

Pere Marquette state park

Here in Grafton, Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet explored what is now known as Pere Marquette State Park, the largest state park in Illinois. At a sprawling 8,000 acres, the park is known for its breathtaking natural beauty, spectacular views of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, and the stone-and-timber Pere Marquette Lodge and Conference Center, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Lodge features a huge 50-foot-tall stone fireplace and a life-size chess board that kids just love to play on. Browse through the Visitor Center before setting off for a day of hiking, horseback riding, fishing or boating. Pere Marquette State Park was named for Jacques Marquette, a French missionary who was a member of a European expedition led by Louis Joliet. In 1673, Marquette and Joliet traveled down the Mississippi River as far as the Arkansas River. They were the first Europeans to reach the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. A large stone cross located east of the main Park entrance along Route 100 commemorates their historic landing.

The region's history of animal and human habitation goes back to prehistoric times. Fossils can be found in the strata, stripped bare by millions of years of erosion. At the foot of McAdams Peak, twin springs flow from Ordovician-Silurian rocks deposited 350 million years ago. Loess (pronounced 'less'), the vertical banks of yellow clay seen along the road to the bluff-tops, is a windblown dust laid down a million years ago during the last Great Ice Age. This material covers all the ridges in the area and is topped by the rich black topsoil that supports the present flora.

The Park is dotted with over 150 small Native American burial mounds and the Illini Confederacy occupied the area when the Joliet and Marquette made their journey. A number of archaeological studies have been conducted here, most notably at the location of the Pere Marquette Lodge. Prior to its construction in the 1930's and again during the lodge's expansion in 1985, evidence that the location was a prehistoric habitation site was uncovered.

In the 1930's, with the advent of the Great Depression and with the nation's natural resources in jeopardy due to poor environmental practices, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was created. At Pere Marquette, the CCC built many buildings and shelters, fences, bridges, water reservoirs, foot and horse trails, riprap and streambank protection. Work was also done to create parking areas, campgrounds, and the clearing of overlooks and vistas. In addition, archeological and other types of surveying activities were conducted. Many of these CCC structures are still standing.

Today, Pere Marquette State Park offers its visitors diverse recreational and educational opportunities that encompass the past, present and future. The new Visitors Center provides displays that cover the region's history and the types of environments the visitor can encounter as well as housing informative interpretative programs. The Lodge consists of both new facilities as well as those constructed by the CCC. All this and more makes Pere Marquette State Park a great place to explore!

Address:

Pere Marquette State Park

Route 100, PO Box 158

Grafton, IL 62037

618-786-3323 For details information: Pere Marquette State Park