

STARVED ROCK STATE PARK



PO Box 509

Route 178 and Route 71

Utica, IL 61373

815-667-4726

www.dnr.illinois.gov/Parks

HISTORY: GEOLOGICAL

600 million years ago Northern Illinois was part of a broad upland that was undergoing extensive erosion. The erosion wore the land down to near sea level. Erosion that forms a near sea level surface is called a peneplain. This peneplain was submerged several times by sea water and several layers of sediment were laid on the surface.

Starved Rock State Park was once covered with 3000-5000 feet of glacial ice on and off over a course of 700,000 years. Glacial ice can move forwards never backwards. When a glacier is said to be retreating, it is actually melting faster than it is moving forward. As glacial ice can only move forward, it picks up rocks and carries them in the ice. When the ice melts, these rock particles are dropped at the point of melting. All dropped rock material is called drift. Drift found at the point of melting is called till. Till is unsorted glacial drift. When the glacier is stagnant, the drift accumulates into a pile called an end moraine. After the glacier has retreated, it leaves a range of irregular hills which are the end moraine. The melt waters of the glacier were so great that they would accumulate behind the moraines and form vast lakes. The streams that drain these lakes were gigantic compared to today's streams. The Illinois Valley was formed by one of these streams.

15,000 years ago during the Wisconsin Glacial Age, the glacial meltwater of a large lake overtopped the Marseilles Moraine and formed Lake Ottawa behind the Farm Ridge Moraine that ran north to south along what we call Starved Rock State Park today. This lake drained when it overtopped the Farm Ridge Moraine cutting a channel that became the Illinois River. Repeated meltwater floods of the Kankakee Torrent poured through the channels cut through the Marseilles and Farm Ridge Moraines establishing the drainage for the Illinois, Fox, and Vermillion Rivers. This repeated drainage also cut the outcrops, overlooks, and 18 canyons that you see at the park today.

HISTORY: I&M CANAL-ILLINOIS RIVER WATERWAY

The Illinois River is formed at the junction of the Kankakee and Des Plaines Rivers. It flows 272 miles through north central Illinois where it joins the Mississippi River at Grafton, IL.

Before 1933, when the Illinois Waterway Lock and Dam system was opened by the federal government, navigation on the river was extremely difficult. An average water depth of 18 inches combined with many sets of rapids and a river drop of 140 feet from Lake Michigan to Starved Rock made the 102 mile trip could take 10-23 days during the 1700's and early 1800's.

The Illinois River was difficult to navigate and for this reason the Illinois and Michigan Canal was built between 1836 and 1848. It connected Lake Michigan via the Chicago River with the Illinois River to LaSalle. The canal was 96 miles long, 6 feet deep, 60 feet wide and had a series of 15 locks. The towpath, a trail on either side of the canal was used by mules and horses to pull the barges and boats along the canal. The I&M Canal was replaced in 1900 by the Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal.

Seven locks and dams were completed along the Illinois River by 1939, with an eighth completed in 1960. This system of locks and dams increased the water depth to enable travel for commerce. More than 45 million tons of coal, gravel, silica, soybeans, grain, fertilizers, petroleum, iron products, and chemicals are locked through each year.

HISTORY: Starved Rock, 1830's to Present Day

Our present day Park has seen a lot of changes over the years. Numerous land additions have increased the Park's acreage to over 2800 acres. Sixteen miles of well-marked hiking trails lead the park visitor to the 18 different canyons and rock formations throughout the park. The park campground was moved off the river in 1977 to its present day wooded location off of Route 71. In 1980-81 the lodge underwent a \$1,000,000 renovation project. In 1986-88 a \$5,000,000 renovation and addition was done at the lodge.



HISTORY: GEOLOGICAL

All 18 canyons that are prominent features at the park were carved in the bedrock by water as upland streams drained into the Illinois River.

About 16,000 years ago, a catastrophic flood, known as the Kankakee Torrent, surged through this region as water from melted glaciers were released. When the flood receded, much of the landscape had been scoured down, exposing the bedrock of St. Peter Sandstone, including Starved Rock. Five miles east of here the same stone is exposed at Buffalo Rock State Park. To the west, however, beyond Split Rock, the bedrock is buried 1,000 feet below the surface.

St. Peter Sandstone is used to make a variety of glass products, such as bottles and car windows. For this reason, there are several glass factories located east of Starved Rock.

St. Peter Sandstone is a sedimentary rock made from pure quality sand and of fine medium size. The rock covers Starved Rock State park which forms each of the outcrops, outlooks, and 18 canyons located at the park. Exposed areas of the sandstone may appear red to orange in coloration due to the presence of iron particles. Most of the rocks found at the park were formed along the bottom of a sea which existed in Illinois about 460 million years ago.



ECOLOGY: HABITAT, FLORA AND FAUNA

Starved Rock is host to several different types of ecosystems at the Park, including prairie, river, wetlands, and oak/hickory forest. The Native Americans and the first settlers both utilized each of these unique habitats for food, medicine, shelter, and water.

PRAIRIE - "The Prairie State" is a nickname given to the state of Illinois. What is now fragments of prairie (grasslands void of trees or with few dispersed trees) and woodlands amongst larger sections of farmland, was once tallgrass prairie. This prairie formed a large 2,600 mile section of the North American Grassland that stretched from Canada to Mexico and from Indiana to the Rocky Mountains. Today less than 1% of the original tallgrass prairies exist in the state of Illinois.

The tallgrass prairie showcases a diversity of grasses, forbs (wildflowers), birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals.

FOREST - Most of the park is covered in a deciduous hardwood forest of white and red oak, hickory, and maple trees with an understory of dogwood, paw paw, hawthorn, witch hazel, and more. Conifers such as eastern white pine, eastern red cedar, and northern white cedar sprinkle the canyon walls and bluff trails. The woodlands at the park provide shelter and food for different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and amphibians. Spring is a wonderful time to look for woodland wildflowers (ephemerals) that bloom on the forest floor before the leaves on the trees in the canopy leaf out and shade the ground.

HISTORY: Starved Rock, 1830's to Present Day

The present day lodge was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the 1930's out of white pine logs. The CCC was a federal program to put men back to work during the Great Depression. The men were housed in the park's present day workshop and a barracks at Parkman's Plain parking lot along present day Route 71 on the eastern side of the park. Besides building the lodge, they built many stairways, shelters, and bridges in the park. The CCC completed the kitchen, dining room, lobby, and 12 cabins at the lodge. There was no longer a need for the buildings in the lower area including the framed hotel after the lodge was completed in 1938. They were demolished and the artesian fed swimming pool was filled in by the 1940's.

The CCC consisted of 3 different companies here at the park. Each company had men ranging in ages of 17-23 working here at the park on various projects. They would typically earn \$25-\$30 a month and send all but \$5-\$7 dollars of their wages back home to their families. While hiking to present day Aurora Canyon on the west side of the park you can look off to the east and see one of the original barracks (long brown building) that is currently used as a park warehouse.

Excursion boats were docked at the Starved Rock river landing and traveled the Illinois River east to the canyons prior to the construction of the Lock and Dam in 1933.

HISTORY: Starved Rock, 1830's to Present Day

Starved Rock became a state park in 1911. The land was privately owned by Daniel F. Hitt who purchased it in 1835 from the U.S. Government as part of his settlement for back pay from the Army. He sold Starved Rock and 100 acres in 1890 to Ferdinand Walther for \$15,000 and an option to buy 265 acres more.

Mr. and Mrs. Walther tried to develop the Starved Rock area as the "Gibraltar of the West" in the 1890's. A large frame hotel was located at the base of the south bluff below Starved Rock. You could rent a room for \$3 a night. An artesian fed swimming pool was located just south of Devil's nose by French Canyon cove. A dance pavilion was located within a circle drive approaching the hotel and concession area.

280 acres of land, including Starved Rock, was purchased from the Walthers by the State of Illinois for \$146,000 on June 10, 1911. Most visitors coming to the park at this time traveled from the Chicago area via the inter-urban railway that ran on the other side of the river. A depot was across from the park. Passengers for the park would disembark and then take a ferry boat across the river to this side as there was no bridge.

In 1918 the park purchased a miniature steam locomotive from Lincoln Park in Chicago. The miniature railroad encircled the artesian fed swimming pool. Traveling and local bands played at the dance pavilion. A family owned garage with a hand crank gas pump was located south of the pavilion. The original campground stood where the lodge is located today.

ECOLOGY: HABITAT, FLORA AND FAUNA

RIVER/FLOODPLAIN - The Illinois River flows along the north edge of the park from east to west. The Visitor Center displays a large aquarium fish tank where visitors can view several species of fish found in the Illinois River and its tributaries. Areas along the River Trail at the park can show activity of waterfowl, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals such as beaver. The west entrance/exit to the park off of Route 178 shows the floodplain of the Illinois River and wetland areas where yellow and blue flag iris bloom in the spring along with marsh marigold. The occasional red headed or pileated woodpecker can be seen pecking away for insects on the trees and the occasional barred owl can be seen in the evening.

FAUNA/WILDLIFE - Starved Rock is home to many different species of wildlife. One day you might see several turkeys in the woods around the canyons and the next a bald eagle soaring to perch on a tree limb at Plum or Leopold Island across from the park. Winter can yield wildlife signs in the snow such as tracks from red fox, grey fox, coyote, raccoon, and opossum.



HISTORY: STARVED ROCK STATE PARK

The land that includes today's Starved Rock State Park has a long and wonderful history. Starved Rock and the immediate area surrounding it have been nearly continuously occupied by Native Americans during the last 10,000 years.

In 1673, the first Europeans to traverse today's Illinois (members of the Jolliet and Marquette expedition) witnessed the steep sides and prominent features of Starved Rock. Intermittently between 1677 and 1679, Jesuit missionary Claude-Jean Allouez lived with the Illinois Indians encamped at nearby Kaskaskia, a large village within view of the famous Rock. In January 1680, the men of La Salle's first Mississippi expedition passed Starved Rock on their way south.

During the winter of 1682-1683, Jacques Bourdon d'Autray, a respected member of La Salle's inner circle, supervised the construction of Fort Saint Louis atop Starved Rock. For the next several years, the immediate area of Starved Rock was the nucleus of what history calls "La Salle's Colony," the home for many Native American tribes and sub-tribes including the Illinois, Miami, Shawnee, and others. The fort on the Rock would remain headquarters for French trade and diplomacy in the "Illinois country" until it was abandoned by the French in 1691, in favor of a new site at Lake Peoria.

In 1712, one band of Illinois Indians, the Peoria, returned to the rock and reestablished camps. They were joined by other Peoria tribesmen in 1722. The last mention in the historical records of Illinois Indian occupation at the site is in 1741.

HISTORY: FRENCH - NATIVE AMERICAN

1812-The War of 1812 had its effects upon the Illinois country. The garrison of Fort Dearborn at Chicago was massacred and resulted in retaliations upon Native American villages in the Illinois Valley.

1813-Native American occupations of Illinois are nearly over.

1818-Illinois was admitted to the Union as a state.



HISTORY: FRENCH – NATIVE AMERICAN TIMELINE 1673-1818

1718-French Fur Traders were once again using the rock, but most of the old trade had gone. New Orleans was founded. Governance of Illinois country was transferred from Canada to New Orleans.

1719-21- Fort de Chartres was built and became the center of French colonial government in Illinois.

1731-Illinois became a royal province governed directly by the French crown.

1760- The first English traders appeared on the Illinois River and called the Native Americans to trade with them at Starved Rock. Another fort was constructed on the north bank of the river most likely at Buffalo Rock by a French commander of the name la Chapelle.

1763- The Illinois Country was ceded to the English. The French moved west of the Mississippi but continued to trade along the Illinois River.

1769- Pontiac, a great Ottawa Chieftain, was killed by an Illinoisan (Peoria Brave). The Pottawatomi, one of Pontiac's controlled tribes, attacked the Illinois (Kaskaskia) and drove them to the top of Starved Rock where they Illinois were soon starved out and massacred.

1779- Americans took over the Northwest Territory and were welcomed by the French.

HISTORY: STARVED ROCK STATE PARK

Between 1741 and 1834, Starved Rock and the adjacent lands were relegated to landmark status, just a place mentioned on old inaccurate maps.

With the arrival of the Americans came new claims of ownership of Starved Rock. Daniel Hitt, La Salle County, Illinois' first land surveyor purchased Starved Rock and surrounding lands from the United States government in 1835. Hitt maintained ownership of the lands until 1890 when Ferdinand Walthers and group of Chicago investors purchased the property in 1890.

In 1891, Walthers constructed the Starved Rock Hotel on the terrace immediately to the southwest of Starved Rock. During the first decade of the 1900's a movement was afoot for public ownership of Starved Rock. This eventually came to fruition in 1911 when the State of Illinois agreed to buy the park from Walthers.

Starved Rock became the second state park in Illinois. Today Starved Rock State Park welcomes over two million visitors annually who come to explore the beautiful environs of this unique site.



HISTORY: INDIGENOUS

Archaeological excavations have uncovered evidence that different Native Americans have lived in the area we know as Starved Rock State Park continuously for more than 10,000 years. The first inhabitants were called the Archaic. Through the centuries, Woodland, and Mississippi cultures have flourished in this area.

The Kaskaskia were part of an alliance of sub-tribes grouped under the name Illinois, or Inoca. Other Illinois sub-tribes include the Cahokia, Michigamea, Peoria, and Tamaroa. The alliance at the time lived in southern Wisconsin, Illinois, and parts of Iowa. The Illinois spoke a similar dialect of the eastern Great Lakes group of Algonquin known as the Miami-Illinois. The Kaskaskia lived across the river from Starved Rock. They left the Starved Rock area in 1691, relocating to Lake Peoria by the early 1700's.

At the time of European contact in 1673, the Illinois people had well-established villages where they lived during planting and harvesting seasons. Plum Island, as seen from Starved Rock was a prime agricultural area for the Native Americans. They grew squash and corn (maize) as well as other crops. They also collected plants and tubers from the woodlands, wetlands, and prairies for food. When they tracked bison on the upland prairies, the Illinois lived in more portable, dome-shaped wigwams.

HISTORY: FRENCH –NATIVE AMERICAN TIMELINE 1673-1818

1673-Father Jacques Marquette and French Explorer Louis Joliet, explored the Illinois Country for France in hopes to find a shorter trade route to China.

1675-Marquette founded a Jesuit mission (Immaculate Conception) near Starved Rock.

1679-Rene Robert Cavalier, Sieur de LaSalle, Lieutenant Henri Tonti and 20-30 French Voyageurs descend the Illinois River by canoe, visit the Kaskaskia Village, then continue to Peoria where they built Fort Creve Couer.

1682-83-LaSalle and Tonti build Fort St. Louis on top of Starved Rock across from the Illinois (Kaskaskia) village. The French begin to aid and protect the Illinois from invading Iroquois attacks.

1690- Profitable fur trading exists between Fort St. Louis and Chicago

1692- Tonti built another fort at the village of Pimitoui or Peoria.

1699- The village of the Kaskaskia was almost abandoned, the Native Americans having moved down the river to Peoria and further south.

1702- Royal proclamations ordered Fort St. Louis to be abandoned. The population, both French and Indian, shifted to the Mississippi settling at Cahokia and Kaskaskia and further south.

1703-1715-A band of Peoria and Moingena settled at the Rock sometime during these years.

HISTORY: STARVED ROCK LEGEND

Starved Rock obtained its name from a legendary incident that supposedly occurred in the 1760's. Most of the Illinois lived along the Mississippi but a small village of 500 Peoria Native Americans still lived in this area. The dominant tribe of the day were the Ottawa who controlled the Potawatomi and Fox that lived up river from here.

Ottawa Chieftain, Pontiac, went to the southern part of the state to negotiate some trade agreements with the French. He was murdered by an Illinois (Peoria) from this area. Pontiac's tribes wanted to avenge their leader's death. The Potawatomi and Fox paddled down river and attacked the Illinois Village by the great rock. A fierce battle was waged for several days reducing the Illinois' number by half. The Illinois sought refuge on top of the great rock.

The Potawatomi and Fox surrounded the base of the rock. As the Illinois attempted to get water from the river by lowering buckets, the Potawatomi would shatter them with arrows. Eventually all of the Illinois on top of the rock starved, and ever since, this site has been called "STARVED ROCK".

There were no written records to report this event actually happened. The story came down through the years from Native American story-tellers. However, due to the strategic location of the rock, we do have evidence it was used countless times as a battleground. Archaeological excavations have revealed numerous artifacts including skeletons and weapons used over thousands of years ago.

HISTORY: INDIGENOUS

Missionary Sieur Deliette wrote, *"The women.....go off in canoes..to cut reeds with which they cover their cabins . They procure bundles of them, which they dry in the sun and tie together with twine..."* He also wrote, *"A cloak of dressed skin is worn in the summertime, and in the winter season, a dressed skin with the hair left on that they may keep warm. They adorn the head with feathers of many colors, of which they make garlands and crowns which they arrange very becomingly; above all they are careful to paint the face with different colors. The Illinois were tattooed from the shoulders to the heels, and as soon as they have reached the age of 25, on the front of the stomach, the sides and the upper arms."*

