GRAND RIVER HERITAGE WATER TRAIL 8.43 MILES

1. LUKE LOWING LANDING

Located along the South Fork of the Grand River, this landing is named for Luke Lowing who was the first known white person to settle in the area in 1828. The area is also significant for its role in the fur trade, as it was a major stop for voyageurs on their way to the Northwest Territories.

2. OHIO RIVER OPEN SPACE - OTTAWA COUNTY - JULIE POPLARS

On the south side of the small island you approach on the boat is a grove of large tulip poplars. Tulip poplars are the tallest of the eastern hardwood species, growing over 150 feet, often with no limbs under 80-100 feet in height. Tulip poplar wood is highly valued and the tree is popularly planted because of its aesthetic beauty.

3. BLENDON'S LANDING

Located in Blendon Township, this landing is named for the Blendon family who owned the land for many years. The Blendons were long-time residents of the area and played a significant role in the early development of the region.

4. GYSU RAINVES

Approaching this GPS point you should be able to see some small inlets and streams along the south bank of the river that are part of the Grand Valley Ravines. The ravines are narrow canyon-like formations that have been carved out by erosion caused by the streams. These ravines are a unique feature of the Grand River and are an important part of the region's natural heritage.

5. GYSU ROWING DOCK

You will find the entrance to the GYSU Rowing Dock when you reach the next little island. The dock is located on the south side of the island and juts out into the river. Grand Valley formed its first varsity rowing team in 1967 to race against other colleges. Their first boat house was built in 1972. Since then, this new boat house was built, which houses their sculling boats and modern equipment. The New Grand Valley boat house is a short ten minute walk from the main GYSU campus using the river rowing trail system. It resides on this beautiful, scenic stretch of the Grand River. This is a great place for beginners to learn to row in a safe and relaxing environment.

6. BOLTHOUSE OPEN SPACE - OTTAWA COUNTY

This recently acquired property (Spring 2010) includes 26.5 acres of existing farm field, being restored to natural condition by the planting of native grasses and a wide variety of native tree seedlings in early June 2010. By partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Department has been able to – kill existing vegetation; dig the fields; plant a cover crop of Virginia Rye perennial grass; and plant more than 15,000 (almost 20 different species) of native trees and shrubs, eventually returning these farm fields to a much more native condition. More information regarding this significant flood plain restoration is available by contacting the parks office.

7. STODDARD'S LANDING

Stoddard's Landing was at the northwest end of the Grand River across from the mouth of Ottawa Creek. Located on the road between Tallmadge and Lamont, the small landing was named in the list of A. Stoddard in 1864 and later H.A. Stoddard and William Stoddard. The Stoddards are believed to have planted the first fruit trees in Ottawa County.

8. SYCAMORE TREES

When approaching this GPS point you will be going by a small clearning on the north side of the river and you will see a large sycamore tree on the west side of the river. Sycamores are one of the easiest trees to identify along the Grand River due to their unique exfoliating bark. The bark of the sycamore has to yield to the growth of the trunk resulting in it flaking off of the trunk. Sycamore bark flakes off in large irregular masses leaving the surface looking almost like camouflage - with a coat of green, white, gray, and brown. Sycamore trees can grow to be massive, reaching heights of 100-150 feet and have a rather large trunk diameter of the average eastern hardwood species.

9. LAMON BUTTON FACTORY

In the late 1850s, the Lamon Button Factory produced thousands of buttons for the Grand River. The factory was eventually closed in the 1940s when the Grand River clams were over-harvested and the use of plastic buttons became common. Fresh water mussels still live in the Grand River. Watch for their pearl shells along the river bank.

10. RIPPS BAYOU

This 172 acre site is also an open space preserve and has no road access. A short portage must be made over the bank of the Grand River to reach the bayou. The property includes a large bayou surrounded by woods. This is an ideal site for birders to see many different species of birds such as herons, ospreys, egrets, and egrets. In the winter months, snowshoe hares can be seen running along the river edge.

11. CHARLESTON TRADER'S CREEK

A fur trading post was established in 1830 at the mouth of Trader's Creek by Pierre Constant. He purchased furs which were delivered to the British Fur Company post at Mackinac Island. Later, with the fur trade waning following a fashion trend in Europe away from fur hats, the land was sold to speculators. Richard Roberts acquired a site about 1 mile to the west and established Charleston Landing in 1842. The Roberts' log cabin became a popular "lumber crew" stop on the trip between Grand Haven and Grandville and was also known as the "Halfway House." Roberts eventually built a 200 foot wharf into a saloon and dance hall that operated with a steam saw mill, carpenter's shop, spool shop, blacksmith shop, store, and some houses. An ad for the steamboat Olive Branch in 1855 lists Charleston as a stopping place between Grand Haven and Grand Rapids.

12. LARGE AGRICULTURAL FARM LAND

Along the Grand River it is common to see agricultural fields that make up the type of agriculture which takes place along the river. The type of agriculture that takes place on the Grand River is the production of commodity crops such as corn and soybeans. In some places livestock is raised near or even along the banks of the river. The increase of farming along the banks of the river is due to the fact that the river provides a fertile soil for crops to grow on. The farmers along the river are also able to use the river for irrigation purposes.

13. CATALPA TREES

When you approach this GPS point along the north side of the river you should be able to see a Catalpa tree - whose leaves look drastically different from most of the other trees along the river. The Catalpa tree has large leaves that resemble a heart shape. If viewed in late June the Catalpa tree is also full of bright yellow flowers which look like extra long bean pods growing up to two feet long. When the fruit mature they turn brown and split open. The appearance of these mature flowers has given the Catalpa tree one of its nicknames, the "cigar tree.''

14. DEER CREEK PARK - OTTAWA COUNTY

Deer Creek Park is on the south side of the river. Deer Creek County Park is a small park and boat launch area. This shady little retreat is a nice place to land in order to enjoy a picnic or do some bank fishing. Purple Loosestrife: When visiting Deer Creek one might notice bright purple flowers in the surrounding area. This is the invasive plant purple loosestrife. Invasions of this plant can have a dramatic negative affect on biodiversity, as native food and cover plant species become crowded out. Most notably this plant thrives in areas that were once dominated by cattails. The loss of biodiversity and native foliage has a direct impact on the lives of organisms including waterfowl, amphibians, and even algae. Purple loosestrife is able to spread effectively, producing up to three hundred thousand tiny seeds annually, and also has the ability to sprout anew from any root fragments. This makes control of this invasive species problematic. However through many years of research, a biological means of controlling purple loosestrife has proven effective. Biological controls include five species of beetle that use purple loosestrife as their natural food source and do significant damage to the plant. Also a species of weevil has been identified that lays eggs in the stem and upper root system of the plant; as larvae develop, they feed on root tissue. The best plan for sites such as Deer Creek is usually an integration of mechanical, physical, and biological control. As for future control of this invasive species, the best practice is prevention, which entails monitoring and the removal of small plants before they become established.

15. MANICURED LAWNS

Approaching this GPS point along the north side of the river, notice a stretch of land where most of the lawns are neatly trimmed right up to the bank of the river. This is another way in which the natural river bank landscape has been altered over the years. These lawns serve a couple purposes for the owner. First they eliminate any disruption of the view of the river; second, look neat and clean. Often overlooked, the unintended consequence of these well manicured lawns is that they provide a natural corridor for rainwater to escape unfiltered to the river. Also, similar to farm fields along the river, these lawns also add fertilizers and herbicides to the river. Other contaminants may also find their way to the lawn and into the river, such as driveway runoff and small gas and oil spills.

16. EASTMANVILLE BAYOU OPEN SPACE - OTTAWA COUNTY

When you see the 68th street bridge crossing the river then you are approaching Eastmanville Bayou Open Space. The actual bayou is accessible by kayak from the south side of the Grand River and is another ideal place to fish from a kayak. Eastmanville Bayou County Open Space is 157 acres with 1.5 miles of Grand River frontage and 1.5 miles on Eastmanville Bayou. Acquired in late 2008, the property became popular with fishermen as an access to Eastmanville Bayou and the banks of the Grand River after two houses on the property were removed in 2008 and access was opened to the general public. The development process that was completed in January 2010. Most improvements are planned for the property just southwest of the 68th Avenue bridge over the Grand River, which will be the primary access point for the site. Improvements include a 40 car parking area, a small boat launch ramp on the bayou, a walkway under the bridge to access the eastern portion of the site, picnic tables, interpretive displays, a special canoe/kayak dock on the Grand River, and rustic toilets. The site will be 100% nature preserve.

Eastmanville was originally settled in 1835 by Dr. Scranton, Timothy Eastman and others and was known as Scranton for a short time. An article about the Grand River Times in 1855 described the "elegant store and warehouse" erected by Dr. Scranton and his sons and stated that the "grounds around the family mansion were tastefully laid out and adorned with choice varieties of fruit trees." George Eastman built a sawmill on the riverbank which burned in 1854 and was rebuilt in 1855. A number of hardwood industries were located in Eastmanville including a barrel factory, handle factory, planing mill, and a shipyard. A popular chain ferry crossed the bridges, the first of which was built in 1837 and then replaced by the second and current Eastmanville Bridge which was opened in 1909.