

Some Geographic Recreational Aspects of Unglaciated Indiana

THOMAS FRANK BARTON, Indiana University

Because of the great abundance and diversity of landforms, water bodies, vegetation, historical landmarks, and land well adapted to recreational advantages, Indiana's southland has a great potential in recreation. By re-evaluating the recreational opportunities, advertising their advantages, and providing adequate facilities, the recreation-travel industry of this area could offer wholesome outdoor recreation for thousands dwelling in nearby cities and at the same time bring economic returns and prestige to an area not well adapted to mechanical cultivation.

For decades the counties in the unglaciated hill lands were relatively isolated. For nearly a half century now, highly mechanized methods of cultivation, well adjusted to level land, have avoided our hills. Also during this same period, we have been largely by-passed by the great streams of rail or waterborne freight and traffic moving back and forth between the eastern and western, the northern and southern parts of our country. Even secondary streams of freight and traffic moving back and forth from Indianapolis to Evansville on the west or between Indianapolis and Louisville, Kentucky, on the east skirted the rugged southern Indiana hills.

During the same decades, especially to the north but also to the south, a highly mechanized form of industrial life mushroomed hamlets into villages, villages into cities, and cities into metropolises. Today, millions of urban dwellers are seeking outdoor recreation.

From the standpoint of modern recreational needs, now is an opportune time to re-evaluate the resources of unglaciated Indiana and make an inventory of our assets better known to the public. Such an evaluation will not only show many assets, but it will also point out a few deficiencies which need to be corrected.

Geographic Recreational Assets

What are some of the geographic recreational assets of the area?

1. *Strategic geographic location.* Situated in the heart of the Ohio Valley, the unglaciated hill country is strategically located to serve millions of people. Many of the principal tourist lanes leading from north to the winter vacation lands of the Gulf States and Mexico, or from south to the summer resorts in the Lake States and Canada pass through southern Indiana.

Ideally, the greatest tourist migrations from north to south and south to north take place in fall and spring—the seasons when people

find Indiana's southland most colorful. The area is highlighted by a rich year-around schedule of recreational and cultural activities on the Indiana University campus, the Indianapolis automobile races, and the Kentucky derby at Louisville.

From the standpoint of our national population, these hill lands are centrally located. The center of population in the United States has been in or near this region for six decades, 1890-1940. Bloomington, the northern gateway to scenic southern Indiana, was the center of population in the United States in 1910.

In contrast with the seasonal vacation travel enjoyed by thousands are the week, weekend, or day (Sunday and holidays) type of recreation. All the cities in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee are within one day's driving distance from this region.

This area is also accessible to several million people who live within a few hours' drive and who want to relax outdoors for a few hours or days in the spring, summer, and fall. Mitchell is near the center of this unglaciated area. Within a hundred mile radius of this city, some of the largest cities are Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville, Terre Haute, Evansville, and Owensboro. These six cities alone have a total population of nearly one and one-half million.

2. *Rugged and varied topography.* A rugged and varied topography is considered an important recreational asset. Our state's most irregular terrain is found here. The three most rugged Indiana counties, Perry, Crawford, and Brown, are in this area. We also have a great variety of landforms with recreational value. There are weirdly sculptured rocks such as the Pinnacle and Jug Rock near Shoals. There are picturesque bluffs, escarpments and ridges such as McBride's Bluff, Knobstone escarpment and Kin Hubbard Ridge. There are numerous steep cliffed-lined youthful valleys. There are many nearly inaccessible and isolated depressions, ravines, and valleys such as Possum Valley and Cave River Valley. Scenic views such as Shoals Lookout and Weedpatch Hill vista are abundant. Cliffs, rock-shelters, falls, natural bridges, caves and caverns are numerous. Marengo and Wyandotte caves in Crawford County are well known in our state but they need to be more widely known throughout the Mississippi valley.

3. *Numerous and extensive wooded areas.* It is a well known fact that wooded areas are more numerous and extensive here. In this area are the greatest number and largest state parks and forests. Here we also find the greatest acreage of farmland unsuited for agriculture—farmland which after a careful survey has been recommended for forest land, recreational and residential purposes. This survey revealed that over 7 percent of Indiana has farmland unsuited for agriculture and recommended that it be used primarily for forests and recreation (1). Nearly all of this type of land is in unglaciated Indiana. For example, a preliminary survey of Monroe County (the northernmost county in which most of the county is in the unglaciated area) shows that 91,863 acres or 34 per cent of this county is unsuited for farming and is recommended for timber use. In adjacent Lawrence County, 39,800

acres have been recommended for forestry purposes. If recommendations materialize, here would be over one hundred and thirty thousand acres of forests contributing to the recreational potential in only two counties.

4. *Four distinct yet mild seasons.* From the recreational standpoint, unglaciated Indiana has four distinct yet mild seasons. There are a few hot days and a few uncomfortable ones due to exceptionally high relative humidity. Statistics show that the average temperature for the two hottest months, July and August, is below 78 degrees F. The winters are mild and short. According to some psychologists and physiologists, the human mind and body function best in a temperature of about 57 degrees F. The standard mean temperature of most of this area in October is 56 to 60 degrees.

5. *Variety of water features.* The variety and novelty of the water features add materially to the region's actual and potential recreational value. There are artesian, mineral, and "medicinal" springs. Although the surface streams and rivers are small, generally somewhere along their course are scenic shoals, rapids, falls, and cataracts. Indiana does not boast of high waterfalls, but there are many picturesque small ones. Associated with the karst topography of this area are many small underground streams which have always fascinated people. Perhaps the best known of these is Lost River near Orleans in Orange County.

6. *Wildlife and game.* Wildlife and game are valuable recreational assets. In general, whether young or old, urban or rural, people enjoy seeing wild animals in native habitats. And when some forms of wildlife are plentiful enough to be used as game, hunters and fishermen will flock to an area. Wildlife is now more abundant here than it is in other parts of the state. Quail, squirrel, rabbit, "possum", "coon", and fox hunting are popular.

7. *Historical places.* Since southern Indiana was settled first, it is only natural that much of the state's early history took place near the Ohio River. If Hoosiers want to study early "on-the-spot" history in its remaining geographic setting, they should come to southern Indiana. Here archaeologists are busy unraveling the past and writing the history of "pre-white" culture.

Conditions Retarding Growth

Some factors retarding the more rapid growth of the travel-recreation industry are:

1. *Dearth of recreational lakes.* Since most of this area is in slope, we have few natural lakes and those we do have are small. During the past year, organizations in Monroe County have been advocating a flood-control lake project in the southern part of the county. The Bloomington Daily Herald, July 12, 1949, carried a story entitled "Need for Lake, Economic, Industrial, Recreational". The story reported that a panel-discussion presented to members of the Junior Chamber of Commerce by E. B. Duane, R. W. Sims, George J. Wise, and Thomas F. Barton discussed this need. During the spring and summer of the

same year this panel appeared before various organizations in Monroe County.

2. *Deterioration of streams and rivers.* Originally our streams were spring-fed, permanent water courses, free of silt and impurities. Today, many streams have become "ribbons of desolation". Fortunately as we restore stream conditions for wildlife by reforesting the watersheds, building lakes, and discontinuing using the streams as sewers, we also increase the recreational potential of the area.

3. *Inaccessibility.* Some of the finest recreational features and areas are relatively inaccessible due perhaps to oversight in considering adequately recreational potentials in road planning. Because of the lack of information, poor roads and inadequate road markers, too many people stay on the primary roads and miss these recreational places. There is a definite need for tourist booklets, guides and maps for cities, counties, and/or the entire hill country.

4. *Lack of comprehensive study.* Although a large amount of research has been conducted and published on some phases of this area, a comprehensive regional study of the counties occupied by the unglaciated hills needs to be made (2). Many facets of the regions' setting and life remain unstudied: Published studies are scattered in dozens of different magazines and books. People living in or outside this region do not have any one adequate source to which they can turn for general information and for geographic and historical perspective. A study of this region could have as some of its objectives the following: a. present the geographic setting, b. give a geographic historical perspective of its development to date, c. picture conditions as they are today, d. assess the natural resources, e. promote the region's travel-recreational industry, f. assist its industrial development, g. crystallize the potentialities of the region, and h. in general to make available information at one source where it will be accessible to people thus enabling them to work individually, or through community, county, or a regional organization to build for a better future. The travel-recreation industry is definitely related to and its development should be correlated with other industries such as agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, and transportation (3).

Conclusion

The hills of southern Indiana are endowed with the two most potent forces that attract travelers who seek relaxation and recreation—these are a favorable physical environment and a rich historical past. Because of the nature of the land, much of the area should serve the dual purpose of providing forests and recreation. A comprehensive regional study needs to be made if this area is to be developed and used wisely.

Literature Cited

1. 1944. Indiana: the land and the people. Bull. 496 Agri. Exp. Sta., Purdue University. Preliminary land use map of Indiana opposite page 66.

2. 1949. Southern Illinois: resources and potentials of the sixteen southern-most counties. University of Illinois Press. A comprehensive regional study of that area.
3. BARTON, T. F. October 31, 1949. Problems of the hills. Bloomington Daily Herald editorial.