



HISTORIC ORIGINS OF THE WABASH RIVER VALLEY



Fort Ouiatenon River Launch

The Wabash River Greenway is being planned along a five county, 90 mile stretch of the Wabash River, known as the “Region of the Great Bend”. The Wabash River, the State’s Official River, is a 503-mile-long waterway with a watershed that drains nearly two thirds of the state of Indiana. It flows from its headwaters in Mercer County, Ohio, across the Indiana state line in a westerly direction through northern Indiana before turning south in the “Region of the Great Bend”, where its southerly route serves as the border with Illinois before flowing into the Ohio River. The Tippecanoe, White, and Little Wabash Rivers are major tributaries.

The name “Wabash” is an English spelling of the French name for the river, “Ouabache”. French fur traders named the river after the Miami word, Waapaahšiki, meaning “it shines white”, “pure white”, or “water over white stones.” The name references the Indiana bedrock river bottoms, over which portions of the once crystal-clear Wabash flowed in northern Indiana.



Fort Ouiatenon Marching

Prior to European settlement, native American tribes thrived in Indiana. The Miami Indians were the dominant tribe with Wea and Piankashaw villages. Other tribes included the Shawnee, Eel River, Delaware, and Potawatomi. Tribes that had a scattered presence here due to migration and settlement pressures from the east coast colonies included Kickapoo, Odawa, Chippewa, Wyandot, Kaskaskia, Mahican, Nanticoke, Huron, and Mohegan.

What has become known as the Gentle Invasion of indigenous culture, French fishermen befriended the Indians and soon discovered that trading tools, knives, axes, guns, powder and shot for beaver, fox, mink, otter, raccoon, and muskrat furs was far more lucrative than fishing. This prompted thriving trading posts with rivers as their transport routes. French trading posts along the Wabash River, the highway of the time, allowed canoe transport of furs up the Wabash, with a short portage to the Maumee providing access to the Great Lakes and back to European markets.

To convince the Wea to trade exclusively with the French, the Governor-General of New France, Philippe de Rigaud Vaudreuil, issued permits for trade at Fort Ouiatenon. Traders began to bring a steady flow of goods to the new town. Ouiatenon was described as “the finest palisaded fort in the upper country,” and was one of the most successful trading posts in the region. At its peak level of activity during the mid-18th century, Fort Ouiatenon supported 3,000 residents and a hub of five Wea and two Kickapoo villages.

The Wabash River Greenway will re-establish Indiana’s River valley as a contemporary trail-based transportation corridor where one can discover the rich and varied history of our great state of Indiana while enjoying nature based recreation.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please take this brief community survey focused on the arts, history, and culture of the Greenway.

TAKE THE SURVEY!

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