliff's edge at South Bass Island State Park (see page 168).



# East Harbor State Park

Beauty ★★ Privacy ★★ Spaciousness ★★ Quiet ★★ Security ★★★★★ Cleanliness ★★

*A day spent walking among Lake Erie's amazing natural resources is one you will long remember.*

The shores of western Lake Erie continue to be a popular vacation destination. This is true for families and adventurous individuals alike. Seven million people visit the great lake each year, but there are still quiet places to take in the abundance of natural beauty. East Harbor State Park is one of those places. Situated on the east side of the Catawba peninsula, and on the western shore of East Harbor, the park is surrounded by vacation activities such as fishing, wildlife-watching, and sightseeing. Inside the park is the Ohio State Park System's largest campground. Even so, tent campers have their place where RVs don't tread (though they are within sight).

Campground sections B, C, and E cater to RVs of every size. A few tents are regularly sprinkled among them, but for serious tent campers, sections A and D (G is a group section) are quietly positioned in forested settings. Section A is the largest of the tent sections and surrounds a wide-open playing field and playground area. Sites A1–A89 line both sides of several paved roads that create a gridlike layout. Sites A90–A114 line the outer perimeter of section A, which means the rear of each site is shaded, and some of these sites have total

This path leads to excellent fishing at East Harbor State Park.



# Perfect Camping for You in **OHIO**

The **BUCKEYE STATE** provides a spectacular backdrop for some of the most scenic campgrounds in the country. But do you know which campgrounds offer the most privacy? Which are the best for first-time campers? Robert Loewendick has traversed the entire state—from Lake Erie with its fantastic fishing to the rich American Indian culture of southwestern Ohio—and compiled the most up-to-date research to steer you to the perfect spot.



## Inside You'll Find

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- 50 private, state park, and state and national forest campgrounds, organized into six distinct regions
- Selections based on location, topography, size, and overall appeal
- Detailed maps of each campground and key information such as fees, restrictions, dates of operation, and amenities
- Driving directions and GPS coordinates
- Ratings for beauty, privacy, spaciousness, quietness, security, and cleanliness

Whether you seek a tranquil campground near a fish-filled stream or a family campground with all the amenities, grab *Best Tent Camping: Ohio*. This guide is a keeper.

Travel/Camping/Ohio



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