

How To Start A Summer

by Billy Lombardo

It was one of the first nice weather days in May and I was driving my youngest son home from school. He was in senior kindergarten and it was one of the last days of the school year. We were talking about how we were going to spend the afternoon having a catch and taking batting practice when all of a sudden he went sad on me in the car. When I asked him if something was bothering him, he seemed as though he was on the verge of tears.

"Kane, it's a gorgeous day out," I said. "We're going to have an awesome afternoon."

He nodded his head sadly, and I asked him again to tell me why he looked so sad.

"I'm sad about the end of the summer," he said.

It was a full month away from the official start of summer and he was already disappointed in the certainty of its end.

That was the year our family started what has become an annual, first weekend in June day trip to the Warren Dunes State Park in Michigan. We had been taking periodic trips to the dunes for several years, but after that drive home from school, my wife and I decided that an early June trip to Warren Dunes might be the perfect way to jumpstart the summer—to make it seem as though we weren't about to waste a single day in our quest to stretch time.

The Warren Dunes cover nearly two thousand acres of Michigan land that settle up against three miles of gorgeous Lake Michigan shoreline. Nestled in among that acreage are 221 modern and rustic campsites and three modern mini cabins. There's a beautiful beach area for swimming and six miles of hiking trails. Activities can include biking, hiking, hunting, birding, windsurfing, swimming, metal detecting, and more. Located along the entrance to the beach area there are picnic tables and fire pits available on a first come first serve basis.

There are no lifeguards on duty throughout the year, so pay attention to the green, yellow, or red flag they will have located at the entrance of the park to indicate the severity of the waves on any given day. An on-site beach house offers restrooms, clothes changing areas, and concessions.

Across the parking lot from the shoreline,

Tower Hill, a rugged dune formation is the most magnificent of the dunes. It rises 240 feet above the lake and offers spectacular views. The more competitive minded children in your group will compete for speed and number of ascents. The climb offers an intense workout for exercise enthusiasts, and the views are spectacular. On a clear day you can see the Chicago skyline from the top of the hill.

The sunset across the lake is like a daily miracle at the Warren Dunes, and the beauty of it, if you don't mind a night ride back to Chicago, is that the best part of the day trip is still ahead of you. It would be a shame to be so close to New Buffalo, Michigan and ignore what is arguably the best burger in the world.

Take a right on Red Arrow Highway for a five-mile or so ride toward Redamak's where they've been making the best, tenderest, juiciest burgers in America for more than thirty years.

What's the secret to these amazing burgers? Is it the lettuce and tomatoes? No. Redamak's doesn't offer them. Is it the fact that you can have it cooked any way you want it? No. They don't do rare.

To begin with, the Maroney family still applies the individual attention to quality that they have since 1975. Though they moved away from pattying by hand, each burger, weighing in at exactly five-and-one-third ounces before cooking, is made from meat freshly cut and ground on site. Redamak's burgers are never frozen. They go through 100,000 pounds of meat each year, so if you can't eat a burger without lettuce or tomato, they won't miss your business. But let's face it, when burgers are this good you can sacrifice a bit.

Don't pass up the cheese fries or the battered cauliflower if your tastes run in these directions. Everything at Redamak's melts in your mouth. For kids, there's a special menu that features the "Little Mak," and every table is equipped with crayons and fun worksheets that kids have been known to fight dads over.

When you leave Redamak's and look at your sleeping children in the back seat of the family car, you'll be comforted by the fact that there will still be ninety days of summer in front of you.



Warren Dunes Looking Toward Lake Michigan. Photo by Tom Zurek



Sunset at Warren Dunes. Photo by Tom Zurek



Warren Dunes State Park Trail. Photo by Tom Zurek

Warren Dunes State Park

12032 Red Arrow Highway
Sawyer, MI 49125
(269)426-4013

Directions: I 94 to exit 16, 2 mi S. on
Red Arrow Highway to park entrance.

Redamak's

616 E. Buffalo Street
New Buffalo, MI (269)469-4522
2008 season:

March 1- Oct. 26
M/T/W/TH: 12pm-9:30pm
F/Sa: 12pm-10:30pm
Su: 12pm-10pm
www.redamaks.com