



The Great Dismal Swamp (it's everything but Dismal)

The completed canal opened in 1805, 12 years after it was started. Because it was so shallow, its use was limited to flat boats and log rafts that were manually poled or towed through. Industry consisted mainly of logs, shingles and other wood products taken from the swamps great stands of cedar and juniper.

In 1829 the canal was widened and deepened and the locks were converted from wood to stone. In 1866, passenger services began in the Canal after which the Dismal Swamp Canal Company was near bankruptcy and the canal deteriorated and the assets were sold to the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company.

In 1925, Congress authorized the purchase of the Canal for \$500,000 and the canal was dredged to 50 feet wide and 9 feet deep. In 1941 new locks were built at Deep Creek and South Mills.

In 1974 the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was established and in 1988 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is said that Edgar Allen Poe wrote "The Raven" on the canal.

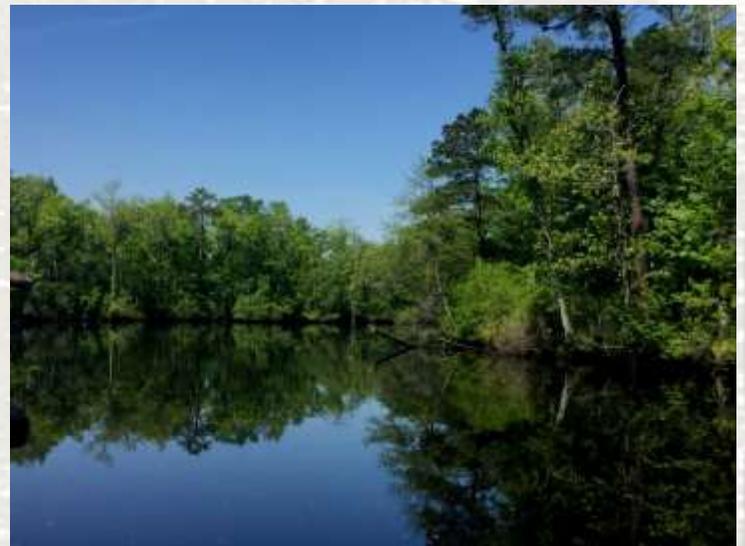
Source US Army Corps of Engineers "Cruising Into History"

May 11, 2018

We left Elizabeth City at 9:00 am and entered the Dismal Swamp Canal under the South Mills Bridge.

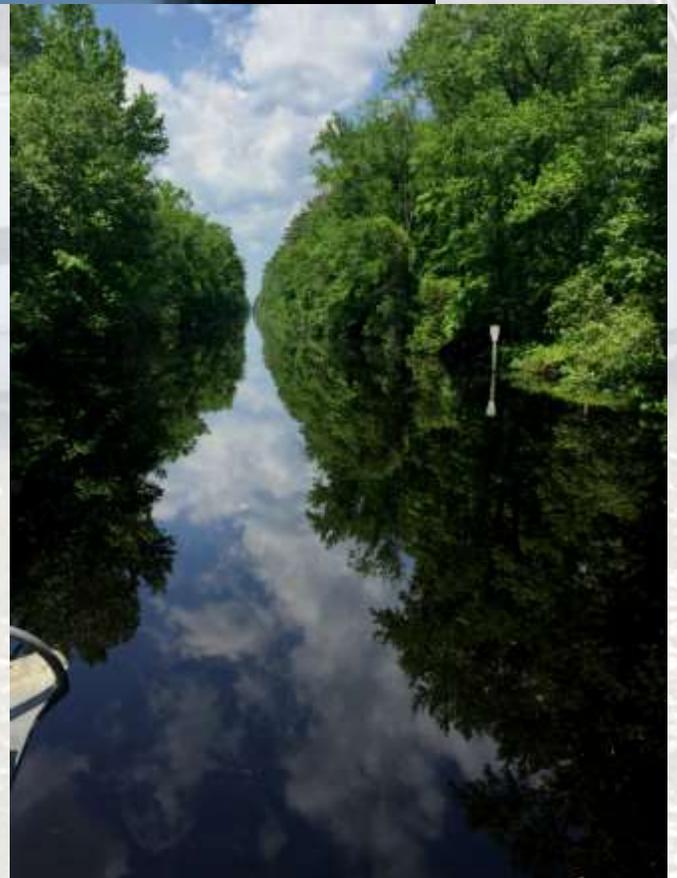


I wanted to drive the canal, as this was a part of the journey I'd been anticipating for over a year. The water was like a mirror, the reflections were breathtaking, however that did made it difficult to discern where the water ended and the shore began.





We reached the first lock at 11:45, it was scheduled to open again at 1:30. So we tied up on the port side dolphins and did some work. We were actually quite productive in such a short period of time.



I washed windows, made crab cakes and tartar sauce, cleaned our saloon cubby hole (your homes version of the junk drawer) and Wallace cut another hole in the boat for a retractable shore power compartment he is designing.

Once through the lock the canal started to narrow and the reflections became even more mesmerizing.

Saw a couple of water moccasins today and loads of water lillies. The swamp is anything but dismal.



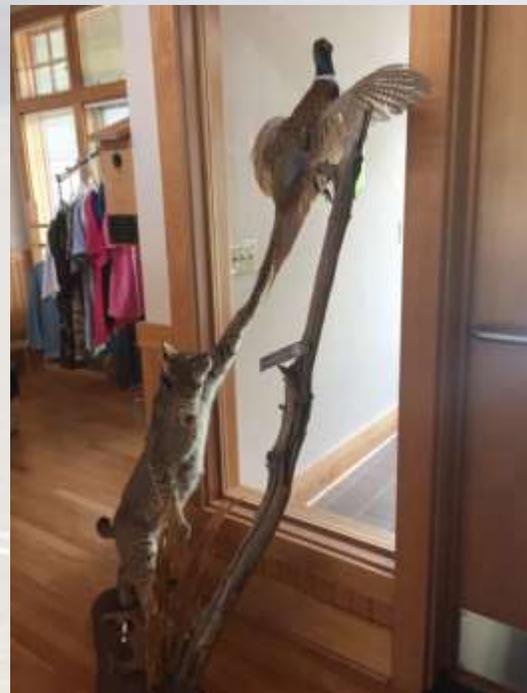


We moored on the free dock for the night at the Dismal Creek Visitor's Centre. There was a small museum with a lot of taxidermy of the local wildlife (somewhat disturbing to me, yet interesting).

Hooded Warbler



Great Blue Heron



Yellow Billed Cuckoo





We took a wonderful nature walk, the sounds of the bird calls reminded me of my many bird watching treks with Dad.

Saw this fellow (on the right), who didn't seem too bothered by us.



Picked some flowers at the Centre (shhh!)



Of course we bought a Dismal Swamp T Shirt and were able to exchange our 30 book library for new reading material.

Left the Visitor's Centre and at 8:35 a.m. we crossed the border into Virginia.



Arrived at Deep Creek Bridge at 10:35 and then on to the next lock



Defaced the lock wall, Mum's the word



Wallace and I spent the morning with Rob Peake who is the bridge and lock master on the dismal. We had the pleasure of his company and he shared some of the history of the canal with us after which he invited us for coffee the next morning. Rob has been working the Deep Creek Lock and Bridge for 25 years and he definitely loves the Dismal. He played the conch for us. Wallace had a go at it and got it...me not so much.



A Story in History, shared by Rob Peake

The canal has been said to have been built by slaves, however Rob's research revealed that all walks of life contributed to its construction. They were paid room and board and 2 bits (\$.25) per day. Rob told us the story of one slave, Moses Grandy who approached his master and proffered a deal that would allow him to work on the canal. He would harvest the master's crop, then work on the canal all winter thus saving his master the expense of feeding and housing him over those months, after which he would return to plant the next year's crop. They struck this deal and Moses then asked the master if he made enough money could he buy his freedom. His master had paid \$600 for him, a huge sum of money in those days, and he laughed at Moses supposition that he could earn enough to buy his freedom back and so agreed to the deal. Moses worked for 3 winters building the canal and logging and making shingles every evening. When he returned home he handed his master \$600, but his master took the money and sold Moses to another man.

Moses then offered his new master the same deal, and it was accepted in the same manner. After another 3 years of working days and nights in the swamp he returned with another \$600 for his new master. Again, this master took the money and sold Moses to another man, a French Canadian Fur Trader. And once again Moses made the same deal with his new owner. Finally, after yet another three years in the swamp, the Fur Trader kept his word and gave Moses his papers and his freedom for a third \$600.



Dirt Free at the Deep Creek Lock Free Dock

Best walk to a gas station ever, enhanced by the sweet aroma of honeysuckle.







We decided to stay a second night at Deep Creek Lock. Our plan was to head to Portsmouth and do a dinner and movie at the Commodore. Being that it was Mother's Day we figured the theatre and dock would be packed, so we headed out on Monday.

Reflections



I had imagined a dank, dark passageway looming out in front of you like a narrow tunnel with a foreboding overhead canopy dripping with moss and vines. There would be a steamy mist rising off the water, poisonous snakes lurking in the tree branches and the echo of bob cats and bears in the distance.

Although not what I expected, The Great Dismal Swamp did not disappoint, it was sublimely calm with mesmerizing reflections, cardinals, great blue herons, turtles, deer and yes the odd water moccasin. Loved it, my bucket list is checked.



Monday May 14, 2018

Portsmouth, Virginia

