GRAND RIVER HERITAGE WATER TRAIL 4.90 MILES

JAC JUNGLER

This was the site of Jac Jungle (1930 – 1951), the most popular dance hall in rural Ottawa County. Live music, a beautiful dance floor, floor shows, food, and drinks – all were featured. The name originated from the owners – initials for Julia and Al Cortes (the original owners); the second part because the original barn was in a wildly growing, unkempt area referred to as the ‘jungle’. Dancing to live bands such as, home cooked chicken dinners (serving for up to 200) family reunions, banquets, picnics, and even baseball all were popular on site. Floor shows featured some local talent; but especially performers from other larger cities such as Detroit and Chicago, and performers Al Cortes secured using his time in vaudeville. A variety of shows were performed including singing, dancing, feats of strength, juggling, etc. It is believed that some big name entertainers performed at Jac Jungle including George Goebel and Kate Smith. In fact, Kate Smith lived in Rochester Township with a local family for extended periods of time. Many local residents have stories of meetings and romances with roots in Jac Jungle. The barn burned to the ground on July 21, 1951 and was never rebuilt.

JUBB BAYOU

Approaching Jubb Bayou County Open Space you must stay to the north of the island opposite of Riverside County Park. Jubb Bayou has no direct access by water from the river. To visit the bayou there is a quarter mile portage from the river bank. This is a good bayou for kayaking fishing. The Jubb Bayou County Open Space property offers a half mile of frontage on the Grand River and plenty of off-trail hiking. The floodplain and wetlands habitats offer quality birding and wildlife viewing. Take a hike to the northeast side of the bayou to discover a barn that was left by the previous owners of the property.

ORANGE JUBB

In about 1850 Edward and Moline Pelter Jubb came to settle east of the mouth of Crookley Creek in this area coming to be known as Jubb’s Bayou. Their eldest son Orange, worked the farm. On April 1, 1853 twenty-three Orange enlisted in the 7th Regiment of Michigan Volunteer Cavalry assigned to the famous Michigan Brigade under the command of Brigadier General George A. Custer. Orange’s battalion left Grand Rapids in May, 1863 to defend Washington D.C. The Brigade would fight in every major campaign of the Army of the Potomac from the Battle of Gettysburg to the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House in April, 1865. Orange sacrificed a leg to the Union cause, and wasn’t released from Harper Hospital in Detroit until August 9, 1865. Just five days later, Private Jubb was discharged from the United States Army into life as a civilian. Orange married Lucinda Bartholomew, and the union produced six children. Orange went on to serve as a community member as Commissioner of Highways for Crookley Creek in 1885 and as Nunica Postmaster in 1889. When Orange died in 1905, Lucinda applied for his Civil War pension. She passed away two years later. The couple is interred at Ottawa Center Cemetery located adjacent to the Jubb Farm, now Ottawa County parkland. Bordering that property is another Ottawa County recreational retreat, the Crookley Creek Natural Area. From the earliest inhabitants of the Grand River Valley, people have always appreciated a beautiful place. Before the existence of the beautiful place, the Frederick Warmke farm once bordered the Jubb Farm, was one such site. The Warmke land was purchased by David Randall and his father in 1956. In more recent years, the Randall’s and George Kirby sold their property to the Ottawa County Parks. The land is once again available to delight picknickers.

CROOKLEY CREEK NATURAL AREA – OTTAWA COUNTY

Crookley Creek Natural Area is located at the mouth of the creek on the north bank. Before reaching this point there is a long stretch of open fields and floodplains. This area is well known for Bald Eagle sightings. The Crookley Creek offers another 2 miles worth of paddling along the Natural Area. There are a couple areas that are flat enough to get out and hike inland to the trails. About 2 miles of hiking trails meander along wooded ridges and wetlands as well as through floodplain forest and open hardwoods. The existing farm house and barn are left from a Centennial Farm and provide a glimpse of a typical family farm yard of the past. In addition to the creek itself, natural features on the site include mature wooded ridges, floodplain forest, open hardwoods, wet meadows and buttonbush swamp. This diversity of natural communities provides habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna including bald eagles, sand hill cranes and red-headed woodpeckers. A small created wetland also provides a resting and feeding area for waterfowl. The Crookley Creek Natural Area also provides staging areas for many migratory birds. In addition to birds a variety of other animals including deer and river otters may also be seen.

TRADING POST

Magdalene Marcotte Lafremonboise was born in 1780 to Jean Baptiste Marcotte and Timothée, daughter of Kii-ne-quoet, the powerful Odawa headman “Returning Cloud.” Her father died when “Madeline” was an infant. Timothée returned to her tribal community located on Crookley Creek near Nunica, where she raised Madeline in Odawa ways. At age sixteen Madeline met Joseph Lafremonboise, a successful American Fur Company trader who operated twenty posts along the Grand, Kalamazoo, and Muskegon Rivers. In 1809 Joseph was brutally murdered by an Iroquois native demanding whiskey. After Joseph’s death the very capable Madame Lafremonboise assumed administrative responsibilities for the lucrative posts, which included sites in Grand Haven and at the mouth of Crookley Creek. Madame Lafremonboise was celebrated for her ability to bridge cultural gaps between the Native Americans and, as an Odawa who married a Saulteaux, and as a woman in 1822, she and Robert Robinson took control of trading operations in the Grand River region. Madame Lafremonboise went on to actively support the Catholic Church and to train young native women as teachers. She died at age sixty-six in 1846. Her Mackinac Island home is now the Harbor View Bed and Breakfast, situated next to St. Ann’s Church, where her crypt can be seen in the churchyard. Magdalene Lafremonboise was one of the first to be inducted into the Michigan Woman’s Hall of Fame.

GHOST PARKS

People often ask what they see when they visit. Before parks were formally developed on publicly owned land, all of these waterfront properties were privately owned “groves” where locals recruited by invitation only. As time passed, turf changed hands falling into the public domain, and select parcels were designated as parks, the turn-of-the-century private park concept was largely abandoned. Since 1995, the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Board has been acquiring land along the Grand River corridor for the development of a linear park, the Grand River Greenway. Though park officials did not know it at the time, numerous plots had actually been “parks” long before actually being purchased for that purpose. Connors Bayou was the domain of two such “Ghost Parks.” Connors Bayou was named for Wm. Connors. Connors was born in County to settle in Robinson Township in the late 1850s. In 1848 Connors sold 240 acres to William Perry for purposes of logging the site. That property was eventually divided with riverfront parcels at the mouth of Connors Bayou going to the Matthews Kumpeski and A.H. Waldron families. Both clans hosted huge picnics on adjacent parklands respectively known as “Kumpeski’s Grove” and “Waldron’s Place.” The biggest event in the rural community was the annual North Robinson Farmer’s Co-operativ Association Picnic starting in 1917. Since its inception in the 1860s, the annual farmers’ picnic had been held at Germania Park located on the Highbanks between Millhouse and Pottawattamie Bayous. Anti-German sentiment during World War I led to a virtual boycotting of that Abbeville owned site, despite the German organisation’s renaming their park “Victoria.” The party upswing re-emerged during the late 20th century with picnics and carriages, automobiles, the May Graham, and in private boats. Organizers promised picnics during World War II (Waverly, Mercy, Green, 128th, N. Cedar) was “one of the best in the county” and there were “splendid judges of white pine trees cut down in the mid 1800’s are visible signs of the past logging era.

CONNOR BAYOU – OTTAWA COUNTY

Approaching Connor Bayou County Park stay along the south bank of the river. There will be a log house visible from the river. An inlet just to the west of the house allows easy access to the park. Connor Bayou is a 750 ft. long bayou in times of high water connects to the Grand River. Its edges are filled with reed, canary and other native grasses. The marsh and flood plain forest provide a sanctuary as well as homes for wood ducks, great egrets and several species of frogs. Upland of the bayou, a canopy of black oak, red maple and sassafras shade the under story of flowering dogwood and witch-hazel. The forest floor, carpeted with native sedges and grasses, are scattered with flowering Indian pipe, wild sarsaparilla, and eastern fescue. Diverse natural communities provide habitat for coyote, fox, porcupine, deer, raccoon and an occasional badger. Stumps of white pine trees cut down in the mid 1800’s are visible signs of the past logging era.

LOG JAM OF 1833

The 1830’s was a decade of tremendous logging and lumber production in west Michigan. The demand for lumber from Chicago was insatiable, especially after “The Great Fire”. In the spring, logs cut all winter in the Grand River watershed were moved to the river and then via the Grand River to lumber mills in Spring Lake, Grand Haven, Ferrysburg: cut into lumber and shipped. Booms’ were pens created along the river where logs from many different logging companies could be stopped, stored temporarily and sorted using piles and gates. Once in a boom area, “river men” sorted logs out by size and species, marked (routed) the route for the log rafts, and drove the logs. Booms’ were often protected by large markers on either side of the river. River teams labored through rain, snow, and high water to move the logs as quickly as possible. The river continued to rise and finally entered a “log jam” in that area of the river. Up river, surging logs took out bridges in Grand Rapids — and moved with such tremendous force that they threatened the booms and logs in this area. If immediate measures were not taken, logs from upstream would destroy the booms in this area — and all the logs would wash into Lake Michigan. Logging and lumber represented such a large part of the economy in those days — the financial results would have been devastating — resulting in closed mills, bankruptcies and job loss. Quick thinking, tireless work and exceptional bravery by local river men such as Captain John Walsh, kept the log jam from becoming a disaster. Working around the clock for — ignoring the swift moving waters and deadly logs, they drove piles and shored up existing booms. Their heroic efforts saved the day. One of the solutions was to ease water pressure against the booms by digging a ditch 35 ft wide and one mile long, to divert water from the river to Grand River to Robinson Bayou and on to Stearns Bayou, around the jam, and back to the river. This was completed in just 2 days. Remnants of the ditch are in area along the connection to the river no longer exists. The location of the log jam was just down river around the next bend.

BRUCE BAYOU

Approaching Bruce Bayou, travel past a long stretch Michigan State Game Area on the north side of the river managed by the DNR. Bruce Bayou stretches back to the east for approximately 1.5 miles offering significant stretches of emergent wetland habitat. Emergent wetlands provide a rich diversity of environments offering food, water, and cover for many species of birds, amphibians, and reptiles. These areas are usually wet year round and support aquatic plants such as cattails and grasses as well as willow shrubs. It is not uncommon to see Kingfisher hovering over the bayou and then diving into the water after its prey. This is evidence of a healthy food web, as the Kingfisher is considered the top on an aquatic food web.