

Family Adventure: Short drive to hidden sanctuary

Wetland's ecosystem makes peaceful retreat

By Maggie Dickinson

Take a drive this weekend two miles west of the busy traffic circle in Viera, and your family will be transported to what seems like another universe.

This is the Ritch Grissom Memorial Wetlands, otherwise known as the Viera Wetlands.

Built and maintained by Brevard County as a healthy water treatment processing system, the wetlands offer a biologically diverse ecosystem and a peaceful retreat from the world.

This 200-acre wetland can be accessed by car, on a bicycle or on foot.

You will find an expanse of sky, water and vegetation filled with more than 100 species of birds, and an occasional alligator — signs warn you to be on the lookout and use caution.

There are benches and observation decks, a butterfly garden donated by Rockledge Gardens and wildflowers planted throughout by a grant made possible by The Florida Wildflower Foundation.

The unpaved roads are wide open and flat, making it easy to bike or walk while keeping an eye on the kids. Small potholes in the roadway give it a great mountain-bike feel.

Vehicles on the path are moving slowly to take in the scenery, and drivers are very courteous to pedestrians and bikers.

This is a great place to get away from it all without having to travel too far from home.

Other tips

Roads sometimes close to automobile traffic, so check the hotline (321-637-5521) before you go if you plan to drive.

It's pet-friendly, but dogs must be on a leash.

Keep children close by and on paths to protect them and the wildlife.

Be respectful of other visitors, particularly the many wildlife photographers.