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Learning On The Go: Trips That Bring Science and History to Life

The Midwest's best opportunities for hands-on learning can be found in Wisconsin

(April 27, 2010)—Engaging kids in learning has always been a teacher's (and parent's) challenge. Thanks to a variety of exciting learning-focused stops near great Wisconsin destinations, that engagement can happen even on vacation. Check out some of the best places to keep you and your kids learning.

The Kovac Planetarium

Located in the [Rhinelander Area](#), the Kovac Planetarium is one of Wisconsin's greatest wonders. It holds the distinction of being only the fourth globe-style planetarium ever built — and it's truly a sight to behold. Most incredibly, it is the work of one man — Frank Kovac — who designed and built it himself over the course of 10 years.

Visitors will be treated to a 90-minute experience in which they'll see the complete rotation of the night sky as it would appear through a 24-hour period. The Kovac Planetarium is open year-round by reservation only, and accommodates up to 25 people. It's a truly incredible experience — and one you probably wouldn't expect to find in the woodlands of northern Wisconsin.

The Horicon Marsh International Education Center

In March 2009 the Horicon Marsh International Education Center in [Dodge County](#) opened, providing visitors with brand new facilities, space and exhibits. The marsh is truly a majestic place. With educational programming appropriate for any age, a day spent learning about the Horicon Marsh is sure to stay with you.

Visitors get their first glimpse of the cattails from the spectacular Marsh Viewing Area in the brand new Education Center building. Programming is offered to the public each weekend and includes marsh history, bird and ecology-focused hikes, and kid-centered events. You'll find it easy to spend an afternoon at the marsh. Enjoy the five miles of trails through woodlots, prairies, and the strange and beautiful marshlands. With more than 300 species of birds, the marsh is one of the top birding sites in the upper Midwest. During your visit you might also try canoeing, biking, and fishing.

The North Lakeland Discovery Center

There may be no better way to appreciate the natural wonders of Wisconsin than a visit to the North Lakeland Discovery Center. The Center is located in the middle of beautiful [Vilas County](#), and makes for a great day trip.

Situated on a tranquil 63-acre site in the heart of lake country, the Center offers some of the best public ecology programming anywhere. If your family enjoys hands-on learning, look no further.

Each week the Center's staff offers great lessons and events designed for visitors to the Northwoods. You might enjoy a guided snowshoe hike where you'll hone your wildlife tracking skills, bring the kids for a special wolf pup program to learn about these predators, or join a Center naturalist for an exploration and history lesson on the backwaters of the Manitowish River. Looking to strike out on your own? The Center maintains a 20-kilometer trail system fit for mountain biking, hiking, and cross country skiing.

The Great River Road Visitor & Learning Center at Freedom Park

Scenic views, a great chance to see bald eagles and falcons, and the unique stories of a historic part of America are highlights at Freedom Park. Nestled above the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers in Prescott, Wisconsin, Freedom Park is a great place to begin your tour of this region, or of the entire [Wisconsin Great River Road](#).

Step into the past through the unique stories of the people who called this region home: the brave pilots of steamboats that brought people, products and ideas from New Orleans to the Twin Cities, the Dakota people who lived in the area for centuries, and the first immigrants who made a living through fishing and boatbuilding. While you're here, be sure to take a stroll along Freedom Park's trails, keeping an eye out for the birds that call the Prescott area home. From May to October enjoy local honey, bread and fruits and vegetables at the on-site farmer's market. Other events are held throughout the year.

The Rhinelander Logging Museum

Located deep in the Northwoods, The Rhinelander Logging Museum is an authentic logging camp where visitors go back to a simpler time. True to its 1870's roots, the [Rhinelander Area](#) camp includes a bunkhouse, cook shanty and a blacksmith shop. Each of the camp's buildings is meticulously recreated, and offers visitors the chance to see what life was like for the adventuring souls who worked on the edge of early American civilization.

Museum visitors will see many of the tools and equipment used by early loggers, including a steam hauler and the massive steam engine that ran the narrow railroads with logs. As one of the driving forces behind the U.S. economy in the 19th century, Rhinelander's logging past will introduce you to an exciting era.

Visit www.explorerhinelander.com for more information about Rhinelander Area attractions such as the Kovac Planetarium and the Logging Museum.

For more information about the Horicon Marsh and Dodge County, visit www.dodgecounty.com.

Get complete details about Vilas County nature opportunities at www.vilas.org.

Find more interesting attractions along the Wisconsin Great River Road at www.wigreatriverroad.com.

For additional information on any of these destinations and other historic and scientific activities, contact Susanne Thiede-Barnet at 608-242-8895 or Susanne@pilchbarnet.com.