

The Amazing Waters of Sauk County

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

It may come as a surprise to many, but Sauk County should be considered one of the more watery counties in the very watery State of Wisconsin. Don't worry, there's plenty of land too, plus forests, rocky bluffs, and grand vistas in this remarkable county, but a listing of waters in the county is surprising.

For example, begin with our county borders—perhaps 40% of our total border is the watery channel of the Wisconsin River, including its great bend to the west. This hard working river features two major Wisconsin dams in our county, those near Wisconsin Dells and Prairie du Chien. The result of the latter dam is our largest lake, Lake Wisconsin, offering recreation such as swimming, sailing, water skiing, fishing and hydroplane landing and takeoff. We share the river with three counties, Iowa, Dane, and Columbia.

The same is found but to a lesser degree below the Prairie du Sac dam, where American Eagles fish the open waters in winter. Sauk County has several river towns, such as Lake Delton, Merrimac, the Sauk Prairies, and Spring Green, with Lone Rock just over the county line. Between Sauk Prairie and Lone Rock there are several state Natural Areas. County-wider there are 17 Natural Areas, plus four of what the state calls Open Spaces.

Talk about parks, how many counties have four State Parks? Sauk County's State Parks are Devils Lake, Mirror Lake, Rocky Arbor, and Natural Bridge. Add to this the eight Sauk County Parks, including White Mound, Yellow Thunder, Man Mound, Redstone, and Hemlock, plus three boat launching Parks.

Many but not all of the parks are adjacent to lakes. When you include our Sauk County lakes the list is pretty impressive. Largest of our lakes is Lake Wisconsin, followed by Lakes Delton, Redstone, Dutch Hollow, Mirror, White Mound and Seeley. Note that all of these are artificial lakes! Redstone is said to be in trouble but correctible, and Lake Delton's ominous and spectacular breakout a couple years made national news. There also are several small private lakes, not listed here.

Not artificial, though, is our great natural lake, Devils Lake, a geologic wonder formed by the Glacier thousands of years ago. The premier destination for state parks in the entire Midwest, attendance threatens to approach two million visitors a year. Sauk County is indeed a water destination! We'll write of the spectacular geologic history of Devils Lake in the future, including the lake which once existed in Steinke Basin, high above Devils Lake.

Lucky Baraboo is generally central to all of the lakes, with Devils Lake State Park virtually at the city limits. In the city the Riverwalk showcases the busy Baraboo River which bisects the county. Its rapid fall in Baraboo creates rapids suggestive of a mountain stream. A

variety of small streams originate in the Baraboo Bluffs, often joining the Baraboo River or Wisconsin River.

The great Driftless area comprising the south and southwestern part of the county, although spectacular in its un-glaciated topography, has few watery areas that could be called lakes. White Mounds is an exception. Streams such as Honey Creek and Bear Creek provide attractive waterfalls, and drain eventually to the Wisconsin River. More to the north, creeks such as Dell and Skillet drain into the Baraboo or Wisconsin Rivers.

As noted, all of the lakes except Devils Lake are artificial lakes, man made with dams. All, however, are located in scenic hilly country, rather than the featureless locations found in many artificial lakes throughout out the nation. Sauk County's lakes look like they belong there, and several were placed by forward-looking county boards to enhance our Sauk County way of life.

We should also note that the drinking water in our towns comes from waters deep in the earth, cleaned by nature's natural filtering system. This aquifer underlies the entire county. Thousands of shorter wells supply many a homestead in the county. Summer is here, a great time to enjoy the Riverwalk or the many waters of our scenic and historic county.

The slightly shaded areas in the center represent the Baraboo Bluffs. Even darker area represent towns or special places, usually with water within or nearby.

