

# March & April 2006

## Feeder Hikes

4.9 Mile "Indigo Bunting", March 19 and 4.2 Mile "Barred Owl", April 23.

Our March hike started at Lock 33 or guard lock on the Rock River in Rock Falls. This is the point from which all the water in the Hennepin Canal comes from. We were fortunate today to get a little history lesson from our shuttle driver, Howard Walcott. Howard lives in the original large block house near the Canal which was the Overseer's House. The first floor consisted of 3 offices and living quarters, with the second floor of six bedrooms and a bath. Much of the interior is the original material and fixtures which sparked an interest from our hikers from Sterling, Bill and Laurel Ingram. They have an interest in the preservation of our historic houses and buildings. Howard also mentioned that they have had a lot of bald eagles there this winter. Howard said that his wife was afraid to let their little dog out one morning as a big eagle was on their front lawn. Now back to the rest of our group. Kim Jalley from Normal and myself, Ed Herrmann from Spring Valley, rode in the shuttle. Wayne Leader from Moline followed in his vehicle with Gary Wagle, Rock Island and Sheila Burns, East Moline. It was quite a puzzle of back roads to arrive at bridge 47 for the start of our hike.

Bringing their own "Xtra Arms" for picking up litter were Bill and Laurel. They had been on a previous hike and purchased their own shortly afterward. The city of Sterling is much cleaner as they use their pickup gadget on all their walks in their neighborhood. I wish more would follow their example in our own home towns. Well we did our job in helping the RRDA in their clean up efforts on the canal. This year we encountered more walkers than in the past and on the whole length of the walk. A very nice area and they do have rest benches along the way. Indigo buntings, none sighted. Mallard ducks, plenty.

Again we had a large group for our April hike and 11 first timers. Our signup: Marsha, Kay, Virgil, and Randy Rieger, and Marilyn Monari from Chillicothe; Deanna and Richard Welch from Mossville; Jim and Sher Gries from Eureka; Sheila Burns, East Moline; Emily Leader, Davenport; Wayne Leader, Moline; Sera Scott, Princeton; from Spring Valley, Ann Pomatto, Janice Dzierzynski, and Ed Herrmann. This stretch of the feeder flows through farm land, no towns in sight, only a few fishermen at one of the bridges. We believe we found a leak, a first for us. Water was trickling into a hole along the bank and disappearing under the path. Wayne and I went back after the hike to re-check and mark the spot. According to Steve Moser, most of the canal leaks are found by people walking along the canal. Be sure to report a small leak to prevent a major breakout

# May & June 2006

May - June hikes

4.4 Mile "Cardinal", May 21 4.1 Mile "Cottonwood", June 18

Bridge 37 (Geneseo Campground) was our meeting place for our May 21<sup>st</sup>, 4.4 mile "Cardinal" hike. Craig Weber was there on hand to guide us on this his home turf. It almost felt like sweater weather but Craig said that once on the canal the trees would stop the cool north wind. And yes, he was so right! It is hard to believe that this is the first time our group hiked on the new trail here. Our "Hikemabika" was scheduled here in lieu of our regular hikes for a few years.

The rest of our group for today: Kim Jalley from Normal; Bob Baierback, Princeton; Wayne Leader, Moline; Emily Leader and her friend Sammy, Davenport; Ed Herrmann, Spring Valley. Walking on the new bike path you can really see how silted in this section of the canal is. The water was very clear and we could spot the bass and bluegill along the weed beds. Craig said there was a bow and arrow carp fishing contest on the canal a week ago and one archer was out today to try his luck. Quite a few other fishermen were out but they all stayed on the road side. It was a little early for the lotus lilies but they were sending up their first shoots. Our added bonus on today's hike was a side visit to an adjacent fenced in wildlife area. The first thing we spotted was a llama out in the tall grass. That llama must have been the herd protector. It headed for a hilly shaded area and shooed the deer herd away from us. Then from the same area a large goat herd came running out but they were nosy and came right to us. Our cameras came out and we all had our pictures taken with the nosy goats. Wonderful hike and it was great to have Craig joining in with us again.

Our 4.1 mile "Cottonwood" hike was on June 18<sup>th</sup>, Father's Day, Again we are on the feeder canal going from bridge 52 to bridge 50. Rain, rain, rain! That and it being Father's Day could put a damper on hikers. It had rained all morning in my area and it continued and followed me until I left Route 40 and went west on Route 172. A few cars were at bridge 50, all were family outings taking dad out fishing on his day. Bob Baierback who was on last month's hike said he would have liked to join us today but he was running a 5k running race in Mendota. (I checked the race results and he did not run, the rain?) Finally Wayne Leader from Moline arrived, the only other hiker. Our shuttle driver arrived shortly after and took us to bridge 52. He said they had no rain west of there but according to my local weather channel we had an 80% chance of more rain.

This is a long stretch with only 1 crossroad, bridge 51, the whole way. Cottonwoods, yes, and their branches were strewn on the path most of the way. They may have had a wind storm recently in that area and a lot of smaller branches came down. Not much garbage to pick up but we did our share of clearing the bike path of branches. Mulberries were in season and the trail was purple under their trees. I wonder if rabbits were eating the berries on the trail too as we saw so many today. One lone deer was also on the bike path but it headed for the hills as we approached. It was hot and muggy as we went along and we were hoping for a brief shower to cool us off. It did rain for a bit but only out in the canal away from us. The sun came out as we got back to the parking lot and a few new people were now fishing enjoying a late afternoon outing.

# July 2006

July 16, 2006 - "Raccoon" - 5.4 MILES

Severe heat warnings out for today and the temperature expected to reach 100. No way could we tackle that 5.4 miles today and part of that was through the oven-like peat bog area. Howard, our shuttle driver, suggested we hike the section just west of Bridge 15. Although most of it was in the sun we would get a nice breeze blowing at us. We all agreed. And "we" were only three, Wayne Leader from Moline, Kim Jalley from Normal, and Ed Herrmann from Spring Valley. Kim and I learned from last year's July hike, take plenty of water and take a cooler to carry it in. We froze our water last year and in a half an hour it was all melted without the cooler. We mentioned to Howard that if all our cars were still in the parking lot tomorrow to send out the rescue team. We did have a cell phone with us that we could dial 911 and Pat Stier would come to our aid if needed.

It was not too bad, that breeze did the trick. We took our time and stopped at the occasional shade tree to rest and take in some water. Not many people out today, only 1 car in the parking lot at the Visitor's Center. We met a few people (6) out for bike rides. A few fishermen were taking it easy in the shade on the opposite bank. The campground that abuts the canal in this area seemed vacant, not a soul. The surrounding fields of corn were lush and all in tassel. Much different from the drought conditions of last year. Our small group did pick up garbage today too. A lot better than in the past, just a few cans and plastic bottles in and around the parking lots. It took an hour and a half to do the 3 miles today. Many thanks to Howard, our park ranger, for keeping an eye out for us. He was there at bridge 16 making sure we were ok and then again at the end of the hike in the parking lot.

# August 2006

## August 20<sup>th</sup> Hike - "RED FOX" 4.5 Miles

It was on the highway at 7:30 a.m. for Lee and Debbie Hayes of Crystal Lake. Hike information was obtained from our web site and they made it an all day outing. John Ast from Evanston saw our press release in a local paper when visiting his mother in Kewanee. The balance of our group have been on more than a few hikes. They were: Wayne Leader, Moline; Sheila Burns, East Moline; Kim Jalley, Normal; Ed Herrmann, Spring Valley. Always something new and interesting on every hike. The one thing that really caught our eyes was the newly repainted lift bridge. It was painted 'Clay Tile Red' as part of a boy scout project. We also found the Railroad Prairie section of the trail quite interesting at this time of the year. This section is left to nature, natural grasses and wild flowers. The fellows sampled wild red and yellow plums from trees that lined the trail. A few were a bit tart. Trees loaded with apples were also found. John Ast got to take pictures of a local train as it passed us just adjacent to the trail. I found this to be an exceptionally good hike, I had 3 inquisitive newcomers that asked a lot of questions about our historic Hennepin Canal.

# October 2006

October 15, 2006 - "Mink" - 5.7 MILES

The cold weather is still lingering on today after this week's snow showers and freezing temperatures. Only Wayne Leader from Moline and myself are here today for this extra long hike. Don't believe those weather men. It was to warm up some today but we have not seen the sun and the wind is making it colder. Once on the hike the trees blocked the wind and it did not seem so cold. Flocks of geese have been flying over and then disappearing into the nearby corn fields. Kingfishers are flashing their blue colors as they skim over the water on the opposite bank. Signs of freshly gnawed saplings show the beaver have been busy in this area. To my surprise I thought I saw two black squirrels chasing each other just in front of us. Wayne was looking up into the trees for them when I told him they were on the ground. How's chances of running into mink on our "MINK" hike! It was a first for me.

Only other people out here today were some diehard fishermen. With just about a mile to go we saw a hiker coming our way. He asked us if we had seen a couple of "yahoos" in a pontoon boat. Yes, we had. He was coming to their rescue, they had run out of gas and had a cell phone to call for help. Back at lock 22, a few more anglers were calling it quits for the day. They too, like the others we talked to, had not much luck today. We moved along fast today but still managed to bring back a few small bags of cans and garbage