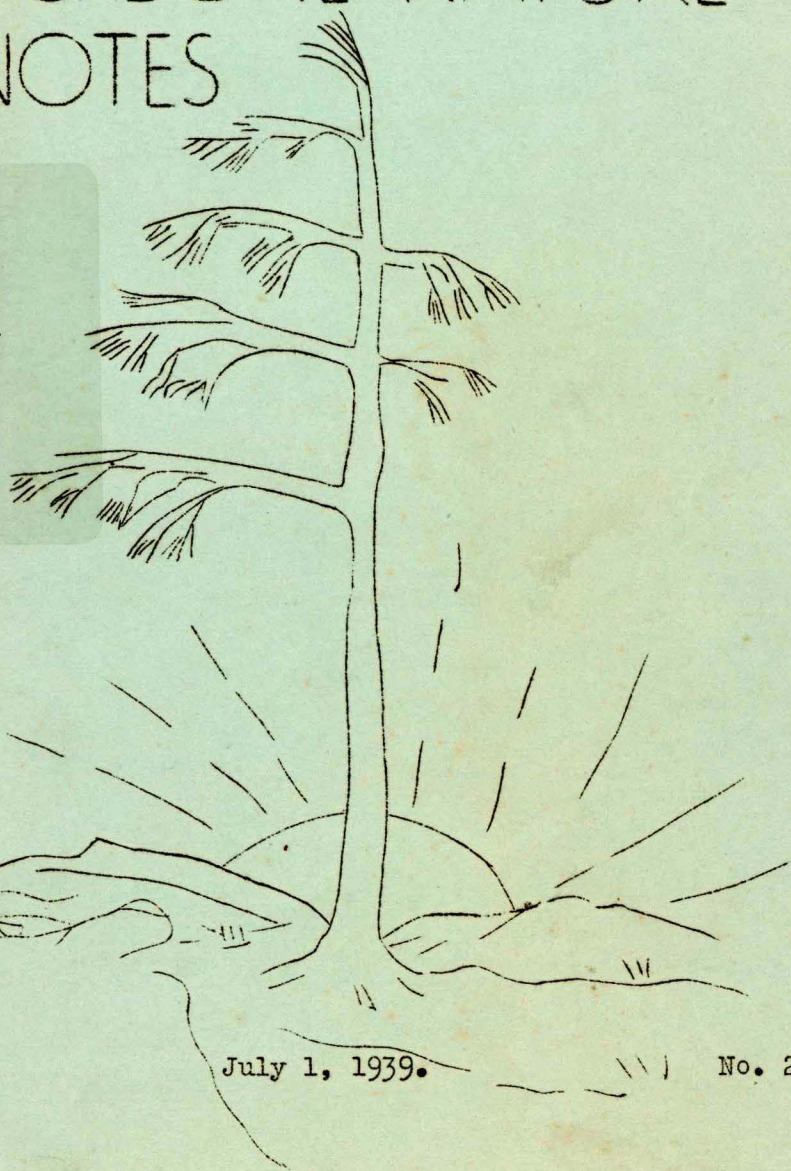


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BACKBONE NATURE NOTES

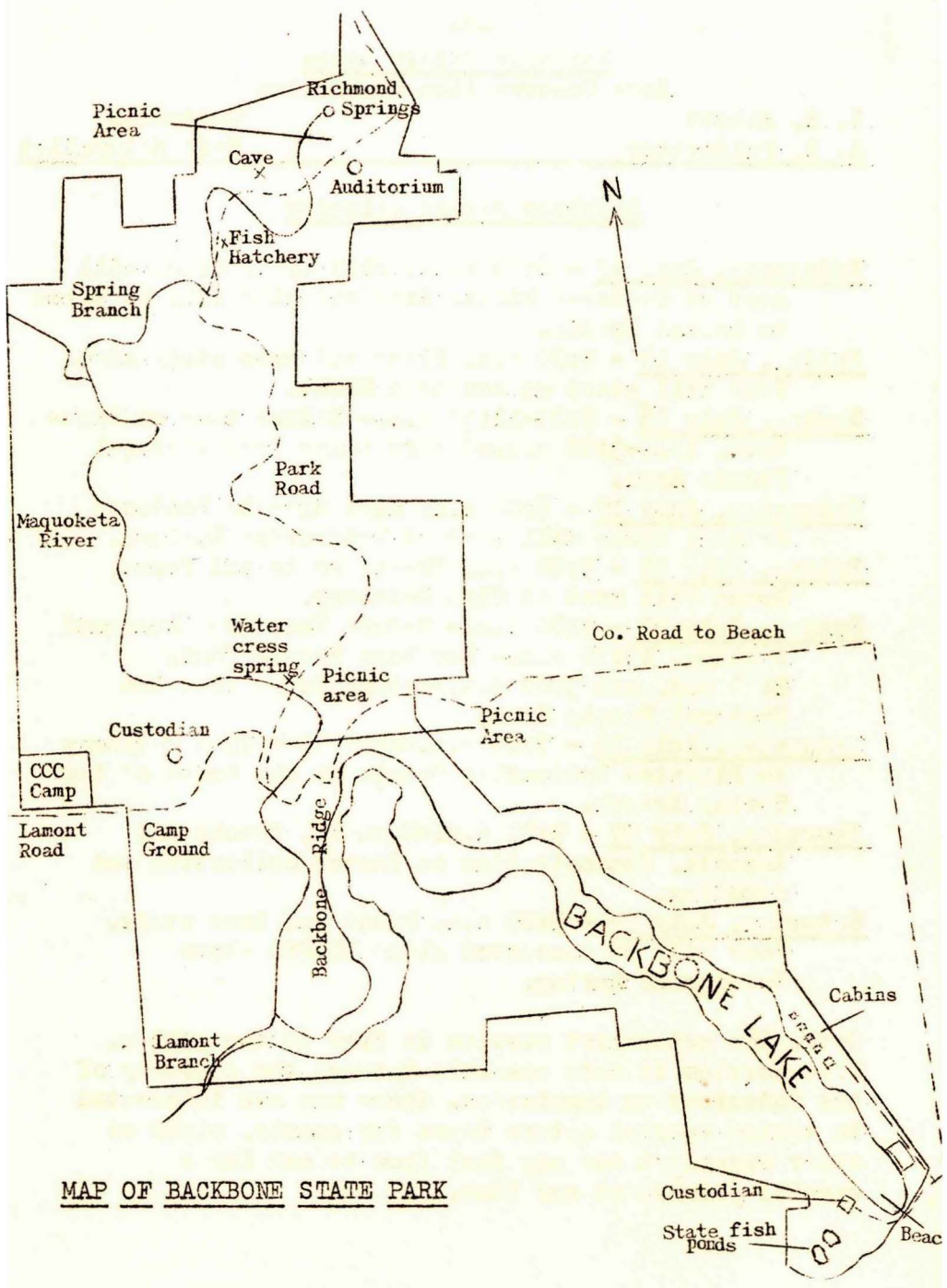


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MAP OF BACKBONE STATE PARK

Backbone Nature Notes
Iowa Conservation Commission

W. A. Abbott

Custodian

E. B. Forderboer

Park Naturalist

Backbone Nature Calendar

Wednesday, July 12 - 6:00 a.m., Bird Hike. Group will meet at Central Picnic Area and hike will be taken to Lemont Branch.

Friday, July 14 - 9:00 a.m. Plant and tree study hike. Tour will start on Backbone Ridge.

Sunday, July 15 - 9:00-11:30 a.m.- Nature tour on Backbone. 1:00-5:00 p.m.-Nature tours from Central Picnic Area.

Wednesday, July 19 - 6:00 a.m. Bird Hike to Woodcock Haunts; group will meet at Watercress Springs.

Friday, July 21 - 9:00 a.m. Trees, herbs and ferns. Group will meet at Fish Hatchery.

Sunday, July 23 - 9:00 a.m.- Nature Tour from Richmond Springs. 10:30 a.m.- Backbone Nature Tour. 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.-Nature Tours from the Central Picnic Area.

Wednesday, July 26 - 7:00 a.m.-Bird Hike from Hatchery to Pileated Woodpecker Haunts at the Mouth of the Spring Branch.

Thursday, July 27 - 9:00 a.m.-Mammals, tracks and insects. Demonstration on insect collecting and mounting.

Saturday, July 29 - 9:00 a.m. Plant and tree study. Tour will be conducted along bluffs above Watercress Spring.

Note: The naturalist service is free to the public. This service is made possible through the courtesy of the Conservation Commission. Those who are interested in taking special nature tours for scouts, clubs or other organizations may feel free to ask for a special program at any time.

Moving pictures and lantern slides on nature topics are available at the visule education department at Iowa State College. These can be used for nature education at the park, providing the naturalist is notified two(2) weeks in advance of a proposed picture program.

"Zeke"

The most familiar figure to all the persons who visit the Backbone part is a gentleman with a cane and badge. He is W. A. Abbott the park custodian. "Zeke", as he is known to most persons, directs traffic about the park, says hello to the kids and makes everyone welcome to the best and oldest state park in Iowa. "Zeke" has lived long in this vicinity and it was through his efforts and the efforts of a few other far sighted men that the Backbone was made into the first Iowa state park. Thousands of persons are personally acquainted with "Zeke" His homely philosophy and subtle humor make him many friends and it is often said that the park would not be the same without his personality being present.

A Raccoon Vandal

Two state foremen from the C.C.C. camp brought a picnic lunch to the park store shelter and left it on a table while they strolled to a scenic spot in the park. At dusk they returned to the shelter house intending to have an evening lunch. One of the men flashed a light upon the picnic table and found that the lunch was gone. A moment later the basket was found upon the floor with its contents absent.

A scratching sound attracted the attention of one of the men who focused his light in the direction of the sound. A very large well fed raccoon was seen making his exit out the back way.

Two nights later another party, having an evening picnic, heard a garbage can tumble over. An investigation revealed another large coon getting a meal of cake crumbs.

Mr. Abbott now has a good clue to the identity of the prankster who has been upsetting his garbage cans during the past month.

A Novel Wren House

When Gurney McCain hung his shoes on the clothes line to dry, after they had been cleaned of their mud coat, a mamma wren decided she would like to be the old woman with a hole in a shoe. She spent the entire morning filling the shoe with sticks and other materials. Gurney decided that before she had so many children she wouldn't know what to do, he would need the shoes. Now the wren is vainly searching for a new home. Perhaps she will choose a shirt pocket next time.

Oscar

Oscar is the name of a king snake found along a rock ledge on the north shore of the Backbone Lake. Before he was christened Oscar he was an ordinary king snake trying to take off an old suit of clothes. While in the act of trying to remove his scaly suit he was found by Mrs. Kenyon and her Manchester Girl Scouts who were on a nature hike in that region. Contrary to the usual rule, the girls gathered about the embarrassed kingsnake. When he saw the group of spectators about him he calmly surveyed the situation as best he could through the bleary eye-skin that he expected to remove with the rest of his suit.

The snake was picked up by the naturalist and all of the girls touched his "smooth as glass" skin. He stuck his tongue out several times, not to be mean, but just to be able to sense what was taking place about him. After he had been handled for a time he was taken to the park store a mile away from where he was found. His next abode was an empty candy box with a perforated cover. Since he was a kingsnake it was decided that he should be named king Oscar I.

Two flat stones were put in Oscar's box to aid him in changing his suit. On the following morning Oscar had modestly changed his suit in the seclusion of his box and was sporting a shiny new polka-dot suit.

Oscar will be kept for a few weeks to be shown to persons interested in nature study. After he has been observed he will again be released in the place where he was found. This snake is considered beneficial because of his habit of killing and eating other harmful snakes, notably the rattle snakes.

Iowa's Oldest Native Pine Tree

A giant pine stands on the central picnic area in the Backbone park. Thousands of persons pass under its boughs, not conscious that they are walking under a symbol of the passing of centuries. A white pine in its self is not to be considered as unusual, but a native white pine in this state is far from common. This pine is a native that grew from a seed produced in the cone of an earlier Iowa pine.

The pine was measured by Professor Guy Wilson and by comparison with other pines of like size, growing in similar situations, it's age was set at over 225 years. It measures nine feet in circumference and 125 feet tall.

It is surprising that such a tree still stands. Nearly all the original trees on the river flat and on the ridges in the park were cut by pioneers who owned woodlots in the area before the park became state property. On the entire river bottom only this one lone native, born of the eighteenth century still stands in defiance of the storms and the fates of time.

Birds Seen in the Park in June

1. Phoebe
2. Pewee
3. Crested Flycatcher
4. Eastern Kingbird
5. Barn Swallow
6. Tree Swallow
7. Rough Winged Swallow
8. Bank Swallow
9. Purple Martin
10. Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher
11. Whip-poor-will
12. Night Hawk
13. Oven Bird
14. Robin
15. Wood Thrush
16. Towhee
17. Red Start
18. Northern Yellow Throat
19. Yellow Warbler
20. Red Eyed Vireo
21. Indigo Bunting
22. Vesper Sparrow
23. Song Sparrow
24. Gold Finch
25. Chipping sparrow
26. English Sparrow
27. Rose-Breasted Grosbeak
28. Dickcissel
29. Cardinal
30. Bluebird
31. Cow Bird
32. Chickadee
33. Red-Winged Blackbird
34. Bronzed Grackle
35. Catbird
36. Brown Thrasher
37. Blue Jay
38. Baltimore Oriole
39. Crow
40. House Wren
41. Prairie Horned Lark
42. Red Headed Woodpecker
43. Downey Woodpecker
44. Hairy Woodpecker
45. Red-Bellied Woodpecker
46. Pileated Woodpecker
47. Flicker
48. White Breasted Nuthatch
49. Killdeer
50. Woodcock
51. Spotted Sandpiper
52. Upland Plover
53. Kingfisher
54. Black Crowned Night Heron
55. Great Blue Heron
56. Green Heron
57. American Bittern
58. Starling
59. Eastern Meadowlark
60. Brown Creeper
61. Red Shouldered Hawk
62. Red Tailed Hawk
63. Coopers Hawk
64. Bald Eagle
65. Great Horned Owl
66. Barred Owl
67. Screech Owl
68. Migrant Shrike
69. Mourning Dove
70. Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
71. Bob White Quail
72. Ring-Necked Pheasant

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