A FOUR-HUNDRED ACRE LAKE DISAPPEARS

BY

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The geolological map of Hardin county, Illinois, shows alluvium deposits covering an area of approximately 700 acres lying mainly in sections 2 and 3 of Township 12 South, Range 9 East. Bulletin No. 41 of the State Geological Survey, "The Geology of Hardin County, Illinois," says, "in a considerable area northwest of Cave in Rock, * * * the drainage is underground through sink holes. * * * It is dotted with sink holes which must connect with underground stream channels which find their outlet through numerous small springs in the county."

Many of these depressions lie in view from the main highway for the first five miles of the distance from Cave in Rock toward Elizabethtown. They may be seen on either side of the road. Others are out of sight in the area lying between this public road and Ohio River which is two and a half miles away. Some sinks are dry, others are dry in some seasons of the year, while still others are permanent ponds or small lakes. Some are small pits as deep as they are broad and many are several rods across. About forty small lakes are shown on the map in addition to the many dry holes through which the rainfall goes directly.

The alluvial area in sections 2 and 3, lying three miles northwest of Cave in Rock, occupies a depression which at times is drained through sinks within it. After a time these outlets become clogged, so that a body of water collects and forms a lake estimated to have an area of 400 acres and a depth of ten to twenty feet. The lake frequently persists through the greater part of a year, sometimes two years, although there are seasons when a crop of corn may be grown on the fertile lake bottom.

In the autumn of 1933, the water drained out completely after remaining for quite a long period. Several truck loads of fish were gathered up and taken to more permanent waters. Catfish predominated, though quite a number of good sized bass were taken and returned to a mine reservoir from which they are thought to have escaped.

My own observations, made at intervals over a period of twenty five years, are that the lake has been in evidence most of that time.

Following the complete emptying of last autumn, it began to fill in midwinter and occupied 80 to 100 acres by April first. Word received near the end of April from a resident whose land is overlapped by the lake was to the effect that the water was going out again.

If this basin would remain permanently dry, some fine corn land would be reclaimed. If it would remain full of water, it would become a valuable fishing and boating resort.

I have found no evidence that the large body of water which leaves so suddenly at times ever finds a final outlet through springs. This leads to the theory that there must be underground channels to the Ohio River which lies at a lower level than the lake bottom. There has been talk of trying to drain the area permanently by cutting a channel through the higher ridge which lies between the basin and the river. The cost might be prohitive. It would be interesting to learn what underground passages might be revealed if such were attempted. The Fredonia limestone, as before stated, has numerous sinks between the river and the lake basin.

The famous cavern at Cave in Rock is thought by some to be the remnant of an outlet from a small basin at the rear of it which now has a surface stream.