It didn’t take long for Sharon and Joel Clark to blast off for fun with this year’s Fairfax County Park Discovery Trail Map – Transportation Edition. In just a couple of weeks, the Springfield couple and their three young children explored eight of 12 featured parks and became one of the first families to win prize packets valued at $93 each and enter a drawing for a new bicycle.

“We first heard about the map activity when a friend told us about it last year, and it definitely encouraged us to try new parks,” Sharon said enthusiastically. “We went to places we had never gone before, and throughout the year we went back several times.”

The Clarks jumped at the chance to set out on new adventures with this year’s map, which highlights each park’s connection to transportation history and celebrates the 50th anniversary of man’s giant leap from the Earth to the Moon. With a picnic lunch in hand, the Clarks often made a day of it, exploring each park’s distinctive features on foot.

“I like for the children to walk and get some exercise, and it’s fun to walk around and see the animals at Frying Pan Farm Park,” she said. The kids love the wagon rides!”

Sharon says the kids also enjoyed the animals and trails at Hidden Pond Nature Center, the hands-on activities at Hidden Oaks Nature Center and a scavenger hunt at Sully Historic Site. They were excited to see a train cross the trestle at Lake Accotink Park, and they all had a ball exploring the natural world at Riverbend Park.

“We did a lot of walking and found a flat, pebbly, beachy area next to the water,” she recalled fondly. “That place is great, and the kids had so much fun throwing rocks into the water.”

Sharon’s favorite destination was the expansive, wetland oasis at Huntley Meadows Park. “One time we saw an eagle, another time we saw a muskrat and we always see different animals there,” she said.

Perhaps one of the biggest surprises was the prize packet contents, which included tickets for boat, train and carousel rides, mini-golf and camping at Burke Lake Park, one of Joel’s favorite destinations.

“That was so special,” Sharon said. “Last year we set up the camp site together and had dinner there with the children. Joel and our eldest son, Micah, spent the night camping while I took Caleb and Alina home. This year, Caleb will be old enough to spend the night at the campground, too.”

Ultimately Sharon hopes the experience instills in her children a greater appreciation for nature and its wonders.

Make lasting memories with your loved ones! Pick up your free Discovery Trail Map at any staffed Fairfax County park, RECenter, golf course, or download one at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/discovery-trail-map. Maps are also available at public libraries and Spokes, Etc. stores.