

# HISTORIC HIGHWAY 131

Interpretive Guide

Kickapoo Valley Reserve  
La Farge, Wisconsin



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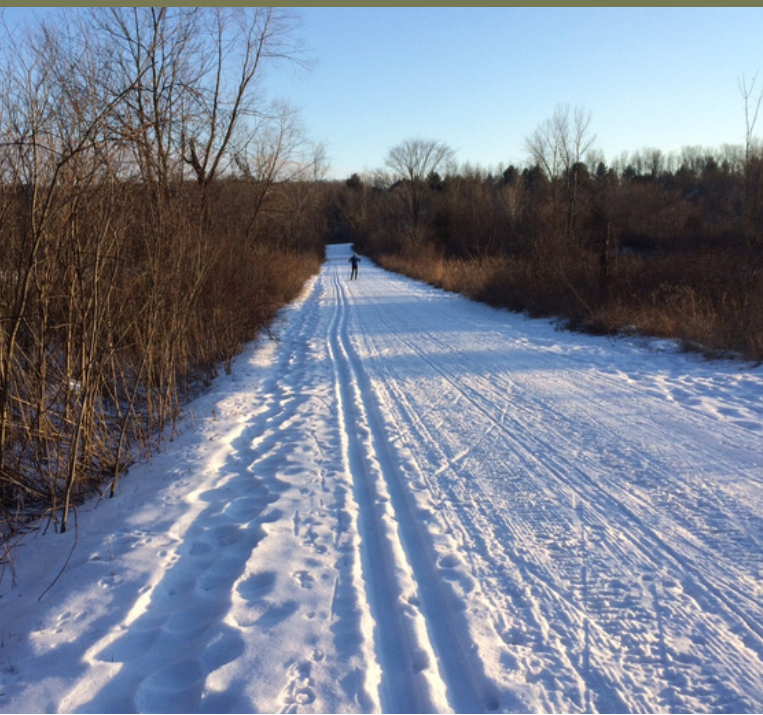
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## Kickapoo Valley Reserve Mission

The land in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve shall be protected, preserved, and enhanced so that its unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve. The Reserve will be promoted as a unique example of the Driftless Area Ecoregion and as a destination for low-impact tourism and education.



# About the Kickapoo Valley Reserve

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## A Unique Place from All Vantage Points

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is an 8,600-acre tract of public land located between the villages of La Farge and Ontario in southwestern Wisconsin. Its history, resources, administration, and recreational diversity make it unique – a place like no other

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More than thirty years ago, the federal government began a flood control project on the Kickapoo River; 149 farms were purchased to make way for a dam and reservoir. The landowners were removed, the farm buildings destroyed, and the first phase of construction begun.

However, after several starts and stops the project was halted in 1973 for environmental and economic reasons. Controversial from the start, people in the area were understandably outraged that they had sacrificed so much and saw no benefit.

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In 1996, federal legislation directed the US Army Corps of Engineers to transfer up to 1,200 acres to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for the Ho-Chunk Nation and the remaining 7,369 acres to the State of Wisconsin. Ownership transfer was completed December 28, 2000.

The US Army Corps of Engineers published two brochures as part of the closure of the deauthorized project: "Prehistory and Archeology of the Upper Kickapoo Valley" and "A Brief History of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve". Both are available at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

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# The La Farge Dam Project



Full story can be found on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Website or by request at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

## La Farge Dam Project

by Al Anderson, UW Extension

The La Farge dam was proposed as early as the 1930s as a means to control flooding in the northern part of the Kickapoo River Valley. After many false starts, in 1962 Congress authorized a flood control dam at La Farge. With some modifications, it took its final form of a larger flood control dam with tourism and recreational potential in the mid-1960s. Acquisition of the property with compensation at market value started in 1969, and ultimately 140 farms were purchased most unwillingly from local property owners. From the beginning, the dam was controversial. Many local people were against it, but the promise of flood control, tourism and economic benefits for a fairly poor area was a powerful argument. Artist Rendition of La Farge Lake and Dam Construction started in the early 1970s, but the project was plagued with problems. In 1970, the Federal Environmental Protection Act was passed, requiring that the project prepare an environmental impact statement. The La Farge dam was a very early example of a federal project preparing an environmental impact statement. Numerous environmental concerns were raised. There were a number of endangered species of plants and serious concerns were raised about the dam's effect on water quality. The US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) made some provisions in the structure of the dam to address the water quality issues and the project was given the go-ahead for completion. By 1975, over half of the dam structure was completed and the state highway from La Farge to Rockton had been relocated. However, costs escalated due to delays caused by the environmental impact statement and modifications made to the plan. In 1975, Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire asked for a re-evaluation of the cost-benefit ratio for the dam and the project collapsed due to that analysis. The project came to a halt in 1975.....

## .....Current Management

The Kickapoo Reserve Management Board (KRMB) began meeting in 1995 to discuss all issues related to the property and pending ownership transfer. The State sanctioned board meets monthly in the villages of Ontario and La Farge. The Corps of Engineers consults with the Board on issues related to trails, agriculture leases, enforcement and recreation in addition to the project features outlined in WRDA 1996.

In June of 1997, the KRMB opened an office in La Farge staffed by an Executive Director and Executive Assistant. In May of 1998, the KRMB entered into an interim lease with the Corps of Engineers to assume day to day management responsibility of the property. During the same period, State legislation was signed into law adding two representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation to the KRMB to further insure joint management. The eleven member board retains a local majority and now includes: three at large members appointed by the Governor; two representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation, one of which must be a resident of the Kickapoo Valley; two representatives of the Kickapoo watershed; and four members nominated from the communities and school boards immediately adjacent to the Reserve lands. On December 28, 2000 the deed was recorded at the Vernon County Courthouse, officially transferring 7,369 acres to state ownership. Although progress is being made, difficult decisions continue to surface. Some residents have not gotten over the tremendous loss they witnessed within their community. The future of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve will surely need to include a memorial to those who sacrificed so much. Perhaps the beauty of the property itself and the guarantee it will be preserved for future generations will be the most important tribute to their sacrifice.

\* Segments added by Marcy West, Executive Director to the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board



# Former Land Owners

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Myron S. & Beverly Jean Alderman  
George & Colett Allikas  
Avery & Ethel Anderson  
Howard B. & Reiko M. Anderson  
Charles & Dolores Anderson  
Dorien L. (Jr.) Barclay  
Gerald A. Belter  
Erma A. Breidenstein  
Dale M. & Carolyn M. Brent  
William L. & Ethel Brown  
McKinley & Ferol Budde  
Carl L. Budde  
Rex A. & Mary E. Bufton  
Carl James Burdick  
Irwin G. & Carol Bringe Buros  
Bazzel J. & Norma Byers  
Clyde R. (L) & Hazel M. Calhoun  
Verne L. Campbell  
Claude & Mary Cass  
Richard & Ruby Clark  
Harold D. & Lorraine Coleman  
Herschel H. & Florence A. Cox  
Vaughn O. & Lillian Daines  
Chalmer J. & Joan Daines  
H. V. & Hamma Daines  
Germaine E. & Bernadine Daines  
James E. & Evelyn Daines  
Lulu Hazel Dempsey  
Leland P. & Ruth Dempsey  
Leo J. & Lillian Dempsey  
Roy E. & Dott I. Dobbs  
Carol & Harold C. Dorschied  
Earl E. & Martha Driscoll  
Erick Erickson  
Vesta V. & Norman Erickson  
Ronald & Rhoda D. Erwin  
Gerald W. & Donna Erwin  
Gilbert L. & Merylin G. Ferson  
Daniel (Jr.) Fish, Jr.  
Keith W. & Magdalene A. Fiske  
Harry C. & Linda L. Fiske  
Sarah Leona Frye  
Morris J. & Helen Funnell  
James D. & Ruth Lorraine Gallagher  
Ernest & Pansy Ferne Gerber  
Gladys & Theodore Getter  
Arnold & Inez Hagen  
Dareld F. & Loretta M. Hanson  
Paul B. & Dollie W. Harris  
Frank L. & Mayva G. Haugh  
Richard & Nanalee Heckart  
Nanalee & Richard A. Heckart  
Ernest and Agnes O. Heisel  
LeMont & Bonnie Hemstead  
Leonard M. & Delores Hilton  
Esther A. & Linley Hisel

Virgil & Julia Hisel  
Esther A. & Linley Hisel  
Gale & Kathryn Huston  
Melvin & Juanita L. Ja Doul  
Alvie E. Jacobson  
Cecil & Beatrice Jensen  
Finn H. & Ruth J. Johannesen  
Milo Lew & Anna Jones  
Edward & Isa Kaukl  
Rose Kriigel  
Hazel Kuenning  
J. C. & Betty La Flash  
Millie Lawrence  
Bard Lawrence  
Willard D. & Mary T. Lawton  
Agnes Leatherberry  
Vester & Leona Lisney  
Gertrude V. Manley  
Mary Hope & Carol E. Markee  
Carol E. & Mary Hope Markee  
William F. & Teresa A. Markee  
Bernard A. & Bonnie Jean Markee  
Carol E. & Mary Hope Markee  
Gary E. & Johanne Markee  
Basil & Esther Melvin  
Michael Monahan  
Geneva & A J . Montgomery  
Marion Munson  
Charles Arthur & Olive Nelson  
Arthur & Olive Nelson  
Cloie M. & Alvin Neprud  
Bert & Noreen Nofsinger  
Neal O. & Betty J. Nottestad  
Talmage & Elna Nottestad  
Annabelle Parker  
John & Violet E. Parr  
Hannora Isabelle & Everett V. Parr  
Clarence A. & Gladys M. Peterson  
Kathryn Richard  
Myron L. V. & Anna Richard  
Vivian & Bernard Riddle  
Roberta Risen  
Floyd H. Roberts  
Larry & Patricia Robinson  
Harvey E. (Jr.) & Darlene Romine  
Sharon & Wesley W. Rose  
Ferna M. Rush  
Dale & Delores Sandmire  
Ruth Sanford  
Clifford M. & Mary Louise Schoenike  
Harvey & Bernice Schroeder  
Clyde J. & Evelyn Schroeder  
George A. & Beatrice T. Schroeder  
Arthur C. & Marian W. Sculley  
Claude V & Leah S. Seaman  
Clyde & Nellie Shumate



Former landowner names are on bricks at the entrance to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

Gertrude Silbaugh  
Milton L. & Hazel Smith  
Victor H. & Eveline Steinmetz  
Donovan E. & Merle V. Steinmetz  
Lloyd A. & Mary P. Steinmetz  
Leroy C. & Matilda B. Stone  
John C. & Garnet Stout  
Robert & Mary Strait  
Ammon Eugene & Esther M. Strait  
Florence & Arthur Swenson  
John & Margaret Switcher  
James Y. Timm  
Murton & Melva Timmerman  
Millard Towns  
Henry & Emmer Dell Trappe  
Sidney Trappe  
Beverly Jean Tunks  
Clifford F. & Ada Marie Turner  
Victor W. & Margaret Van Dyke  
Gharld & Mildred Vance  
Hazel & Carl Vitcenda  
Gloria J. & David R. Volzka  
Leah & Henry B. Von Ruden  
Dennis E. & Golda Waddell  
Bernard Ward  
Gerald Dodd & Mary Joyce Wilson  
Ronald & Mabel Winchell  
Gary L. & Linda Withrow  
William J. Withrow  
Rudy G. & Susan Withrow  
Dale & Thella Wolfe  
Kenneth E. & Marie Wolfe

# Historic Photos



Rush



Shumate



Anderson



La Farge Dam 1970



Bridge 18 - Bacon's Bridge



Trappe



Brown



Hagen



# Historic Photos



Star Valley



Roberts



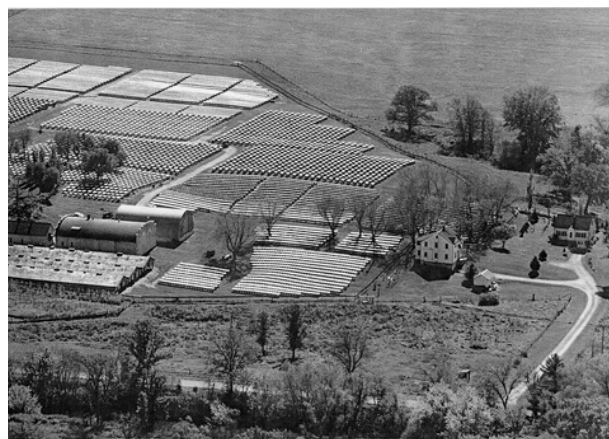
Leatherberry



Bridge 17 to Hanson Hollow



Hanson



Schroeders Mink Farm



Bridge 16 - Schoreders

Markee



# Historic Photos



Bridge 15



Kaukl



View of Blackhawk Rock and Bridge 13



Silbaugh



Munson



Nottestad



Anderson



Bridge 12 - Jug Creek



# Old Hwy 131 Today

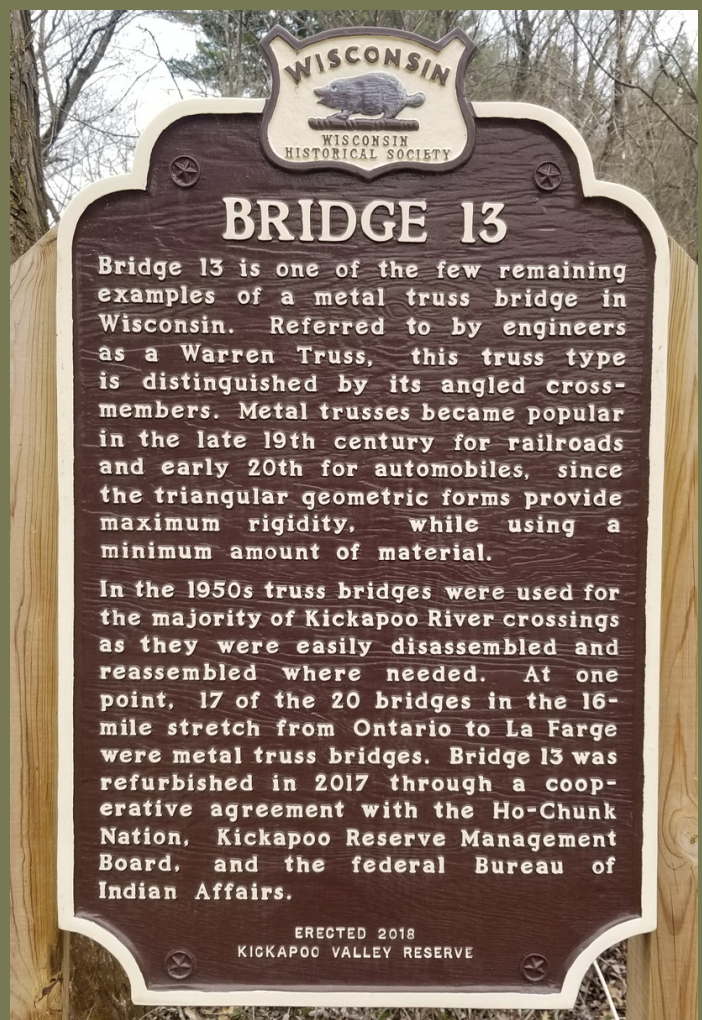
Today, Old Hwy 131 serves as a shared use trail for non motorized vehicles, within the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Those that hike, bike, horseback ride, cross country ski and snowshoe can enjoy the Old 131 Trail. Timber trail bridges, installed in the early 2000's replace all but one of the steel truss bridges. Repaving of 10 ft wide "Greenway" was done on sections between 2010 and 2017. Bridge 13 was refurbished and entered into the Wisconsin Historical Society in 2018.

Three covered bridges adorn the Old Hwy and connecting trails. Bridge 18 Covered Bridge was funded and installed by Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. 2 other covered bridges, one on Old 131 Trail and one on Indian Creek Trail were funded and installed by the Ho-Chunk Nation.

Maintenance and care of Old 131 Trail is by the staff of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, under the oversight of Kickapoo Reserve Management Board. Annually, on July 4th, Old 131 Trail is open to vehicle traffic from Noon -4pm

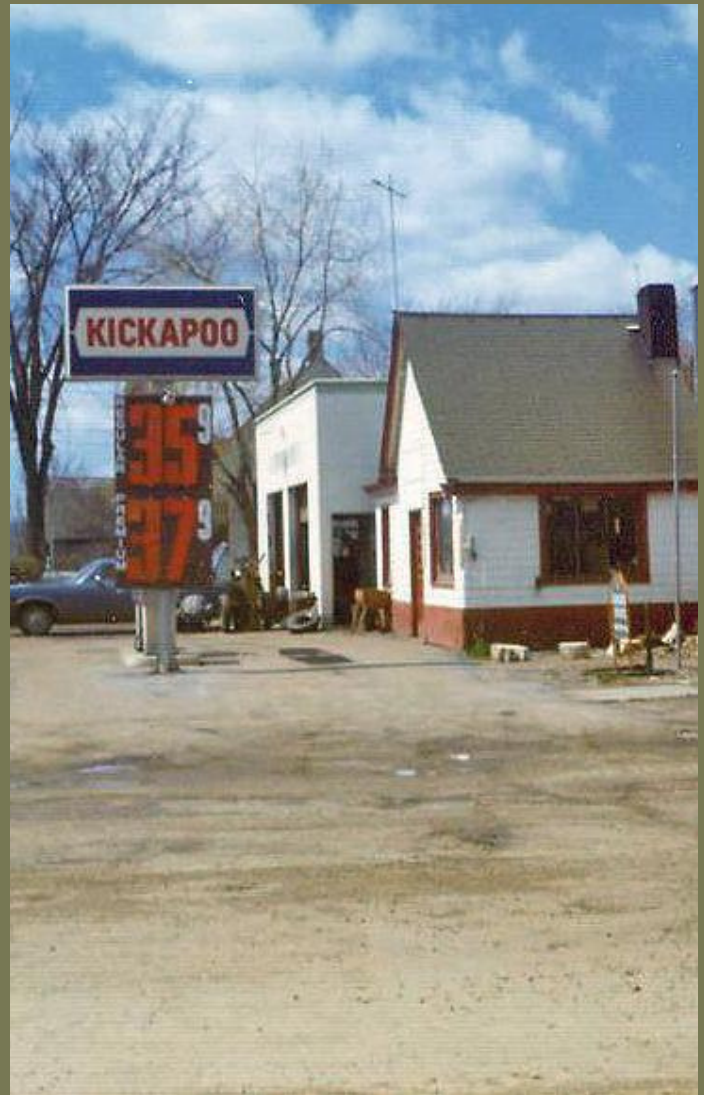
Kickapoo Valley Reserve  
S3661 State Hwy 131, La Farge, WI 54639  
608-625-2960  
kickapoovalley.wi.gov  
kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us





# Continue the Tour

If you are interested in learning more about the cultural and natural history of the Kickapoo Valley and the Reserve, there is more information in the Discovery Center located inside the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center and our website under About Us.



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