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CONTACT:

Jill M. Krajewski

Trips For Kids Detroit

7536 Hazelton, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127

313-724-9499 home; 586-945-5455 cell

tripsforkidsdetroit@yahoo.com

Detroit Kids Go for a Ride Off the Beaten Path

Earlier this month the non-profit organization Trips for Kids Detroit showed 6 Detroit area kids the ins and outs of mountain biking at Island Lakes State Park in Brighton, Michigan.

The volunteers and participants, from Alternatives for Girls, gathered at the trailhead in the park midmorning for introductions and to play some games to become more comfortable with each other.

Each girl was fit with safety equipment and given a bike to use for the day. In mountain biking, riders take their bikes off the pavement into the woods on "single track", a dirt path designated for cycling. There was about an hour of getting to know proper bicycle safety and then testing out their newly learned off-road skills, before lunch.

During lunch, Carina Carlesimo from REI in Northville and Troy spoke to the girls about the principles of "leave no trace" - a series of principles showing courtesy and environmental responsibility in the wilderness towards other campers, animals, and nature. Then, it was back to the trail.

The riders encountered a few tough challenges, but with the assistance of volunteers the kids were able to overcome them. During the ride, this group of new mountain bikers encountered tough climbs, loose gravel, roots, branches and even a little mud.

"Once the girls learned some of these essential biking techniques to get them through the rough spots they looked like they had been riding trails for years," said Dave Hurst, Trips for Kids Detroit President. "Everyone came home a little tired, but smiling!"

The last part of the event closed with the cookie circle - participants and volunteers reflect on the day's discoveries and challenges.

Alicia, 16, said, "I liked listening in the woods. I could hear the wind, which you can't hear at home." Mariee, 14, was more impressed with the creatures she noticed on the ride,

"I liked seeing all the turtles in the river".

This was the second event held by Trips for Kids Detroit, and there are several more planned for this summer. Hurst hopes that these events will "show kids an appreciation of the natural world and help build their self-confidence and self-esteem."

The next trip is scheduled for Sunday June 1st with the Detroit-based organization Back Alley Bikes. If you are interested in making a donation or volunteering for Trips for Kids Detroit, contact Dave Hurst at 313-724-9499.

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