

LINCOLN BOYHOOD NATIONAL MEMORIAL GUIDE TO NATURAL RESOURCES

This guide is intended to provide insight into the interrelationship between man and the landscape. Pioneers on the southern Indiana frontier in the early 19th century lived close to the land. They looked to the natural environment for food, clothing, and shelter. Their survival was dependent on the resources they found and their ability to effectively utilize them. But in the process of doing so, they altered the environment as well. They hunted the wild animals and cleared the land. Those who followed them continued to reshape the land and the environment for varying reasons. Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial combines the commemorative and natural landscapes to serve as a useful example of the continuing evolution of the relationship between man and the world around him.

FOR YOUR SAFETY:

Please stay on trails to avoid Poison Ivy and stinging insects. Use caution on steps, roads and railroad crossings.

NATURAL HISTORY OF LINCOLN BOYHOOD NATIONAL MEMORIAL

When the Lincoln family arrived in Indiana in 1816, they found a largely unsettled and untamed wilderness. Native hardwood trees such as walnut, white oak, tulip poplar, red maple, Eastern redbud, sweet gum, ash and wild cherry were in abundance. It was from these trees that Thomas Lincoln, a carpenter, built his cabin and made many of the tools and implements necessary for a life on the frontier. White oak supplied shingles; tulip poplar became cabin walls; cherry wood was fashioned into the cabinets for which Thomas was well known.

The forest supplied more than just raw material for construction. It was, especially in the early years of settlement, a storehouse of foodstuffs. An abundance of wild fruit, nuts, herbs, and berries could be found in the thickly wooded area. It was also home to a variety of wild game such as panthers, black bears, wolves, raccoons, white tail deer, woodland buffalo, wild turkeys and passenger pigeons. In fact, it was because of the vast numbers of passenger pigeons in the area that the place became known as the Little Pigeon Creek Community.

Wildflowers, weeds and other plants also grew in the shade of the towering trees. But, amidst this bounty lay danger for the pioneers as well. It was the innocent looking white snakeroot plant that brought tragedy into the lives of many frontier families. The Lincolns were counted among them when Abraham's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, fell victim to the dreaded milksickness that resulted from the poisoning of the milk of a cow that ate the snake-root plant. His life, like the lives of many of the pioneers, was forever changed because of the environment in which he lived. For people who lived close to the land, the natural world often held the power of both life and death.

The lives of the pioneers were governed by the natural world in many ways. Not only did it contribute to their survival, but it shaped their daily lives as well. The transformation of the forest into cleared land suitable for agriculture was a task that continued for many years. Abraham Lincoln's famed proficiency with an axe was due directly to his nearly constant use of it during the 14 years he lived in Indiana. By the time Thomas had decided in 1830 to move his family to Illinois, he and his son had cleared and cultivated 40 acres. They no longer were dependent on the wild game and plants for survival, but their fortunes were still tied very closely to the land and the new environment they had helped to create.

THE CONTINUITY OF CHANGE

By 1830, the area in which Abraham Lincoln grew up was no longer considered a wilderness. Significant portions of the forest had been cleared, replaced by fields of corn, beans, and other agricultural produce. The populations of wild game had sharply diminished due to hunting and destruction of habitat. No longer did wolves, black bears, panthers and buffalo roam freely, and the passenger pigeon was on its way to becoming extinct before the end of the 19th century.

Beginning in the 1870s, the Little Pigeon Creek community evolved into the town of Lincoln City, with its railroad, streets, commercial buildings and homes. Remnants of the former pioneer settlements disappeared in the wake of the new development. By the early 20th century, the area bore little resemblance to the wilderness the Lincolns and their neighbors had tamed.

In the 1920s, a state park was created to preserve this place where Abraham Lincoln grew to manhood. Recognizing that the natural environment in which he had lived had significantly influenced the shaping of his character, early park planners determined to work toward the restoration of the forest. It was their belief that seeing a landscape similar to what Lincoln had known as a boy would help visitors to gain insight into the man that he became.

At the same time that efforts were being made to restore the natural environment, early park proponents worked to create a commemorative landscape as well. The Cabin Site Memorial, the Memorial Visitor Center, and the trail of Twelve Stones are key components of this cultural landscape. They were designed to be in harmony with the natural landscape around them. It is this blending of natural and cultural features within the park, that makes Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial a testament not only to Abraham Lincoln and his fellow pioneers, but to those who followed. In addition to preserving this place so important to the life of this man, it represents the continuity of change that is present in all our lives.

THE TRAILS

Four walking trails are available within the park. Each is designed to give you a different sense of the landscape and the environment. Please stay on established trails. Insect bites, poison ivy, and the occasional snake, may cause unnecessary discomfort. Please remember that the natural resources belong to all of us; do not damage or remove anything.

THE LINCOLN BOYHOOD TRAIL

This trail begins at the Memorial Visitor Center and leads you to the Pioneer Cemetery and the Lincoln Living Historical Farm. On this trail, you will pass from the formal commemorative landscape of the Memorial Visitor Center plaza and the Allee to the wooded knoll where Nancy Hanks Lincoln and other pioneers are buried. The shrubs which line the walkways are Japanese dogwood. On either side of them are rows of tulip poplar trees. Dogwoods and redbud trees dot the landscape with beautiful pink and white blossoms in the spring. The leaves of the maples, sweet gums, sassafras and oaks are brilliant in autumn.

A variety of insects are found near the flagpole. Blue-tailed skinks can be seen sunning on the steps at the top of the Allee. Deer often graze near sunset in the grassy area of the Allee. Birds like scarlet tanagers

and bluebirds are often spotted flying in and out of the shrubbery. The trail leading from the cemetery to the Lincoln Living Historical Farm passes through a deciduous forest very much like the one that existed during the time the Lincolns were living here. Most of the trees you see were planted as part of the state's reforestation effort in the 1930s. The forest, however, does contain numerous types of flora and fauna. At the northern end of the trail, approaching the farm, the forest gives way to cultivated crop fields in much the same way that it did after Thomas, and his son Abraham, had spent years in the backbreaking task of clearing the land.

The Cabin Site Memorial is set among the surrounding trees and marks the location of one of the cabins that Thomas and Abraham built during their time here in Indiana.

THE TRAIL OF TWELVE STONES

The Trail of Twelve Stones begins at the farm and ends near the flagpole. It passes through the oldest forest of the park and best represents what the entire property looked like at the time of the Lincolns' arrival in 1816. This primarily oak-hickory forest is able to support many types of wildlife. Acorns and hickory nuts and other seeds are important food sources for small mammals such as gray squirrels, chipmunks, and rodents. Large populations of small mammals, in turn, allow this forest to support other animals such as red foxes, coyotes, snakes, owls, and other birds of prey. Whitetail deer are abundant here due, in part, to a lack of natural predators and a reduction of habitat elsewhere in the vicinity. Intermittent streams and ponds throughout the forest support amphibian and insect reproduction which provides another important food source for animals such as birds, reptiles, raccoons, opossums and shrews.

THE BOYHOOD NATURE TRAIL

Located in the northern portion of the park, the nature trail passes through an undeveloped area and represents a successional forest. Succession is the shift of plant communities from a field filled with

highly competitive grasses and plants to mature forest. The process takes decades, if not centuries. As late as 1985, no trees were present in the majority of this area. Although the National Park Service has done some planting to encourage the re-growth of an oak-hickory forest, the process has been allowed to primarily occur naturally. Future management actions, such as planting and controlled burning, are being considered to facilitate the process.

In a successional forest, small trees and shrubs gradually take the place of grasses only to be replaced, in time, by larger trees. Competition for nutrients, water and sunlight favor growth of certain species. Oaks and hickories replace maple, dogwood and ash, which then become the understory trees of the mature forest. Fallen trees and decaying vegetation provide shelter for wildlife. As the succession process continues, this area will harbor a growing number of wildlife species.

THE LINCOLN SPRING TRAIL

This short trail begins to the west of the Living Historical Farm and leads to the site of the spring that was the Lincolns' primary source of water. On either side of the trail are trees similar to those found throughout the park. Wildlife is limited in this area due to modern intrusions such as roads and the railroad.

The spring represents another natural resource that was of vital importance to all pioneers on the frontier. A safe, reliable source of drinking water often determined where a family decided to settle. The presence of this spring helped to assure Thomas Lincoln that he and his family could survive in this place.

USE OF NATIVE PLANTS BY PIONEERS

The pioneers, especially in the early years of settlement, relied on the resources of the forest for their daily living. Plants and animals provided food, shelter, and other needs. Many of the plants and animals utilized by the pioneers still exist within the park's forest.

For instance, the leaves and berries of the spicebush were used as a spice and for making tea. The roots of the sassafras were collected and boiled for making teas and to make brown dye for cloth. The ripe fruits of the persimmon trees were harvested in the fall and eaten plain or made into cakes, puddings, and cookies. The wood of the trees is very hard and makes excellent wedges for use in splitting logs.

The wood of the dogwood tree was utilized for knitting needles and sled runners because of its smooth texture. It also can be fashioned into wedges for splitting wood. The leaves of the sweetgum tree were ground for medicinal purposes and were chewed like gum.

NON-NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Because of the many changes that the landscape within the park has undergone over the years, it also has a substantial number of non-native plants. A non-native plant is one that was not present prior to settlement of the United States, or is found far outside of its normal range due to human intervention. Many of these species, when placed in an ecosystem other than their native one will compete with the native species. Because they often have no natural controls, these exotics can consequently destroy the naturally occurring species.

Many of the exotics that are present within the park were intentionally planted in the area during the Lincoln City period as ornamentals. An especially troublesome example of this is the Japanese Honeysuckle. A pervasive woody vine, it wraps around small trees, stunting their growth and producing abnormalities. In some cases, it can even kill species that can not compete with it for sunlight.

Another problem plant is the Japanese Knotweed, which can be found along the Boyhood Nature Trail. Growing as a vine, it quickly covers anything in its path. By late summer the vine can even reach the top of canopy trees. Because it grows so fast, it can quickly cut off sunlight to slower growing native species, which, unable to compete, will often die.

WILDLIFE

Like the vegetation, the composition of wildlife at Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial has changed since the frontier period. Reduction of habitat and hunting lead to the demise of such species as bears, wolves, and panthers that once roamed these woods. The following animals have been identified during recent wildlife inventories; other animals may be present but remain undetected.

Large Mammals

Virginia Opossum

Raccoon

White-tailed Deer

Red Fox

Coyote

Small Mammals

White-footed Mouse

Deer Mouse

House Mouse

Short-tailed shrew

Bats

Birds

Numerous species have been identified in the park. For a complete listing, ask a ranger for a copy of the bird list.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Skink

Eastern box turtle

Garter snake

Species that no longer exist with the park:

Black Bear

Passenger pigeon

Panthers

Wolves