



Fall 2000
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Bayou Cleanups Dominate Fall Schedule

The last two Saturdays in September served as the dates for volunteer cleanups in Jefferson and Lincoln Counties. On the 23rd a group of volunteers removed enough trash from the Ohio St. bridge area to fill two 16 ft. trailers 5 ft. high. There was so much trash that the cleanup had to be halted due to lack of room on the trailers. Another trailer load was removed from a site near the Jefferson/Lincoln County border on the 30th. Two future cleanups are scheduled in Drew and Ashley Counties as well. The Drew County cleanup is set for October 14th at 8:00 a.m.. It will take place at the bridge crossing Ables Creek near the community of Selma. Volunteers are asked to meet at the old white church on Hwy. 293. The Ashley County cleanup is scheduled for October 28th at a site near Little Bayou WMA and Lake Grampus. Volunteers will gather at the community of Boydell on the west side of Hwy. 165 at 8:00 a.m.

Anyone is welcome to attend the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance (BBA) sponsored cleanups. The BBA does not have a “membership” in the traditional sense of the word. We consider our members to be all the people who live along the bayou as well as other interested parties from around the state and the nation. Essentially, anyone who cares about restoring and maintaining the beauty and health of Bayou Bartholomew is a member of the BBA. It can sometimes be embarrassing to drive near Bayou Bartholomew with someone from another state or region of our state. It’s difficult to explain why people would dump a refrigerator, or a washer, or a television into the bayou. It can be equally as difficult to explain why the decent people who live in the area and the people charged with enforcing the littering laws can’t do something about it. Helping out at a BBA cleanup is one way a person can help make a difference. We hope to see you and your family at the next cleanup. Additional information can be found by calling (870) 879-4808.



Volunteers remove large appliances such as refrigerators and stoves from the bayou channel with the help of a small boat and a winch.



Although it looks like it could have been taken miles from civilization, this photo was shot from the Ohio St. bridge in Pine Bluff after the BBA cleanup.

Bayou Bartholomew as a Stream of History

“The Old Arkansas River Channel”

by Rebecca DeArmond-Huskey

Some people find it hard to conceive how the Arkansas River once flowed through part of the present bed of Bayou Bartholomew. This difficulty stems from failing to recognize the almost unfathomable changes that the landscape experienced in the last 30,000 years. Riparian dwellers easily notice stream banks caving in, sandbars switching from one side to the other, and occasional changes of courses caused by new channels cutting through. While these changes are evident, those that took place eons ago are not so easily understood.

Timothy Flint, writing in 1835, said in reference to Bayou “Barthelimi” and other similar streams, “...long, deep, and winding water-courses...which seem to have been dug out by the hand of nature....” Ancestral rivers began carving channels southward as million year old glacial ice sheets in the northern hemisphere started to melt around 35,000 to 25,000 years ago. There are scattered terrace remnants along the bayou that geologists believe were laid down by the braided (diverse channels) Arkansas River during the melting of Rocky Mountain glaciers 20,000 to 12,000 before present. Archeological finds on these terraces support the geologist’s theories.

The Arkansas occupied six meander belts between the Mississippi River and the bayou before reaching its present channel. The areas of Macon Ridge and the Boeuf River mark the fourth and fifth paths. The sixth and last meander belt is associated with Bayou Bartholomew. As the river moved westward from the Boeuf, it carved out a new course corresponding to Plum Bayou north of the present river, passed just east of Pine Bluff, and then followed a southern route along a course corresponding to present-day Bayou Bartholomew to its confluence with the Ouachita River.

The scalloped outline of the edge of the pine timbered terrace west of the bayou and the many oxbows flanking the bayou reflect the meandering of the old Arkansas River. Approximately 2,500 years ago the Arkansas began to divert to its present channel, and between 1,800 and 2,200 years ago it left the bayou channel entirely. The present bayou channel reflects the course of the Arkansas when it was in a partial-flow regime. Part of the river was already diverting through a crevasse into the swamps at that time.

More easily understood are the clues left in the bayou bed and its terraces by the old Arkansas River. The buried red sediment it carried from Oklahoma maps the course of the old riverbed. A soil sample taken near Pine Bluff in the late 1800s found sixteen feet of red clay and twenty-six feet of orange colored sand under seventeen feet of other soil types. The red deposits are evident all the way to the mouth of the bayou and on into the Ouachita River.

Most bayous were created, as Bartholomew was, by the shifting of old river channels. They were constantly changing because running water takes the less obstructed course. Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Thus in the course of ages the rivers wiggle in their beds, till it feels comfortable with them. Time is rather cheap and insignificant.”

Local Farmer Receives Conservation Award

The Jefferson County Conservation District recently announced the winner of the annual Cooperator of the Year Award. One person from each Conservation District is awarded this honor each year through the Goodyear/NACD Conservation Awards Program. Recipients of this award are characterized by their commitment to conservation efforts through cooperation with the local Conservation Districts.

The winner of the 1999 Cooperator of the Year Award is Benny Fratesi of Pine Bluff. Mr. Fratesi farms 4,300 acres in Jefferson County and has been in the business of farming for 40 years. He has enrolled over 400 acres of land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). He has also initiated conservation tillage practices such as no-till and mulch-till on much of the land he farms. Other soil conserving steps Mr. Fratesi has taken include land leveling, irrigation water management and other erosion control practices. He also farms 1500 acres in Lincoln County, of which over 500 acres has been enrolled in CRP.

The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance has also cooperated with Mr. Fratesi to assist in the effort to improve water quality in Bayou Bartholomew while at the same time improving wild-life habitat. Using money received through grants and donations from American Forests, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and Potlatch Corporation, the BBA financed the purchase of almost 81,000 hardwood seedlings for planting on much of his CRP enrolled land in Jefferson County. Mr. Fratesi summed up his feelings on his cooperation with the Conservation Districts and the BBA with this statement, "Most farmers are concerned with environmental and conservation issues. These programs allow the farmer to care for the environment while still making a profit."

BBA Contributions

The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance would like to use this space to thank and recognize the individuals, businesses, and organizations that have recently donated money to assist in the effort to restore Bayou Bartholomew. All donations to the BBA are tax deductible.

Allison Hobbs, in Memory of W.W. Phillips Jr. – Santa Monica, CA
J.C. and Carolyn Nichols, in Memory of Alma Ruth Short / sister of Curtis Merrell – Monticello
Mrs. Ocie (Jamie) Bradshaw, in Memory of Ocie Bradshaw – Star City
Patrick and Nell Allison, in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Shaw's participation in Camp PB-2000 – Dallas, TX
Patrick and Nell Allison, in honor of Sue Phillips Philp on her birthday September 10 – Dallas, TX
Three Rivers Audubon Society – Pine Bluff
John Yeldon – Bastrop, LA

Several donations have also been made to finance the publication of an upcoming book on the history of Bayou Bartholomew. Donors include: Kenneth Dashiell of Bastrop, LA; Hibernia National Bank of New Orleans, LA; Mer Rouge State Bank of Mer Rouge, LA; and Bonita Motor Supply and Hardware of Bonita, LA.

You can contact the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance by writing, calling, or e-mailing:

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This towering cypress tree occupies the channel of Bayou Bartholomew in Jefferson County. Many large cypress trees line the banks and channel of the bayou here, but few true giants such as this one remain. Trees this size are known to exceed 1000 years in age.

Send to: Bayou Bartholomew Alliance, 7233 Camden Cutoff Rd, Pine Bluff, AR, 71603

To Restore Bayou Bartholomew I Would Like

to donate _____ **(a tax deductible donation) to be used for**
(circle one)
tree planting
educational programs
general funds to be used wherever needed most
a memorial gift in memory of _____

to donate time as a volunteer
(circle one)
to plant trees
to clean up Bayou Bartholomew
wherever I am needed

Name _____ **Phone** _____

Address _____

Comments:

Creature Close-up

The creatures in this issue's close-up have a love/hate relationship with mankind. If you were an adventurous young man in early 19th-century North America, you most likely would have loved these creatures because of the opportunity for economic gain that they provided. However, if you are a landowner growing crops or timber in modern day North America it is quite possible that you hate these creatures because of the economic loss they can cause. These creatures are the largest rodents in North America, attaining a maximum size of over 100 pounds! Unlike the majority of rodents, they live a mostly aquatic lifestyle. Their scientific name is *Castor canadensis*, but they are commonly known as beavers.

Beavers are one of the most recognizable creatures in the animal kingdom. If you see a giant rat-like creature with huge buck teeth and a tail shaped like a paddle, you can be certain it's a beaver. Beavers use those buck teeth to perform their most famous (or infamous) act, that of chewing down trees. They are capable of chewing down a willow tree 5" in diameter in only 3 minutes. Beavers chew down trees for several reasons, the primary motivation being to gain access to the bark that lies above their reach. Bark from trees is one of the primary food items for beavers, especially in the winter, although they will also eat softer herbaceous vegetation in the warmer months. Felled trees are also used for the construction of dens and dams.

Beavers are disliked more for their habit of damming streams than that of cutting down trees. Beaver dams often cause water to back up over a large area, resulting in more loss of timber through flooding than a whole family of beavers could ever inflict with their eating habits. The fact is that a lot of beavers in Arkansas never build dams. Only individuals that inhabit relatively small streams or rivers perform this activity. Beavers living in lakes, ponds, or large rivers have no need of storing extra water. Beaver damming activity can actually be beneficial in remote areas away from commercial timber stands, crops, or homes. During dry weather periods the ponds that result from dams provide a reliable source of water for fish, waterfowl, and other aquatic mammals such as otter and mink.

Beavers mate from late January to late February, and 1-8 kits are born four months later. They are born fully furred and with their eyes open. They enter the water within 30 minutes of being born and are adept at swimming within a week. Young beavers remain with their parents for two years, helping to maintain the den. Dens can be located either in a "lodge" made of interwoven branches or in a hole in a stream bank known as a "bank den". When the birth of another litter approaches, the previous generation is kicked out of the den to find their own territories.

Beavers were once a very valuable commodity in North America. Millions were trapped for their pelts, which were used to make robes, coats, and top hats. Their fur was so valuable that they were trapped to near extinction by the early 20th century. The last century has seen beaver restored to most of their original range. A lack of demand for beaver pelts has led to an explosion in beaver populations. Trapping beavers has now become a way to control their population.



BBA Attends Boeuf-Tensas Project Meetings

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently held scoping meetings in McGehee and Pine Bluff regarding the proposed Boeuf-Tensas irrigation project. The meetings were held to educate local citizens on the purpose of the project and to allow them to express their views or possible concerns regarding the project. The BBA, along with several state and federal agencies and local citizens, attended both meetings.

The Boeuf-Tensas project was proposed to help ease the pressure on ground water supplies in the Southeastern part of Arkansas. Decades of pumping from the ground for irrigation, industry, and household uses has lowered groundwater levels to the point that salt water intrusion is occurring in some places. This condition causes groundwater to be unsuitable for use in irrigating crops. The project proposes to transfer surface water from the Arkansas River into unspecified canals and streams in order to move water into the affected region. Bayou Bartholomew is listed as a possible conduit for this water. The BBA has no official stance on the project, but did present a list of concerns to the Corps of Engineers. They include: 1) possible impacts on water quality in the bayou; 2) distribution of organisms (such as zebra mussels) from one stream basin to another; 3) impacts on wetlands; 4) impacts on WRP (Wetlands Reserve Program), CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), and buffer strips funded by the USDA throughout the watershed; 5) impacts on flows of the Arkansas River from a cumulative perspective if all proposed irrigation withdrawals become reality; 6) impacts on fish and fish habitats in all water from which flows are depleted or augmented; 7) impacts on soils receiving irrigation water from the Arkansas River, and 8) potential economic feasibility of enrolling buffer strips, riparian lands and wetlands in existing federal USDA programs thereby improving fish, wildlife, and environmental situations and reducing the need for flood control and irrigation waters.

The Corps of Engineers wishes to inform residents in the area that they have contracted with EMC, Inc. of Greenwood, MS, to conduct surveys of stream cross-sections within the Boeuf-Tensas Basin during the next 6 months. Access to bridge crossings and remote sections of streams will be required. Survey streams include: Boeuf River, Boeuf River Diversion, Canal 19, Bayou Macon, Ditch Bayou, Big Bayou, Black Pond Slough, Connerly Bayou, Macon Lake, Canal 43, Canal 81, Canal 81 Diversion, Canal 18, Deep Bayou, Jacks Bayou, and Bayou Bartholomew. Landowners with questions can contact Paul Eagles with the Corp of Engineers at (601) 631-5745 or Ann Cash of the Boeuf-Tensas Regional Irrigation Water Distribution District at (870) 222-

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