

CROOKED LAKE

BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF FISHERIES AND GAME FOR INDIANA 1913-1914

Crooked Lake lies about four miles northwest of Angola, the seat of Steuben County, and is to be reached by the St. Joseph Valley Railroad, operating between Elkhart and Angola. The road follows the north shore of the lake, and maintains a station at the north shore of the main basin. The lake has an area of 992.79 acres, which makes it the second largest lake in the county and the sixth largest in the State. It has been aptly named, for it somewhat resembles a gourd in shape, the large or main basin lying at the southeast end, and the long, slender neck with irregular banks extending northwestward. There are three basins of the lake, although previous to the building of the wagon road across the narrowest part of the western basin there were but two. The basins lie on the crest of a moraine, and are about twenty seven feet higher than the basins of Lake James, only three miles to the northwestward; which fact was determined a few years ago when there was a project on foot to connect these two bodies of water by a canal, but which difference in levels made it impracticable to proceed with the undertaking.

Crooked Lake is partly fed by springs, although the principal source of water is through three inlets flowing into the main basin, and these carry water throughout the year. The inlets themselves are in part spring branches. The outlet of the lake is at the north western corner, the stream flowing about a half mile to Lake Gage, another body of considerable area and importance as a resort; thence the flow is to the Pigeon River. The connecting stream between Crooked Lake and Lake Gage is not navigable, however, but in the early spring when the water is high and before the dense vegetation has had an opportunity to grow, a boat may be forced from one lake to the other. From the southeast end of Crooked Lake to the northwest end of Lake Gage is a distance of six miles.

Crooked Lake became known as a summer resort about fifteen 119 years ago. Previous to this time, however, it was popular with fishermen who came to camp for a few days. The name is that given by the first surveyors, and, the visitors who have been coming here conceding that no other name could apply so well, there has never been any attempt made to change it. The early settlers in the vicinity of the lake have no remembrance of Indians being in the neighborhood, nor are there any indications that this body of water was ever popular with the native redmen. The only indication of an historical past is the beaver dam along the

eastern shore of the main basin, where the shore is low, and beyond which is a pond that was cut off by the dam ; and in and about this dam can be found occasionally a piece of the gnawed timber that the little animals used in their construction.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago campers and fishermen began coming to the lake to spend a season of outdoor life. But at that time there was no way of getting to the lake except by driving from Angola. Consequently the greatest number of people coming here were from the county seat. Steadily the number of campers grew, and about fifteen years ago there seemed to be enough traffic to the lake to justify the operation of a hotel on the bank. As soon as the hotel was built, three or four people erected summer cottages: whereupon the place began steadily to grow as a resorting lake. The greatest impetus was given Crooked Lake about seven years ago when the St. Joseph Valley Company constructed a road from Angola to Elkhart, and laid its track along the north shore of the lake, establishing a station here. Quickly the place became known beyond the confines of the county, to the extent that today cottages are closely built around the shore of the two western or main basins, with only a short portion on the south western shore of the main basin remaining unsettled. And these cottages are owned and occupied by people from Fort Wayne, Goshen, Angola, Elkhart, Lagrange and South Bend.

There are three good hotels at the lake, each able to care for a large number of guests comfortably. The first one to be built was the Beach Hotel, standing near the shore at the railway station. West of this on the north shore is the Oak Bluff Hotel, this name having been given it by nature of the high, oak-covered 120 bank; and at this place is located, back of the hotel, on the wagon road, a sort of general supply store, where cottagers can get groceries and other articles; and at the water's edge, against the high bank, commanding a very pretty view of the lake, stands the new dancing pavilion, a large structure in the building of which money was not spared to make of it the best for miles around. Proceeding along the north shore, after passing several cottages, one comes to the Cedar Side Hotel, built on the high bank and overlooking the water, and back of which are growing a few cedar trees.

With the exception of the long, slender basin at the north western end of the lake, the whole bottom is of gravel and sand formation, underlaid with a stratum of blue clay that here and there is barren ; and in one or two of the bays is to be found a deposit of marl. The two western basins of the lake are surrounded by high gravel banks, mostly covered with fine oak trees. The shores are sand and gravel, receding so gradually as to make bathing beaches almost continuous around the two eastern basins. The most popular beach, however, is on the eastern shore just south of the Beach Hotel, the place having received the name of Long Beach. –



From the eastern end of the lake the water continues to grow deeper as it extends westward. In the area of the broad eastern basin, or main basin, toward Point Comfort, the deepest place is thirty feet, there being three or four places in this vicinity having such a depth. Beyond Point Comfort, the Middle Basin, the lake gradually gets deeper until it reaches the wagon road, a highway that has been built across the narrowest point. In the Middle Basin the lake attains a depth of about ninety feet. Where the highway crosses the water a bridge has been constructed to permit the free passage of fish from the Upper Basin to the Middle Basin. Beyond the bridge the Upper Basin is an immense area of shallow water, the greatest depth being eight feet, and the average being about three and one-half or four. The greatest depth of Crooked Lake is in the Middle Basin, about one-half mile due east of the wagon bridge.

The Upper Basin is one of the best spots in Indiana for the breeding and feeding of bass. It is long and slender. The shores are marshy, fringed with a dense growth of lily-pads and cattails. Over the whole basin grows spatterdock in great profusion, with here and there an occasional area of a few square rods of open water. Not only is this spot a favorite ground for fish, but also it proves very tempting to migratory birds, and the place has for years been one of the most famous hunting grounds in the county. If fishermen could be kept

off the Upper Basin wholly during the spawning season in the spring, more bass would be propagated here naturally in one year than would be possible to plant here artificially in many years.

The United States Fish Commission has planted several species of fish in the lake at various times. The black bass have done well, owing to the natural suitableness of the Upper Basin and other fine fishing bays around the two eastern basins. The wall-eyed pike that were planted here, however, seem not to have thrived so well, for seldom is one caught. The lake is one of the best pickerel lakes in the state, for this fish is the principal one in the lake. Many pickerel are caught each season weighing as much as seven teen pounds, and occasionally one is caught weighing twenty-five— the largest one weighed a few ounces more than twenty-six. There are both the large- and the small-mouthed black bass in the lake, and in considerable quantity, although the large-mouthed is in the majority. The bluegills are excellent, and are plentiful. A few years ago a large plant of yellow and channel catfish was put into the lake, where they have been thriving and propagating. And not long ago several ciscoes were put into the lake; but of these nothing definite can be said, for it seems that no one has ever caught any. The crappies grow to large size and are much sought. The lake seems to be well supplied with ringed-perch and sunfish.

There never has been a steam passenger boat on the lake. Three public launches are at the service of excursionists. There are many rowboats and many privately owned motor-boats; and only one or two small sail-boats ply over the water. The waves sometimes rise to such height as to make boating dangerous to one not accustomed to rowing.

The main basin is almost round in contour. At Point Comfort it is shallow for about one hundred and fifty or two hundred feet out from the water edge. Point Comfort is a high ridge of ground 123 reaching into the lake from the north, and, with Sanders Point on the south shore, forms the Narrows connecting Main Basin with Middle Basin. Several cottages have been built on Point Comfort; these, however, front on the Middle Basin.

Between the high ground at Oak Bluff and Point Comfort lies the sandy, shallow Kitchard Bay. At about the center of the bay is situated the Cedar Side Hotel. The bank at the shore of the bay is high.

The three inlets to the lake are into the Main Basin; one entering between the Oak Bluff and the Beach Hotel, another flowing into the lake a few rods south of the Beach Hotel, and the third emptying its water at the south shore between Sanders Point and the nearby grocery store. Between the grocery store and the inlet stretches the County House Bay.

Cottages extend along both the north and south shores of the Middle Basin. About midway of the north shore of this basin is Roby Bay, fringed with lily-pads, and shut in from both sides by high, oak-covered banks. On the south shore, a little way east of the bridge, lies Wickwire Bay, a good fishing spot. Just west of Sanders Point, between the point and a mound bank, lies Sanders Bay, with its fringe of pads and dock, and its overhanging willows and sycamores—a fine casting bay. Along the north shore of the basin, extending from Point Comfort to and including Roby Bay, is a broad area of shallow bottom, and this has been designated by the State as breeding ground. At one or two places along the south shore of the Middle Basin the stratum of white sand on the bottom is thin and covers a layer of marl.

The water of Crooked Lake is clear and pure. That it is spring-fed in part is evidenced by the fact that there are here and there cool spots in the water. The lake is markedly free from small floating vegetation, except in the Upper Basin, west of the bridge.

The scenery around the lake cannot be surpassed by any of the other lakes in the State, and the place deserves even a wider popularity than it is now enjoying. When one considers that practically its entire growth as a summer resort has come in six or seven years, he can not but hold to the belief that the place is fast coming to its deserts.