# CAMP SALMEN NATURE PARK SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF CAMP RIDGE LOOP

The high ground along Bayou Liberty was called Camp Ridge by the Scouts and was previously occupied by the French and untold generations of Native Americans. In prehistory it was formed by deposits from the bayou and possibly the Pearl River. People who occupied this site took advantage of its elevated ground, wildlife, timber, clay and accessibility to Lake Pontchartrain. The Boy Scouts of America and you have added new dimensions – education and enjoyment.

# Begin in the Pavilion:

- This site was a Boy Scout dining hall built in the 1950's and torn down by St. Tammany Parish in preparation for this park. They "repurposed" the old slab to build this new Pavilion.

# From the rear corner of the Pavilion (opposite of the parking lot) go down the asphalt Bike Path, a future spur from the parish-wide Tammany Trace Bike Trail:

- The depression in the trees to the right is believed to be an old clay pit that was mined by the site's earliest American settlers to make bricks. This walking tour goes clockwise all the way around it.
- The old Boy Scout Camp Salmen water tower once supplied the camp's water system by holding approximately 4,100 gallons of water (about 17 tons or 35,000 lbs) some 40 ft up in the air. Its future use may be as a park sign. Turn right at the water tower.

# Side Trip - go left over Goldfish Bayou Bridge and up the hill to Mary's Grotto:

- This stream drains the park's Gum Swamp basin located in the woods across the street, an area probably mined for clay used in Fritz Salmen's brick manufacturing. This "bayou" is the park's only natural tributary to Bayou Liberty.
- The Scouts religious needs were met by Protestant and Catholic Chapels that were once in this vicinity.
- Across Parish Parkway is a field of wetland trees planted by schoolchildren. In the upper left corner is the entrance to the park's approx. 1mi. long Main Trail that goes to the Pine Savannah Boardwalk at the northern end of the park. Just inside the trail entrance, on the right, is the path to the closer Gum Swamp Boardwalk
- If you keep going down the asphalt bike path from Mary's Grotto you'll follow the W-12 Canal for about 1/2 mi. to the park's eastern gate. The bike trails goes on to Heritage Park in Old Town Slidell.

#### Turn around and return across the bridge back to the Camp Ridge Loop Trail and turn left:

- The old Boy Scout pool and shower house once stood upon the knoll next to the new picnic shelter. The pool is still under the lawn.
- A shortcut to the parade ground/playground is behind this shelter.
- Goldfish Bayou continues downstream on the left.

#### The Cathedral Oak on the right:

- Its quite likely this tree began its life more than two-hundred years ago by leaning out from the undergrowth established in the new clay pit dug for making bricks.
- Camp Ridge's massive oaks hold tons of dense wood in the air. The curved branches were once sought by ship's carpenters for critical components in the vessels they built.
- Live Oaks host many other organisms hanging Spanish moss and other mosses, lichen, Resurrection Fern, understory trees, vines, birds, insects, snakes, lizards and mammals.

# The Old Trading Post/Salmen Lodge is on the left, you're invited to walk around it:

- Built in the early 1800s by Joseph Laurent, a lake trader who produced of north shore building products like bricks that were probably used to re-build the French Quarter after devastating fires. The building was operated as a neighborhood store and ferry office for nearly a century.
- Fritz Salmen bought to property to continue the tradition of producing bricks and timber but this time on an industrial scale. He used the building as a commissary for his workers.
- The scouts renovated the building as a residence for the camp director.
- St. Tammany Parish plans to restore the building to its original condition.

#### **Bayou Liberty:**

- One of the first known European settlers on the bayou was a Frenchman named Bertram Jaffre who called himself "la Liberte" and for whom the bayou was named.
- Because the bayou is wide here Laurent was able to turn his schooner "Marguerite" around to load cargo and head out for another voyage.
- At times the bayou practically boils with life water bugs, gar, bass, shad, turtles, minnows, mullet and sometimes Albert the alligator.

#### **Amphitheater:**

- The Scouts' original amphitheater was here and was the main gathering place for camp meetings and ceremonies.
- The new amphitheater will have as many uses as the public's imagination weddings, award ceremonies, meetings, family reunions, poetry readings, music, educating, regattas, etc.

# **Bayou Liberty Trail:**

-Proceed upstream (to the right) to enjoy lovely views of the bayou and many plant species - Magnolia, Locust, Red Drummond Swamp Maple, Cedar, Sycamore, Wax Myrtle and Water Oak; Virginia Creeper, Rattan, mustang grape and Green briar vines; star-shaped Palmettos were once used for roofing and basket weaving.

# Fritz Salmen Monument/ Ralph Razza Flagpole:

- Placed in gratitude for Salmen's generous gift to scouting.
- Mr. Razza has been an important contributor to Scouting's legacy in the new park.

### The Leaning Oak:

- Someone thought to help this fallen tree with a couple of props a long time ago. Since then it is likely hundreds of thousands of visitors have climbed it.

#### **Canoe Launch:**

- This is a favored part of the bayou bank to launch canoes and kayaks. The park plans to eventually rent canoes from here.

#### Swampwalk Boardwalk:

- This is an intimate view of a unique Louisiana wetland plant and animal community.

#### Parking Lot/End.

