



Introduction

Welcome to Black Hill Regional Park's canoe trail. We're glad that you've decided to explore the natural beauty of Little Seneca Lake by going beyond the boundaries of land. Your environmentally gentle craft, the canoe, will allow you to go without a trace as you silently poke your way around the many small pockets and coves of the lake. To the careful observer, each of these areas can reveal a part of the picture that makes up the life of the lake. Use all of your senses as you enjoy the interplay of land, sky, and water.

This spectrum of trail is designed to be completed in a leisurely two hours of paddling and observing. Follow the route on the map to complete this circuit trip. There are numbered stops along the way designated by a canoe symbol. Each of these stops will describe an interesting natural or cultural history feature of the lake. Please be respectful of this aquatic environment and have a safe trip.

Where did all the water come from?

Little Seneca Lake is a man-made lake whose waters are contributed by three streams which joined together in the valleys now flooded by the lake. These streams are: Cabin Branch, Ten Mile Creek, and Little Seneca Creek. The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) owns little Seneca Lake. WSSC operates the 505-acre lake as a reservoir is an emergency water supply for the Metropolitan Area.

Stop 1: How does this lake help the Visitor Center building?

The water of the lake is put to work to provide both heating in winter and cooling in summer for the Park Visitor Center. In summer, cool water from the lake is used to transfer the heat out of the building. In the winter, the water in the lake is warmer than the air temperature and this heat is transferred into the building. This is accomplished by a series of coiled tubes extending from the building into the lake, which circulate a heat-transferring fluid. Thus, we are using nature's free energy to keep the visitor comfortable in all seasons.



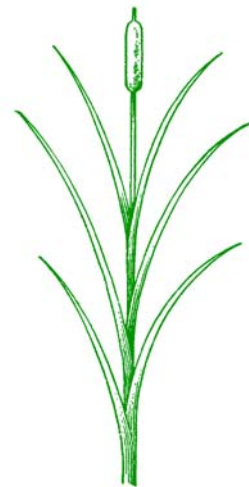
Stop 2: What was here before the lake?

Old Black Hill Road disappears beneath the surface of the lake and skirts around a spring-fed pond which is now also covered by the water in this cove. The road used to connect Clarksburg Road and West Old Baltimore Road, and passes by the site of an old gold mine, which operated in the late 19th Century. Largemouth Bass and Bluegill, which now live in the lake, came from the pond; one of four that were flooded by the lake. This pond provided recreational fishing and was the

summer swimming hole for the former owners of the land.

Stop 3: What good is a cattail anyway?

Imagine yourself as a Maryland Indian before the Europeans arrived on these shores. Instead of an aluminum canoe, you'd be padding a dugout canoe, burned and scraped from an ancient tulip poplar tree. The cattails growing near the shore here would have supplied food and useful products for your family. The roots were roasted like potatoes, the pollen used as flour for bread, the leaves woven into mats or twisted into cordage, and the cattail seed fluff used as kindling for fires or as absorbent material in a baby's diaper. Today, muskrats munch on the starchy roots, songbirds line their nests with the seed fluff, and ducks hide from people and predators in the tall leaves.



Stop 4: Why did these trees die?

Beneath you lies the old stream bed of Cabin Branch. Few trees like "wet feet" so when the lake was created, the roots were flooded and the trees died. They were left standing to provide shelter for fish. Birds will use dead, trees to do you see any Tree Swallows perching in the branches? How about holes pecked in the trunk for woodpecker nesting cavities?



Stop 5: Why can't I pick the flowers?'

An eye-catching display of native wildflowers decorates the shoreline between July and September. But human eyes aren't the only ones looking ... bees are gathering nectar and pollen from the bright pink flowers of the Swamp Rose mallow. This striking plant is related to Marsh Mallow which was once cultivated to produce marshmallows (yes, the campfire kind!). The gelatinous roots were also made into cough syrup and were chewed by "teething" babies. You'll also notice the tall vibrant red flower spikes of Cardinal Flower. Watch for movement near these flowers since the red color attracts hummingbirds and Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies. Birds, bees, and butterflies depend on wildflowers

for food. If the flowers are picked, so is their food.

Stop 6: People aren't the only ones fishing this lake . . .

Be silent and move your canoe slowly as you enter the cove to your right. This is a favorite fishing spot for herons, egrets, and kingfishers. The Great Blue Heron may be poised motionless in the shallow water patiently waiting for a fish to swim within reach. Green-backed Herons of ten perch on dead snags or logs in the water. Their fishing technique is fascinating to observe – they will lure the fish with a feather placed on the water's surface as bait! Belted Kingfishers perch motionless in trees and will startle you with their loud "rattle-calls" as they dive for fish.



Stop 7: There's something moving down there!

Shhhh! Quiet please! You are in the nursery. Look in the shallow water (up to about 4 ft.) for round, saucer-shaped depressions on the bottom. These are the nest sites of Bluegills and can be seen from spring through fall. Eggs are laid in the nest and the nests are carefully guarded against predators until the young fish hatch. If you look closely, you may even see the male fish guarding the nest.



Stop 8: That green plant growing in the water looks like seaweed, is it?

The plant you see growing in abundance in the water is hydrilla (Hydrilla verticillata). This exotic plant, originally from the Far East, was imported in the late 1950's for use in fish aquariums - as you can see it got away! Unfortunately, hydrilla has adjusted too well to Little Seneca Lake and pushes out many of our native aquatic plants. Fish and turtles use hydrilla to hide in. Can you find an animal path cutting, through the thick blanket of hydrilla? Hydrilla is present between Mid June and late fall.

Stop 9: How can you tell where beaver live?

Beavers have adopted Little Seneca Lake! We may not see the beavers themselves, but we can see the signs they leave behind. Look for stumps of small trees in the meadow; they will look like short "pencils". Your canoe might pass over a branch or two - beavers stick gathered branches into the mud underwater to store them for winter. If you continue up the cove, you'll come to a "bank lodge"; a beaver house built on the shore with sticks and mud.





Stop 10: Who lurks in these evergreens?

This dense stand of Virginia Pines and Eastern Red-cedar trees provide great hiding places for songbirds, owls, and other birds. Listen for the “scolding” of crows – they may have found an owl napping. Even bald eagles have been seen perching on an exposed branch. Park visitors also enjoy fishing from this shore. Do the animals here a favor, and pick up a piece or two of trash that people may have left behind!

Stop 11: Who's singing those songs?

Stop paddling and let your canoe drift silently. Listen to the summer sounds on the hillside above you. From the chorus, see if you can pick out the music of grasshoppers, crickets, and birds. You may hear the "potato" call of the goldfinch as it flies over, the loud "wichity-wichitywichity-wich" song of a common yellowthroat perched in a low shrub, or the downslurred catlike "mew" of a gray catbird. To attract more birds into view, try making a whispered "pish" sound, or "squeak" by kissing the back of your hand.



From this same location :

You may find a BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) which is Latin and Greek for “white headed sea eagle”

Look across the lake in the big dead tree and you may see a Bald Eagle perched on a limb. They are not really bald, and do not get their white head and tail feathers until they are four years old. They are scavengers as well as excellent hunters. Fish is their preferred food, followed by waterfowl and then mammals. Bald Eagles build the biggest nest of any bird. They build on top of their nest each year, and constantly add to it. Nests weighing as much as two tons have been discovered! Eagles are increasing since the pesticide DDT was banned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1972. This pesticide caused eagles and some other birds to lay thin-shelled eggs, which cracked during the incubation process. Eagles usually lay 1-2 eggs each spring. Fledglings leave the nest 72 to 75 days after hatching. Eagles average life span is 21 years. We hope you are lucky enough to observe this magnificent national symbol.



Stop 12 - Good news for those who like to fish:

Notice the dam, also off to your right. The lake is 68 feet deep at the foot of the dam. During the summer, cold water layers up on the lower levels of the lake and this water is drawn off to be fed into Little Seneca Creek below the dam. Surface temperatures may be 85 degrees Fahrenheit, but the temperature at the bottom can get down to 39 degrees Fahrenheit. This cold water has enabled a year-round trout fishery to be established for about 4 miles of the creek below the dam.

Congratulations, You have completed the canoe trail. Paddle back toward the boat rental and enjoy the rest of your stay here at Black Hill Regional Park.