

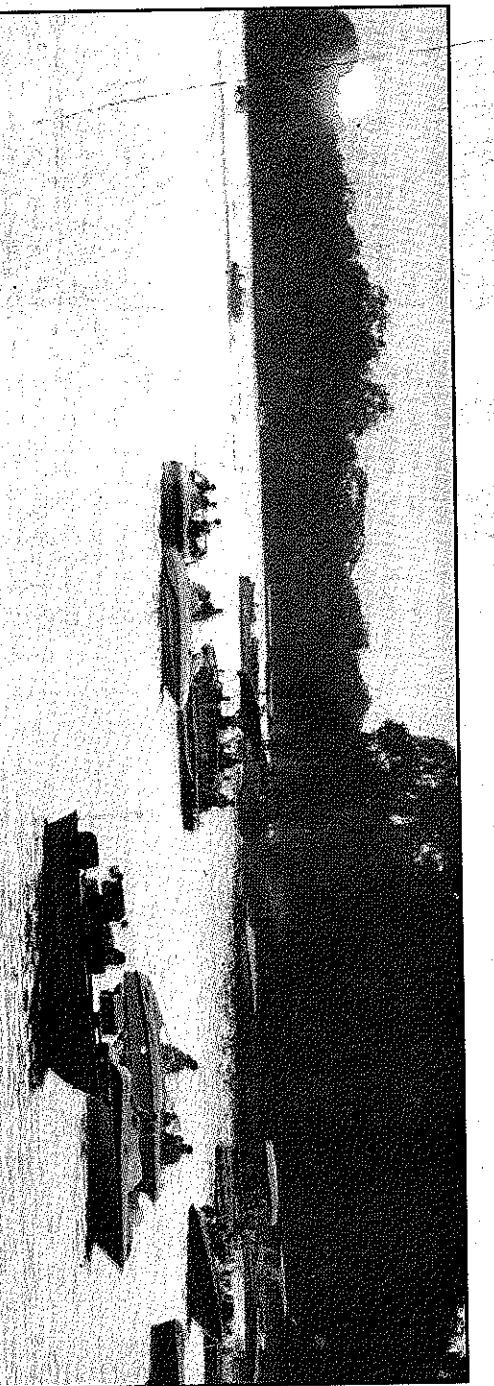
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**KANKAKEE, IROQUOIS, WILL,
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DAY'S END: Boat traffic on Six Mile Pool basks in the glow of a setting sun.

Journal/Oscar Salinas

Rivers offer bounty of recreation

By Bill Byrns, Journal writer

There is a magic about rivers like the Kankakee and Iroquois — a quiet serenity that enriches life for all who live in this river valley.

The rivers make no class distinctions. Rich or poor, man, woman, adult or child, all find a bit of that magic, if only for a little while, along their banks.

From the marshlands of Indiana to the rugged limestone cliffs at the Kankakee River State Park, the river provides a mix of recreational opportunities for all. But because it's there — as rivers always seem to be — it is often taken for granted, its bounty forgotten under the demands of daily life.

And yet, a quiet walk along a streamside trail, a few moments fishing a swirling eddy or a lunch-time break along the bank can ease the pressures of the day and recharge the spirit.

Today many enjoy the river by canoe, capturing in places a fleeting glimpse of what it might have been like in the late 1600s when LaSalle and his band of explorers ventured into the wilderness that became Illinois.

Both the Kankakee and the Iroquois are considered fine canoeing streams. For most of its length, the Kankakee is the domain of canoes and other shallow-running craft. Its current most times is gentle enough to provide a cozy "float" trip with little real work.

A 20-mile section of the river in Will-

County, from the state park to Wilmington, even has been proposed as a state

water trail by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission.

Slower moving, the Iroquois is also a

above Mornence, and the "Sandbar" at the trailing edge of Hog Island upstream from Kankakee — expose the sediment that is slowly filling in boating access along the river.

But the biggest party is the annual River Regatta boat races. It ranks as the county's top tourism event, drawing thousands for two days of power boat racing. Spectators line the banks at both Beckman and River Road parks.

Ranking second to the Regatta is the Kankakee River Valley Fishing Derby, a 10-day family fishing event that pays cash and merchandise prizes on tagged fish and daily winners.

The Kankakee ranks among the state's premier smallmouth bass streams, while the Iroquois and its Beaver Creek tributary is a top choice for channel catfish.

Both produce splendid walleye and the occasional trophy-sized northern pike.

In fact, the state record walleyes — for both states — were taken from the Kankakee River.

Anglers find other pleasures, pausing at times to watch true master fishermen such as herons, eagles or osprey effortlessly pull a meal from the river.

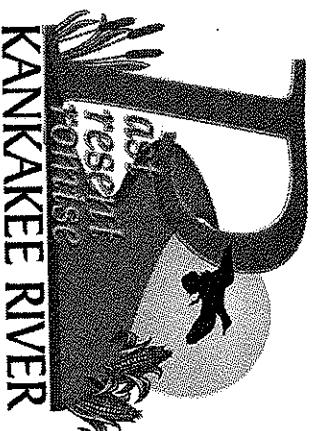
Hunters, too, find many opportunities here. Whitetail deer and wild turkey abound following successful reintroduction programs by the state.

On 1,600 acres at the Iroquois County Conservation Area, sportsmen and women can enjoy stalking squirrel, pheasant, dove, rabbit, quail, woodcock, rail, snipe and, of course, the ever-present whitetails.

Kankakee River State Park stretches across more than 4,000 acres running

visit and enjoy the sand and sun.

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River

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along 11 miles of the river between Illinois Routes 102 and 113.

The park is equally divided between hunting and horseback areas on the south side of the river and recreational land on the north.

Hunting opportunities include waterfowl, deer, turkey, pheasant, woodcock, dove, rabbit, squirrel, fox, coyote and raccoon. The park also hosts special deer and pheasant hunts for the disabled.

An archery range and a hand trap range for shotgunning are also found at the park.

The park shoreline and Rock Creek are among the most popular fishing spots along the river.

Campers can find a total of 260 sites at the Potawatomi and Chippewa campgrounds.

A 19-mile-long bike trail runs from Davis Creek to Chicago Road in Will County. That trail could someday link to the Wauponsee Glacier Trail,

■ The final installment of the Kankakee River series will appear in Friday's edition of The Journal.

planned to connect the river to Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Illinois and Michigan Canal Trail at Joliet.

A three-mile long Chief Shawaw-na-s-see Nature Trail follows along the waterfall and canyon of Rock Creek from Rt. 102 to DeSelms Road.

South of the river, a 12-mile equestrian trail south of the river becomes a snowmobile trail in winter with four inches of snowfall. A riding stable is also located north of the river at DeSelms Road.

Picnic areas and ball fields occupy much of the main park area and a concession stand is located near Rock Creek.

Downstream near Wilmington the DesPlaines Fish & Wildlife Area offers 5,000 acres of picnicking, fishing, hunting, camping and field dog training.

Located near the confluence with the DesPlaines River, the park offers numerous backwater areas and ponds for fishermen, a boat launch and hunting areas as well as archery and hand trap ranges. Boating access to the Illinois and Des Plaines rivers is available

Parks and forest preserves offer closer-to-home recreational areas.

The Perry Farm in Bradley includes a network of trails linking LaVasseur Park in Kankakee to Riverfront Park in Bourbonnais. A favorite stop along the Perry Trail is the Indian Caves at Bourbonnais Ravine. The Perry Farm Park also hosts a large prairie restoration area as well as picnic facilities, a gazebo and a small tree nursery.

Forest preserves include the Aroma Preserve along the river on Heiland Road and Gar Creek Prairie adjoining River Road Park in Kankakee.

Nature lovers and birders also find plenty to explore at the 10 state nature preserves in the basin. They include two in Iroquois County — Bonnie's Prairie north of Watseka and the Hooper Branch Savanna, northeast of Beaverville; four others in Kankakee County including Gooseberry Island and Iroquois Woods south of Aroma Park and the Momence Wetlands east of Momence; the Kankakee River Preserve in

RIVER SPECTACLE: Surrounded by scenic beauty, Jerry Terrell of Bourbonnais fishes the Kankakee at Riverfront Park in Bourbonnais.

River basin at a glance

■ The Kankakee River is 150 miles long and falls more than five feet per mile below Momence.

■ The river between Kankakee and Wilmington, is considered one of the state's premier smallmouth bass fisheries.

■ The Kankakee is between 200 and 800 feet wide and only 15 feet at its deepest point. In most spots during the year, the river averages 3-5 feet in depth.

■ The Iroquois runs nearly 90 miles, with the lower reach fed by artesian wells that bubble up from its bed of gravel, sand and silt. Its course.

■ A natural rock dam on the Iroquois east of Chebanse forms a 26 mile-long pool of slightly deeper water upstream toward Watseka.

■ The Iroquois and its major tributaries rank among the state's best channel catfish waters.

■ An estimated 249 of the 299 bird species in Illinois are found in the river valley.

■ The Kankakee is home to 84 species of fish, 14 species of crustaceans such as crayfish and 37 species of mussels or river clams.

■ The Illinois state record 14 pound walleye was caught on the Kankakee near Flag Island in 1961 by Fred Gosein of Kankakee.

■ The Indiana record, a 14 lb. 4 oz. walleye was taken by Leon Richard on the Kankakee just east of State Line Bridge.

■ Walter Klenzak of Bradley holds the state record for northern pike on a 16 lb. 15 oz. fish taken in 1989 at Monster Lake near Essex which is now part of the Mazonia South Fish & Wildlife complex.

■ Joe Veronda of Coal City set a 26 lb. 9 oz. state record for Tiger Muskie in May of 1999. The fish was caught at the Coal City Area Club.

■ The Illinois record yellow perch belongs to Joe Grega of Coal City who in 1974 caught a 2 lb. 8 1/4 oz. fish at the Arrowhead Club Lake in Will County.

■ The basin has 10 nature preserves and another 33 state-designated natural areas that include rare savannas, dunes, sandy uplands and bottomland forests.

■ Only 1,600 acres of the Momence Wetlands survive along the river.

■ Biologists rank most of the Kankakee and Iroquois rivers and nine of their tributaries as "highly valued aquatic resources."

■ Among the river's rarities is the Kankakee Mallow, a unique species that grows naturally on a single island at the Kankakee River State Park and along a railroad right-of-way in Indiana.

