

Volunteers Participate in "Trash Bash"

Story and photo by Tracy Spry, park ranger, Lake Red Rock



Only days after the national celebration of Earth Day, Lake Red Rock hosted the reservoir's tenth annual "Trash Bash," an event designed to bring the community together to keep the lake area clean.

"Trash Bash" kicked off with volunteers picking up litter in numerous areas, and was followed by a free picnic lunch.

The April 28, event was capped off by a much-anticipated drawing for prizes donated from area businesses.

Approximately 200 volun-

teers turned out for the experience and collected more than 135 bags of trash and 18 tires.

Over the past ten years of the event, volunteers collected 3,572 bags of trash, 1,110 tires, and an endless list of miscellaneous items ranging from plastic swimming pools to household appliances.

The Marion County Development Commission, Red Rock Lake Association, and area businesses co-sponsored the event. ■

River Cleanup 2001

By Justine Barati, Public Affairs

On June 9, District employees are invited to participate in the District's annual cleanup of our river miles adopted through the Adopt-a-Mississippi River Mile Program. We will be meeting at 10 a.m. at Locks and Dam 14 in Pleasant Valley, Iowa.

"This cleanup is especially important considering the amount of debris left from the recent high water," said Steve Vacek, Operations Division.

The District has adopted river miles 493-495. These miles are located at LeClaire Base, Iowa. The locations to clean include the area around Locks and Dam 14 and Smith's Island.

"We are hoping to have a cookout at the Smith's Island recreation area after the cleanup. The cookout will depend upon approval of a funding request," said Justine Barati, Public Affairs.

"If you are interested in participating in the cleanup, it is important to remember to wear long pants, long shirts, and gloves, since nails and other debris will be present. It is also important to be up-to-date on your Tetanus shot, since we will

be picking up debris left by the flood," said Vacek.

"Reservations for the cleanup must be made by Tuesday, June 5, so that there will be enough food for the cookout, if we get the cookout funding," said Barati.

Reservations can be made by calling Barati at 309-794-5204 or by e-mailing her at Justine.A.Barati@usace.army.mil.

The Adopt-a-Mississippi River Mile Program has become a major focus of the Mississippi River Beautification and Restoration Project.

Schools, organizations, companies, and families have adopted one or more miles of shoreline since the program started in 1999. There are no fees involved in adopting shoreline miles, only a voluntary commitment to stewardship. Chad Pregracke, coordinator of the MRBRP, estimates that by the end of the project more than 100 groups will be adopting Mississippi River miles.



Photo by Mark Kane
Jerry Skalak, Programs and Project Management, throws away a piece of trash during last year's District Adopt-a-Mississippi River Mile cleanup.

The MRBRP was founded in 1997 with the objective of cleaning up the Mississippi River. In addition to cleaning the shoreline, the project's mission is to involve as many people as possible in the hands-on project.

An in-depth look at the MRBRP, including upcoming clean-up dates, can be viewed at: www.cleanrivers.com. ■

Navigation Improvements on the Kankakee River

By Ron Deiss, Programs and Project Management

Momence Ledge in the early 1880s where the exposed rock outcrop can be seen.

Photo by C. Elvin Butterfield



For more than 50 years navigation on the lower Kankakee River, from Momence, Ill., to its confluence with the Des Plaines River, provided a valuable service to the settlements, which lined its banks. The Kankakee River is about 150 miles long and drains an area of 5,270 square miles.

In July 2000, the Rock Island District began a Section 206 preliminary restoration plan for the Kankakee River in Illinois near the state line. The Corps has initiated the feasibility study to restore aquatic habitat. Proposed restoration work includes removing sediment composed mostly of sand, potential creation of a sediment trap, managing marsh for wildlife or fish, and improving aquatic conditions for native fish and mussel species.

Since the early 1800, the Kankakee River has been diverted, damed, ditched, and blasted. A short story of these changes to the river may provide insights into why the Kankakee River would benefit from restoration plans.

The upper and lower Kankakee River meet at a rock outcrop in the water called the "Momence Rock or Ledge" near the town of Momence, Ill. Above the Momence Ledge, the river was originally surrounded by marshes. Mentioned by the French as early as 1721, the Native American translation of Kankakee is "swampy country." This makes reference to the marshy ponds at its upper reaches, referred to as the Grand Marsh by the area's earliest pioneers.

With the construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal feeder in the mid-1830s, navigation improvements to the Kankakee River held the potential to stimulate further expansion of slack water navigation above the Momence Ledge into northern Indiana and connect with any future canal construction or river improvements. That is, if river traffic grew, providing access to the markets of St. Louis, Chicago, and the East and South via the I & M Canal and Des Plaines, Illinois, Mississippi, and Ohio Rivers.

In 1847, the Kankakee and Iroquois Navigational and Manufacturing Company was formed to make improvements to the Kankakee and Iroquois Rivers, which included the erection of waterpower, as well as the erection of mills and machinery. Under the acts of incorporation, the company, later renamed the Kankakee Company, was chartered within the state of Illinois for a period of 50 years. The Kankakee Company began work almost immediately, focusing on raising the state dam two feet for the I & M Canal, developing waterpower and building a series of four locks and dams.

By the 1880s, grain was moved by barges operated by steamboats by way of the Kankakee River and the feeder to the I & M Canal below Wilmington, Ill.

In its later years, even one of the oldest boats on the river, the

Morning Star, did a profitable business carrying supplies into the great marsh country and bringing out game. Trappers found the muskrat and beaver pelts extremely profitable and sportsmen found the waterfowl and fish plentiful. Wild game of all sorts was considered a delicacy and market hunters, who often averaged a hundred birds a day, supplied many of the finest restaurants of Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and many eastern cities.

Between 1889 and 1893 for the Kankakee Valley Drainage Company to administer a program, a cut was made by blasting through the Momence Ledge to facilitate drainage of the Grand Marsh. The cut was 8,649 feet long, 300 feet wide, and approximately 2.5 feet deep. The Momence cut was a major impetus in converting the Grand Marsh into arable land. By 1906, 46 miles of the upper Kankakee in Indiana had been channelized for agriculture and by 1918, the entire reach near South Bend to the Illinois state line, had been dredged and drained, transforming the Grand Marsh into a straight, deep ditch. Many residents along the lower portions of the river attributed increased flooding activities to the Momence cut, loss of wetlands from draining, and inadequate ditching.

In 1931, the Corps restudied the Kankakee River for navigation potential in combination with power development, the control of floods and the needs of irrigation. The plan was determined not feasible. During this survey from Oct. 13-23, 1929, Corps surveyor R.E. Jackson took numerous photographs. At the time of the survey, the locks and dams were in ruins, with the exception of the dam at Wilmington, Ill.

A product of the "Great Canal Era," the slack water improvement of the Kankakee River is an artifact of the systemic approaches to link large trade centers. The earliest steamboats provided goods and services to nearby growing cities and towns and transported bulk grains and raw products to the larger metropolitan and industrial centers for processing. In the 1870s and early 1880s, Kankakee River steamboats were primarily used to augment existing rail traffic. Due to the size of the ships, their cargoes were small, and use soon became relegated short pleasure excursions into the hinterland.

Excursions provided a diversion for those fleeing inner cities for quality leisure time in a socially redeeming "Chautauqua" atmosphere thought lacking in urban settings. The failure of commercial steamboat traffic on the Kankakee River in the early 20th century can be traced to the growing dominance of rail and auto overland roads and main-stem waterway transportation networks connecting large trade and industrial centers. ■