



## “Kayak Thru History” at Laurel Lake

**1. What’s in a name?** Near the boat ramp, a small stream is today called “**Sage Run**”... but sage is not a plant native to this region. An 1830 legal map reveals a different name: “**Say’s Run**.” We don’t know today who “**Say**” was, perhaps someone with a sawmill upstream. A similar name change occurred with “**Leaf Road**” (now a trail) between Fuller and Laurel Lakes: one old document instead called it “**Lief Road**” – again, we don’t know who “**Lief**” was. Another amusing name issue relates to “**Leeper Farm Road**” northwest of Laurel Lake. Daniel Leeper was “wood boss” for the iron company. At various times the Post Office (and road signs) called it “**Leeper**” or “**Leper**” but the correct name is “**Leeper**” with two E’s.

**2. Recreation at Laurel Lake.** When the Commonwealth of PA bought the former South Mountain Iron Company in 1913, most attention focused here, not at the old iron furnace and Fuller Lake (though an improved swimming area at Fuller was being developed). The introduction of mass-produced, relatively inexpensive automobiles led to the new concept of “car camping.” An official 1923 guidebook *Public Camp Grounds in the Pennsylvania State Forests* listed a single “Class A” location in the entire Michaux State Forest, “**Laurel Lake Park**.” What we now call Pine Grove Furnace State Park was not separate from the State Forest. In this area, also notice a stone pavilion, paving stones and water fountains built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, which had a camp (1933-1942) located west of the State Park that we now call Camp Michaux.

**3. Why is Laurel Lake here?** Float towards the dam. Not visible past the tall retaining wall is a parking lot (**3A**). This was the site of **Laurel Forge**, built in 1830 by Peter Ege to transform pig iron from the furnace into wrought iron. The forge shut down after the furnace stopped smelting iron in 1895; what was left of the forge burned in 1900. (Anywhere around here that you see a parking lot, wonder what formerly existed at the same location!) Next, consider the **dam (3B)**. The modern concrete dam built in 1968 replaced a timber crib dam that supplied water power to two waterwheels at the forge. The original dam built in 1830 was 60 feet upstream from the modern one. It breached in 1847, 1889 (the same storms that caused the famous Johnstown Flood) and 1919. For the next half-century, the Pennsylvania state government made various temporary repairs until the legislature agreed to fund a permanent replacement. See the separate two-page handout.

Not visible while floating on Laurel Lake: along Old Railroad Bed Road near Pine Grove Road, a separate small “lake” (**3C**) is a **flooded iron ore pit** about 50 feet deep called “**Laurel Pit #1**.” This iron ore had high concentrations of manganese, making it notably darker in color than the red rust color of other ore near Fuller Lake. The ore here was covered by 30 feet of clay, used at a commercial brick-making operation (1892-1907) at today’s Brickyard Day Use Area near Fuller Lake.

Now look south at the hillside rising behind Laurel Lake. Consider that this forest, like most of today’s Michaux State Forest, was clear-cut repeatedly to supply charcoal fuel for smelting pig iron. Numerous **charcoal hearths (3D)**, flat areas 30 feet across where colliers turned hardwood into charcoal, can still be found by hikers today (the Pole Steeple trail passes directly through a charcoal hearth, for example). The location of hearths is also shown by laser LIDAR mapping. The thick forest we see also contrasts with numerous **forest fires (3E)** that devastated the area especially in 1872, 1900 and 1915.

**4. Natural ice industry, 1880s-1920s.** Enter the narrow water channel at the west end of the lake near the parking lot for the Pole Steeple hiking trail (**4A**). This lot was the foundation of a huge ice storage barn that kept ice, packed in sawdust and tree bark, frozen into the summer. Ice was shipped by rail to customers in Carlisle and beyond. The barn and other structures burned in 1900 and 1915. Paired concrete abutments (**4B**) and less obvious small hills (**4C**) show where two bridges allowed wagons to reach the barn area (today’s Old Railroad Bed Road did not exist as a road: it was for trains only).

**5.** Paddle upstream a short distance on Mountain Creek. To your left is **Old Railroad Bed Road**, formerly the South Mountain Railroad built 1868-1869 and completed by 1870. Rails between Laurel Lake and the furnace area were removed in 1936, but rail service continued to Laurel Lake until the early 1950s. In this area, **beavers** have been busy since the 1920s.

**6.** A stand of evergreen trees hides the site of **Laurel Farm (6A)**, one of five farms owned by the iron company to feed people and animals. Boy Scouts from Chester County (1921-1927) occupied “**Camp Rothrock**” (**6B**), later “**Camp D.R. Thompson**” (publisher of the *Evening Sentinel* newspaper and a YMCA board member) now run by the Carlisle Family YMCA. A separate Mechanicsburg Boy Scout camp (1920s-1950s) was at Camp Lion Road, and the Girl Scouts (1921-1967) camped upstream on Mountain Creek. Looking south, consider **shallow areas created by silt (6C)** dropped as the creek enters the lake; to preserve the lake it must be dredged every few decades, such as in the 1950s and again 2006-2007.

**7.** In 1961 Maurice Goddard, famous Secretary of the PA Dept of Forests and Waters 1955-1979, briefly considered building a **new huge dam** that would have flooded the whole area and created a much larger lake extending to Fuller Lake.