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Local Students Gain First Hand Experience in the Restoration of Bayou Bartholomew

Seventh and eighth grade students from White Hall Junior High recently joined forces with other members of the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance to help in the organization's efforts to reforest riparian areas along Bayou Bartholomew. On November 14th and 15th thirty-nine students from the White Hall gifted and talented classes joined their coordinator, Ms. Linda Johnson, and the BBA coordinator, Dr. Bill Layher, at a tree planting site near the Interstate 530 bypass in Pine Bluff. The BBA worked in cooperation with Mike Luers, the head of Pine Bluff Wastewater, to gain permission to reforest an abandoned sewage settling pond. The site, which discontinued use in 1988, is located near the northbound exit ramp onto Hazel Street.

The planting area consisted of approximately four acres lying within the levees of the old settling pond, which is now mostly dry except during periods of heavy rainfall or flooding from Bayou Bartholomew. Because the area is covered by up to several feet of water during these periods, the number of potential tree species for planting was very limited. In natural oxbows and brakes along the bayou, bald cypress and water tupelo are two of the only species that can tolerate extended periods under water (they often spend their entire lives with their roots submerged) while also maintaining the ability to survive the drought years when Bayou Bartholomew doesn't flood. Because cypress seedlings are commonly grown by tree nurseries throughout the south, they are much cheaper and more accessible than the water tupelo. Because of this the decision was made to plant the entire site in bald cypress.

Each class was divided into tree planting teams consisting of two individuals. One person was in charge of digging holes with the use of a spade-like tool called a dibble bar. The other person carried the trees and placed individual trees into each hole. The combined classes planted over 1800 trees in two days. Anyone who has planted trees by hand will tell you it can be back-breaking work. These first time tree planters did an excellent job and no complaints were heard from either group. On the contrary many of the students commented on how much fun it was to be outside doing hands-on work for a good cause.

The two days did not consist totally of tree planting activities. After lunch, each group participated in an informative nature walk along Bayou Bartholomew near the planting site. Despite its location within the city limits, the trail revealed a surprising diversity of plant and animal life. The students were able to observe many species of wetland and bottomland hardwood plant species including smartweed, button bush, cypress, black willow, willow oak, and water oak. They were also able to get close up views of a beaver lodge and a heron rookery. Several flocks of mallards and wood ducks were also observed resting on Bayou Bartholomew.



The students who volunteered to help plant cypress trees along Bayou Bartholomew include:

7th Grade:

Angela Berlin
Emily Brown
Daniel Burgess
Sammuel Callahan
Becky Casey
John Daniel Chambliss
Tyler Copeland
Larry Edwards
Lenny Goodnight
Briteny Horn
Kristen Howard
Dustin Huggins

Andrew La Harp
Sara Langley
M'Shelle Miller
Jerrod Powell
Justin Smith
Joseph Stout
Sarah Strawn

8th Grade:

Victoria Baureis
Megan Berley
Megan Butts
Rachel Butts
Albert Carey
Onalee Carson
Stephen Cunningham
Erica Dierick
Tiffany Erwin
Glenn Fullington
Brian Garner
Heather Hall

Perry Hayes
Tiffany Jones
Cody Kees
Eric Lunsford
Josh Stringer
Tye Thorneberry
Kati Tucker
Natalie Ward

Bayou Bartholomew as a Stream of History

“Crossing the Bayou on Ferries”

by Rebecca DeArmond-Huskey

Long before the first ramshackle bridges spanned the bayou, people crossed on fords, footlogs, canoes, and makeshift rafts. Equestrians simply plunged in and allowed their horses to swim across. As travel increased on the primitive roads, ferries began to offer a drier alternative at the principle crossings. Many bridges that now extend over the bayou are at the old ford and ferry sites.

Known ferries in Lincoln County were Sorrells, Summerford, Browns, and Jones, the latter two being in place by 1860. In Drew County there were Pruitts, Hudspeth, Gasters (all operating in 1860), and Hedges (near Jerome in 1913). The county court granted Stephen Gaster a license in 1848 “to run a public ferry across Bayou Bartholomew, near his residence, the rates of ferriage being as follows: Wagon and team, 50 cents; carryall or cart, 37½ cents; man and horse, 10 cents; footman, 5 cents; loose stock, 3 cents; all but lead horse, which was 5 cents. Their rates were to be doubled during high water.”

Ferries were numerous in Ashley County. From north to south there were Fergusons (1913, above Boydell), Nobles Landing and McCombs (west of Montrose), Perkins, Cains, Culpeppers, Sherrer place, Bloomers, Brooks, Wilsons, Robinsons, Dades (1849), Poplar Bluff, Phillips (by 1841), Grants, Montgomerys, Smiths, Eatmans, Bells, Crawleys, and Haynes. In 1849 John Wilson was operating his ferry (and another business along with it). He left a note on it for his customers: “If ennybody cums here arter lickier, or to git across the river, they can jes blow this hear horn, and if I don’t cum when my Betsy up at the house hears the horn blown, she’ll come down and sell them the lickier, or set them across the river.”

A change of terminology takes place in Morehouse Parish where ferries are more commonly referred to as flats or rafts. William Penn McCain and his son, Jesse, built a ferry just below the Arkansas state line in 1903 and built a second one in 1909. While he was away, the ferry was left in the care of neighbors. Other ferries in Morehouse Parish were Barnes, Winklers, Zacharys, Hopkins, Cora’s Bluff, Vesters, Wards, Days, Wardville, Bonners, and Scotts. Before the Cival War there were ferries at Knoxes, Grays, Colliers, Rosses, and Boyds.

Although some commercial fishermen had primitive houseboats, known as shanties, on the bayou, they were not a common sight. In 1909 William Penn McCain of Zachary needed to move his family to West Monroe so he could work there. He decided to use the bayou as the route. With the help of his son, Jesse, he built a houseboat, which he named “The Little Star.” He and his wife with five children then set out on their voyage down the bayou and on to West Monroe via the Ouachita. After living on the houseboat for a short time, the family moved into a rented house. After a while, his family wanted to move back home, so back up the bayou they went. McCain put the houseboat up for sale, but no one bought it. The bayou bed eventually became its permanent home.

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

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Pine Bluff, AR 71603
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These students donated their time and sweat to aid in the restoration of a tract of land along Bayou Bartholomew. Other people choose to help in the form of participating in trash clean ups or donating the use of equipment. Others show their support of the BBA's efforts in the form of a tax deductible donation. How do you support the restoration of Bayou Bartholomew?

We would like to apologize for misspelling the name of Mr. John C. Yeldell in the last issue's list of donors. We would also like to thank recent donors including: Sarah and Earl Wruck (in memory of Jeff Stone), Mark Jenkins, and Linda Johnson. We also appreciate the materials and time donated by James and Susan Mooney and the Drew County Highway Department.

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 _____

Creature Close-up

The animal in this issue's close-up belongs to a group of creatures generally known for their migratory habits. This particular creature, however, often prefers to make the creeks, bayous, and backwaters of Arkansas its year-round home. The male of this species is known for his brilliantly colored plumage. When disturbed, they often respond with a ear-piercing wooo-eeek! Anyone who has lived near or explored the streams and bayous of this state know that this creature is the American wood duck.

Arkansans, particularly those from southern and eastern portions of the state, are blessed with an autumn migration of millions of waterfowl each year. Thousands of hunters and birdwatchers enjoy this seasonal influx of species ranging from the tiniest green-wing teal to the largest Canada geese. One of the most popular ducks with hunters and birdwatchers is the wood duck. They are known for their acrobatic flying capabilities, having the ability to fly full speed through thick forest canopies.

Like most other waterfowl, wood ducks spend a great deal of time floating on the water's surface. In contrast to many species, however, these little ducks also have the ability to "perch" on tree limbs and other objects. This habit relates to the reproductive strategy of wood ducks. The vast majority of the world's waterfowl nest on the ground. Wood ducks, however, belong to a minority of species that are known as cavity nesters. In the case of wood ducks, a cavity is usually a hollow cypress or other hardwood tree near a water source. Nests are often located up to 50 ft. high and several hundred feet from water. These ducks are usually observed as pairs in the late winter and into spring prior to mating. After mating, the female lays a clutch of 13 to 15 eggs and incubates them for about 30 days. The male leaves the female shortly before hatching occurs and she is left to raise the young alone until they can fly in about 60 days. Immediately after hatching, the young must leave the nest in order to forage for food with their mother. The hatchlings bravely leap long distances to the ground with only their underdeveloped wings and webbed feet to slow them down. Luckily, their small size usually allows for a successful landing. Once on the ground, they must quickly follow their mother to water before predators become aware of their presence. Once in the water the young still fall prey to the likes of mink, alligators, snapping turtles, and the occasional fish.

Although many wood ducks remain in Arkansas year-round, during harsh winters they are joined by additional individuals from Canada and the northern United States. During the winter flocks of 25 or more wood ducks are a common site on Bayou Bartholomew and its tributaries. Wood ducks have not always been so numerous, however. During the 1930's many feared that they might go extinct. Populations were hit hard by drought, loss of nesting habitat, and over-hunting. Enforcement of wildlife management regulations and the return of normal rainfall has greatly benefited the wood duck. Another aid to their recovery was and still is the use of wood duck boxes. These man-made boxes serve as an artificial nesting cavity in the absence of mature, hollow trees.



Alliance Funds Annual Winter Tree Plantings

Continuing an annual tradition begun in the winter of 1997-1998, the BBA is again funding the purchase of hundreds of thousands of hardwood seedlings for planting in the Bayou Bartholomew watershed. We are proud of our progress with tree plantings. Every year we have increased the number of trees we are able to purchase. The first winter of our tree planting program we purchased 39,300 trees for landowners in Lincoln and Drew Counties. The next year we were able to acquire 65,000 hardwood seedlings for people in Lincoln, Drew, and Ashley Counties. In the winter of 1999/2000 we more than doubled the previous years purchase with over 189,000 trees going to landowners in Jefferson and Ashley Counties. This year looks to be even better with over 430,000 trees scheduled for planting in Jefferson, Lincoln, and Ashley Counties. This adds up to over 720,000 hardwood seedlings purchased by the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance in four years.

Where are all of the trees planted and who qualifies to receive them? All of the trees the alliance purchases are planted within the Bayou Bartholomew watershed. The vast majority of the trees are planted on acreage enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The Alliance works closely with the county Conservation Districts within the watershed to determine which landowners might qualify to receive trees. Choices are usually made on a first come first serve basis, although land that is planted in riparian areas (sometimes known as buffer strips or buffer zones) is most desirable. Landowners enrolling land in CRP or WRP receive rental payments for planting buffer zones around streams and/or planting marginal farm land back to native vegetation. The landowner is usually required to front the money for the purchase of trees. By donating trees to landowners in the watershed, the Alliance provides further financial incentive for restoring wooded corridors along Bayou Bartholomew. This in turn helps to filter sediment, pesticides, and nutrients from the water entering the bayou . Wooded areas also provide additional habitat for wildlife ranging from deer and turkey to songbirds.

Bayou Bartholomew Alliance
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