

The Nature of Things

THE BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 18 Fall 2019

History of the Old Creamery Nature Trail *By Randy H. Scheel*

An average user of the Old Creamery Nature Trail may notice many things as they walk, ride, or jog along any of the 15 miles between Vinton and Dysart. Open areas, tree lined stretches, bridges (13 total), bluebird houses, and an abundance of wildlife are most common. But knowing the history of this special trail really makes a person appreciate it even more.

Judge George Greene of Cedar Rapids organized the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Minnesota Railway in the early 1870's. His goal was to commercially promote Cedar Rapids and sought new rail lines from all directions, including one line north to Vinton. In 1871, Greene launched the Pacific Division, with the goal to extend the rail west from Vinton.

Despite its name, the rail line never did reach the ocean but did reach Garrison and then Dysart by December 29, 1872, beating the deadline for special tax benefits by only two days. A locomotive crossed the Benton - Tama County border on that date. The base for the Old Creamery Nature Trail was established.

One particular area of the trail demonstrates the effort that was required to build this rail line. An October 1922 issue of Rock Island Magazine points out a large earth cut just west of Garrison that nearly presented an "insurmountable barrier". This cut is about two miles west of Garrison (just west of the dirt road crossing at 16th Avenue). As you pass through this area today, you will notice the steep hills on both sides of the trail. The original railroad builders decided they must cut through that hill. For if they had not, heavy trains would have stalled at the crest. In 1872, there was no mechanical machine yet created to handle this cut. A rail project of this magnitude would typically involve several hundred men, often Irish immigrants, equipped with only picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows accompanied by teams of horses pulling dirt carts. For \$1.00 - \$1.50 per day and their humble rations, these men opened up the cut. Every time I go through this area, I marvel at the work that was required and can almost hear those workers picking their way through the dirt and rock one swing or shovel full at a time.



Garrison Rail Yard

Inside this Issue

Calendar of Events
Insert

**A Fall Tour of the Benton
County Parks**
page 2

**Meet Benton County's
New Naturalist**
page 3

A New Home
page 6

The Tajma Wall
page 8

**Renovated Hannen
Shelters and Campground
Book Libraries**
page 9

Fun Fall Craft
page 10

Electronic versions are
available at our website
www.bentoncountyiowa.org
Contact us at:
319-472-4942 or
info@bentoncountyparks.com
to be added
to our mailing list.

Continued on page 4

A Fall Tour of the Benton County Parks By Karen Phelps, Executive Director

As you drive around the county this fall on your leaf-peaking adventure, be sure to include all of our county parks on your tour. Doing so will reveal not only the beauty of the fall colors and the wildlife that call our parks home, but you'll notice a great deal of enhancements to our parks.

Starting in the southern part of the county with Hannen park, you'll notice a new kayak dock located on the west side of the lake near the boat ramp. Thanks to the Benton Community Foundation and all the proceeds from this year's ice fisheriee, kayakers and canoeists alike will be able to safely launch their vessels into the water without a mishap. This new dock is ADA compliant and should serve the public safely for many years to come.



New kayak docks

After paddling around the lake on a beautiful day, you may want to enjoy a leisurely hike around the lake and stop for a picnic at one of our newly renovated shelters. Enclosed ceilings, new LED canned lighting and electrical upgrades will make for a pleasant evening listening to the owls and other night creatures that call Hannen home.

If you are camping in the park, you now have multiple 50-amp sites to choose from as well as taking a selfie on top of the hill at the Northwest corner of the park. This is one of many selfie stations we are placing in our parks as part of the Iowa County Conservation system's 99 County Parks promotion.



Hannen selfie station

So let's leave Hannen Park now and travel north to Rodgers Park. Upon entering the park you'll notice a great deal of soil disturbance directly to the west of the main entrance. As part of a lake restoration project, we



Rodgers wetland project

are installing a wetland to help offset the high flow of water entering the lake after heavy rains. This new wetland basin will filter out sediments, phosphates and nitrogen entering our lake. Made possible through an Iowa DNR Fish Habitat grant, these smaller changes are necessary before we can undertake a much larger lake restoration project.



Rodgers selfie station

Continued on page 7

Meet Benton County's New Naturalist *By Signey Hilby, Naturalist*

Hello, I'm Signey Hilby and I have been a naturalist at Benton County Conservation since June 2019. I grew up in Dubuque, Iowa. As a child I was always outside learning about and exploring the great outdoors. As a teenager my sense of adventure grew and I began exploring in new and more appropriate ways. My aunt and uncle introduced me to backpack camping and I enjoyed it so much that we continued to take annual trips. When I turned 14 I immediately joined Venture Crew (A co-ed branch of The Boy Scouts of America) which has allowed me to participate in many outdoor activities while also receiving the Triple Crown Award of National High Adventure.

In 2018, I graduated from Upper Iowa University with a double major in Environmental Science and Conservation Management. When I started at UIU I really didn't have a specific career path in mind. It wasn't until my last year of college when I realized just how much environmental education experience my Venture Crew adventures had given me. So I applied for a Naturalist Internship at Winneshiek County Conservation. That summer was so much fun and the internship experience made me realize that environmental education was what I wanted to do. While looking to further improve my environmental education skills I had the opportunity to work as an AmeriCorps Naturalist for several months, during that time I was stationed at Nahant Marsh in Davenport, Iowa. Just before my AmeriCorps term ended I became part of the Benton County Conservation team.

When not working I enjoy backpack camping, hiking, geocaching, horseback riding, traveling, and learning about other cultures.



Signey Hilby - Naturalist



Did You Know?

Monarch Butterflies travel as much as 100 miles a day during the 2,000-3,000 mile migration south!

History of the Old Creamery Nature Trail *Continued from page 1*

Throughout the next century, this rail line changed names, ownership, and direction several times. Aside from passengers, the Pacific Division's top commodities in 1885 were coal (from southern Iowa mines), flour and other milled products, lumber (from Clinton sawmills), wheat (widely grown in Iowa with corn being #8 on the list), and oats. By the 1920' and 1930's, railroad use was declining. Roads were being built while cars were transporting people. An even bigger problem for railroad than declining passenger revenue was the loss of freight revenue to trucks once concrete roads became commonplace. Trucks could pick up and deliver door to door faster than railroads.

In the early 1990's, the Iowa Northern Railroad announced the abandonment of several miles of right of way from just west of Vinton, through Garrison to Dysart. A group with members from Vinton, Garrison, and Dysart was formed to purchase and establish the nature trail. Working with the Iowa Trails Council, the 15 miles of right of way was purchased in 1995 at a cost of \$45,000. CD's (not used for the installation of rails to a failed power plant west of Des Moines), a private loan of \$25,000 from Bob LaGrange, and Iowa Trails Council dollars were the funds used. In addition, the trail president was Bill Hansen from Dysart who helped provide much of the direction during this acquisition.



Old Creamery Nature Trail bridge construction

Later in 1995, the Iowa Trails Council filed a lawsuit against the Sumitomo Bank of Japan. The salvage company, financed by the bank, had removed rails from the property in violation of the purchase agreement. Finally, in 1999, after many legal proceedings, the lawsuit and arbitration on the bridge flooring were all settled with the trail winning. The settlements provided enough funds to finance clear title to the trail.

In 2000, the trail was named the Old Creamery Nature Trail after the Old Creamery Theater, Iowa's first professional theater located in Garrison. The Old Creamery Theater was founded in 1971. While the theater still performs in Amana, the Garrison theater closed in 1996, a very emotional time for the community and those that followed the theater closely. One mile of trail (the portion that starts on the west edge of Highway 21) was given to the city of Dysart. This mile is now called the C.R. Roberts Parkway.

Immediately, trail volunteers began work on the nature trail. Nine of the thirteen bridges were floored with cement and railings were installed. Low areas and some banks were graded to help divert water away from the trail. Landscaping and plantings were done in areas it made the most sense. With a lot of sweat and hundreds of volunteer hours, the trail took shape to become the core of the trail being used today.

Work on a nature trail is never complete. Grass and weeds need to be mowed. Trees need to be trimmed. Storms cause damage. The trail surface needs maintenance.

Continued on next page

History of the Old Creamery Nature Trail *Continued from page 4*

As a result, volunteers continued their efforts to maintain the trail. This was all done through fundraising and hard work. Equipment was borrowed as needed to mow or do major repairs. Words cannot describe the passion this founding group of people had for the Old Creamery Nature Trail.

Two major events happened to move the Old Creamery Nature Trail to a new level. First, the trail was given to Benton County Conservation in April 2010. This was done for several reasons. As part of BCC, the trail was now considered tax exempt and could apply for state and federal grants. It also increased the access to equipment and extra staff that was so desperately needed. Even though the trail volunteers have continued to meet and do their part, at times it was difficult to keep up with the needs of the trail. Finally, it helped increase exposure to the trail. Becoming part of Benton County Conservation provided an immediate boost to the trail!

The second event that pushed the trail forward was being awarded a Federal Recreational Trails Grant for \$143,000 in January 2014. With the trail being required to raise an additional 20% match for this grant, the total money available was nearly \$180,000. All of this was used to resurface the entire length of the trail. The announcement generated immediate excitement and energy for the volunteers, the BCC staff, and those who used the trail. The 20% match was raised in four months. Other areas of improvement were considered. Items (including benches) were donated. In the summer of 2015, the Old Creamery Nature Trail was selected to participate in a Trails Visioning Process. This program started in September 2015 and helped identify specific improvements along with ideas and potential funding sources to implement them.



AmeriCorps NCCC team helping with maintenance along the Old Creamery Nature Trail

Fast forward to today. The Old Creamery Nature Trail is in the midst of building a Rest Area in Garrison on the former site of the Old Creamery Theater. A pavilion was recently erected, and many more improvements are to follow this summer. The funds for the pavilion and other needs were provided by grants from the Benton County Community Foundation, Wellmark, and a local donor, Robert Risdale. The prairie plantings and trees are courtesy of the Rockwell Collins Green Communities grant. The long, trestle bridge just east of Garrison now has two donated benches to commemorate two key founders, Bill Hansen and Bob LaGrange. Signage to honor these two significant contributors were added this fall. The BCC staff received funding from Iowa National Heritage Foundation and ITC Midwest for native prairie seed and pollinator habitat for open portions along the trail. The community of Dysart continue to add improvements to their one-mile portion of the trail.

The next time you are on the Old Creamery Nature Trail, take a deep breath and think about the history and all the work that went into making it possible. It's been a labor of love for nearly 150 years!

A New Home *By Aaron Askelson, Naturalist*

We are excited to introduce our latest addition to the Nature Center, Dallas Coffey. This little turtle comes to us from Dallas County Iowa, hence the name (Coffey means box). Dallas seems to pass the day in his aquarium eating worms and the occasional cricket with a side of berries, this turtle is no fan of his veggies. Dallas's favorite activities include bathing in his freshly cleaned water dish and burying himself in dirt. Dallas spends his days meeting school kids at the Nature Center for field trips and day camps. Every once in while he goes on a road trip to visit a daycare or local library.

The ornate box turtle is one of two recognized subspecies of the Western Box Turtle (*Terrapene ornata*). This native of the Great Plains of the United States can be found from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and east as far as southern Wisconsin and western Indiana. Their range extends to Louisiana and eastern Texas. The Ornate Box turtle in Iowa is a prairie turtle found in mostly treeless environments with scattered brush vegetation. It prefers open sandy plains and grasslands, but is often found in some forested areas near streams.

Most of Iowa's 13 turtle species are found in and around water. While this turtle spends very little time in the water, they still need water for drinking. During Iowa's hot summer days, the turtle will find water to "bathe" in to help regulate their temperature. They are also very adept at digging and will dig themselves into the ground to make sure they do not suffer the effects of dehydration.



Dallas the Ornate box turtle

During the winter months they will hibernate by digging a shallow hole. Sandy soils seem to be their preferred area for hibernation. The burrow they make will be their home for winter all by themselves. When spring arrives all the box turtles in that area will emerge within one to two weeks of each other.

The Ornate Box turtle is easily identified by their domed shell which ranges in color from dark brown to olive green and sometimes black carapace (top of a turtle's shell) that has short yellow stripes adorning it. They do not get very big; only 5 to 6 inches. The females of the species tend to be bigger than the males and the males tend to have orange to reddish eyes while the female's eyes are more tan.

They are long lived animals that don't reach maturity until 8 or 9 years of age, making it hard for populations to bounce back from habitat destruction and predation. That is why they are a threatened species in Iowa making it illegal to capture or keep one of these turtles.

With habitat loss contributing to so many species having a harder and harder time just surviving, now is the time we need to take action. Since these little guys are unable to fight for themselves, preservation of unique ecosystems is a must. Sand prairies like the ones the Ornate Box turtle inhabits cannot be found everywhere so protecting these areas are key to the survival of this species in Iowa. With Dallas here at our Nature Center we hope to raise awareness about this problem and help out the Ornate Box turtles of Iowa.

A Fall Tour of the Benton County Parks *Continued from page 2*

Traveling towards the center of the park you'll notice a large retaining wall taking shape along the beach area. This wall is being constructed to help retain the sand on the beach by diverting water around the beach and allowing it to filter before it enters the lake. Perhaps you didn't notice the newly installed mini-shelters along the lakeshore. These metal roofed small shelters have cement pads supporting new recycled benches: a great place to simply relax or drop a fishline into the water. Sitting there relaxing, you might notice a new kayak dock across the lake next to the boat ramp. Just like the one at Hannen, this dock was made possible by multiple fund-raising efforts throughout the years at Rodgers park as well as funding from the Carol Sue Donovan Trust Fund. If you choose to drive the circle loop at the far end of the park you will discover another selfie station!



Rodgers beach project

A newly remodeled shower house did suffer some vandalism shortly after restoration: someone decided the urinal in the men's restroom was not a necessary feature and thus tore it off the wall. We on the other hand believe it to be a necessary feature and thus replaced it. While the pit-toilets at the far end of the park are closed for the time being, we are looking at replacing several of our outhouse style bathrooms with cement vault style restrooms. Though they come with a hefty price tag, we know they will be easier to maintain and will outlast anyone currently on staff.

Another project soon to be started at Rodgers Park is part of the Middle Cedar Watershed Authority. We are working with neighboring landowners and the MCWA to improve the watershed surrounding Rodgers Lake. These are exciting projects we are undertaking and all with the intent to make your stay at any of our parks more enjoyable.

Let's head towards our river parks. Mainly Hoefle Dulin, where you'll notice a new playground at the top of the hill where an old shelter was once located. Again, our heartfelt thanks to the Benton Community Foundation for the funding to complete this project. They have done wonderful things in our parks for all to enjoy. Playgrounds at Hoefle Dulin, Wildcat Bluff, Benton City Fry, Rodgers Park and Hannen Lake were all made possible with support from the Benton Community Foundation. As you enjoy our parks, please remember to thank the BCF as well as support them financially.

If you're an avid camper at Hoefle Dulin, I'm sure you've noticed how the great Red Cedar River has cut into the embankment of the park, most likely where your favorite campsite once was. Permits are in place to secure the shoreline from further erosion, however funding is still needed for this project.



View from the top of Hoefle Dulin playground slide

Continued on page 11

The Tajma Wall

By Scott Bahmann, Rodgers Park Ranger

After being a ranger for 20 some years, I have seen many changes at Rodgers Park. Some of these changes have happened naturally and others have been man made. As we all know changes sometimes have a purpose. These changes may offer a new experience or enhance what is already there. So, after several huge rain events and a few thousand dollars later, I decided to build a wall.

As many of you remember, the beach once was located below the campground on the north side of the lake. It was small and very shallow. At times it couldn't even be used due to the amount of moss that covered it. In the winter of 98' the lake was dredged out and the beach was moved. The beach is now located in a little bay along the picnic area.

The new beach location is good except for one problem. With most of the beach being on a slight slope, every time it rains, some of the beach sand is washed into the lake. Every year most of the sand washes away and we have to add more sand. The cost to add more sand each year adds up and made us wonder what could be done to mitigate this. A little grading and a short retaining wall could help with this issue.



Rodgers Park beach project

As we all know in this profession, things come up and ideas get thrown off to the side. It was laid to rest until a campground host donated an outdoor shower/rinse station. This shower station would help keep the facilities free of sand and would offer a new amenity to the park. Flashback to an old idea.

This wall was a vision I had many years ago. I envisioned a smaller wall to keep the sand from running into the lake. After doing some grading work the wall will end up being 130 feet long with two levels. The lower wall will be six feet tall and the top wall will be three feet tall. This will all be connected with a staircase between levels. The landing between the walls will be great for families to lay out in the sun and still have a view of the beach below. With the outdoor shower and rinse station close by we hope it will make it a lot more convenient for families to use the beach. The beach will also be nice and flat with little slope to the water.

As with any other project, it takes time to complete. Changes in design and weather has slowed this project down some but hopefully we can stay on task and have it completed by the fall of 2019. It should be fully functional by the 2020 season.



Whose Tracks?

Can you guess what two animals left these tracks?

See page 11 for answers

Renovated Hannen Lake Shelters *By Collin Strickland, Hannen Park Ranger*



*Enclosed metal ceilings
and recessed LED lights*

Just in time for Labor Day weekend, both shelters at Hannen Lake Park were renovated. Both shelters received enclosed metal ceiling, new LED recessed lighting, and electrical upgrades. We hope you enjoy the view from these nicely renovated shelters!



*Renovated
Hannen shelter*

Campground Book Libraries *By Collin Strickland, Hannen Park Ranger*



Rodgers book library

Did you know that Rodgers Park and Hannen Park now have awesome book libraries?! At Rodgers, the book library constructed by Mike LaGrange, is located along the main road right across from the registration kiosk. At Hannen Lake, the book library constructed by Florence Go-Getters 4-H group, is located on the east side of the lake near lakeshore camping. During your stay everyone is welcome to take a book, read a book, or donate more books!



Hannen book library

Thank you for your various gifts of kindness:



Benton Community Foundation

Jim Hyde and Family

LaGrange Family

Phil and Linda Barkdoll

Sam Overturf

Steve Haefner

Fun Fall Craft *By Signey Hilby, Naturalist*

Leaf Monsters!

Materials Needed:

- Real leaves - Gathered from your own backyard
- Brightly colored paints
- Paint brushes
- Silly face stickers or permant markers

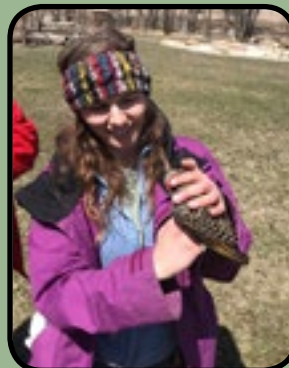
Steps:

1. Gather leaves from your own backyard
(Make sure you identify and avoid poison ivy)
2. When choosing leaves, try to find a variety of types, shapes, and sizes
3. Make sure leaves are dry
4. Paint the leaves until they are completely covered
5. Peel and stick silly face stickers onto the leaves or draw silly faces using permant markers



*Thank You
Jon and Caitlin*

Wishing you both the best!



A Fall Tour of the Benton County Parks *Continued from page 7*

Let's leave the river parks now and drive south of Mt. Auburn about one mile. Though not open to the public at this time, Benton County Conservation has purchased 160 acres of ground within the Middle Cedar Watershed. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is currently holding the deed to this land as we work to obtain funding.



*Barred Owl feather
in a Marsh Fern*

This fragile area contains one of the rarest types of wetlands known as a fen (more on that in future newsletters). We have entered into a partnership with the MCWA, INHF, Pheasants Forever, the Izaak Walton League, Cargill, the Iowa Ornithologists Union, Whitetails Unlimited, and perhaps YOU! All of these entities are helping us reach our goal of \$1,024,600.00. Securing this purchase will allow us to protect this rare fen, provide 160 acres of habitat for various forms of wildlife and native species; all the while being open to you, the public to enjoy. The MCWA will be constructing a large wetland on this land to help drain over 500 acres of watershed prior to it draining into the Cedar River above Vinton. Of course, Rodgers lake is also included in this watershed downstream. Another great conservation partnership working together for everyone's benefit.



*Red Admiral on
Wild Bergamot*



Evening Primrose

I hope you enjoyed this mini tour of the Benton County Parks and wildlife areas. As you can see, we are always striving to make your time in our parks enjoyable, safe, and most of all environmentally friendly.



Thistle

If you would like to financially contribute to any of our projects, please direct your inquiries and funding to: Benton County Conservation Foundation (BCCF) at 5718 20th Ave., Drive, Vinton, IA 52349. These gifts are always tax deductible.



Swamp Milkweed



Wild Bergamot

Whose Tracks? - Answers

A racoon and a deer

Conservation Board Members

Daniel Gibbins: Urbana, Chair
Dan Hill: Vinton, Member
Denni Randall: Belle Plaine, Member
Randy Scheel: Garrison, Member
Becky Van Wey: Vinton, Member

The Benton County Conservation Board meets the second Monday of every month at 5:00 at the Nature Center. Meetings are open to the public.

Conservation Staff

Karen Phelps	Executive Director
Scott Bahmann	Rodgers Park Ranger
Aaron Askelson	Interpretive Naturalist
Signey Hilby	Interpretive Naturalist
Coming Soon	River Parks Ranger
Collin Strickland	Hannen Park Ranger
Zach Parmater	Conservation Tech/Ranger
Shelby Williams	Conservation Tech

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