

Old Growth Forest

Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest



USDA Forest Service

Hoosier National Forest

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Imagine walking through Indiana 100 years ago. Instead of cornfields and forested hillsides of young trees, there were 19,000,000 acres of old growth forests. Walnut trees 40 inches in diameter and 130 feet tall were common. Ancient oaks, which had stood since before Columbus discovered America, were abundant.

You don't have to just imagine, you can visit Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest and step back into the past. This 88-acre area is located just south of Paoli, Indiana. Formerly known as Cox Woods, the tract is the last old growth forest of its size in Indiana. The site has been left virtually undisturbed since before it was purchased by Joseph Cox in 1816.

Cox came to Indiana from Tennessee and acquired 258 acres near what was to become the town of Paoli. Cox loved trees and set aside 88 acres of his land to save for future generations. His land stayed in the family and eventually passed to another Joseph Cox who shared his grandfather's love of the stately old trees. He resisted pressure to sell the large trees despite poverty and debts.

The second Joseph Cox died in 1940. His heirs quickly sold his property, including the tract of old growth timber, to Wood-Mosaic Lumber Company of Louisville, Kentucky for \$23,000. When the sale was publicized in local papers, a movement was started to save the unique tract from harvest. The Meridian Club of Paoli convinced Wood-Mosaic to refrain from cutting the timber for 90 days and to resell the tract at the purchase price. The community then began a massive fund-raising effort.

The Forest Service also initiated efforts to help save the old forest. The agency was able to procure half the funds needed as long as the land would be controlled by the Forest Service. The remaining money was quickly raised with one day of grace and the land bought back from the lumber company.

Two conditions were attached to the donations received from the community. First, no trees on the 88 acres could ever be cut. Second, in tribute to the \$5,900 donation from the Indiana Pioneer Mothers Club, the area would be named the Indiana Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest and a suitable memorial would be built. A rock wall memorial was completed in 1951.

In 1944 the tract was designated a Research Natural Area by the Forest Service. Along with a 165-acre buffer, the area is managed to protect its unique qualities.

Today, because of the determined commitment of many people, the Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest has been preserved. These great trees now stand as a monument to the massive deciduous forests that covered Indiana 180 years ago.

Before the Cox Family Arrived

Long before Joseph Cox arrived in 1816, Native Americans inhabited this area. One group is known as the Oliver Phase people. These prehistoric people are believed to primarily have lived in White River valleys between 1000 and 1500 A. D. They were a farming culture that lived in small groups (up to about 100 individuals). While most Oliver Phase villages have been found along the White River, at least one village was along Lick Creek in what is now the Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest.

Survey reports noted the archaeological value of the Lick Creek site as early as 1876. In the 1940's, Jesuit missionaries collected artifacts from the site and did some excavation. Since a portion of the area had never been plowed it was still apparent where the walled village had been.

A double-walled post stockade designed for defense encircled the village. This stockade enclosed over an acre of land. Excavations by the Glenn A. Black Laboratory at Indiana University in 1993 and 1994 defined the walls and scope of the

village. Further study focused on identification of house sites and a central plaza, and study of the daily life of these people.

Even though vandalism and illegal digging have disturbed much of the area, the site is still eligible to be on the National Register of Historic places.

Archaeological sites hold clues to America's past. Federal law protects them. If you discover such sites, leave them undisturbed and report your discoveries to the Forest Service. Like the tall trees preserved for future generations, archaeological resources are shadows of our past - a tie to the people and cultures that came before us.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Note: Since this area is a Research Natural Area no hunting, camping, target-shooting, or plant collecting is allowed. Horses and bikes are also prohibited in this area.

For More Information:

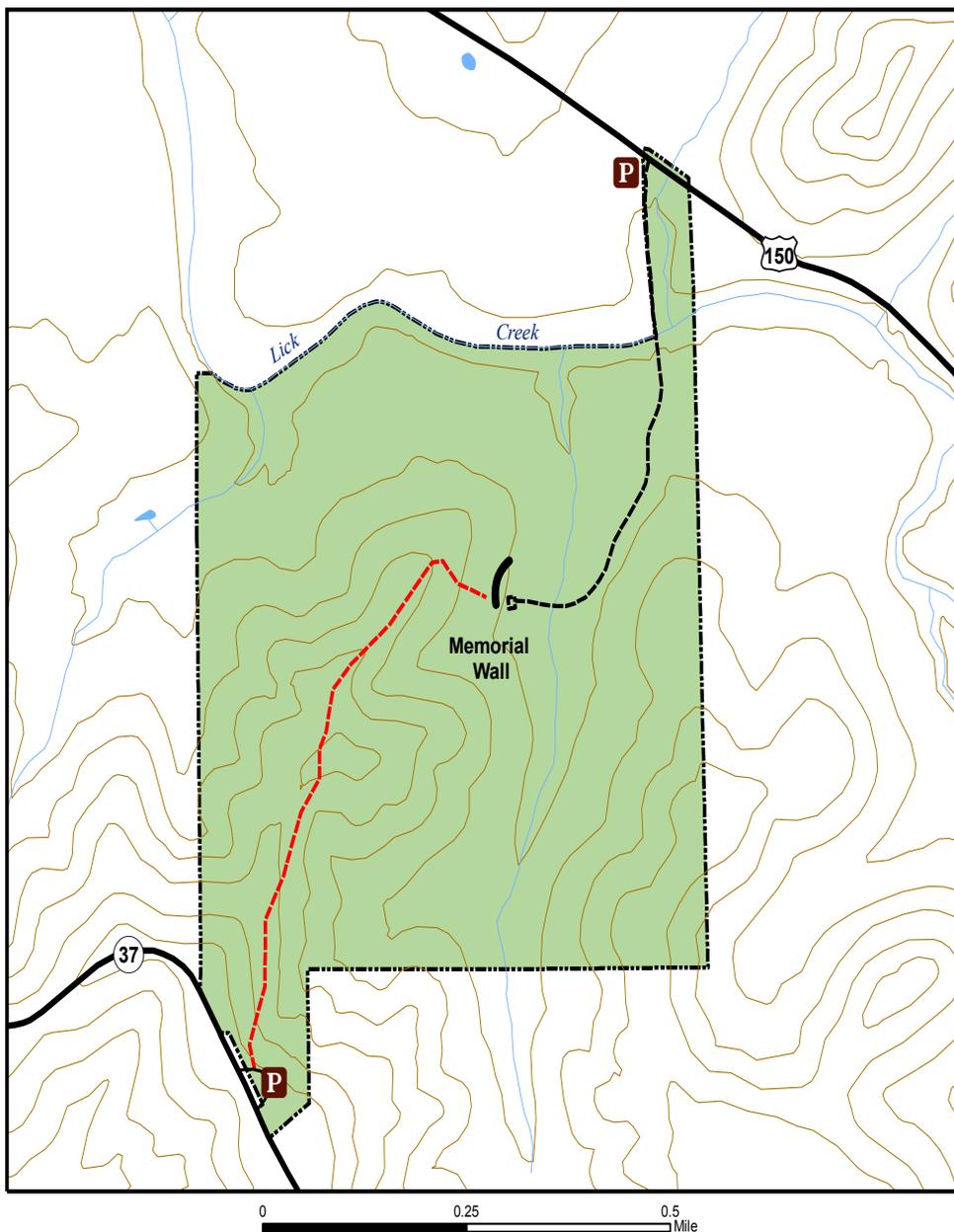
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