

Springhouse Ink

If Sonny Curtis was here in 1958, he might have been inspired to write a song. It might have started out like this:

Draggin limbs in the — hot sun.
I fought the lawn and the — lawn won.
I fought the lawn and the — lawn won.

Trees have taken a beating during the July rain and wind. Limbs are strewn across the lush grass. That grass was mostly brown during the June drought and crunched beneath the feet. About July 1, sun and rain became the perfect ingredients for jungle.

It doesn't even have to rain these days to spur grass growth. A haze of humidity lingers over the lawn until the morning sun burns it away. Grass glistens and the tree leaves drip. There is no need for lawn sprinklers.

The trails in our Shawnee National Forest are swamps.

Scrutiny of our trails tells the tale. Hoof prints have churned the wet spots into soup. Hikers must take to the poison ivy to navigate many of the bogs.

My former roommate from Bryce Canyon National Park, Dale Sieber, and his wife, Peggy, visited in late July from Clarksville, Tenn., for what should have been a quick morning hike to Indian Kitchen overlooking Lusk Creek Canyon.

There are two parallel trails into the site. The old trail is an old wagon and horse road. The U.S. Forest Service built the new trail a few years ago and built it to Wilderness Area standards, narrow and winding so as to deter erosion.

The old trail is the most interesting since it passes an old home site where yucca continues to grow near an old well with stone walls. There are a few large and oddly shaped trees along the way. One tree has the appearance of a giant shoved head first into the earth with only a rear end and legs poking toward the sky. A pond grows thick with duck



Brian DeNeal photo

Dale and Peggy Sieber take in the view from Indian Kitchen, a view much better appreciated when winter's leaves don't obscure Lusk Creek below.

weed and water lilies. The hike in has as many points of interest as the canyon walls themselves. But on this trip it was apparent the old trail I love is very nearly gone.

Thick brush growing in the trail bed obscures the bogs underneath. Shoes are soaked in no time as one crashes through the overgrown marsh. As the Forest Service wants the old trail to become reclaimed by nature, fallen trees are uncleared and block the path in numerous spots. Some of those logs are slick as grease, as Peggy discovered when she went down, cutting herself between thumb and hand. After some quick bloodletting and first aid treatment we continued on. The hike in is only a mile or so, but it was a slow-going obstacle course.

Anyone who has walked out to the Indian Kitchen site itself knows the experience is one to get the heart pumping. The narrow trail clings to the cliff wall above Lusk Creek. A wrong step or overbalance could send someone plummeting to the rocks below. Those willing to take the trek are rewarded with a shelter just large enough for half a dozen people to stand comfortably. There is a view of the opposite canyon wall and Lusk Creek below, which on this day flowed a muddy brown color from recent flooding. In dry weather the creek is a clear greenish blue.

At the water's edge the banks were eroded and sticks were piled several feet above the creek. In heavy rain the creek rises quickly, as much as 10 feet in a period of hours and kayakers take advantage of the opportunity. There are spots with Class 3 rapids, rarely found in our part of the state. While thrilling, the rising waters can also be dangerous to the unsuspecting. College students were killed several years ago while camping near the creek during an overnight flash flood.

July's rain even flooded the parking area near Jackson Falls in Pope County. Campers from Murfreesboro, Tenn., experienced the flooding. One escaped the tent as it was being pulled by the quickly rising water. Another was unable to escape and was carried downstream and over the falls with a drop of about 30 feet. Rescued at about 2 a.m., the man was hospitalized in critical, but not life-threatening, condition. He will have a camping tale to beat most contenders for the rest of his life. *Springhouse* has put out feelers to our Tennessee friends, hoping someone knows the man. I would like to interview him, but as of this writing his identity remains a mystery.

The "new" trail back to the trailhead was in somewhat better shape than the older one. The new trail was not overgrown so we could see the mud bogs we were about to step into. Other than that, the trail was a mucky mess.

We had a rainy May and a rainy July, so maybe by this fall conditions will begin drying up. If they don't, I'm afraid hikers may be forced to limit their activities to winter when the bogs freeze over and become passable. We may have to invest in some warmer boots.

In this issue you will read about improvements to a cabin at the Saline Creek Pioneer Village and Museum Grounds. This is not just any cabin. It once stood on the banks of the Ohio River at Elizabethtown at a strategic point to locate

unsuspecting flatboat travelers. The cabin's foundation at the museum site was failing and — with a bit of effort during the worst of July's heat — that foundation has been restored.

Readers who want to know more about mud, heat and ticks may enjoy reading about my excursion on the River-to-River Trail. I encourage everyone to try a few days backpacking along it, but best to do so in spring or fall. On the upside, I think I cleared all the orb weaver webs.

John J. Lesjack tells us about Bert Cutting, the blind diver of Gallatin County who felt at home on river bottoms — actual beds of rivers — helping hook up submerged vehicles to tow them to shore.

John J. Dunphy revisits the Piasa Bird whose image graces a river bluff at Alton. Legend has it the giant bird's chief prey was deer until it tasted human blood. Myth or monster? Dunphy believes he knows the answer. Dunphy also submits a book review of *The Story of A Common Soldier of Army Life in the Civil War 1861-1865* by Leander Stillwell. Stillwell was a Civil War veteran of Jersey County, Illinois, who wrote the book for his son in 1916.

Paul Stroble reviews Susan Croce Kelly's *Father of Route 66*, a biography of Cyrus Stevens Avery who helped designate a series of federal highways, including the most historic U.S. Route 66.

Hearty recipes may be a bit much for the heat and humidity of southern Illinois' summers, but fall and its cool nights are right around the corner. Italian beef, stew, stuffed peppers and baked apples will soon find a place on our tables. Find Dixie Terry's delicious fall crockpot recipes in her *From My Kitchen Window* column.

The Rebel has left his hovel for a visit to a school of higher learning, in search of... something.

The 1812 earthquake that rocked New Madrid, Mo., and most of the country sent midwesterners fleeing, chimneys collapsing, rivers flowing backwards and sand shooting skyward. Lorenzo Dow's *The Dealings of God, Man and the Devil*, published in 1851 carries an account few have likely read before.

An individual who has asked to remain anonymous provided copies of two letters dictated by Charlie Birger prior to his hanging in 1928. Birger was hanged for orchestrating the murder of West City Mayor Joe Adams, a final horrific act after a career of organized crime centered around whiskey bootlegging.

We reprint a second installment of *Pope County Notes* by John W. Allen in honor of this Pope County bicentennial year.

Keith Ewell has provided us with photos and descriptions of insects with his recent *Backyard Bugs* column. Want to see what the inchworm becomes? Check it out.

This looks to be a more eclectic issue than many, which is another way of saying we're throwing it all at the wall to see what sticks, but when has any issue not been?

The adventure continues...