

Introduction

Welcome to Goll Woods State Nature Preserve. This 320-acre site is an exceptionally fine example of the primeval swamp forest that was characteristic of Northwestern Ohio's "Great Black Swamp." This poorly drained plain which, during early post-glacial times, was the lake bed for predecessors to modern Lake Erie. Many of the magnificent trees seen along Goll Woods' trails were large even at the time the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock. Only since 1916, when lumber was in great demand because of World War I, have any trees been removed from the woods and then only on a limited basis.

Although this remnant of centuries gone by has been markedly affected by extensive drainage, agriculture activity, and development, Goll Woods remains one of the most outstanding remnant old growth woodlands in Ohio.

Pioneer History

In August of 1834, a handful of German pioneer families were the first white people to settle in what is now German Township, Fulton County. Other families soon followed. Among them were Peter F. Goll, his wife Catherine, and their young son Peter jr., who in June 1836, immigrated to this country from Dobs, France. The next year, Peter Goll, Sr. blazed his way to the federal land office in Lima, Ohio, where he purchased his first 80 acres of land for \$1.25 per acre. In the years that followed, as his farm prospered, Goll continued to buy land until he had acquired more than 600 acres.

Goll Woods was in the Goll family for four generations, passing successively from Peter F. Goll Sr. to Peter Goll Jr. to George F. Goll Sr. and to his daughter Mrs. Charles (Florence Goll) Louys. While Peter Goll Sr. and his descendents were farmers, they loved the big trees and carefully guarded the “Big Woods” from a multitude of timber operators.

The Landscape

About 25,000 years ago, the Wisconsinian Glacier, the most recent of four major continental ice sheets, invaded North America. As the glacier slowly advanced, plants as well as animals were forced to migrate southward. Finally, about 18,000 years ago, after covering two-thirds of the state, the ice sheet began melting back. As the Lake Erie Basin was gradually uncovered, a large glacial lake formed across the northwestern corner of Ohio by glacial melt waters. With the Niagara outlet blocked by ice, the lake waters rose until they were as much as 200 feet higher than modern day Lake Erie.

As the Wisconsinian Glacier continued to melt northward, lower outlets to the west were exposed which allowed the level of the lake to drop. Occasionally, the glacier would temporarily advance, causing the lake level to rise for a time. Each stage lasted long enough for a well-defined beach ridge to develop along the shoreline.

Once the Niagara outlet was clear of ice, the water level fell rapidly, bringing the present Great Lakes into existence. As the glacial lake level dropped, the ancient beach ridges were left far inland and the former lake bottom

was exposed. Aquatic plant communities quickly encroached on the shallow but extensive water filled depressions, eventually developing into wet prairies and luxuriant swamp forests. The flattest, densest, and most poorly drained part of this vast swamp forest was called the “Great Black Swamp.”

Visiting The Preserve

The preserve is open to the public year round during daylight hours only. Four Hiking trails traverse the preserve taking you through the natural hardwood forest as well as the conifer plantation. A variety of wildflowers can be found throughout the preserve, especially in the spring. Violets, bloodroot, hepatica, Dutchman’s breeches, and many other species common to the “Black Swamp” region thrive in this remnant of Ohio wilderness.

National Landmark

The purpose of the national landmark program is to identify and encourage the preservation of nationally significant examples of the full range of ecological and geological features that constitute the nation’s natural heritage. The national landmark recognition is authorized by the Department of the Interior and is administered by the National Parks Service.

In 1975, 170 acres of the natural hardwood forest at Goll Woods was recognized as having significant features representing the habitat (primarily the old growth oak forest) of the “Great Black Swamp.”