

Terradise to Cincinnati Expedition

August 12, 2007 – Greenlawn Avenue Dam to Shadeville - Scioto River - 9.74 miles
3:30 PM to 7:30 PM

Now, we are on two rivers – the Olentangy and the Scioto have joined together to double their flow and enter a new type of riverbed. 10,000 years ago, the glaciers were receding and dumping prodigious amounts of water and gravel into the valley they had filled and buried for the cold spell that was the last glacial age. Along came modern man, and these rivers served them well to travel from Lake Erie to the Ohio River.

Along came even more modern man, and his steam and diesel shovels, and these gravel beds became base materials for the superhighways that now link the state in ways the early men would have marveled at. Of course, the land looks like the deserts of southwest North America, with dry piles and dry washes dissecting almost 10 square miles of the area south of Columbus in a well-hidden gravel pit. None of this is visible from the major highways of the area, nor from the river. You have to climb out of the river banks to see this marvel. While on the river, you could be anywhere – there are no visible signs of the pits.

Needless to say, the bed of the river is gravel, and the ripples I go over are now over 6 inches deep, giving my Ocean Kayak enough draft to avoid the in-and-out of the Olentangy limestone riverbed. Even at low water levels like this summer, the flow is enough to allow me to increase my travel speed to 2.5 mph, up from the 1 to 1.5 mph in the slower stretches above Columbus.

I put in at Greenlawn Dam, since the direct route from the Confluence is blocked by two very high lowhead dams. The Main Street Dam is at least 10 feet high, and the Greenlawn Dam about 8 feet. The fishermen all wished me luck, and seemed concerned I might not make it past the first ripples:



Greenlawn Dam – South Columbus

I could tell right away I was on a different kind of river, and it took a little practice to read the clues as to shallow areas and rocks. The small gravel doesn't give away any

secrets as to river flow, and several times I was tricked into a shallow area before learning to read the telltale signs of depth.

The fishermen are numerous, and I see why – although I only saw fish where there were no fishermen. The big ones (carp and bass) hang out above the ripples, and are extremely fast swimmers when disturbed from their feeding.

The gravel pits fascinated me, so I pulled ashore near the first gravel pit bridge, and snapped a couple of shots of someplace I probably would never be allowed to enter otherwise:



Gravel Pit South of Frank Road and Columbus Skyline

All these pits collect water, and in such a gravelly base, the ground water must be continually pumped into the river:



Pumping the Pit Lakes

After a while, I ran into three folks with an ATV, friendly enough, enjoying a Sunday Afternoon along the river. About another ½ mile and a SUV came bouncing along the gravel pit roads and dumped some folks out to pound stakes – now I wonder what that was all about?

Rivers make easy dumping grounds – or maybe this guy just took a wrong turn:



The Interstate 270 bridge just east of I-71 soon appeared with its constant traffic. I could hear this traffic for the next hour – sound carries extremely well over the straight stretches of water south of here.



I-270 Bridges

Next bridge will be the take-out point on State Route 317 at Shadeville. This basically uneventful stretch is bounded on the left bank by another gravel pit, this time from Kokosing Basic Materials. The right bank is, for a while, lined with some nice homes whose address is no doubt State Route 104. I find that the more money spent on the home, the more control of the riverbank is attempted. Somehow, they think dumping broken concrete blocks on the bank will stem the erosion. In reality, this only speeds up the water around the blocks, causing un-natural erosion and worsening the problem. The stream bank is littered with ill-fated attempts at control, when the best method is good planning and an eye for where the river is headed over the long term.

This gnarled old stump first caught my eye with the thought that a tire had gotten caught up in some wayward log:



I imagine the bridge that used these piers and abutments was a covered bridge, as the road (which would have connected White Road to US 23 but for the abandonment to the Kokosing Gravel Pit) was no doubt last used in the 1800s.



East Bank



West Bank



Google Earth View of abandoned White Road across Kokosing Basic Materials Gravel Pit

Soon, I heard shouts of a party of kayak/canoists and then saw the beer bottles and cans floating behind them. Fortunately, they stopped to gather their half-wits, and I had a chance to pass them, leaving them to their Sunday fun tearing up the river. The river will survive, the half-wits, maybe not.

Rounding another bend, I spotted the island that signaled that the State Route 317 bridge was close at hand. The left channel is pretty narrow, so I decided to go right and take advantage of the last set of ripples. As I passed the point, an otter ambled out of the weeds and crossed the left channel entrance to take shelter in some logs. That channel would connect to the main channel again under the bridge, and was the clearest water

seen so far, with literally hundreds of crawdads darting in the shallow water. This was the way the Olentangy (Whetstone) was at Terradise during the 1950s while I was growing up staring into the water while wearing my “knee boots”. Now a crawdad in that area is a rarity, and mussels are few and far between. There was a fish kill in the 1960’s but the real kill may have been the pollution that killed the fish food. Rivers can heal almost overnight, since they are replenished with new water constantly, but chemicals and other pollutants can do damage which takes decades to repair.



Takeout point, under State Route 665 Bridge at Shadeville

I dragged the kayak across the narrow left channel shown here, with the main channel and the continuing journey behind my back, beckoning in the sunset. Next trip will get me halfway to Circleville. Can't wait!