Des Plaines River Trail

Big Bend Lake

When the Illinois Tollway system was established in the mid 1950’s, the need for fill to build the roadways resulted in the creation of dozens of artificial lakes from DuPage County to the Wisconsin state line. Big Bend Lake is a result of that construction. Today, Big Bend Lake and the surrounding area are home to waterfowl and other birds and wildlife. Fishing, canoeing and kayaking are popular visitor activities.

Forming Habitats

Then and Now

The historic aerial photograph above illustrates land usage of the Big Bend Lake area before it was excavated for fill. The aerial to the right depicts current usage, and illustrates Big Bend Lake in its present day state.

Des Plaines Disturbance

Des Plaines is at the center of a suspected meteorite strike estimated to have occurred approximately 280 million years ago. The actual epicenter is believed to be around the modern-day intersection of Dempster Street and the I-294 Tollway, directly south of where you are standing. There are no visible signs on the surface because the crater has since been filled with glacial till. However, beneath 75 to 200 feet of glacial till lies a massive five-mile diameter crater evidenced by fractured and deformed rock. For comparison purposes, the famous “Meteor Crater” in Arizona is less than one mile in diameter.

Did You Know?

The Forest Preserve around Big Bend Lake has been identified as potential habitat for the state threatened Kirtland’s Snake. This small (14-18”), reclusive snake eats earthworms and slugs and spends the winter hibernating underground, often using abandoned crayfish burrows.
Entries from a page of the Conant Diary, 1836.

Soules took away his cows. $22.47
Receipts    $8.23
Bought flour at $9.00 and lime $2.00

Mon. 3 Went to Chicago carried pumpkins and peas

Sun. 2 Took a walk in the grove

Oct. 1 Sat. Finished pulling beans afternoon a thunder shower

Fri. 30 Finished drawing oats out corn for hogs

Thurs. 29 Pulled beans first frost sufficient to kill vines

Wed. 28 (Drew oats heard big wolves howl)

Tues. 27 Killed a prairie wolf drew wood, pumpkins oats etc

Mon. 26 Opened oat stacks pulled beans etc
day cool morning a little frosty

Sun. 25 Mr. Kent preached at my house
and got 2 lbs. of tea cr. to him 1.50

Fri. 24 Hewed timber evening went to see Mr.
F. Soules turned 12 cows into pasture

Thurs. 23 Helped hew timber for corn house

Wed. 21 Worked at my house J. Long
killed a badger etc.

Tues. 20 Made churn hunted for horses

Mon. 19 Made churn hunted for horses
time. Long called

Sun. 18 Started for meeting but found out that

Frid. 16 Worked at my house

Thurs. 15 Worked at finishing my house  L. Hart

Wed. 14 Ploughed, let Mr. Kent have some potatoes

Tues. 13 Ploughed

Mon. 12 Commenced ploughing for fall wheat

Sun. 11 (Mr. Kent preached at my house
Went with L. Clifford to hunt cattle broke stone pot
Bennicetts Fogers and Peets

Sat. 10 Rode out in the afternoon called at

Frid. 9 Made fence made a bed for threshing
on the bank of the river

Thurs. 8 Threshed peas built brush fence

Wed. 7 Drew oats, peas etc

Tues. 6 Morning frosty day warm drew oats

Mon. 5 (Drew oats)

Sun. 4 Attended meeting at Mr. Long's Lamb preached

Sat. 3 Finished cutting oats near the river

September                1836

The Greenhouse Industry in Des Plaines

At one time, Des Plaines had so many greenhouses that Lord and Burnham built a
foundry here circa 1910 to provide parts for the large glass and steel structures that dotted the
city’s landscape. In 1951, a local newspaper noted that “More roses and carnations are
grown in Des Plaines than anywhere else in
the universe . . .” but by the 1960s, with the
growth of O’Hare Airport, the once thriving
industry was in decline. It was less expensive
to ship flowers that were grown in warmer
climates than it was to grow them in the forced
atmosphere of the greenhouse.

Garland Homestead
Solomon Garland settled in Des Plaines in 1861
at the age of 32. He established a homestead
which stretched from the Des Plaines River east
to Potter Road and from Ballard Road south
to the Union Pacific – Northwest Line railroad
tracks. Used primarily for farming, the property
had six greenhouses. Three of Solomon’s sons:
Frank, Warren and Solomon Jr., each owned
a greenhouse while son Frank had a foundry which produced floral shops in Des Plaines.
Solomon’s wife, Minnie, operated one of the first floral shops
in Des Plaines.

Des Plaines Greenhouse Workers.
Source: Paul Warren Stoddard - Works Progress Administration, circa 1934
Dr. Earle House and Rand Mill

The Illinois and Wisconsin Land Company built a steam mill just west of here circa 1852 to saw railroad ties. Early settler, Socrates Rand, graded a four mile stretch of land, and the Company provided the ties. A station was built, named after the Des Plaines River, and daily commuter traffic between here and Chicago began in 1854.

The mill was purchased by Rand who continued to saw ties for a time and later converted it to a grist mill which served the local farming community. Rand died in 1890, and the property was purchased by Dr. Clarence A. Earle. Earle moved the mill a short distance north and built a copper domed house that sat majestically at river’s edge.

Dr. Earle House, circa 1907

Did You Know?

Local weather conditions affect animal and plant populations in numerous ways. For example, spring flowers typically bloom along the Des Plaines River two weeks earlier than at cooler sites near Lake Michigan.


Comments:

Authorized Representative Approval

I have reviewed the information contained in the attached proofs and find them to be accurate to the best of my knowledge. Authorization of this submittal indicates acceptance of all responsibility related to accuracy and spelling of textual and graphic data. By accepting this proof, I understand that Hitchcock Design Group will not be held responsible for errors in spelling or factual content based on third party information, including information furnished by the owner.

Date

Accepted

Resubmit with Comments Addressed

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Spelling

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Comments:

Did You Know?
A Brief History of Des Plaines…


1840’s and 1850’s – German immigrants, seeking economic and political freedom, arrived in the area in large numbers. German was the primary language in many Des Plaines homes and churches.

1852 – A steam powered mill was constructed next to the Des Plaines River to cut railroad ties from the forested belt of burr oak and hickory along the river. The mill was later purchased by Socrates Rand, one of the area’s first settlers, and converted to a grist mill. The area of the existing downtown began to grow around the railroad and the mill.

1869 – Des Plaines was first incorporated and the federal census of the following year shows that the town had grown to a population of 800.

1873 – Village form of government adopted.

1925 – Present city form of government was established with H.T. Bennett as the first mayor.

Post WWII – Movement of people from the City of Chicago, plus the development of O’Hare International Airport signaled a great period of growth for Des Plaines. Population jumped from pre-war nine thousand to over fifty thousand.


1990 to Present - The city experienced phenomenal industrial growth, becoming a raw materials and finished products distribution center, as well as the headquarters of several major corporations.

Today the City of Des Plaines is a progressive city characterized by fine residences, industrial opportunities and an abundance of business and trade facilities. There are over thirty churches representing every major denomination. The city’s elementary and secondary schools are nationally acclaimed. A progressive park district accommodates the recreational needs of all ages. And the art and theater guilds, the community concert series, a fine public library and a history center are true indications of the cultural growth of the community.
Flood History

The Des Plaines River has a long history of flooding. The Flood of Record occurred in October of 1986 with the Des Plaines River peaking at Flood Stage 10.88 near the City of Des Plaines. That single flood affected 33 municipalities up and down the river, causing an estimated $35 million in damages to dwellings and businesses, and resulting in the evacuation of more than 15,000 residents.

The photos below were taken during the 1986 Flood of Record. These areas are now protected from Des Plaines River flooding by the Levee 50 project.

What is the Levee 50 Project?

The Levee 50 project emerged from a decade-long study of the Des Plaines River watershed by the Army Corps of Engineers and partners. The purpose of the study was to identify projects that could reduce the impacts from the periodic flooding along the river. Only projects that had a positive benefit-cost ratio and that would not result in an increase in the upstream or downstream river levels could be advanced. In the end, six flood control projects emerged from the study. The Levee 50 project, completed in 2010, was the first of these six projects to be constructed.

Prior to the construction of the Levee 50 project, flooding from the Des Plaines River caused $1,315,500 in average annual flood damages to 181 structures east of the River. The river’s history of flooding caused extensive damage to businesses, homes, and properties in the community.

Multi-Use Trail Component of the Levee 50 Project

The multi-use trail component of the Levee 50 Project was installed as part of a federally-funded Grand Illinois Trail project. This 12-foot wide concrete trail segment, combined with the Miner Street culvert, closed a crucial gap in the roughly 50-mile Des Plaines River Trail. The trail now extends from Des Plaines to the City of Glenview, connecting to the North Chicago Trail and providing a safe alternative for cyclists and pedestrians.

Regular trail users will notice that the trail and the culvert are subject to flooding. This is because the culvert (tunnel) to your left was first and foremost designed as part of the flood control project to provide necessary "hydraulic conveyance" during flood events. In addition, the elevation of the trail was severely constrained due to the existing elevation of the Miner Street bridge and the utilities running under the bridge.

The use of the culvert as a trail during dry times was therefore an added bonus. Did You Know? The Des Plaines River watershed begins in Racine and Kenosha counties in southeastern Wisconsin and drains ... 840 square miles. Rain that falls in Wisconsin typically takes 2-3 days to make the journey south to the City of Des Plaines.
Historical Attractions

Methodist Campground

The first camp meeting was held in 1860 on property owned by Socrates Rand just north of here. The camp moved to the current location a few years later. A circle of tents served as housing and enclosed a large clearing in which religious services met. Within a few years, small cottages joined the tents in the circular “wheel pattern” arrangement borrowed from the Martha’s Vineyard Campmeeting Association.

Camp Slemmer

By General Order No. 33 of the War Department, Camp Slemmer was established along the banks of the Des Plaines River in July 1861 to train regulars for the United States Infantry in the Civil War. Under the command of Major Sidney Coolidge, approximately 350 men known as the Sixteenth Regiment U.S. Infantry broke camp and left for Columbus, Ohio and further instruction in early November.

Waldorf Tabernacle

Built in 1903, the American Tabernacle replaced a large canvas tent that had been in use for many years. Constructed with wood from trees along the Des Plaines River, it is supported by a lightweight steel frame similar to that used in construction of the Eiffel Tower. The building received its current name “Waldorf Tabernacle” in 1943 following the death of State Bishop Ernest Lyn Waldorf, a supporter of the campground.

Did you know that trees such as the white oak may outlive most humans. In fact some white oaks can live to be over 500 years old. Some of the trees in this grove may have been here when Major Coolidge’s men broke camp at this site in 1861.
Natural History

Pre-Settlement Conditions

Prior to the settlement by European immigrants, fire played a major role in shaping the landscape. Areas to the west of the Des Plaines River were subject to frequent fires. These fires were ignited both by lightning and by Native Americans managing the land for hunting and food production. As a result, prairie plants, which were well adapted to fire, dominated these areas.

The Des Plaines River acted as a fire break from the sometimes massive fires from the west, allowing oak woodlands to thrive on the east side of the River (where you are standing). Oak woodlands consist of tree species with thick bark and some resistance to fire. During modern times fire has been suppressed and so other species of trees and shrubs that have less resistance to fire, have begun to establish themselves in this forest.

Source: Conservation Research Institute and Heidi Natura

Prairie plants are well adapted to both fire and drought due to their extensive root systems. Some prairie plants such as the Common Sunflower have roots extending 15 feet below ground.
Discovering the Past

Des Plaines River Trail

Iroquois School Dig

During an ecology field trip through the nearby forests, local educators and students from the Iroquois Community School’s “Gifted in Science” program found a depression in the ground with pieces of glass, iron and earthenware lying about. This discovery turned into an archaeological dig of the former Nelson and Kranz form site, in what is now Iroquois Woods, near Touhy Avenue and the Des Plaines River.

The dig began in May 1985 under the supervision of Forest Preserve personnel. Following archaeological procedures they set up grids and, for the next few summers, students continued the dig where they unearthed, researched, and documented hundreds of artifacts dating back from the late 1800’s to 1920’s.

Finds at the Dig

While many common household items were found including knives, forks, spoons, bottles and remnants of jugs and crocks, perhaps one of the most interesting artifacts unearthed was a lady’s compact engraved with the name “Harriet Hubbard Ayer.” Ayer (1849 – 1903) was a Chicago socialite who established her own company selling facial cream when her husband’s business ventures failed.

The items discovered in the dig are now housed in the state museum in Springfield, Illinois. For more information about the dig, please contact the Des Plaines History Center.

Des Plaines History Center

Artifact Screen

An artifact screen, such as this drawing illustrates, was used by the students to unearth artifacts found in the site.

Shagbark Hickory trees, once common in these forests, can be easily identified by the “shaggy” peeling bark. The hard wood of hickory trees was valued for many uses such as baseball bats, including Babe Ruth’s famous 47-ounce bats. Today bats are typically made from White Ash or Maple due to their lighter weight.

Plant Search?

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Date:

[ ] Comments:

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