

By Michael Wentzel and Michael Shultz.

The River You drink – V

Gunpowder Park Unique In Nearness To City

Hiking trails stretching for miles, wilderness almost untouched and one of the most popular river beaches in the Baltimore area are some facets of Gunpowder State Park. Maryland's largest park. These are the last articles in a five-part series on the Gunpowder River by Michael Shultz and Michael Wentze I, as part of The Evening Sun's continuing look at Maryland waterways.

John Gontrum. Felt claustrophobic in the middle of Muir Woods, surrounded by the giant redwoods that soared to the blue sky and by the horde of tourists who had ridden the hour out from San Francisco.

"I asked an old guard there if it was always that crowded." Mr. Gontrum said "He just sighed. When I think about Muir Woods I realize how unique the Gunpowder Park is. I had to ride on a bus for an hour to get to Muir Woods and then it was jam packed. The Gunpowder is a beautiful, natural wilderness within a few miles of our metropolitan area, within walking distance in some cases. No other city has this type or park. [Baltimore has] Druid Hill, but that lost its charm when they cut the trees down. I've stood on the bank and watched floats of canoes coming down in the spring and them having a wonderful time. And down at Chase there is a swimming area and boat docks and good fishing, all in a relatively short distance from the city. We have something here you would expect to find out in the middle of the Sierra."

A tall, spare man who lives near Big Gunpowder Falls off Belair road in the Kingsville area, Mr. Gontrum is a farmer. He was chairman of the final citizen advisory boards for the Gunpowder park's development. His father, Judge John Gontrum, was one of the powers behind the creation of the park. Gunpowder State Park, along the Big and Little Gunpowder Falls and the Gunpowder River, is Maryland's largest park, with the state owning 10,981 acres. Another 4,115 acres are on state plans for future acquisitions.

Patapsco State Park is the second largest now 8,770 acres.

In the late 1950's when the park was still a gleam in then - Governor McKeldin's eye, the plan was to buy land all along the river and both Little and Big falls. A 1958 report estimated that acquiring a proposed 12,000 acres of land would cost about \$3,483,000, a cost of about \$200 an acre, plus another \$100 for administration costs.

Since then the state has spent far more than the proposed \$3 million, although a stat official could not find the exact cost for the 9,000 acres purchased between 1960 and 1978, in the last six years under Project Open Space , the state has spent \$2,681,477. The Gunpowder park, the younger of the Baltimore area's two state stream valley parks, is different from the Patapsco River Park, which emphasizes developed recreational areas.

Since Gunpowder's beginning, it has been seen as "a wilderness-type park where the natural setting is left as little disturbed as possible," an early study said. In the 1960's, that concept changed somewhat. A master plan for the park showed a golf course, stable area, many picnic areas and other recreational areas scattered throughout the valley.

Now a new plans being drawn. Tilly Peu leche, a planner of the state Department of Natural Resources' land planning services division, is pulling together the divergent interests the [ark represents.

"I often think of it as seven different parks." the young, dark-haired planner said. "Different people are interested in different things. Some people want to ride horses, some bikes, others want wilderness." "There's a real trend away from the kind of plan where there is heavy recreational development, in the parks." Said Grace Fiedler, who, until she recently left the state government for a Washington area planning agency, also was working on the park plan. "The state is letting local governments build the tennis courts in local areas. These are state parks and not just for local people. Most parks have come 360 degrees. Most of the development plans were sent outside to be done. Now we have in-house consultants and planners and we have people behind the project to get the plans done and the parks constructed."

The seven areas that make up the Gunpowder park are along all three sections of the river system. The Hammerman and Dundee Creek Marina section at Chase are on the Gunpowder river. The Days cove area is where the two falls join to form the river's delta and estuary. On the Little Gunpowder Falls are the Central Little Gunpowder section, and the Sweet Air section. On the Big Gunpowder Central section, the Springdale section below Zloch /raven dam and the Hereford section below Prettyboy Reservoir.

Last fall planner Peu Leche rode a horse through the sections to get a feel for the area. She grew up in the Worthing Valley area in Baltimore county, but said as a girl she didn't visit the park.

She works in an area of the Tawes State Office Building crammed with multicolored maps, flow charts, file cabinets and acetate overlays - the tools of the trade is trying to pull the divergent interests of people and the needs of the land together.

The different factors that go into planning a park include topographic maps, traffic patterns for cars, planes and trains, zoning, utilities, pollution, historical and architectural sites, types of soils and slopes, geology, hydrology, vegetation, wildlife, water quality, the feelings of residents and others, land acquisition and more.

Elizabeth Hart line is an example of a "special interest" that Miss Peu Leche will have to consider in her planning. Mrs. Hart line has been hiking along the Big Gunpowder recently, she pointed to practically hidden orchid seed pods and the bright green of pipsissewa poking through the brown of the oak-leaf covered forest floor. Mrs. Hart line is a leader of the Maryland Wild-lands Committee, a group dedicated to preserving natural areas in the state. Beside a lone white pine that grew from a table-rock, she explained why she wanted to have this section of the park above Falls road and below Prettyboy Dam on the north bank set off as a wild area.

The table-rock stood on top of a ridge that jutted 100 feet above a bend in the falls. Gilded with ice and laced with an occasional rapid, the falls twisted slate-black between the banks below. As far as one could see on either bank was interrupted woods. As early park plan called for a picnic area with space for hundreds of people to drive in and eat on this isolated ridge. The possibility that it could happen haunts Mrs. Hartline, who believes the area should be kept wild to protect the plants that grow there and to maintain one large undeveloped and permanently wild section in the park. Because of its diversity of life and its isolation, she said she thinks this section is best.

But scientific reasons and careful judgment aside, Mrs. Hart line will candidly tell one, between bites of a hiker's lunch, that she believes "every living thing has a right to life." Development would destroy the area she and many others worry. The only developed area in the park is the Hammerman and Dundee area on the tidewater near Chase.

In summer, refugees from Baltimore's heat stream out Eastern avenue to the beaches on the gunpowder. "It's so busy that lots of weekends we just have to close the park." said Michael Browning, the Gunpowder park system's ranger-naturalist. "On July 4 - that's always our busiest day - we close by early in the morning.

Part of Mr. Browning's job is explaining the natural and historical features of the park to visitors. Under the new program of the park service, the interpretative specialists design nature walks, historical tours and other devices to allow people to see more of what is there.

In winter the wide open grass fields of Hammerman are vacant. Not a soul is around. The monolithic, curved, concrete bathhouses stick up along the edge of the river like H.G. Wells robots. It is hard to imagine the picture Ranger Browning paints of shoulder to shoulder picnickers, players, bathers, and strollers crowding the fields on a summer day.. From Dundee Creek Marina, boaters can rent a boat or launch their own and in the corners of the creek and the river beyond fisherman can try their luck with crabs and fish.

D----- D----- Assistant supervisor for the park said " the creek marina will be enlarged this summer with a new launching ramp additional and a deeper channel dredged. Last year there were 3,830 launches from the slip." he said. The park is bordered by federal land along the south side of the lower Gunpowder River. The old duck hunting grounds at Battery Point and on Carroll Island now are parts of Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Amid the black swamp mud, brown reeds and bare oaks in the Chase area as one of the finest holly stands in the region, said planner Grace /fielder. And in among the trees are a oarge herd of deer. "People love to drive here and watch the deer," said Mr. Browning. But he said the deer attract more than sightseers. Poachers have been killing the animals, shooting them most often at night.

The park now is the major industry along the river, which at one time provided mill sites to diverse industries. Canoeing and tubing, swimming, fishing, and hiking a ll attract thousands to the valley each year. About 30 miles of trail wind along Big Powder Falls, a series of footpaths mapped out by Martin Larrabee of the Sierra Club.

An avid skier and partially retired professor of bio-physics at The Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Larrabee has been hiking since he was a boy smooth faced and agile, a man of the outdoors, he looks 20 years younger than his 67 years.

With a long string and the bottoms of orange juice cans for markers, Dr. Larrabee has strung out the trails. "I walk through an area and try to find the best, most interesting walking. I did a lot of bush-wacking in these woods." he said. He looks for dry footing, for banks that aren't going to tumble walkers into the river, for climbs away from sharp drops. "At first I had to get the trail approved by the park people," he said. "On the first one they made some suggestions here and there. We relocated a section of trail on a hillside and brought a section back farther from the river. They are worried about safety for the public. Now, I pretty much lay pout the trail and they approve it."

Most of the trails were cut after the professor interested graduate students in joining him. With lopping shears and axes they moved through the woods, clearing a marrow path. Now every week or so, Dr. Larrabee walks the woods, pulling a fallen branch off the trail here, cutting back some briers there, thinking of moving a fence or mending a long bridge. He said he would like to see the park expanded to include the land along the Big Gunpowder between Big Falls road near Hereford and the Loch Raven Reservoir. However, a railroad right-of-way and Blue Mount stone quarry are beside the falls there, one of the reasons the section was not included in the park in the first place. Just what to do about industries along the river presents a problem for the state. Twin particular, a rendering plant on the Little Gunpowder near Jerusalem and a sand gravel quarry in the deltas at Days Cove, have created controversies. Harry T. Cambe II and Sons Company, a large sand and gravel mining firm, has applied to Baltimore County and state officials for permits to mine about 200 acres of a sandy delta near Days Cove where Big and Little Gunpowder Falls come together.

Local residents and environmental groups have opposed the permits, arguing the mining would destroy a valuable wetlands in the area and would ruin the area for the park. The wetlands and most of the area that would be mined are within the park's proposed boundary. Although the area is considered a valuable asset for the park and has been considered as an environmental center, state officials have suggested the land should not be acquired because the price tag would be too high.

"We'd have to pay for that land as if it were a producing sand and gravel pit because of the permits that have been issued rather than the price of wetlands," one state official said.

"The land could be sacrificed to conserve purchase money for other pieces of land the park wants to buy. If they don't buy the Campbell land then what will they say to the next person who starts something inside the proposed park boundaries," said Mrs. Hart line.

The park planners also are considering whether or not to buy the E. M. Tollsman and Son, Inc. plant, which renders animal carcasses into liquid. It is on the Little falls near Jerusalem. The rendering process gives off a strong offensive odor and in the past has polluted the stream. But again the park planners are torn between buying the land and forcing out the industry, which they said is needed in the area, and protecting the park from the odor and the stream from possible pollution.

"This is a very important river area for the water supply and in the past for industry," said Mr. Gontrum. "But more important is the natural beauty, the recreation," a healthy recreation. Walking through that valley is a lot more thrilling than all the pinball machines in Ocean City. But I guess I'm prejudiced, I like the outdoors I've hunted and fished and lived along them Gunpowder