

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK

The land that is now Prince William Forest Park has been used by man for a long time. American Indians are thought to have had two village sites along the South Branch of Quantico Creek and to have used the land for hunting and farming. Shortly after the first European colonists arrived in North America, people began moving into the Dumfries-Triangle-Quantico area in what is now the Commonwealth of Virginia. Primary settlement occurred around the mouth of Quantico Creek where it emptied into the Potomac. Until the mid-1700's, Dumfries was a thriving port, rivaling many others on the East Coast.

In the meantime, the land west of Dumfries was rapidly cleared and planted with crops such as cotton and tobacco. These crops were harvested and shipped out through the port at Dumfries. Over the years, the land in this area was farmed intensively. As happened in so many other parts of the country, poor farming practices depleted the soil and caused extensive soil erosion. Soil from the farmland west of Dumfries washed down Quantico Creek and gradually silted up the harbor. By the late 1700's, the harbor at Dumfries had become useless because of siltation, and farm products had to be transported to other nearby ports or markets.

Over the next 200 years, the land in the Dumfries area was farmed and re-farmed. By the early 1900's, the old farmland was badly depleted and eroded. Farmers still remaining on the land were barely able to eke out

a living. In 1933 the Resettlement Administration, under the authority of the National Industrial Recovery Act, acquired 17,000 acres of this depleted farmland in Prince William County, Virginia, and established the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area. In 1936, the area was transferred by Executive Order to the Department of the Interior for administration. In 1940 Congress directed that the area be administered as a part of the National Capital Park system. A major stated purpose of the park was to provide recreational opportunities for residents of and visitors to the Washington metropolitan area.

During World War II parts of the park were utilized for military training purposes, and over 4,500 acres of land south of Virginia State Rt. 619 are still under special use permit to the Department of Navy for Marine training purposes. Shortly after the war, the name Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area was changed to Prince William Forest Park.

Most of the buildings in the park, including the five cabin camps, were built during the early days of the Chopawamsic RDA by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Work Projects Administration. The CCC and WPA provided work to people unemployed during the early 1930's. Other facilities, such as the two campgrounds, the picnic grounds, the road system, and the trails, have been developed gradually over the years.

When the old farmland was first acquired in 1933, most of it was cut over and barren. In the forty years since then, most of the old farm sites have become overgrown with vegetation. It is still possible, though, to tell

where old fields were by the presence of blocks of pine trees. The pines are the first trees to come into a cleared area, to be followed later by the shade tolerant hardwoods such as oak and hickory. In this area, the hardwood forest is the climax stage in the gradual change from open fields to dense forest.

The park as it is today contains numerous plant and animal species. Pines and hardwoods are both present, along with many other plants and shrubs. Raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries can be found growing wild in the park, many of them marking old home sites and farm plots. The park also supports populations of white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and beaver, as well as numerous smaller animals such as raccoons and gray squirrels.

Prince William Forest Park has a short history as a formal park, but the land here tells a story from the early days of man's use of the land to the present. The park provides recreational opportunities for people from the Washington metropolitan area, yet it is one of the few natural areas with wild flora and fauna populations within a half-hour drive of Washington, D. C. It is the hope of the park staff that you will enjoy the park and learn more about yourself. Welcome!!