

2-14-2000

Interview with Janet Snow of the Army Corps of Engineers

Peter Wickline

Janet Snow

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Recommended Citation

Wickline, Peter and Snow, Janet, "Interview with Janet Snow of the Army Corps of Engineers" (2000).
Interviews. 22.
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Accession Number: LAK-PW-A021400.a
Researcher's name: Peter Wickline
Event: interview with Janet Snow of the Army Corps of Engineers
Place: Mohawk Dam, Coshocton County
Coworkers present: none.

PW: Alright, this is Peter Wickline, with life along the Kokosing, Rural Life Center at Kenyon College. I'm here interviewing Janet Snow at Mohawk Dam. This is number LAK-PW-A001*. On February 14, 2000.
[*inaccurate, real accession number is LAK-PW-a021400.a]
Alright, just a little information about yourself. You've been here a year?

JS: Yes.

PW: Alright.

JS: Okay, sure, I've been here at Mohawk Dam, which is the management office for Mohawk and also for the North Branch of Kokosing river-lake project. This office runs both projects, so if anyone needed further information from us, they should contact, you know, whoever's here at this office.

PW: Alright, so what does, exactly, the Army Corps do here?

JS: We have flood control projects in the Muskingum river basin, and that's our primary responsibility is to- for flood control, as much as it's possible to control flood water. There's a whole system of dams, and they're thought of and organized around the drainage basins that- that they control. So this is the Muskingum river drainage basin system of dams. We, here at Mohawk, is a dry dam, we don't have a lake, the river runs through- through it. Right now I believe there's about seventeen feet of water, behind the dam, because we've had quite a lot of rain. At North Branch, the lake is there all the time, it's a self-regulating dam, so we don't have to do gate operations there like we do here.

PW: I observed that -I've been up there- I've observed that it's a self-regulating dam. Could you talk a little about the Kokosing insofar as how it's set up. What types of dams you use?

JS: It- the dams are engineered for the site. You know, it all depends- they go from dams similar to the dam at North Branch which is in a very sh- in a very shallow dam with an earthen embankment to great concrete structures, between rock faces in- you know, like in West Virginia and places like that. Our dam here at Mohawk is also an earthen dam, with a very large concrete gatehouse.

PW: To your knowledge, how high have the levels been [difficult to make out]?

JS: At North Branch? Yeah, I didn't- this has been an education for me too, because I, being new here, I haven't- the was a neat reason to sit and read a lot. The pool of record for North Branch is 1,137 feet. Now, our feet are above sea level. So, okay, normal lake level is 1,121 feet above sea level. Our flood control pool is 1,146 feet above sea level, that means when the lake level gets to that point, the emergency spillway will drain it, yes. With an earthen dam it's really important to not let the water run over the top of it. So- but also, at that point we no longer have any control over the water. So, you know, we all hope that we never get to that point.

PW: [Indistinguishable, something to the effect of intimating from earlier notes that the spillway has never been used.]

JS: No, sir, it hasn't.

PW: Ever, have-?

JS: No, no. As I said the pool of record is 1,137 feet, and our flood control pool is 1,146 feet, so it was getting close.

PW: Do you have a time on that? A record?

JS: Sure. Yeah, uh... '97.

PW: 97?

JS: Yeah, July the second, of '97. Of '87, I'm sorry. Now, they didn't have- I didn't find the data on the 97 flood. I'll tell you what, if you want, I'll ask Annette to look that up while we do other things. I forgot that that did happen, they had a terrible flood there, right shortly before I got here.

PW: Right.

JS: And see that's new enough that it's not in. I kind of went to historical data, so okay. Um, let me see...Did you want to go back in time? Since you're doing life along the Kokosing.

PW: I would actually like to know, what methods were used in the building-?

JS: Okay, I went way back, we have some historical- we always try to keep historical, and archaeological information on our projects. I found one article that I found quite interesting on Indian tribes trailways, which had to do with the fact that the Indians, of course, walked everywhere they went and made wonderful trails which were then used by the pioneers, the traders, and fur trappers and pioneers. Very often our roads follow the old Indian trails. In this article, and I made a copy for you, for your records. It mentions that the Kokosing river was overland portages from its headwaters to the streams flowing northward into lake Erie was another route used by various Indian tribes who traveled between the Ohio river and the Great Lakes region. It mentioned that there were various Indian tribes inhabiting the river valley, ummm, and it had numerous mohican encampments. While land along the Kokosing and Wohanding rivers were claimed by the Delawares. I didn't know that Kokosing was an Indian

word for Owl Creek, that- I thought that was pretty nifty. Let's see, and the rest of this is just general information about that -the trails, okay? Um, you all probably know this but you know I- this is what we have. There was an archaeological reconnaissance of Corp of Engineer dams in the Muskingum river basin done in 1982, by Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Kent state university, okay? By Jeffery D. Brown. The Corp contracted with mister Brown to do this and -um- I made you a copy of this. It tells us that -at North Branch, the most recently constructed dam in the Muskingum watershed system, there are six prehistoric sites. Now I didn't know that. And it shows a catalogue, or it shows a map with them -with them listed. Ummm. And it talks about the fact that there were several mounds in the area, and -ah- one of them: Sackhuffs mound, is listed on the national register. And it tells in here what was found on the different sites, and they're -they're all numbered on the map. The copies of the actual artifacts, of course are not really wonderful. At least it gives you a little bit of background into what the -you know- what we know of as being there. He mentions that some -there may have been some things lost when the dam was constructed, but you see that happened before we started doing that- the archaeological um, searches. But that -you know- that's a little bit more information for -for your -for your study. I just think it's wonderful when you think that people - even that far back, were drawn to the river.

PW: First of all, this was the way they would travel...

JS: Sure, that's right.

PW: And it was very fertile land, the problem being that it was usually the flood plain.

JS: Yeah [laughs].

PW: Do you know anything about the flood tables? I know that it was built in reaction to considerable flooding in the area, because the '59 flood was definitely-

JS: Yeah. I found an article about -about the '59 flood. I can look that up for you, and get that to you at a later date. I didn't -you know- I didn't know that you would be needing that. The only information on any flood that I found just in looking through our material here, was the flood of July 21, '59, and ah, it must have been really, something -there are some really neat pictures. Do you have all these? Or do you wan this whole thing? It's just photocopies of the -of the newspaper article, and um, ah, all that kind of thing.

PW: When I- When I was up there, I found the small map that was suggesting expansion. I was curious, because I thought it curious...is there future plans for this area?

JS: No. No, the plans that the Corps has for the area right now involve -and this is a recent development, very recently, Thursday-Friday of last week we received word that we will be turning our recreation areas over to Muskingum watershed conservancy district. They are the people that run the recreation areas at the other Corps of Engineers dams, and they are the entity that we built the dams for, originally. That whole process of dambuilding started in the '30's. Ah, North Branch being, I believe, the newest, and probably the last in that process. So we're going to be doing quite a lot of work to bring them up -the campgrounds up to the standards that

MWCD wants, and it'll be really -those of us who love to run campgrounds or recreation areas are going to be really disheartened, you know, to lose them. Our dam was built in May- it was completed in May of '72. See, I have a little bit of the history of the area, do you want that? Okay. This talks about the topography, because Kosing river -Ko-Kosing, I keep mispronouncing that, being a foreign person, is located in central Ohio and covers portions of Knox, Monroe, Richland, Ashland, and Coshocton counties. The basin is roughly rectangular in shape, thirty-two miles long and eighteen miles wide. It has an area of 484 square miles, see that's how look at -at things. We consider, um, kind of think about a bathtub. So what we're talking the drainage basin is the bathtub. And the Kokosing river is the drain, where -where it all gets out at. Ah let me see, the Kokosing river rises in Monroe county, near the village of Williamsport, it flows in a general south-easterly direction for 56.1 miles, to its confluence with the Mohican river to form the Wohandering river. The North Branch of the Kokosing river is located in the north western portion of the Kokosing river basin. Its basin is rectangular with drainage length of approximately 22 miles and a maximum basin width of 7.2 miles. Usually that -that will -if you look at a map, a topo- map you'll see kind of the hills, and whatever flows down in on one side goes into the Kokosing. The basin axis lies in the northwest-southwest direction, the headwaters rise near the town of Williamsport, at approximate elevation of 979 feet, at the mouth of the north branch, .75 miles north of the town of Mt. Vernon. The basin for the North branch has a drainage area of 96.5 square miles, 44.5 square miles of the basin lies above the dam site. The flood plain of the North branch varies in width from a few feet at the source to approximately .4 miles at its confluence with the Kokosing river. Lost run is the largest main tributary above the dam site, it drains approximately 14% of the area, and has a length of approximately 5.2 miles, averaging a fall of 38.5 miles per feet. I don't -I don't know how much technical data you want, you know, they have-

PW: As much as possible.

JS: Okay, alright. The topography of the basin steep with maximum relief of approximately 600 feet. Kokosing river follows a meandering course through a broad valley from its headwaters downstream to Mt. Vernon, and it does it very beautifully I must add. Between Mt. Vernon and Gambier the stream pattern is altered radically and the river flows through a narrow gorge-like valley which has apparently formed during the recession of the Wisconsin glacier. The stream profile is relatively steep, dropping from elevation 1,300 at the headwaters to elevation 820 at the mouth: an average fall of 8.55 feet per mile. The stream gradient becomes somewhat flatter in the immediate vicinity of Mt. Vernon, where the average slope is about 6 feet per mile. Despite the relative steep stream gradient at the headwaters of the main stream, and the tributaries, most of the highlands along the western boundary of the basin are marshy uplands, of low relief, where the terrain had been affected by glacier action. The streams varies considerably in size being a few feet wide, with shallow depths near the headwaters and increasing to as much as 150 feet in width with 15 foot banks in the lower reaches. At Mt. Vernon, about midway on the streams course, the river averages from 100 to 125 feet in width, and has banks 8 to 10 feet high. That's the basic data on the river, I won't go into soil types that's just.

PW: [unintelligible]

JS: Okay right.

PW: [unintelligible]

JS: Great. Right, we're covered real well there. Our primary concern is how much water comes in there, and all of that sort of thing. I didn't know -did you want information on the dam itself?

PW: That would be nice. I noticed that the three primary objectives of the set out for the dam were recreation, wildlife control, flood control. So, how is recreation addressed by the [???

JS: The campground, and the picnic area and the launch ramp. The wildlife has been managed by Ohio department of Natural Resources for quite a long time. I don't think they do much active - you know they're not stocking things in there, and all that sort of thing, though they may in the future, do a little bit. They're going to do some controlled burns this spring, keep the fields clear. They do wildlife [????]

Quite a lot of fishing goes on on the lake, and duck hunting now, and that sort of thing. So, that's another recreational aspect of it. There's no swimming allowed, and we don't have a beach, and of course, there's very low horsepower limit on the lake. Actually, it should be no a horsepower, would be just canoes and things, because of the erosion of the banks.

PW: Is erosion a problem?

JS: Yeah, any time you get boats on an enclosed body of water like that, you have the lapping action. There's a certain amount of that anyway: the flood control project, because it goes up and down. People don't abide the speed limits on the lake, and you can see it real plainly, were going to address that this spring and summer, and hope to reclaim some of our shoreline. The campsites there -there's not been much done in recreation areas for some years, ten plus years, due to financial constraints on the Corps. We're hoping that -there's been quite a lot of money released now for us to do the upgrades, that MWCD's requiring. If there's a public outcry that keeps the recreation areas from being turned over to MWCD then they will beautifully upgraded for us to continue to run, but I don't know how that thing will work out. Just looking forward to being able to improve the area, beautiful campground, it really is, it's beautiful.

PW: [unintelligible, JS laughs, agrees]....

JS: Do you want me to describe the dam a little bit?

PW: That would be nice.

JS: Okay. Let's see, North branch of Kokosing lake is located on the north branch of the Kokosing river, 9.1 miles above its confluence with the Kokosing river and 2.2 miles north of Fredericktown. The project is operated in conjunction with the integrated system of reservoirs in the Muskingum and Ohio river basins to provide flood control, and a seasonal pool for fishery and recreational benefits. See there's three other dams above north branch, and then there's us. So, we're kind of like the bottom of the backup, before- and from here on down, then, it's -it's just pretty much uncontrolled. They're all -like it said- very well coordinated so that there's control over who's releasing how much water at what time. So that there's no mistakes made.

PW: So these are [????]

JS: Oh yes. The embankment, the actual dam consists of zoned earth fill, with a crest width of 22 feet, the elevation of the top of the dam is 1,169 feet. The embankment, it says zoned earth fill means it's built up of different types of clay that's been compacted to make it as impervious as possible. The crest length is 1,400 feet, maximum height of 70.5 feet. It's found -it's built on an overburden varying in thickness from 15 feet at the right abutment to 230 feet toward the left abutment. The outlet works is located in the right abutment and includes a Weir-type, vertical shaft intake structure: that's the little house that you see, little lake structure. [PW:????] Right. The inlet's uncontrolled with 2 11 foot weirs, at elevation 1,201 foot. 2 by 2 sluice gate in the intake structure can be opened, to lower the lake elevation for inspection and maintenance. Let me see, I think that's about- the spillway's is uncontrolled broad-crested spillway is located just beyond the right abutment, it is concrete lined and 60 foot wide, the spillway crest is at elevation 1,146 feet, which is the flood control level. Flip buckets provide a dissipate [?] to discharge energy associating with any spillway flow. That's pretty much the dam, it's pretty straight ahead, little dam.

PW: [unintelligible, JS: Yeah, right...] Just in your experience, dealing with this, what do you - is there anything that- is there any events that you know of or have heard of from in that area? Just stories-?

JS: Unusual things that happened? Somebody disposed of dynamite caps, and -ah- I'm not sure what all other sorts of explosives, that were very badly deteriorated, in the wildlife areas. I guess in the vicinity of the Batemantown parking lot, several years ago, and that caused quite a lot of concern. And -um- we had -it was all gathered up and disposed of, burned. ODNR did a controlled burn, and found some more and got rid of it. That's about the only thing that we know of at this time. I haven't been around here long enough to know any of the old, you know, the old stories.

PW: Don't worry about it. What few there are...[???? asks her to go ahead]

JS: That's about it, I think it's just such a nice little lake. One of the things that I'm looking forward to getting some pictures of is the use -ah- by the Amish, of the lake. I've seen come in - ah- one beautiful black, shiny carriage, full of young folks, with a bright yellow canoe lashed on top. You know, just make a wonderful picture. They do a tremendous amount of fishing, tether the horses and the buggies in the woods. [PW: ?????] Right, yeah. I haven't -I haven't had a chance to speak with them, you know like I said, I'm new here, just sort of been busy trying get a handle on it all: something to look forward to for this summer. Can you think of anything else I can help you with?

PW: Is there anything-? Understanding the medium through which we're going to go, a tape with a short section on each part along the lake. Is there anything in particular, not just here, not just at North Branch, which you would like to see on this? Anything in the area along the river?

JS: That I think would be interesting to people? Right, I think that people need to get out and walk, I think they need to walk. You know, walk along the river and take a good look at it, walk

across the dam and into the woods and up along the lake bank, and get to know the creatures that live there, and look at how beautifully engineered the whole thing is, not the dam: The world, the beautiful intricacy of nature, and realize our role in that, and how very fragile it is, and what a tremendous amount of impact we've already had. I think that people need to -if they are -are going to exhibit the caring that our intelligence should tell them to do, that they need to really stop and look around and realize that, um, we can't -we can't, in large part, clean up a lot of what's happened. We need to stop and take as good a care as we can of what we have. And you can't do that driving past in a car, you almost need to get out and look at it, get to know it. Do you need any maps or anything?

PW: Yes, that would be nice. Any final thoughts?

JS: No, except that I think that this is really nice, this project that you're doing, and I'm hoping that it will get wide media coverage. And you had mentioned that, or someone had told me that they thought it was going to be a tour that a person could take in an automobile.

PW: Or in their home, either, because it will have the booklet which will have pictures, and [?????]

For instance, I'm going to interview Harold Bower of the Division of Forestry, and he has -right up above Kokosing reservoir, right about a mile above that is Yankee rd. [JS: Yeah?] That is - was a treaty line, for Indian native wars...[????] important in Ohio...

JS: See, that is so neat. Now I've seen a sign there that says treaty line road, and I thought 'Now I've got to figure out, I've got to look and find out what that is.' And that's the kind of thing that this will serve such useful purpose, to bring this to light. Possibly -are you going to do signs along the road? Or anything?

PW: That would be difficult and maintain, this is something that people can get, and rent [JS: right] [something????] environmental center. We were probably going -to possibly rent out copies there. [????]

JS: Sure, generate revenue. If you get a brochure or anything printed up, please send me several copies and I'll see that they're distributed to, you know, to any interested people at the dam, that come into the campgrounds. If we do lose the campgrounds, we'll still have the dam site, and there'll be a bulletin board there, so I could display, on the bulletin board the fact that this is available. Because quite a few people come, a tremendous amount of people come through, give them something interesting and new to do, and help them get more aware of the area. You have somebody who's covering the wildlife and everything?

PW: Yeah, that's part of it, [?????] I've already interviewed, earlier when we weren't sure exactly what we were doing I interviewed Michael Miller who's county wildlife officer. Somebody [??????]

Anything, anything in particular about the wildlife that you think-?

JS: No, just a- just how dependant they are on the environment. I don't think people realize that there are lots of creatures that live outside. You wonder where -where did they go in the winter,

and that sort of thing. You hear about...horrible environmental disasters that occur and smaller ones, you realize that profit is not the bottom line. It's just, there was an article not long ago that, you can cut this out if you want, but it had to do with genetically altered -ah, field of genetically altered corn, in the midwest somewhere. Monarch butterflies landed on it, and they all died. There was some -some problem with it that -and they, it killed them. And I guess what had been engineered into them was the ability to kill caterpillars, which....the monarch butterflies are. I'm afraid that possibly our advances in technology are not being...we've overstepped our, our bounds, our ethics haven't caught up with the advances in technology. The people, the creatures that will pay for that first, will be the -those most innocent. We're the ones that are responsible for that. So...there we go. My little- my ranger, boy it really comes out when I get a chance. [PW:????] Thank you, I appreciate it.

PW: So, it's hard to tell, do you think there's a good diversity of wildlife along the lake?

JS: Yeah. We see a tremendous number of birds, I know there's foxes...you know, skunks. Yeah, it really seems to be a pretty healthy environment. I don't know, um, I haven't had time to do the water quality studies there or anything, but the Kokosing is such a beautiful clean stream, that everything has to be good up there, or we wouldn't be...I'm personally involved in the stream monitoring program, and I have a -I have a station, on the lower Kokosing. And I'm doing our river below the dam here, just for our purposes, just to see what -how things are there. So it's ah- it's really nice to see a river, that -that's that clean. It's good.

PW: Anything else?

JS: Ahh, no.

PW: Alright, I won't get you to say anything else.

JS: [laughs] That's fine thank you.

PW: Thank you for your time.

JS: Thank you, appreciate it.