

# *Aaron's Guide to Cleveland*

----- Published Since 2006 -----

Summer 2016 Edition

*Also Featuring One (and Two) Tank Trips*

## **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition**

**Dedicated to my wife and kids who make fun, fun to have.**

Cleveland has many beautiful and wonderful treasures. My family likes to “get away” for the day on free or low-cost outings. Our favorites are grouped below by location. You should check each destination’s website for the most current information. Directions are from the Beachwood/University Heights area.

### **Quick Six**

1. Bike ride from Peninsula to Boston Mills on the Towpath and return on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. Check out the museums at each stop.
2. Creek hike in the Chagrin River; including starts at Squaw Rock, Jackson beach, or the Polo Fields.
3. A tour of the Cleveland Museum of Art and Botanical Gardens. At the Museum of Art my favorite is the modern art and huge atrium. At Botanical Gardens we love the butterfly room and outdoor children’s garden. All of University Circle is worth exploring, summer or winter.
4. Holden Arboretum’s 120 foot tall emergent tower and canopy walk. If you join the Botanical Gardens, Holden Arboretum is included. A great value.
5. If you like towers, check out President Garfield’s tomb at Lake View Cemetery. Climb to the top and look toward the City and lake. It’s near Coventry.

6. Virginia Kendell Ledges at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The temperature drops when you hike down the rock gorges. The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is a gem, and appropriate to both start and end the top 6 list.

### **More I'd Like to Try**

1. The new bike paths around downtown Kent. There is also a canoe livery and model airplane airport nearby.
2. Southern parts of the Towpath including real canal boat rides south of Canton, Ohio.
3. Renting canoes and kayaks in the Flats along the Cuyahoga River.
4. Presque Isle beaches – a peninsula that juts into Lake Erie.
5. Jet Express from Lorain to Cedar Point.
6. Part of the Towpath near downtown including the Metropark’s water taxi across the Cuyahoga River.
7. Niles bike path, including the bike path over an old railway bridge.

### EAST (ALL EAST ON RT. 87)

The West Woods Nature Center has a geology museum with hands-on displays for children. This park is located off South Woodland Road/Kinsman Road (Rt. 87) is well marked and easy to find. The museum has clean bathrooms and a water fountain. The museum garage has a “green” roof made out of plants. Outside there are many trails, some of which are paved (and can support a normal stroller) down through wetlands. Longer trails go through the woods to Ansel’s Cave, used during the civil war, though you cannot enter the cave. My kids like to swing on the vines hanging along the trails – but swing with caution! You can pick up a map on site. <http://www.geaugaparkdistrict.org/parks/westwoods.shtml>

The American Society of Metals (ASM) is harder to spot (and may no longer be open to the public?). The official address is 9639 Kinsman Road, Russell Township. It is just beyond, and adjacent to, the West Woods Nature Center. There is a sign out front with a long driveway through soft green hills. You cannot see the building from Rt. 87. Once you find the sign, turn into the driveway and continue down until you see the building, which looks like something out of “Men in Black.” You can park in front of the building. Inside are multiple raw metals in their unprocessed form, along with beautiful gardens and fountains. The “inside” is not enclosed, so don’t go in the rain. The site is wonderful for pictures. (Note – check before coming to see if it is open to the public). <http://www.asminternational.org>

Further down Rt. 87 is Punderson State Park. Punderson has a golf course, lodge, hiking trails, and a beach, though the last time we visited the beach was a disappointment. You are better off at Mentor Headlands beach. <http://parks.ohiodnr.gov/punderson>

If you continue east on Rt. 87, you will hit historic Burton. The central Burton circle hosts a yearly Maple Syrup festival. Also adjacent to the main circle is Century Village, a historic village you can tour. <http://www.geaugahistorical.org/>.

Further east down Rt. 87 puts you into Middlefield/Mesopotamia and Amish county <http://www.visitamishcountry.com/>

### EAST (RT. 422)

***A family favorite*** Nelson’s Ledges State Park is located off Rt. 422, south on Rt. 282, southeast of Cleveland. The roads leading to the park are not well marked so follow closely on a map. The park is great for hiking through enormous rock gorges. My small children (not so small anymore) are able to handle the hikes, but parts of the more difficult trails require long legs to move from rock to rock. Temperatures change dramatically as you move up and down elevations between rocks. Follow signs for the “icebox” to experience the greatest temperature changes. You cannot let kids out of your sight because there are steep cliffs in this park. Make sure you bring a camera. The parking lot has an outhouse, a picnic pavilion, and grills. This is one of the area’s better unique natural attractions. <http://parks.ohiodnr.gov/nelsonkennedyledges>

Lake Farm Park. The park is located in Chardon. There is an entrance fee. The park teaches about farming and has live animals and seasonal events, such as hayrides. My kids love it. <http://www.lakemetroparks.com/select-park/farmpark.shtml>

***Family favorite – highly recommended*** Holden Arboretum: The Arboretum has hundreds of acres to explore; including a 120 foot wood emergent tower that takes you above the trees to see to Lake Erie. There is also an elevated canopy walk through the trees. Both are awesome. The gardens are beautiful and picturesque. At times there are nets to catch frogs and other children's activities. Tree houses and child-size sheds are scattered throughout the site. The Arboretum is located in Kirtland. A family membership is \$75.00 and gets you into Botanical Gardens as well. <http://www.holdenarb.org/home>

***Don't miss the trains!!*** Penitentiary Glen Reservation is a Lake County Metropark located at 8668 Kirtland-Chardon Road. It has an excellent indoor nature center with hands-on activities and a see-through beehive. The park also has an animal rehabilitation center with live animals. The highlight of the park is the Lake Shore Live Steamers train rides (<http://www.lakeshorelivesteamers.com/home.shtml>) where on select Sundays volunteers bring their model trains (approximately 1.5 feet wide and many feet long) and allow families to ride through the park's 5-minute long forest train track. Everyone loves the FREE train rides. The park also has art shows and other free events. [www.lakemetroparks.com](http://www.lakemetroparks.com)

If you want to check out starts on a dark clear night, head to Observatory Park metropark. It is a certified dark-spot and has telescopes on site along with friendly staff to point out stars and constellations.

### CHAGRIN RIVER VALLEY

The Chagrin River Valley has many wonderful Metroparks with trail run along the Chagrin River. Chagrin River Road runs along the River and has many opportunities to park, hike to and in the river, or ride a bike. <http://www.clevelandmetroparks.com/Main/Home.aspx>  
Best to avoid creek hikes after heavy rains due to increased runoff pollution.

In the summer, the Polo Fields of the South Chagrin Reservation, on the corner of South Woodland (Rt. 87) and Chagrin River Road, host a variety of activities. There is rough access to the Chagrin River and my children like to wade in the water and play with the rocks. We catch tadpoles there and watch them turn into frogs. On certain weekends, there are competitive horse-jumping shows. Some shows have preliminary rounds which are free and I've walked into the paddocks with my children to pet the horses. Outhouses and drinking fountains are on site.

***One we love.*** Excellent Chagrin River access is available at Squaw Rock in Solon. The parking lot has an outhouse, fire pit, swings, and picnic tables. The hike to the river takes you down large carved rock steps, over bridges, and under overhanging rocks. Squaw Rock itself has a mermaid carved into a large stone, hence the name. At the end of the trail (before heading back up-hill) the river has a waterfall, and is a popular destination for waders. The waterfall crosses the river and we've hiked on the top and into the falls. It's great for a hot day. Upstream from Squaw Rock, even beyond the trail, is a natural waterslide and swimming hole. The waterslide portion of the river is just "around the bend"

and it's worth getting wet to see. Access to Squaw Rock is easiest by heading east (and downhill) from the Metroparks entrance off SOM Center Road (Rt. 91) south of Miles Road.

In the winter, our favorite sledding hill is across from the intersection of Miles and Chagrin River Road (South Chagrin Reservation). The large hill has a campfire on top and a rope to help with the climb; often it's icy. It may have "moguls". There are smaller adjacent hills for little kids. Many people come to cross-county ski in the snow covering the hiking paths.

Close by is Downtown Chagrin Falls. Follow Chagrin Blvd east with all its turns until you come to Main St. then find a place to park. In the summer, you can hike down to the famous falls. Upstream is a nice park. The area is centered on the river and has a great small town feel. There are some unique shops in the square

Going north along the Chagrin River is the Metroparks' large North Chagrin Reservation. The park is between SOM Center Road (Rt. 91) and Chagrin River Road, south of Chardon Rd. (Rt. 6). Take 271 North and exit at Wilson Mills Road east until you intersect Chagrin River Road. Head north (left) and you'll be driving through the park. The park has many picnic areas. My kids like Squires Castle. It is an old mansion kids can explore. The area has swings, picnic tables, usually horses, and is a favorite spot for motorcyclists. The North Chagrin Nature Center (access off of SOM Center Rd.) contains exhibits about wildlife (and bathrooms). Outside the Nature Center is the "duck-pond" and an extensive network of boardwalks over wetlands. In the winter, there is a sled hit that is lit up for night sledding, which is a great Saturday night treat.

#### Mentor Headlands Beach

***Get to the beach early and its have hours alone.*** Go east on Rt. 2 to Rt. 44 north for Mentor Headlands Beach. The water there is perceived as being cleaner than other beaches in Cleveland. The beach is large. There are many picnic pavilions, playgrounds, and a paved path. We like to go early (by 9am) before anyone else has arrived, and then leave before lunch as other guests arrive. There are outhouses at the beach. The sand along the shore is rocky so bring sandals. Check for lifeguards before you swim and do not put your head under the water. <http://parks.ohiodnr.gov/headlandsbeach#nearby>

DOWNTOWN CLEVELAND (Note: Since starting this Downtown Cleveland has exploded with life!)

Superior Viaduct (A half bridge that overlooks the River, a swing bridge, and the City). To get to the Viaduct from Public Square, go west over the Detroit-Superior (Veteran's Memorial) Bridge. At West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, take a hard right, almost 180 degrees, onto a narrow street, called Superior Viaduct. Drive all the way to the end. There is parking by a restaurant and for the Cuyahoga County Engineer. The viaduct is a half-bridge overlooking the west bank of the flats. It affords and great view of downtown and its many means of transportation. You don't realize you're up many stories until you look down.

From the top you can see the Center Street swing-bridge, which regularly swings open and closed in the summer based on the Cuyahoga River boat traffic. You can see the trains running along the Superior Bridge and all the activity in the flats. We bring a picnic lunch

and eat watching the boats on the Cuyahoga River. It's windy up top so bring a hat. There is a bathroom in the restaurant.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland is an impressive building that contains a Learning Center and Money Museum. It's only open from 10-2 on Monday through Thursday, but admission is free. There are hands on activities for kids and worth a visit just to see the building. Plan to spend no more than 2 hours.  
[http://www.clevelandfed.org/for\\_the\\_public/tours/learning\\_center/hours\\_and\\_admission.cfm](http://www.clevelandfed.org/for_the_public/tours/learning_center/hours_and_admission.cfm)

#### East 9<sup>th</sup> Street Pier

Voinovich Park is located at the end of the East 9<sup>th</sup> Street. There are large areas for recreation (including a skateboard park) and people fish off the pier. During the summer we've attended the Tall Ships festival at the Park. The Park is easily walkable to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Great Lakes Science Center, and Burke Lakefront Airport. Cleveland Browns Stadium is also nearby. Cleveland has never used this space to its full potential.  
<http://clevelandlakefrontconservancy.org/project/voinovich-park/>

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is on the East 9<sup>th</sup> Street Pier. The building is worth seeing from the outside, looking like the Louve in Paris. The museum is excellent if you enjoy rock and roll. [www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com)

The Great Lakes Science Center is close to the East 9<sup>th</sup> Street Pier. My kids enjoy touring the museum and it has many hands-on exhibits. NASA now has a permanent exhibit inside the museum including a real space capsule. Center admission can include access to the Mather – a large Great Lakes shipping vessel. The Center also has an IMAX theater.  
<http://www.greatscience.com/>. Consider becoming a member if you have a family. Membership here gets your free admission to many other reciprocal museums. Locally we've used our museum pass to gain free admission to:

- COSI – in Columbus, Ohio (well worth the drive – its an all day museum)
- Pittsburgh Children's Museum (excellent – even older children enjoy – it puts the Cleveland museum to shame)
- Pittsburgh Science Center (includes a tour of a submarine and an science-exercise facility)
- Though requiring an overnight stay, we have also used reciprocity to gain admission to the Toronto Science Center and Montreal Science Centers in Canada.

Burke Lakefront Airport is a small airport on Lake Erie. The Airport hosts the annual Labor Day air-show and in the past a Grand Prix race. The International Women's Air & Space Museum is inside the airport and admission is free. <http://iwasm.org>

#### UNIVERSITY CIRCLE

***A place I could spend all day...*** One of the most beautiful areas in Cleveland is University Circle the home to Case Western Reserve University. The area includes Severance Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra, and MOCA (Museum Of Contemporary Art) (<http://www.mocacleveland.org/>).

***I love exploring...*** The Cleveland Art Museum just completed a massive renovation and addition and is a must-see. The museum has wonderful exterior gardens and a picturesque lake. Admission to the building is free. We often attend Sunday family activities in the new lobby. If you need nice family photos, take them at Wade Oval Lagoon in front of the Art Museum. <http://www.clevelandart.org/>

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History is a family favorite, with good child-friendly exhibits (and a climbable outdoor dinosaur). It is currently being expanded. Make sure to check out the outdoor animal exhibits and basement children's areas. <https://www.cmnh.org/>

***We love playing in the garden ...*** The Cleveland Botanical Gardens has an indoor butterfly room and huge outdoor garden (including edible plants you can sample). The children's garden is amazing, with tree houses, small ponds with rocks to cross, and places to dig. Admission is part of the Holden Arboretum family pass – at \$75.00/year it is a value.

Around all the museums is the park-like outdoor area known as Wade Oval. On Wednesday night in the summer, attend “Wade Oval Wednesdays” for free concerts. In the winter there is free ice-skating rink (skates rentals or a small fee). It is a great place for a walk, even if you don't want to visit any of the museums. Money continues to be invested to ensure University Circle remains a Cleveland gem. From this area heading north, along Martin Luther King Blvd., is Cleveland's cultural gardens. <http://www.cb garden.org/> Hungry? The new Kantina ([www.kantinakatering.com](http://www.kantinakatering.com)) kosher restaurant is in the new Hillel building.

#### Whisky Island

Whisky Island is a Cuyahoga County park. It has a small beach and a boat ramp and is just west of downtown. To get there, you first have to get to Edgewater Park (exit west on Rt. 2). At the main entrance to Edgewater park (itself a large beach – now managed by the Metroparks) make the sharpest possible right. There may be a Whisky Island sign, but overall the road isn't well marked. The road is narrow, so drive carefully. You'll know you're going the right way when you pass and smell the sewage treatment plant. Eventually you'll hit Whisky Island.

Whisky Island has a marina (though it seems more people are grilling on their boats than going on the water). There are volleyball nets and a large grassy area. Jet-skis can be rented. You can explore the old (and decrepit) coast guard station at the end of the park where the Cuyahoga River empties into Lake Erie; it's worth the hike but be cautious of young children. The train bridge move up and down based on Cuyahoga River boat traffic. A bathroom and restaurant are on site. Cleveland has the Burning River festival, among other things, at Whisky Island.

#### Shaker Nature Center

***Close and quiet...*** Head down South Park Blvd. until you see a sign for the Shaker Nature Center. There is an indoor nature center with exhibits. I like the trails. One has a boardwalk through wetlands and I can push the stroller over it. There is a larger marked trail in the woods that's an easy hike. <http://www.shakerlakes.org/>

We also enjoy Horseshoe Lake Park, located between North Park and South Park drives, in Shaker Heights. The park has bathrooms, picnic pavilions, great climbing equipment, a handicap accessible tree house, and trails (with boardwalks) through the woods. The trails lead around Horseshoe Lake.

The Shaker Median Path in Beachwood is a popular addition running along Shaker Boulevard, starting at Warrenville Road and going to the Brainard Road circle. The path runs through the Beachwood Park (which also contains a sledding hill, picnic pavilion with bathrooms, and free WIFI). We use the path to access the Beachwood Library and JCC Campus. From Green Road, we follow the path to Richmond Road, enjoy Kosher Subway at the JCC, and head home. At the end of the path on Brainard Road you can cross to the Pepper Pike Park, which has swings, trails, and a small creek. Friendship Circle is also located at the end of the path. <http://shakeronline.com/for-residents/bikes-and-hikes>

### Cleveland Zoo

The Zoo has a new elephant exhibit. Time your visit to see the elephants “crossing.” There is also an indoor RainForest; always warm and with interactive animals – great for a winter visit. We have used our Zoo membership to obtain free and discounted admission at other zoos. <http://www.clevelandmetroparks.com/Zoo/Zoo.aspx>

### WEST

#### Vermillion

At the western end of Lorain County is the port city of Vermillion. It’s accessed off of Rt.6 west. The City has a large marina lined with well kept vacation homes (the Lagoons) and large boats. There is a small beach. Its fun to walk around, but there isn’t that much else to do. I haven’t found anyone willing to rent boats. There is seasonal put-put. Vermillion hosts the annual Wollybear Festival. Vermillion is halfway to Cedar Point (the best roller coaster park in the country). Lorain County also maintains Metroparks, including those along the Black River, which have hiking and biking trails. <http://www.vermilion.net/>

### SOUTH

***The Best in the City!*** The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is located along the Cuyahoga River. This is a Cleveland treasure and can be explored over many weekends. If you try just one place in this guide – go here. Most of the park is between Rockside Road (south of 480) and Akron. The Park is famous for two elements that run beyond its boundaries; the Towpath and the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad ([www.cvsr.com](http://www.cvsr.com)). My family has explored only a few of the park’s many areas and paths, and enjoys visiting new parts of the park at each visit. <http://www.nps.gov/cuva/>

The park is based along the old Ohio Canal. The canal flowed between Lake Erie and the Ohio River to transport goods between the Mississippi River and New York City. It was destroyed by a flood in the early 1900s and replaced with railroads. Parts of the canal have been restored.

The Canal Visitors Center (1550 Boston Mills Road, east of Riverview Road Peninsula, Ohio 44264) is along a restored portion of the Ohio Canal. The site has a historical home/museum. During the summer, volunteers in period costume open and close

the lock doors, raising and lowering the water in the lock. It's a great place to start exploring the park and popular with both bikers and picnickers. There is parking and all activities are free (except the train, see below). There is access to the towpath and a great pedestrian bridge to the train station. Even if you don't take the train, its still fun to watch it go by.

The Towpath is one of the best parts of the Park system. When complete, the Towpath will run from downtown Cleveland to downtown Canton. The Towpath runs along the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad and Cuyahoga River. It is used by hikers and bikers. Along the Towpath are many other trails and short hikes focused around the river and its past uses, including old quarries. There are other bike paths in the park including the Summit County Metro park bike-paths that connect to the Towpath. The Towpath also connects (indirectly) to the paths in the Cleveland Metropark's South Chagrin Reservation.

***Combine the Towpath and train!!!*** The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad runs in the park and offers riders a leisurely tour of the park via train. The Railroad also has specials in the summer allowing bikers (and runners) to ride or run as far as they can on the towpath, and catch the train back to the parking lot for \$3.00 per person, aptly known as "bike-aboard." We try to do this as often as possible. [www.cvsr.com](http://www.cvsr.com)

***Where to start*** If you need a place to start, start in the middle of the park on Rt. 303. To get there take 271 south to Rt. 8 south, getting off at 303. Make a right, going west into the Park. You'll head downhill. At the bottom of the hill is the Cuyahoga River. There is Park parking north of 303. The intersection includes many restaurants, as well as art galleries, a train station, and bike rentals at Century Cycles (<http://centurycycles.com>). This is a popular area for motorcyclists.

For a fun first ride, head north from Rt. 303 (Peninsula) on the towpath to Boston Road, which is a 2.5 mile trip. The trip will take you past old canal structures and under huge highway bridges (for Rt. 80 and 271). At Boston Road, the park has a museum about the old canal boats which features a large front porch filled with rocking chairs. Across the street is a general store with cold drinks, ice-cream, and other historical touches. The Boston Road stop is very close to the Boston Mills ski resort and CVSR train stop. After getting sufficiently refreshed and using the bathroom, you can head back south to Rt. 303. When "Bike-aboard" is running you can also ride the train back to Rt. 303. Just make sure to time your ride so you catch the train – plan to be at the stop 10 minutes before the train is scheduled to arrive. Remember, stay to the right on the trails.

For your second longer ride, start south at Indigo Lake. We ride the Towpath north, stopping at Szalay's Sweet Corn farm for fresh produce. Adjacent to the Szalay's is a ranger station and clean bathrooms. My kids have a National Park "passport" and we get it stamped at all the ranger stations and tourist stops in the Park. We plan our ride to stop along the way for bathroom breaks, tourist stops, and to eat, but make sure to catch the train at Boston Mills back south. It's a 2+ hour bike ride north and a 45 minute train ride south.

Just south of Rt. 303 on Riverview Road is Summit County Metropark's Deep Rock Quarry Park. There is a short hike to the quarry where huge carved steps demonstrate how stone was cut from hills. My kids are fond of this easy hike. Towpath access is also available from this park.

Also, in the park is the Virginia Kendell Ledges. This area is great for hiking and rock climbing. My kids love the rock gorges, but surrounding all the rocks are easy to traverse flat paths. This is an excellent place to hike with very small, adventurous children and older adults. The parking area has a large picnic shelter with bathrooms. The structure was built during the great depression.

**Our Spring favorite...** We know it's spring when we make a trip to the Spicy Lamb Farm. This farm is located on a dirt road off Boston Mills Road and every spring it's open for lambing days and shearing days. You can see, touch, and hold baby lambs, chicks, and other animals born on the farm. The farm also sells lamb meat and wool products. This eco-tourism-agricultural site is a partner with the national park service and only open select weekends so check the website for a schedule of events. [www.thespicylamb.com](http://www.thespicylamb.com) Plan to get muddy.

Brandywine is a ski resort in the park. <http://www.bmbw.com/>. Brandywine Falls contains a hiking path to a deck by the falls.

Boston Mills is a second ski resort adjacent to the towpath and scenic railroad. Each summer Thomas the Tank Engine visits Boston Mills and offers children the chance to ride on Thomas (pulling Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad coaches) and includes a large Thomas-themed fair. It is not to be missed by any Thomas fans. The fair is free but train rides can be pricey. Boston Mills also hosts an annual art fair.

### Industry

My children still talk about the tour they took of the Schwebel's bread factory in Solon (free). Check out <http://www.factorytoursusa.com/state/ohio/> for a list of similar tours.

### **ONE (OR TWO) TANK TRIPS**

If you have membership to the Cleveland Zoo or Great Lakes Science Center, the following stops are free (other than parking).

**Columbus** – COSI science center is awesome. My kids never tire of the permanent exhibits. The Columbus Zoo is also great, but not free (though there is a discount). It has manatees, which Cleveland lacks.

**Pittsburgh** – Children's museum, Science Center, and Zoo. All are terrific and worth the drive. The Zoo has an aquarium. This is worth an overnight trip since you only have to pay for the hotel. Also hit the Incline while you are there – but bring exact change.

**Toledo** – Art Museum – admission is free. There are hands on activities in the galleries for children and the guards were great, pointing out cool parts of the art to my kids. The museum also has a glass gallery and daily glass blowing demonstrations. (Check for times on the website). It's worth the ride from Cleveland to see the glass blowing. <http://www.toledomuseum.org/>

**THANKS!!**

WE'RE always looking for other great spots...Please share them with me so I can add it to my guide. (Last updated Summer 2016). I can be reached via e-mail at [aevenchik@frantzward.com](mailto:aevenchik@frantzward.com). My music is available at [www.myspace.com/aaronevenchik](http://www.myspace.com/aaronevenchik)

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