

Terradise to Cincinnati Expedition

Delaware Dam to Olentangy Road south of Delaware- 7.7 miles

June 13, 2007 9 AM to 4:30 PM

This leg of the trip was a little intimidating, as it was the first time back in the original riverbed since last year. The trip last week on Delaware Reservoir was interesting, but not typical of a river journey. I had scouted this area from Delaware Dam south into the city of Delaware, and have to admit a little nervousness about the low head dams. There are three to pass over today. The water level is at 1.1 feet, so there is not much danger of wild water taking me away! On the contrary, there was a lot of walking ahead of me, as we will see.



I left Cincinnati at 6 AM, arriving at Main Road just south of Delaware Dam at 9 AM. I started unloading and dragged the kayak along the trail leading up the east bank just behind the truck in the picture above. Something (spider? bee?) bit me just below the hairline on my right forehead. I brushed it away, but a welt started raising right away.

Nobody around, so I left the kayak on the little path leading down to the lowhead dam (about 2 feet high) with the other supplies (cushion, backpack and paddles), I climbed back in the truck for the trip to find a good ending place. I would be attending the visitation for a High School friend's father (Bill Flach) at Denzer Funeral Home in Marion by 4:30 PM, meeting with another HS friend, Jay Walker, so I needed to pick a spot that would have me finished in time to make it to Marion.

I had originally intended to leave the truck on River Street just south of the old RR Bridge (now bikeway), but parking there was a little iffy, so I went on down to Olentangy Road south of the Delaware Water Treatment Plant where I could park along the road east of the bridge.

I unloaded the rest of the goodies along with some water and packed up my bike ready for the trip back up to Main Road. Fortunately, the new bike trail took me back up to the old train station on Lake Street (US 42) and I could ride the sidewalks to the north end of town. A short stretch on busy US 42 took me to Horseshoe Road, then to Case Road and over to Panhandle Road and finally Main Road.

I hid the bike behind some bushes and proceeded on down the path to find the kayak where I had left it. A fisherman from Marion was playing catch and release with the crappies, and we had a nice talk about river running and fishing. I figure fishermen are just closet naturalists – it's more manly to be out there fishing, I guess, instead of just enjoying the natural world for it's own sake.

I told him I would be back downstream after the short 300 yard trip up to the base of Delaware Dam (No cheating on this trip – got to run everything runnable!) The water coming out of the base of the dam was muddy colored, betraying its silty origin some 20 feet or so below the surface of Delaware Lake. I imagine a very odd landscape exists at the bottom of the reservoir, resembling nothing like the valley that still exists below the dam and which must have been enchanting up to the post-war period that saw its destruction. My boyhood memories of skunk hollow are really only of some pictures and stories told by my mother. The reservoir is rapidly (geologically speaking) filling with silt from central Ohio cornfields, and during low water season (late fall) exposes a full 1/6 of the length of the lake as mud flats. At this rate, in 200 years or so, there will be no Delaware Lake, and the river will once again start to carve its valley. But I digress...

On the way back to the lowhead dam above Main Road, a crappie obligingly jumped into the boat, and I belayed him long enough to show the fisherman that all that equipment wasn't really necessary, just a dripping paddle to emulate an insect's dipping a drink.

At the low water level, getting over the dam was simple. Just get out of the kayak, step over the dam, and pull the boat over the top, threading between the rubble stones below. I hopped aboard and was on my way again.

Passing under the Main Road bridge, I soon came upon the CSX Bridge and decided to wait for the consist I heard coming from the south. Unfortunately another consist was parked on the bridge, and the northbound train was hidden behind it as it crossed. All this backup was due to a wreck at Irwin Road the previous week.

There is either one Great Blue Heron who has decided to follow me on this trek from Caledonia to Cincinnati, or the territory for each heron is about 2/10 mile. I finally got one to stay put long enough for a closeup photo:



Great Blue Heron – south of CSX bridge and Main Road

The Olentangy takes a holiday and goes east for about 3/4 mile and then makes a horseshoe bend and comes back to within 2/10 mile of the first turn east. This area is known as the panhandle, and Panhandle Road follows it. On the way east, a family of wood ducks led my way, and sure enough, a friendly sycamore with a large branch with wood duck sized holes swept out over the river. Once I reached horseshoe bend, I stopped to investigate some concretions at the mouth of what I will call Horseshoe Creek until I find the real name.

Heading back west, a bald eagle suddenly swooped down for a fish, and just as quickly lifted up into the trees and out of sight. Wow!

As I approached the dam below Panhandle Road (visible from US 23 across from the Site Gasoline Station), I was much calmer than I had expected. The fear of disappearing over the top of this 3 foot lowhead dam dissipated in the calm water which gradually shallowed above the dam. On the right hand side (river right), someone had thoughtfully rigged a cable to a large log, which made climbing the bank up to the guardrail on US 23 much easier. Alas, the Site Station has no food, so I couldn't get the snack I had promised myself.

It was an easy task to lower the ocean kayak over the dam and resume the trip. Going past the amusement park and on into downtown Delaware, I approached the lowhead dam which has been punctured with a 4 foot breach, allowing the entire flow of the river to pass and making the job of passing this dam an easy one. The trip through the gap was thrilling, but the outwash had piled up a bunch of rocks at the end of the sluice, so I had to hop out and walk a little around this area.

I had thought I would exit the river along River Avenue, but instead had parked at Olentangy Avenue, so I made my way down there and encountered the first of the flat limestone pavement that would underlie the next 8 miles of river. Another 6 inches of water would have helped, but I ended up walking over these areas.

I beached under the bridge, and dragged the kayak up to the road east of the bridge (an easy path through weeds) and loaded up and headed back to Main Road to retrieve the bicycle and head back to Cincinnati.