

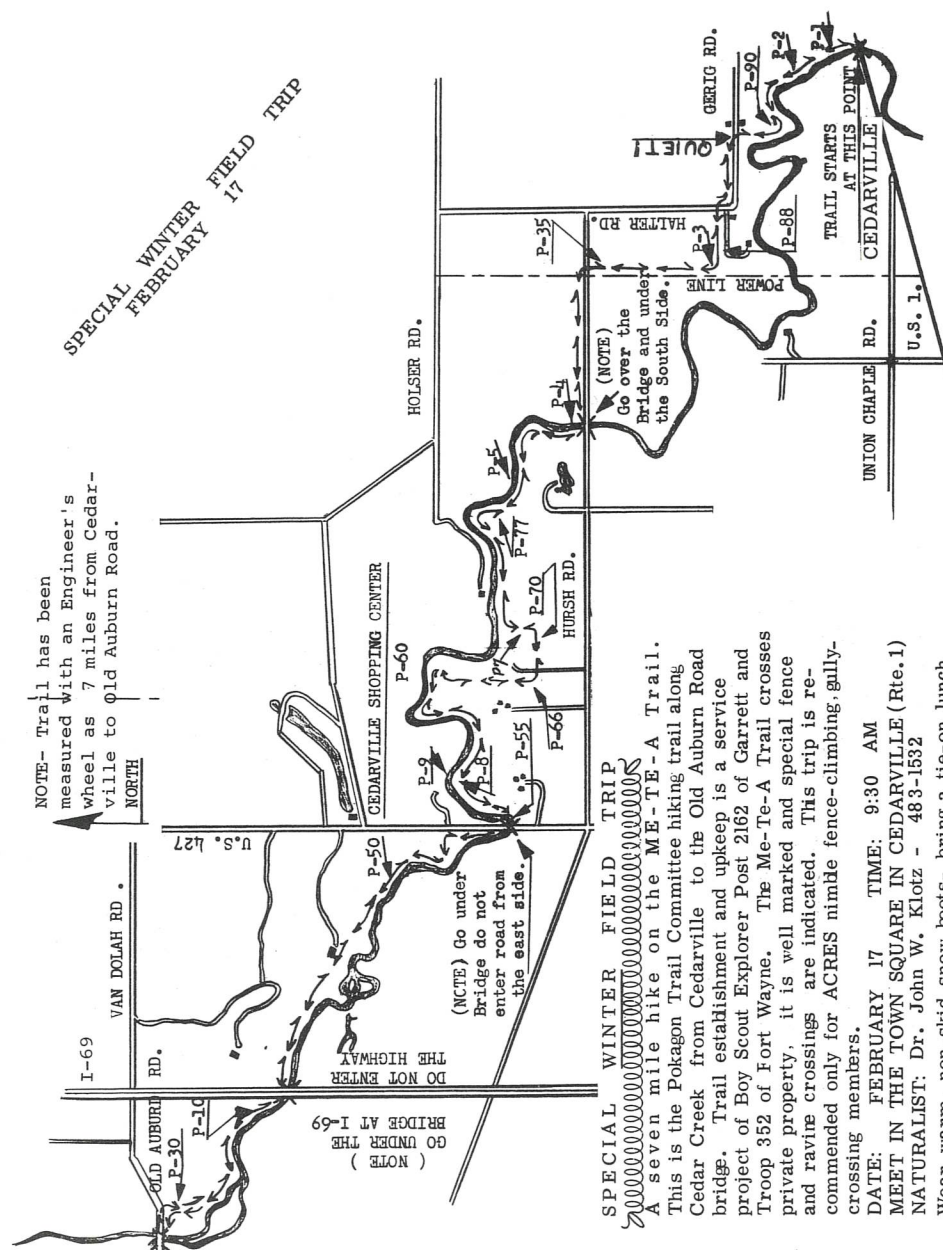


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Betty G. Oettel



The Great Kankakee Swamp

The Kankakee derives its name from the Indian words Thea-kiki or Kankekiki meaning "land inhabited by wolves and rivers" or "Wolf Land". Tales, sad and happy, true and false, have become legendary along the banks of what was once one of the greatest swamps in the world. The great Kankakee swamp once stretched from South Bend, Indiana across the northwestern corner of the state into Illinois near the present city of Kankakee. At some points it was 30 miles wide. The swamp was one of the greatest natural flood control reservoirs in the Upper Mississippi watershed.

Historians and naturalists have failed to determine exactly when the swamp area was first inhabited by man. The only remains are dated within the last three hundred years, although it is suspected man inhabited the area long before. The pre-historic mound building Indians made small islands by taking mud from the bottom of the swamp. About 35 of these mounds have been found along the winding banks of the Kankakee. Also remains of mastodons and other pre-historic creatures have been found buried in the muck accumulated over millions of years, many skeletons complete and well preserved.

The Indians who inhabited the swamp area depended upon the abundant wildlife for food and shelter. Fish were so plentiful that a few thrusts of a spear into the water would provide a day's food. Ducks and geese were without number, deer, buffalo and small game abounded on the numerous islands formed by the winding river.

In the 1600's French trappers invaded the area and an expedition by LaSalle in 1679 marked the beginning of the end for the Indians living along the banks of the swamp. During the next 200 years trappers and settlers waged war against the Indians and the swamp. The last of the Indian tribes were moved westward along "a trail of death" in the 1830's. The great swamp lasted only another 75 years.

After the trappers came the settlers who killed the deer and gigantic flocks of birds to protect their little fields of corn and wheat. In the early 1850's railroads were built across northern Indiana. With the railroads came more settlers, and with them, commerce. Fur, timber, hay, wild

ducks and geese and grains were their produce. Logging camps soon replaced many of the trapping camps where virgin timber was cut, yet much trapping of fur animals continued.

Chicago provided a steady market for the produce and "market hunters" established a thriving business from the sale of wildfowl. Oldtimers now living in the area give several other reasons for the slaughter and extinction of some species of wildlife. First, the market hunter, shot ducks and geese by the boatloads. One oldtimer from English Lake, in Starke County, Ind. recalled market hunters who shipped more than a thousand birds a week. Sportsmen coming from New York and even from Europe shot thousands of birds that were never used for food. After the Kankakee river was dredged the great marshes began to dry out and waterfowl had to find new nesting places.

The draining of the swamp uncovered the richest soil in the U.S. A mixture of rotted vegetation and silt accumulated over the centuries, muck is similar to peat moss and will burn if it becomes too dry. The richness of its soil can produce higher yields of nearly all farm produce, but during the first half of the 20th century, the area became the peppermint capital of the world, producing more than 90% of the world's supply. The black soil also produces fantastic yields of potatoes and onions.

Today only a small portion of the great swamp is preserved for future generations in the Kankakee State Fish and Game Area. Some 2,000 acres of the river bottoms, bayous, old river beds, timber and marshes are located at the junction of State roads 8 and 39. Ducks and geese still nest there, and in the spring and fall migrating birds stop for food and rest. A local hunter reported his hounds chased a wolf into her den in the swamp recently. Perhaps, once again the night in "Wolf Land" will be pierced by the lonesome cry of days gone by.

Mrs. Gertrude Brallier
Winona Lake, Indiana

THE GREAT BLACK SWAMP -

Living in northern Indiana today, we have no concept of the vast wetlands which once predominated our landscape. Mrs. Brallier, Audubon Lakeland Shores editor tells about the Great Kankakee Swamp of northwestern Indiana.

Much the same geological phenomenon existed in northeastern Indiana where glacial Lake Maumee receded to what we now know as Lake Erie and left behind "The Great Black Swamp". This area, now boasting more miles of tile and ditch drainage than anywhere else in the world, is one of the richest agricultural valleys in the country.

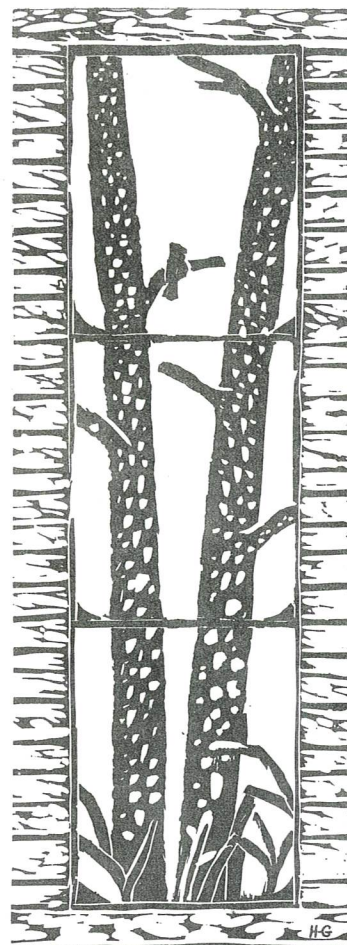
The area was so slow to settle, the U.S. Government sent a survey team in 1823 to find out "why?". A small part of their journal follows:

"Near to this house we passed the State line which divides Ohio from Indiana....The distance from this to Fort Wayne is 24 miles, without a settlement; the country is so wet that we scarcely saw an acre of land upon which settlement could be made. We travelled for a couple of miles with our horses wading through water, sometimes to the girth. Having found a small patch of esculent grass (which from its color is known here as bluegrass) we attempted to stop and pasture our horses, but this we found impossible on account of the immense swarms of mosquitoes and horse flies, which tormented both horses and riders in a manner that excluded all possibility of rest."

It seems hard to believe today, doesn't it? And what fascinating wild-life abounded there!

I can't help wishing that I could pick a sunny, brisk fall day back in the 1820's and take that same horseback trek through The Great Black Swamp.

Jane Dustin
Huntertown, Indiana



crew re-installed the rustic sign at the Spurgeon Reserve, installed a registry box (made by Roger Eberhardt and David Putman) and cleared some wind-fall from the trails. Thanks to the Lyle Claphans for a warm place to have a hearty beef stew!

.....Thank you all!

VISITS TO THE BOOMING GROUND

Plan early to visit the Prairie Chicken Booming Ground in Illinois next spring. Nearly 100 people did in 1967. Write to Ronald Westmeier, R.R.1, Box 131, Effingham, Ill. for a place in the blinds. March is the favorite month for viewing this courtship spectacular.

DUTY REPORTS FROM ACRES' MEMBERS

John Ellenwood has volunteered to do a series of ACRES black and white photos for our publicity file and fill in the color slide selection which is available for talks and personal viewing. . . . a picture story of ACRES areas and activities.

Tom Kohlmeyer is engineering and manufacturing some permanent trail bench marks. Indestructible! Now we can maintain the self-guiding nature trail at the Spurgeon Reserve.

George Pacenza has agreed to do a quarterly area reconnaissance, reporting to the Board any needed maintenance, repairs and improvements at ACRES' five reserves.

Carl Coleman will be busy this winter, designing and routing signs for ACRES' areas.

The Hy Goldenbergs of Huntington are watching the Huntington Herald Press to keep a clip file on John Klotz' articles which will be carried this year in their newspaper under the title "Nature's ACRES". Goldenbergs will field local inquiries to the ACRES office.

Joe Porter continues to do duty as mailing crew recruiter. Always more fun than work, for as you stuff, staple and stamp, good lunch smells waft from Joe's kitchen.

Mary Maus warmed up her typewriter by doing thirty invitation letters to community groups to attend ACRES annual dinner meeting.

A very successful Work Day was held at the Bender and Spurgeon Reserves, Saturday, November 4. Despite the wet and cold, a hard working crew of 25 children and adults completed a trail at Bender Reserve and finished a line demarkation. A work

Conservation involves both attitude and action. One little boy defined it as "putting the frogs back", and that definition is not a bad one at all. It's so easy to exploit our environment, to develop the attitude that it's meant only for us and that we may use it or abuse it as we see fit. Taking a frog or two home doesn't seem too important: there are probably hundreds where the ones we've managed to catch came from. Picking a bouquet of wild flowers doesn't seem too important; they often occur in carpets in our woodlands. Dumping sewage into the nearest creek can't possibly be damaging: it's quickly diluted and disappears. But all these little actions multiply because they are repeated by hundreds and thousands, and it isn't long until there are no frogs, no wild flowers, no clean streams. Responsible Americans recognize that they are only stewards, that they have a responsibility to others who share this planet on their time level and that they have the obligation of protecting, preserving, and passing on to future generations what they have received. No one suggests total preservation of our resources: they are here to be used, but of what use is the frog we take home to die or the wilted bunch of wild flowers? The conservationist recognizes moreover that the use must be wise so as not to infringe on the rights of others.

Conservation also involves action. There are things to be done if our heritage is not to be lost through ignorance and misunderstanding. Most people put the frogs back and most people are willing to love the wildflowers and leave them if they know why they ought to. One of the big challenges to conservation today is developing understanding of natural balances and natural processes. We need a series of informal educational programs if the conservation movement is to succeed.

We also need people who are willing to give time, talent, and money to promote programs they recognize as important. We can't always let George do it: we need to pitch in ourselves. ACRES needs a great many of these people. We can't pay people for doing the work that has to be done: we have to depend on volunteers who think enough of our program to step in when help is needed.

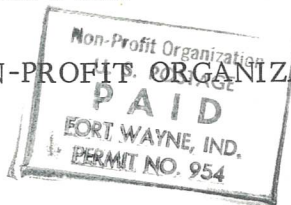
Unfortunately, conservation needs even more than this. There are always people who are for conservation in principle and especially for the other person, but can't understand why they can't take a few frogs home. We need legislative action to enforce conservation principles. We need legislative action to take care of our rapidly increasing problems of pollution. We need legislative action to preserve and protect our few remaining natural areas. We need legislative action to protect the rights of society as a whole against what some feel are their inherent individual rights to use up.

Conservation has come a long way. We are glad to see more and more people involved, not only in our ACRES program but in the programs of many other responsible conservation organizations. Conservation has a long way to go. Check your conservation attitudes and action!

John W. Klotz

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