

# TIME OUT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2018

Gulf Today



## TWIST OF FATE

DESTINY PLAYS A ROLE IN THE PATH **OLIVIA WILDE** TAKES IN 'LIFE ITSELF'

Designer: Anwar Siddiqui



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# ROCK ON

High Rock Adventures in Ohio's Hocking Hills County offers hiking trails, waterfalls, creeks, zip lines, old caves as well as camping sites.

Anne Z. Cooke writes

If you paused long enough to read the trailhead signs in Ohio's Hocking Hills State Park, you'd find that the Black Hand sandstone underfoot was laid down 350,000 years ago, on an ancient seabed.

Or you could push ahead to the Old Man's Cave, past a meandering creek and down a level path. Level, it seemed, until both trail and creek abruptly vanished, swallowed up by a hole in the earth.

The Old Man's Cave was as fabulous as it was unexpected. But our next day's outing, a nature walk booked in advance, which — to my surprise — included an introduction to rappelling — outdid the caves by half.

Steve Roley, our guide, a rock climber, gathered the group together. "Yeah, where's Old Rocky top?" echoed the guy behind me.

But Roley, a student of native plants, was in no hurry as we, he pointed out the edible plants that thrive beneath hemlocks, trees descended from similar hemlocks that flourished 10,000 years ago, when the climate was cooler and moister.

"These here are jack-in-the-pulpits and those are may apples," he said, moving on to a patch of greenbriar and a solitary sweet cicely.

Then Roley stopped short, next to two rocky walls. "Geez," said somebody, gazing skyward. But before you could snap your fingers, we'd buckled up, climbed to the top, wobbled over a narrow bridge, and one-by-one, gasped, backed off into thin air and "bumped" down the wall to the ground.

"Wow, it's easy, let's do it again!" clamored the group, thrilled — and relieved — that they hadn't backed out. And to think that a month earlier, I'd written off Ohio as one of the states you fly over on your way to somewhere else.

And I would have, if my sister, who lives in Kent, hadn't suggested a getaway to the Hocking Hills, southeast of Columbus. "C'mon, this is Daniel Boone country, with log cabins and pioneer history, like those books we used to read," she said. "Except that it's the 21st century. There's zip lines, music festivals, art galleries, antique malls. Even golf, or canoeing or we can look for the caves."

"Everybody wants to see the caves," said Audrey Martin, at the Hocking Hills Tourism Association, in Logan, the county seat. "From nature lovers

to serious hikers, or families camping or renting a cabin, they all want to get out and walk.

"The park gets an estimated 1.4 million visitors annually, but the trails are rarely crowded," she said. "But come in autumn, if you can. When the weather cools and the maples and birch change colours, every hillside glows. They're a dazzling panorama of reds, golds, bright yellows and orange, with splashes of green. Hemlocks are overgreens."

Packing up, we drove southeast to Columbus and on to Hocking County on State Route 33.

Cottages, barns and trailers measured the miles; front porches, vegetable gardens and laundry on the line marked the days. Here was a rusty truck; there a flower garden. The last turn, on State Route 374, left us at our destination's door, the Inn & Spa at Cedar Falls, and to Ellen Grinstelder, the owner.

Perched on 75 green acres near the State Park, the inn was a modest B&B when Grinstelder inherited it. Today it's classic rustic-luxury, with a cozy lodge, nine single rooms, 12 furnished log cabins (some with kitchenettes), four snappy yurts (where we stayed) and an outdoor fire pit plus benches.

The restaurant, the neighborhood's best, employs a full-time chef and supports a large and inventive menu. The 1840s cabin houses a tiny bar and half the kitchen; a meeting room seating 50 hosts girlfriend reunions, county dinners and small weddings.

Best of all, it was a brisk walk from the inn to the State Park where the trail loops from Cedar Falls to the Old Man's Cave, to Rose Lake and to the newest area, Whispering Cave. Other park sites — Conkles Hollow, Ash Cave, Rock House and Cantwell Cliffs — are linked by roads, a free public shuttle bus, 35 miles of hiking trails and 33 miles of bridle trails.

The next day we toured Logan, And the town's premier attraction? The Columbus Washboard Factory, the last American maker of washboards, the rackets percussion instrument favoured by country and bluegrass bands.

The business, owned by James Martin, a former Brill, sells thousands of washboards annually; many to tourists lingering in the gift shop. A souvenir hunter's heaven, it's awash in games, hats, soap, honey, lotions, towels, playing cards, toys and, of course, washboards.

Tribune News Service

Tight quarters and low ceilings in the Old Man's Cave most have been uncomfortable.



Cabins and cottages dot hills, hollows and meadows in southeast Ohio's Hocking Hills.



Hidden in plain sight, the Old Man's Cave surprises visitors exploring the trails.



"Dogwood Cabin," one of 12 at the Inn & Spa at Cedar Falls, is on 75 private acres near Logan, Ohio.







Gritting the teeth and walking down the wall.