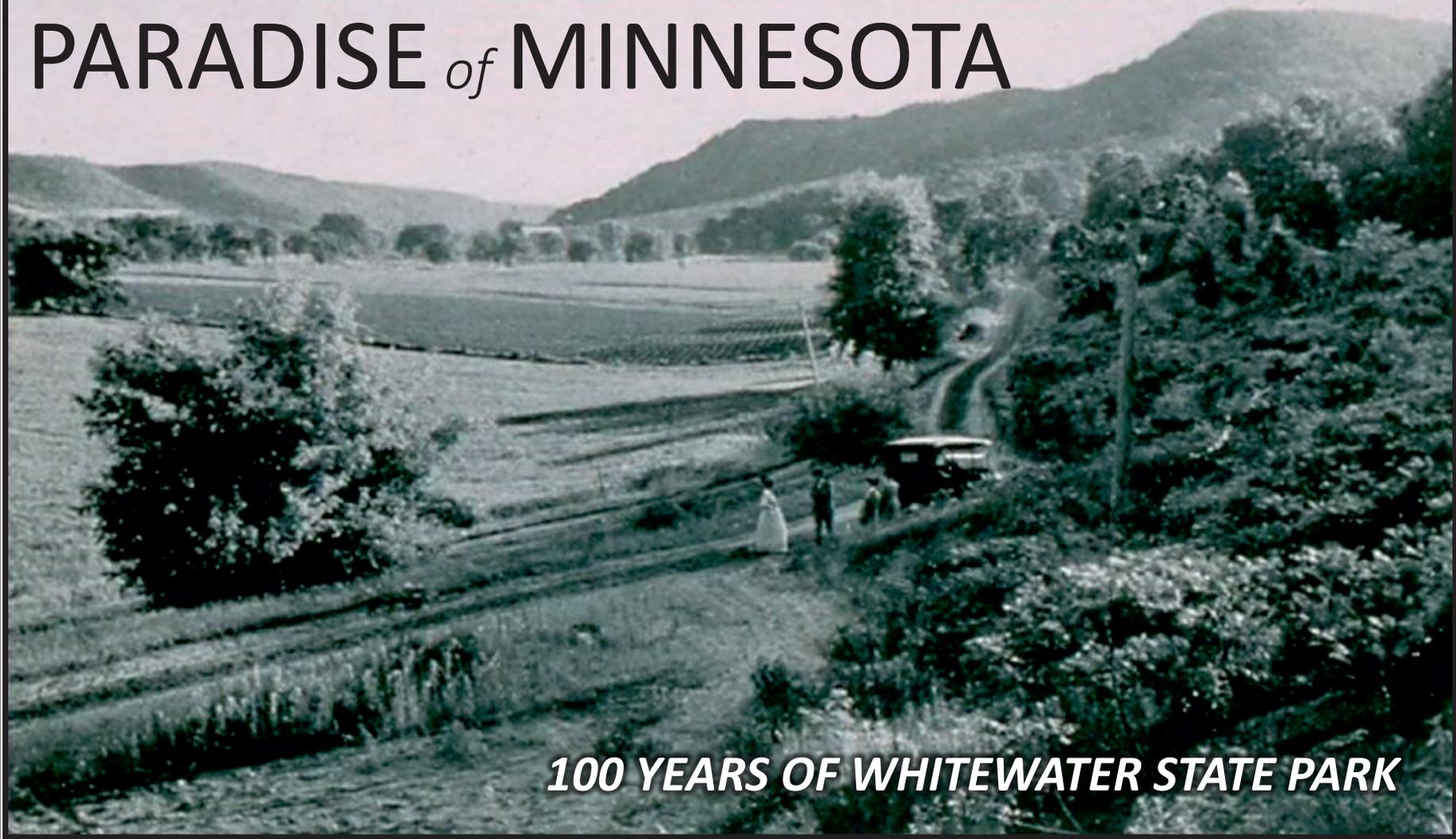


*The*  
**PARADISE** *of* **MINNESOTA**

***100 YEARS OF WHITEWATER STATE PARK***





# Preface

In 1917, in an effort to protect one of the most scenic portions of the Whitewater Valley for future generations, southeast Minnesota residents began to mobilize to establish Whitewater State Park.

After an unsuccessful attempt that year by the state legislature to appropriate funding for the park, L. A. Warming, local resident and St. Charles newspaper editor, decided to put his photography talents into action. Warming spent the following year photographing the scenic landscapes and the visitors and tourists of the Whitewater Valley. He assembled his photos into a book he called, “The Paradise of Minnesota; The Proposed Whitewater State Park.” Across the region, these books sold for \$1.50 and the funds were used to increase the lobby for Whitewater State Park. It worked!

In 1919, the state legislature appropriated \$10,000 dollars toward the purchase of land to establish Whitewater State Park. And over the past 100 years, the land within the park boundaries witnessed tremendous change. This book is a testament to the ever-changing Whitewater State Park.

This collection of photos and memories from park staff and visitors throughout the years is a tribute to the shared joy and love that we hold for this special place. Visitors today can learn more about the topics presented in this book by attending one of the many naturalist programs offered at the park throughout the year.

We can only imagine what changes will come to the park over the next 100 years. We invite you and your friends and family to be part of the continuing story of Whitewater State Park!

- *Jeremy Darst and Sara Holger*  
Whitewater State Park Interpretive Naturalists

*“This tract of two or three thousand acres of land is especially adapted for park purposes. Nowhere in Minnesota can be found a more beautiful locality, where nature has done so much. To conserve, improve and develop this into a State Park would not only be of inestimable value and a source of great pleasure and enjoyment to the general public of the immediate future but would be of lasting usefulness for scores or even hundreds of years to come.”*

- L.A. Warming

*The Paradise of Minnesota*

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# Park Development



The Whitewater Valley has been a popular vacation destination since the 1890s. Above: Early picnickers pose for a photo in the area that would later become Whitewater State Park, 1896.



Locals enjoy a camping trip to Paradise Ranch in a 1917 photo by L.A. Warming titled "June Camp in Gooseberry Glenn." Paradise Ranch was located within the current boundary of Whitewater State Park.



First picnic shelter constructed at Roosevelt Park, aka Whitewater State Park, 1923.



With little to no budget, the park's first Supervisor, Albert Blankenberg, made due with rustic materials on hand. Above: Some of the first park amenities, on display in the North Picnic Area, were a testament to Albert's many skills.



As a result of the Great Depression, between 1934 and 1941, the park rapidly developed with the labor provided by two Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) companies and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). At left, a member of CCC Company 1723 poses with the company sign. Center: Members of CCC Company 2709's basketball team pose before a game. Right: Local labor and a transient camp located in the park allowed Work Camp 13 (WPA) to construct many of the buildings still in use today.



Early stages of constructing the CCC barracks in the present-day South Picnic Grounds. The CCC camp was built on a section of the old golf course.



On a cold winter day, a worker in CCC Company 2709 shapes the stone that will become the pavilion in the North Picnic Area.



Much of the quarried stone was used as rip-rap along the river. This common practice helped prevent streambank erosion. Above: CCC boys work with simple hand tools to enhance the stream channel.



Many bridges have come and gone throughout the park's history. When a flood washed out a bridge, another was constructed with a new design. We continue to experiment with bridge designs today, as the river always finds a way to destroy what man lays in her path. Above: The beach area and an old foot bridge prior to the dam construction.



The beach parking lot during construction by the WPA. Notice the south-facing side of the Chimney Rock hill has sparse tree coverage while the north-facing side has a dense forest? Whitewater State Park is home to unique ecosystems with different microclimates that support many rare plant and animal species.



Most of the stone structures were built during the Great Depression. If you look closely around the park, you can find a few relics that have slowly withered into disrepair, including some of the original stone drinking fountains and picnic tables. Above: CCC workers shingle the pavilion in the North Picnic Grounds on a cold winter day.



When you flush a toilet in the North Picnic Grounds, you are utilizing the original septic system constructed by the CCC boys in the winter of 1935. The fact that this system still functions over 80 years later is a testament to its design.



Did you know that the original channel of the Middle Branch of the Whitewater River was altered to create the swimming beach? This required digging an entirely new channel to create the river we see today. If you hike the Oxbow Trail behind the beach, you can find the dike and culvert used to block the river's original path. In this photo, CCC boys work on the dike to divert the river.



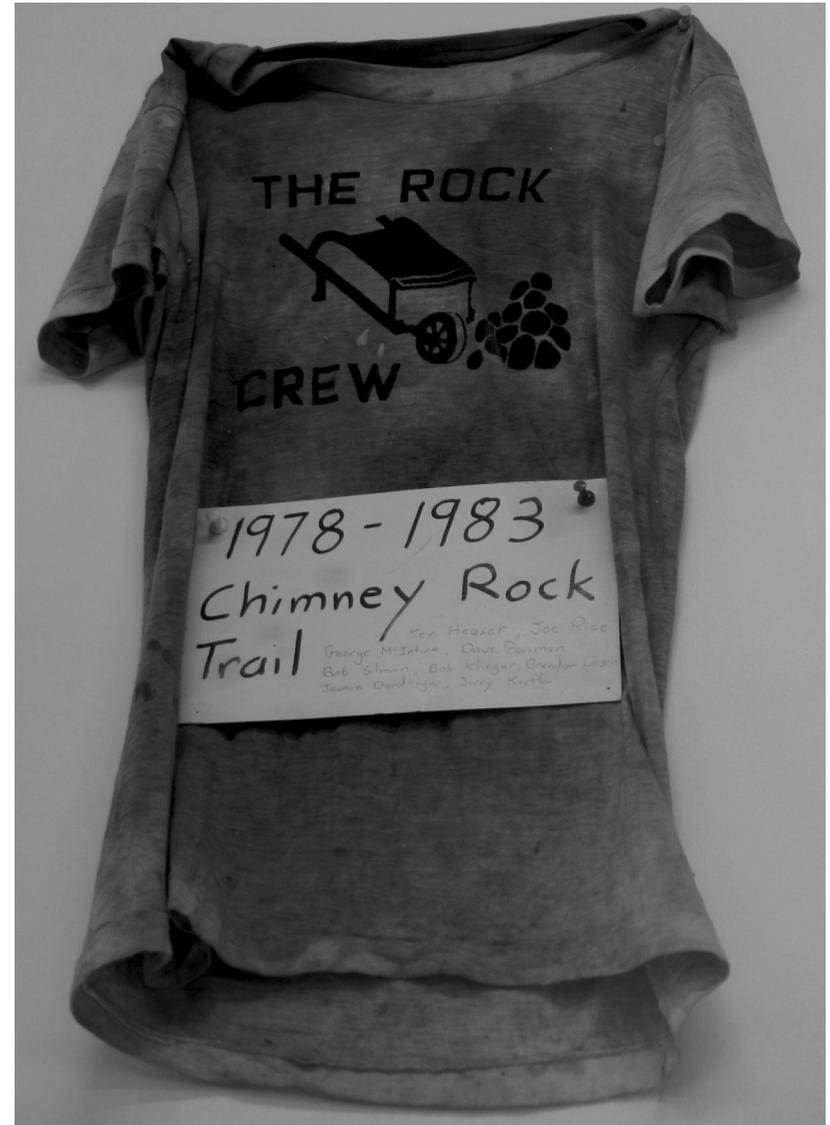
The beautiful stone-arch bridge constructed by the WPA was located on Highway 74 at the old golf course (present-day Meadow).



A young boy poses at one of the CCC stone drinking fountains or “bubblers” as they were called.



Repeated flooding in the 1970s led to many changes over the following decade. The golf course was closed. Campgrounds were relocated to areas less vulnerable to flooding. And trails improvements were made to accommodate the large volume of park visitors. Above: Park staff in the late 1970s pose with the old dump truck used to haul stone from Biesanz Quarry in Winona to build the steps up to Chimney Rock. Right: A T-shirt hangs on display in the park maintenance shop, testifying to the hard work of the Chimney Rock “Rock Crew.”





Left: Known today as the Nature Store, the old park office was constructed in 1959. Prior to this, an old farm house near the golf course was used as the office.

Right: The Whitewater Valley Visitor Center opened in 1989 as an information center for the entire valley. Here, visitors get park information as well as information on the 27,000-acre Whitewater Wildlife Management Area, the Crystal Springs Trout Hatchery, Trout Valley Forestry Unit and other points of interest in the valley.

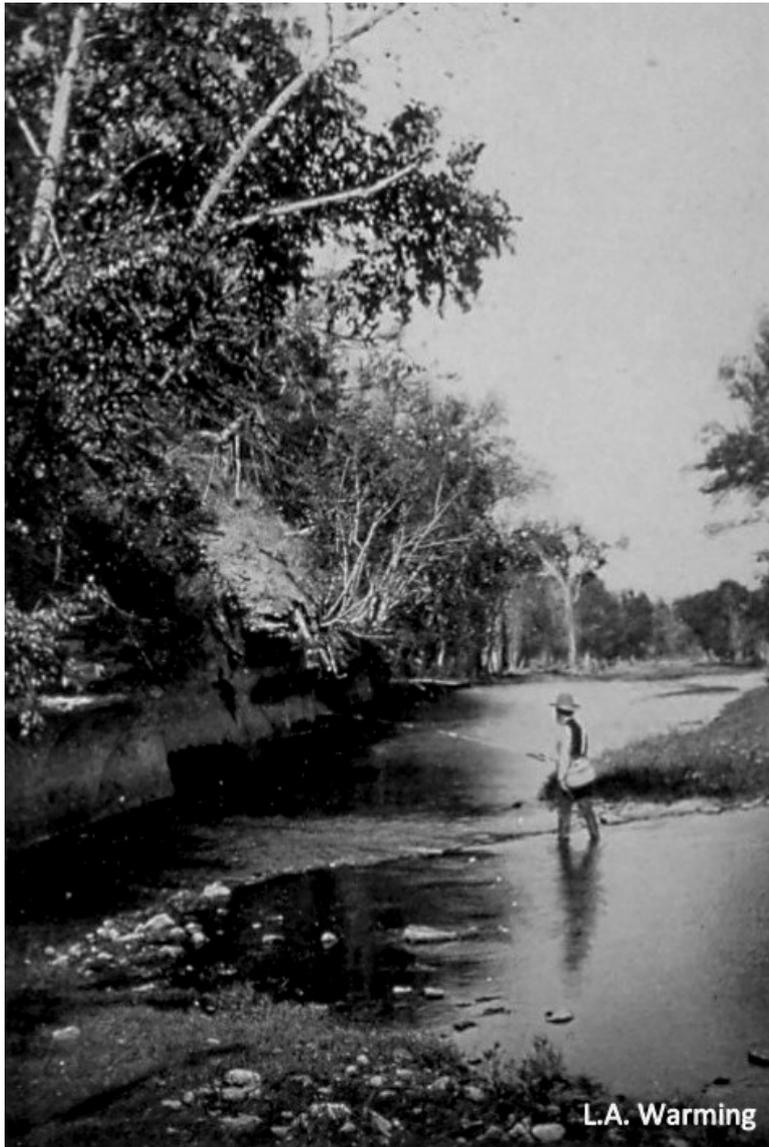


# Recreation



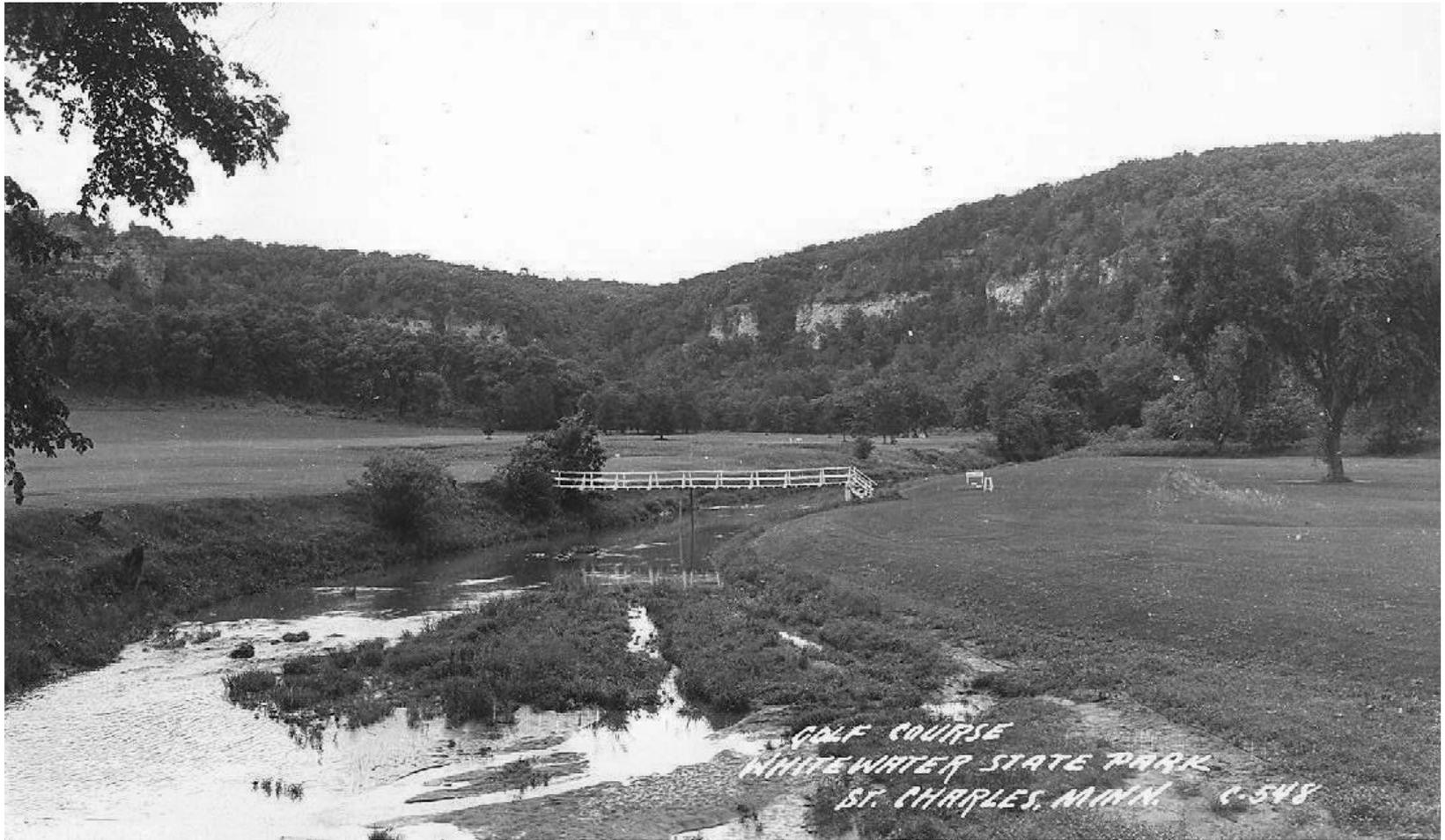
L.A. Warming

In 1934 the CCC created the first hiking trail system in the park. Most of the trails are still in use today, but some of the names changed over the years. Left: The original trail signs created by the CCC. Can you find the lost trail names? Right: The hike up Chimney Rock has always been a well-known destination in the park.



Trout fishing may very well be the reason that Whitewater State Park exists. Since the earliest pioneers first entered this valley, people praised the cold water fishery found here.

Left: A trout fisherman tries his luck at Sand Rock in 1917. Above: Participants in a Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Introduction to Fly Fishing class pose for a group photo at Sand Rock, 2017.



Up until 1974, the park boasted a beautiful golf course with unique sand greens. Local residents still have fond memories of the golf course and club house where the former site manager once allowed St. Charles youth to store their golf clubs and fishing poles for free. Flooding eventually led to the demise of the golf course.



A beach photo from 1958 demonstrates how the park has long been a popular swimming destination. Before the local communities constructed their own swimming pools, area youth rode by bicycle down to the park for swimming lessons taught by students from the Winona State Teachers College (now called Winona State University).



In 1976, Dave Palmquist became the first year-round naturalist at Whitewater State Park. Over his 38 year career at the park, he built a phenomenal interpretive program that inspired many area youth to pursue science and conservation careers. Above: Dave Palmquist guides a group of kindergartners from Immanuel Lutheran School in Plainview on a nature hike.



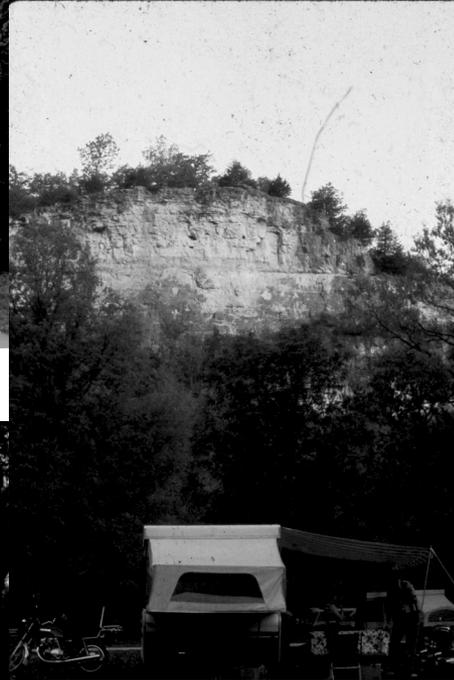
First Campground 1920—1950s



Cedar Hill Campground 1968—Present



Gooseberry Glenn Campground 1939—2016



South Campground  
1953—1978

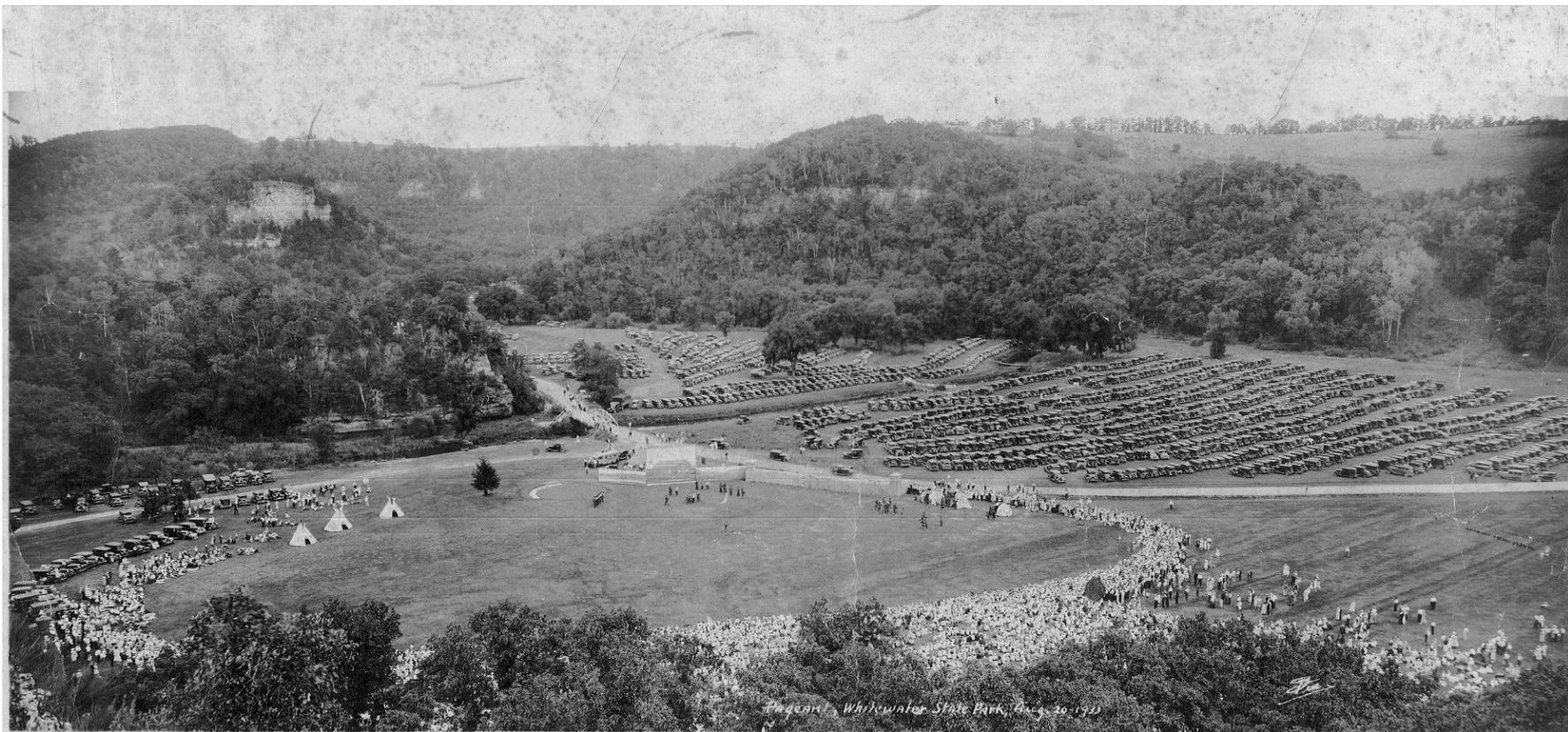


Minnieska Campground 2017—Present



Visitors to Whitewater State Park often discover peaceful solitude and opportunities for self-reflection. Panoramas of dramatic scenery, sounds of the flowing river, and fragrances of the natural world relax tired and stressed minds and feed the soul. Above: Students from Lewiston schools journal on top the Chimney Rock overlook during a class field trip in the 1980s.

# Landmark Events



To commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Minnesota becoming a U.S. Territory, a number of Centennial Pageants were staged at state parks across Minnesota. At Whitewater State Park, pageants were held in 1933 (above), 1935 and 1949 on the golf course. These pageants involved hundreds of local resident actors as well as professional actors and tribal members from the Red Lake Indian Reservation. The pageants attracted thousands of visitors and sparked the creation of the Winona County Historical Society.



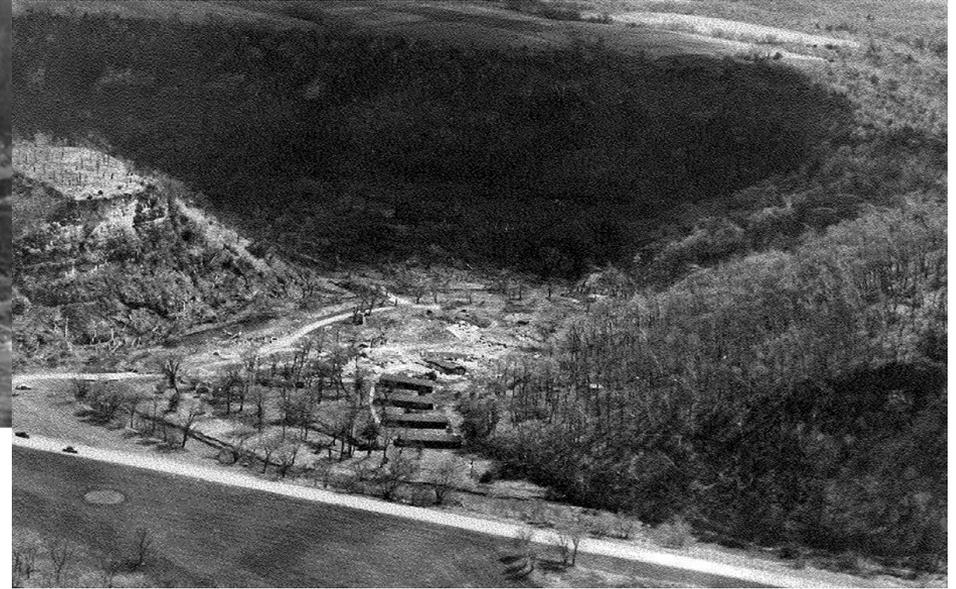
During the summers of 1944 and 1945, the former CCC barracks at the park were used as a summer work camp for German Prisoners of War (POWs) who had been captured during World War II. The POWs lived most of the winter at a base camp in Algona, Iowa where buildings were insulated. Left: Ernst Kohleick, a former POW who stayed at Whitewater during his capture returned in 1977 to visit and was interviewed by park staff. Right: Ernst with his wife and children during their visit to Whitewater State Park.



Imagine more than 1,000 boys amassed on the old golf course in a flag ceremony. This was the scene during the annual Boy Scout Camporees that were held each May at the park throughout the 1950s and 1960s. After the flag ceremony, the boys marched a parade down Highway 74 to the North Picnic Area. Above: A scene from a Boy Scout Camporee, circa 1960s. During the camporees, the scouts were allowed to pitch their tents in the floodplain forest between the beach and the South Picnic Area.



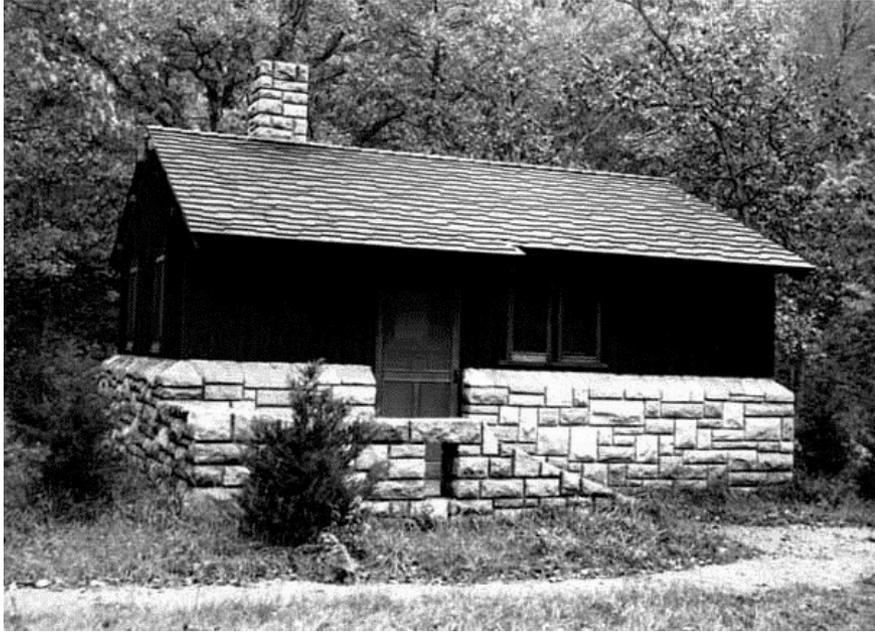
After the barracks were used as a POW Camp, the site became a group camp for local organizations. Many groups returned to the park for decades. Since the 1940s, Camp Whitewater has gathered at the park each summer to bring together southeast Minnesota youth who share the Lutheran faith. Photos: Scenes from the 1947 gathering of Camp Whitewater.



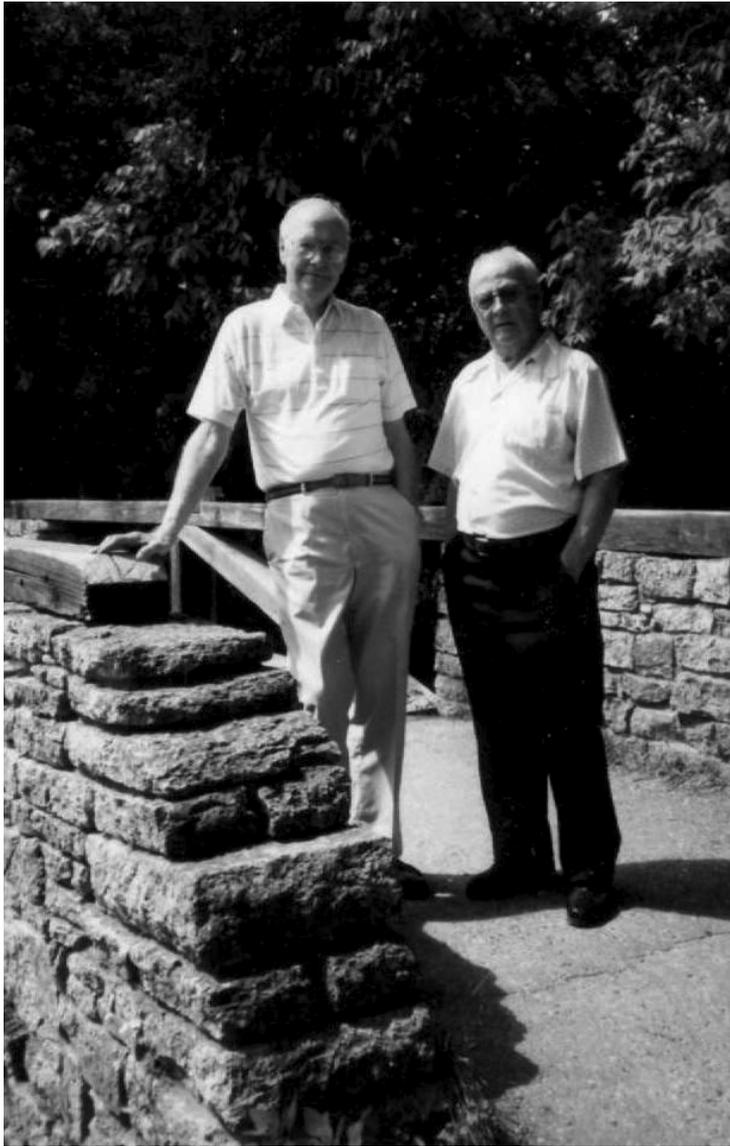
On May 10, 1953, a tornado destroyed all but four of the buildings in the former CCC Camp. Fortunately, no one was injured during the storm. Instead of a Camporee that year, the Boy Scouts held a “Workoree” and helped clean up the debris. Left: The CCC Camp prior to the tornado. Right: The destroyed camp after the tornado. Notice how the old road crossed from Highway 74 directly into the present-day South Picnic Area via a vanished bridge.



A new group camp, today known as the Modern Group Center, was built in 1956. Throughout the following decade, Winona State Teachers College (aka Winona State University) held annual Conservation Workshops for teachers and teachers-in-training at this facility. During the week-long field course, professors such as the late Calvin R. Fremling, prepared participants to teach their own lessons in biology and conservation. Above: Teachers and college students from Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota work to build an earthen cooking pit where they cooked all meals during the 1966 Conservation Workshop.



Flooding is an essential part of the Whitewater story. Repeated flooding in the 1970s caused the park to lose its golf course as well as the stone-arch bridge and the beautiful CCC cabins (above). Floods washed away and buried campgrounds, forcing park staff to rebuild in new locations out of the floodplain. In 2007, the largest flood in the park's history caused several million dollars in damage to infrastructure and closed the park for nearly a year. Over the last 100 years, agricultural land-use in the Whitewater River watershed has been a major factor in the flooding history of the Whitewater Valley.



In 1994, former CCC boys, James Bishop and Fred Johnson, returned to the park to give talks about their experiences at Whitewater State Park during their service with the CCC. The men became teary eyed as they observed modern families enjoying the facilities they helped to build so long ago when they were young men. Left: Fred Johnson and James Bishop. Above: Fred Johnson leads a group of park visitors on a walk to visit the CCC sites in the park.



In 1933, the Elba Fire Tower was constructed to thwart local landowners from burning their hillsides to clear brush so they could graze livestock. Grazing of the hillsides contributed to the already-intense soil erosion and flooding in the valley. The tower was used until the early 1960s and then sat empty and began to deteriorate. In the 1980s, Elba residents heard rumors the tower was to be demolished and they mobilized to save it. They got it listed on the National Historic Register and a local Booster Club raised funds to rebuild it. Left: The tower after it was re-opened in 1995. Above: Many Sentence to Serve (STS) crew members assisted in building the 634 steps that lead up the bluff to the tower.



In the 1850s, Luxembourg immigrants constructed a stone house deep in the Whitewater Valley along the Oronoco Stagecoach Trail. Several families lived in the house over the years until the State of Minnesota took ownership and the house sat abandoned. After years of organizing, advocating and fundraising, local residents, many of whom were Luxembourg descendants, got the home placed on the National Historic Register. In 1993, the house was eventually restored, with the help of craftsmen who travelled from Luxembourg. Each year since, Elba residents host an open house event at the site. These photos depict pre and post restoration of the house.





In 2017, the Minneiska Campground opened. The campground features facilities designed to better accommodate an ever-growing base of diverse park users. Left: DNR staff pose at the Minneiska ribbon-cutting ceremony. Right: Some things never change as local boy scouts kick-off the event with a flag ceremony and songs.

# Resource Management



Prescribed fire is an essential land management tool at Whitewater State Park. Natural wild fires and fires set by Dakota Indians roared across this landscape for thousands of years. Today fire helps to maintain remnant oak savannah and prairie landscapes and to slow the spread of invasive species. Each year, park staff develop a detailed resource management plan of which prescribed fire is an integral part. Above: Park staff oversee a prescribed fire below Eagle Point in 2016.



Since the naturalist program's beginnings in 1960, countless school children visited Whitewater State Park to learn about science through hands-on encounters with the natural world. Students also played and continue to play a vital role in assisting with resource management projects. In 2018, Plainview-Elgin-Millville science teacher, Denine Voegeli, shared that, for her, the park "is a tremendous resource and one that is vital in getting students to understand the concept of Earth Systems and the stewardship of our planet Earth." Left: Plainview Middle School students assist with a direct seed planting in 2006. Right: Lewiston students help with prairie seed collecting in the 1980s.



In 2009, peregrine falcons returned to Whitewater State Park after a nearly 40-year absence due to widespread use of the pesticide DDT. Over his career, former park naturalist, Dave Palmquist, devoted hundreds of hours volunteering with the peregrine falcon recovery project. Above: Dave proudly displays one of two peregrine falcon chicks banded at the park in 2009.



Fishing has been a part of the Whitewater landscape for over one hundred years. This is reflected by a very long history of trout fisheries management in the valley. Left: One of the first trout rearing ponds in southeastern Minnesota was constructed at the confluence of the Whitewater River and Trout Run Creek in 1925. Right: An early raceway at Crystal Springs Hatchery in the 1930s.



Rattlesnake



Bull Snake

Each summer, one or two park visitors encounter a timber rattlesnake at Whitewater State Park. Although there has only been one confirmed death in Minnesota due to a timber rattlesnake bite, this species continues to be feared. The timber rattlesnake was nearly extirpated from Minnesota due to a bounty that was outlawed in 1989. Because of its delayed sexual maturity (8–12 years before females breed), people acting out of fear, and the loss of their bluffland habitat to human development, timber rattlesnake populations continue to decline.

Left: A timber rattlesnake suns itself on a log in the park. Right: Live snake programs have long been a staple program at Whitewater State Park. Over the years, thousands of school children and park visitors participated in live snake programs and learned to appreciate these awesome creatures.

# Making Whitewater Better



Since 1981, the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCM), previously called the Minnesota Conservation Corps (MCC), has played a major role in the resource management of Whitewater State Park and parks throughout Minnesota. This modern-day CCC program allows young adults to gain valuable experience in the conservation field while helping manage the outstanding natural resources of our parks. Left: A MCC crew poses with their harvest of wild garlic mustard at the park. Right: A CCM crewmember helps plant trees on a newly acquired parcel of land at Whitewater State Park in 2017.



Currently, more than 600 individuals volunteer each year at Whitewater State Park. Volunteers young and old play a critical role in the interpretive program and resource management of the park. The Friends of Whitewater is a group of volunteers who work hand-in-hand with park management staff to find innovative and creative ways to help achieve goals and objectives identified in the park management plan. Above: A 2016 photo of park volunteers during the annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner sponsored by the Friends of Whitewater.



# GPS Location of Images

Note: Some images have been omitted due to lack of knowledge or resource management concerns.

6)	44.059043°N , 92.048114°W	22 R)	44.0622200N , 92.044467oW	35 UR)	44.0512160N , 92.047670oW
7)	44.058212°N , 92.047719°W	24 L)	44.051624oN , 92.047137oW	35 LR)	44.0512350N , 92.047344oW
8)	44.053817°N , 92.047149°W	24 R)	44.0538370N , 92.041868oW	36 L)	44.0536150N , 92.048767oW
9)	44.054613°N , 92.044749°W	25 L)	44.0605230N , 92.049284oW	36 )	Aerial Photograph
10 L)	44.052604°N , 92.047210oW	25 R)	44.0622580N , 92.047473oW	38 L)	44.0555010N , 92.047148oW
10 C)	44.050595°N , 92.047173oW	26)	44.0513810N , 92.051575oW	38 R)	44.0507220N , 92.051443oW
10 R)	44.0526490N , 92.047213oW	27)	44.0534960N , 92.044972oW	39 L)	44.0541830N , 92.043860oW
11)	44.0510950N , 92.046910oW	28)	44.0630790N , 92.045833oW	39 R)	44.0544150N , 92.045711oW
12)	44.0542030N , 92.045831oW	29 UL)	44.0509560N , 92.042827oW	40 L)	44.0886620N , 92.011782oW
13)	44.0494670N , 92.046483oW	29 LL)	44.0569110N , 92.048010oW	41)	44.1196940N , 92.032292oW
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22 L)	44.0529960N , 92.045943oW	35 L)	44.0509750N , 92.046726oW		

# Credits

Unless noted otherwise, photos were provided by the Whitewater State Park archives, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Thank you to those who shared stories during the Whitewater State Park Oral History Project in 2017.



Above: Park entrance sign constructed by the CCC.

Front cover photo: Sightseers in the Whitewater Valley, L.A. Warming, Paradise of Minnesota, 1917.



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