

Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center

By Rod Dawson 06/11/05

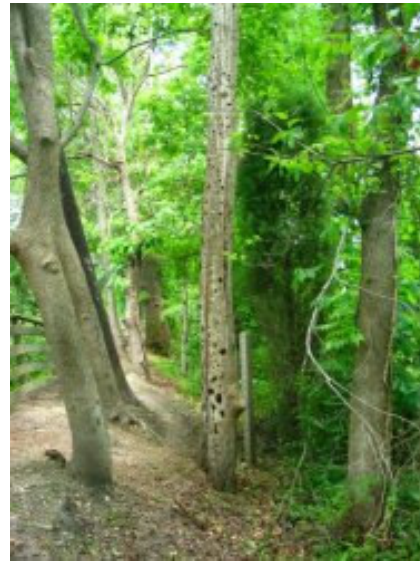
Sybil and I decided to have a small picnic up Rt. 17 North at the Welcome Center. This place is tiny as parks go but is a cool and tranquil spot. The water in the Dismal Swamp Canal is dark and mysterious, the grass is well kept and green. There are several picnic tables, some even have covers for shade. People from all over the eastern United States seem to stop here. Probably some return for a second or third time. It is a lovely and restful place.

We carried the cooler to a table close to the canal and saw a sailboat docked at the small quay. We put our cooler on the table and ate the food we had brought. We sat, enjoying the cool air and watched the insects that buzzed past. Several dogs on leashes sniffed around, inspecting new places.



Sybil on the Trail

We had heard about a new feature at the Welcome Center, a quarter mile walking trail so we decided to try it. It follows the east bank of the canal and has a wooden fence that prevents careless people from falling in the water. Trees have small identifying tags, announcing their names and there are several dead trees that have become targets for woodpeckers. These are full of holes, drilled by hungry birds.



Woodpecker Tree

Soon, we arrived at the end of our trail. There we discovered an incongruous sight. A mailbox on a post! What, we wondered, is a mailbox doing in the middle of the woods? We opened the door and discovered a notebook inside. On opening the notebook, we found thoughts written by previous hikers. Reading these thoughts was quite interesting. People from many different areas, both in our state and outside it had written in the book.



One interesting note was by a young boy. He mentioned seeing two alligators in the water! Sybil and I marveled at his imagination. After resting and reading more of the book, we added our own note, walked back to the Welcome Center and left for home. We forgot about the alligators. But, after learning about the eight foot long alligator, recently run over by a car near South Mills, we now wonder if the young boy really imagined seeing two alligators!