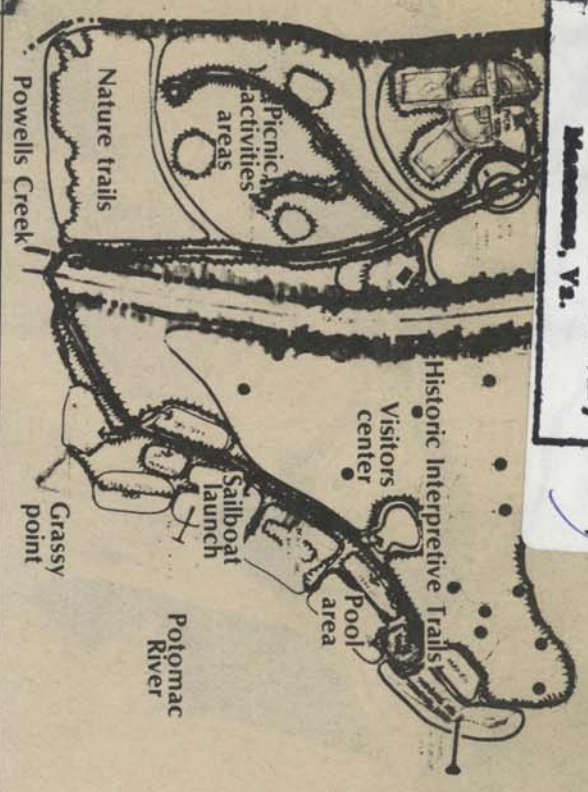


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Park



Paw-paws in the park: Touring Leesylvania

BY EILEEN MEAD
Potomac News Staff Writer

State Parks Commissioner Ronald Sutton and historian Don Curtis proudly showed Virginia's 28th District Senator John Chichester, the lush forests, sandy beaches and historic sites at the new Leesylvania State Park Monday.

Chichester tasted, for the first time, paw-paws which grow abundantly on trees in the overgrown forests and were exactly ripe enough for eating.

"They're like persimmons: if you bite into them too early, you might not get your mouth unpuckered for several hours," State Park Ranger Kathy L. Schutte told him.

The new state park on the Potomac River came into the 28th District along with Dumfries, Triangle, Quantico and two southern Woodbridge precincts in the recent redistricting. It was Chichester's first visit to the park.

Chichester, whose family name runs throughout Stafford County history, seemed especially interested in the historic significance of Leesylvania, which was originally established in the mid-1660's as a 3,000-acre tobacco plantation.

It was the home of Robert E. Lee's father, Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, and some ruins of the Lee mansion and the 19th century Fairfax
—See PARK, Page A5

PARK

From Page A1

mansion were visited on the tour, as well as the site of the graveyard for both families.

Chichester was also impressed by the sandy beaches, he said, and he has already heard from sailing groups who want him to give first priority to developing the boating facilities in the park.

"The people are locked out of public access to the water in Northern Virginia," Sutton said, "and facilities will be provided for sailboats as well as power boats."

"I find it (the park) as intriguing in potential as anything I've witnessed," Chichester said, "We now take for granted state parks like Kenmore, and Wakefield."

The visitors toured the area over rough access roads, some newly filled in with rock and concrete, and Sutton said that roads into the area will first have to be completed and a modular park ranger's residence is scheduled to be built as soon as all the necessary permits can be obtained.

Ms. Schutte is presently assigned to the park and she is slated to move into the residence when it is com-

pleted.

As chief ranger, under the direction of Superintendent W.D. Taylor, Ms. Schutte now oversees Mason Neck State Park, George Washington's Grist Mill and Leesylvania State Park.

"It is going to be difficult to keep out the deer poachers, four-wheel drive vehicles and campers until we have rangers living in the park," Ms. Schutte said.

She said some of the people who have been using the area for years are showing their vindictiveness

against its state park status by tearing down signs and gates and questioning her authority, she said.

Sutton said the theme of the park will be related to the Lee family, and it will be a day-park open year-around. Schools will be able to bring classes there to study nature and history.

Sutton made Leesylvania Park one of its top priorities in July and placed \$2.5 million in the 1984-85 budget for Phase I of development of the park. It will take more than \$7 million to complete the park, Sutton said.

RETRACING

Campers were in wrong place at wrong time

Three teenaged hikers from Woodbridge chose exactly the wrong time and place to pitch a tent and start a campfire in the new Leesylvania State Park on Freestone Point.

The boys had established camp Monday morning in a clearing at the crest of a hill near the Lee Cemetery in the park and were gathered around the campfire eating lunch when a caravan of cars approached. It was then that they learned their tent was pitched right in the middle of an access road.

They soon learned, too, that their camp was impeding a tour of the park by state dignitaries including State Senator John Chichester and Ron Sutton, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.

State Park Ranger Kathy L. Schutte helped the boys extinguish the campfire and informed them that the area is now a state park and camping and camp fires are not permitted.

The tour group walked to the nearby cemetery and when they returned the boys had their backpacks on and were ready to leave. They politely apologized saying, "We didn't mean any harm," and one boy mustered enough courage to ask if he could take a picture of the senator.



By Mark Milligan — Potomac News

ON TOUR — Standing at the ruins of the Fairfax House, Don Curtis (right) explains the historical significance of the site to Andrew Donnelly, (left) former Prince William Supervisor, and State Sen. John Chichester during the course of a tour of the Leesylvania State Park yesterday.