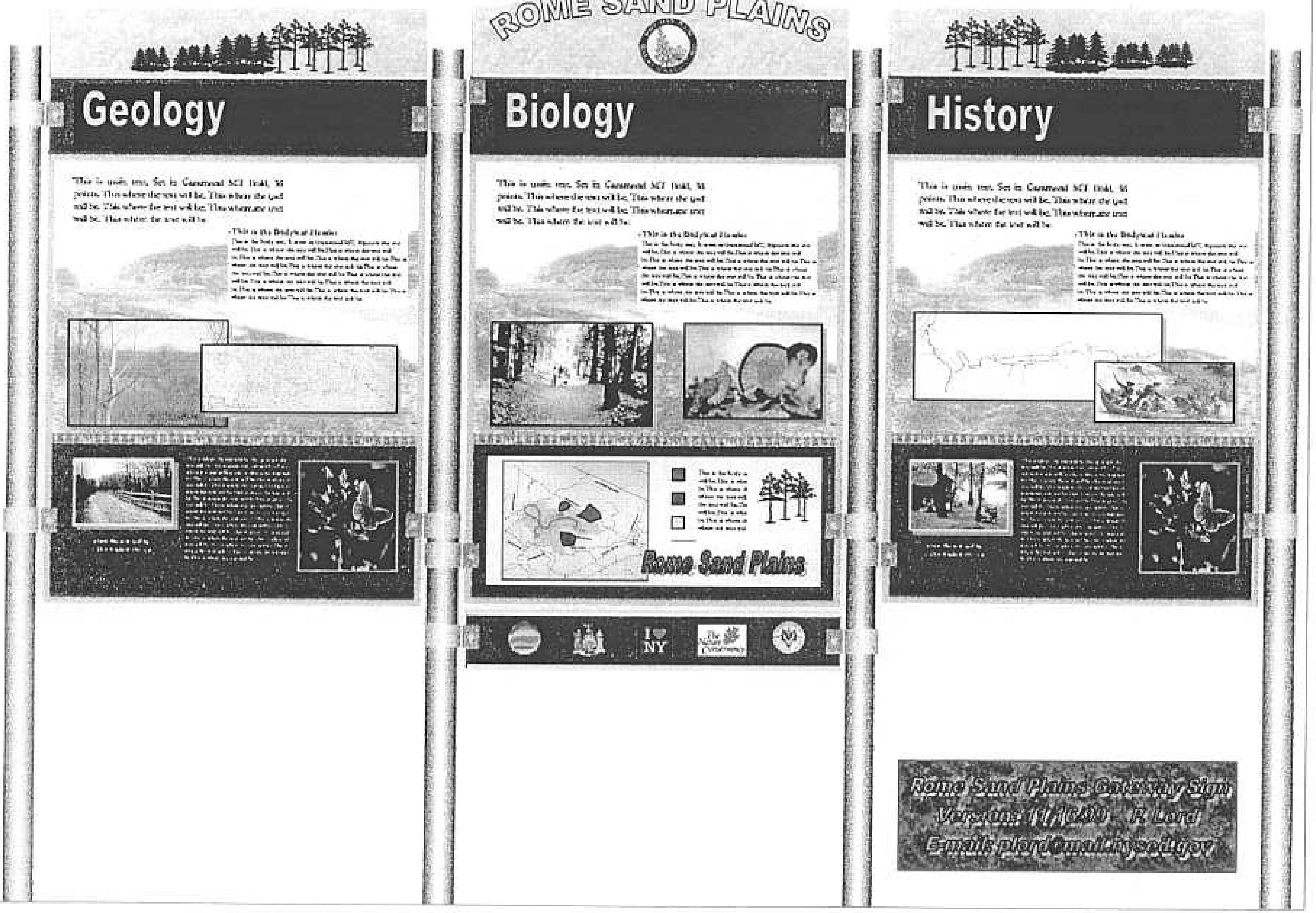
APPENDIX J

SIGNAGE



Rome Sand Plains Gateway Sign
Version: 11/10/99 R. Lord
E-mail: plord@mail.nysed.gov

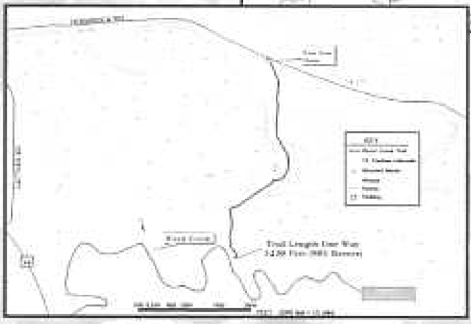
ROME SAND PLAINS

What are the Rome Sand Plains?

Created 10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age, the Rome Sand Plains were once at the bottom of a huge glacial lake – Lake Iroquois – that covered much of central New York.

Rome Sand Plains Region

Wood Creek Trail



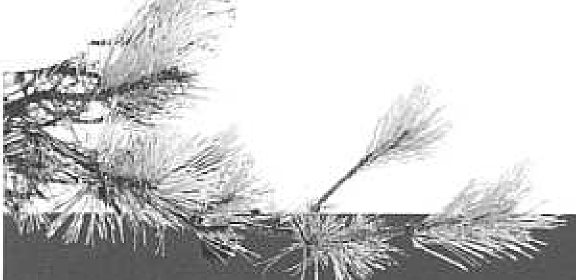
Sands and sediments at the bottom of Lake Iroquois were exposed when the glacial waters receded. Prevailing winds then shifted these sands into a series of crescent-shaped dunes that still exist today. Low areas between the dunes have become wetlands and peat bogs, while the dunes and the surrounding uplands support a pine barrens ecology typically found in coastal areas.

The combination of wetlands and high dunes make the Sand Plains a unique natural area. The mixture of pine barrens, mixed northern hardwoods and open meadows supports a diverse assemblage of plants and animals, including pitcher plant, wild blue lupine, red shouldered hawk and the spotted turtle.

The Rome Sand Plains is managed by the Rome Sand Plains Management Team, a group of state and local agencies, conservation organizations, and individuals. This group is dedicated to protecting and enhancing the unique ecology, the unusual geological features, and the historic resources that are found here, while offering opportunities for the public to enjoy this rare open space.

For additional information about this area please contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, or the Izaak Walton League.

Please help protect this valuable resource. . .
Stay on marked trails. Take only pictures,
leave only footprints.



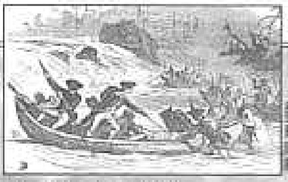
WOOD CREEK

Two hundred years ago Wood Creek was the critical link in a network of inland waterways that stretched from Albany to Oswego, connecting the Great Lakes and the Hudson River.

This chain of rivers, streams and lakes was a highway of international travel, exploration and warfare. Many consider it to be the Oregon Trail of the east.

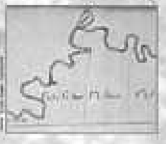
Hundreds of canoes and bateaux passed back and forth on Wood Creek every year, carrying some of the most important figures in American history, and laying the groundwork for the emergence of the New American Nation.

Native Americans, colonial armies and early settlers continued to follow this ancient water route until the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.



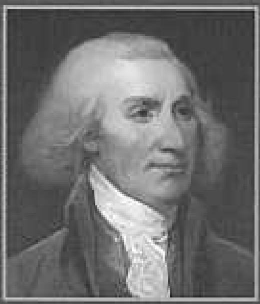
"Embarked in my boat and went down Wood Creek .... the creek is greatly obstructed by sunken timber in the bed of the creek, by large piles of drift wood, and by trees hanging over the creek. The piles of driftwood cause eddies which form sand banks on which the water is shallow"

Philip Schuyler, July 1802



The abandoned loops of Wood Creek, cut through in 1793, can still be seen between Rome and Oneida Lake. (1832 map, left)

Western Inland Lock Navigation Company



General Philip Schuyler of Albany
President,
Western Inland Lock Navigation Company

The Western Inland Lock Navigation Company was chartered in 1792 by the State Legislature to improve navigation along the shallow inland waterways of the Mohawk Valley. Led by General Philip Schuyler, the Company experimented with innovative engineering techniques to create a continuous large-boat channel across New York State, decades before the start of the Erie Canal.

In 1793 the Company reduced the thirty-mile passage down Wood Creek by six miles when workers cut across thirteen sharp meanders in the creek. Trees were cleared and thirteen tiny canals were dug across the "neck" of each loop in the stream. The old channel was dammed, and the creek was forced through the cuts to form a new channel deep enough for large boats.

These are some of the oldest artificial waterways in North America. Their remains can still be seen today. The experience and information gained in this work was later utilized to help build the Erie Canal.

Official seal of the
Western Inland Lock Navigation Company
1792-1820

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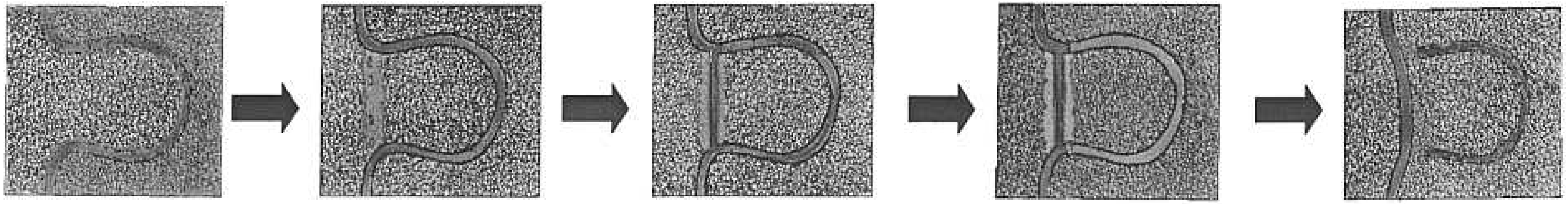
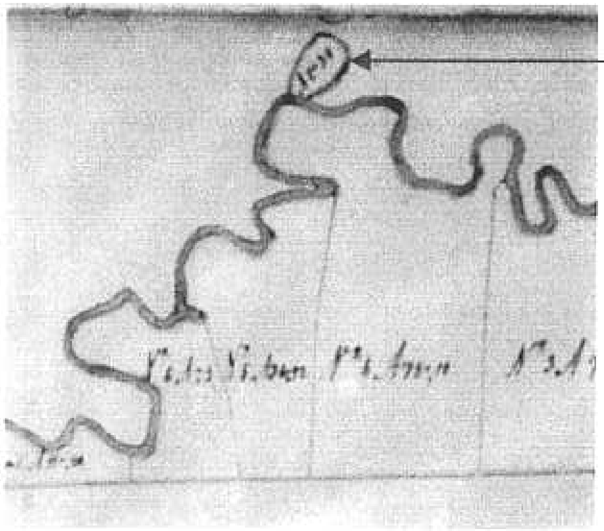
These mini-canals were created in an age when engineering like this was almost unheard of, and in a wilderness where no roads, trails, or settlements existed. The technique consisted of five stages, the descriptions of which were discovered in eyewitness accounts recorded during the summer of 1793 by travelers passing down Wood Creek in boats:



First the meander to be cut was selected. Then the trees along the line of the cut were cleared and the stumps dug up. The logs were stockpiled for later use. Next a narrow ditch about 10 feet deep was dug across the neck and the saved logs were used to dam up the old channel. While the little "canal" could be used for boats at this time, it was shallow and the banks were in danger of slumping. However, the next heavy rain or spring freshet, forced to run through this ditch by the log dams, would erode the ditch to the normal size of the natural Wood Creek channel. Thus the new "canal" would be finished by nature.



This historic "canal" on Wood Creek was recorded on a map of the Wood Creek Reservation done in 1832 (left). It is shown as a cut off loop of the stream and is identified in the map legend as land that was once on the south side of the creek.

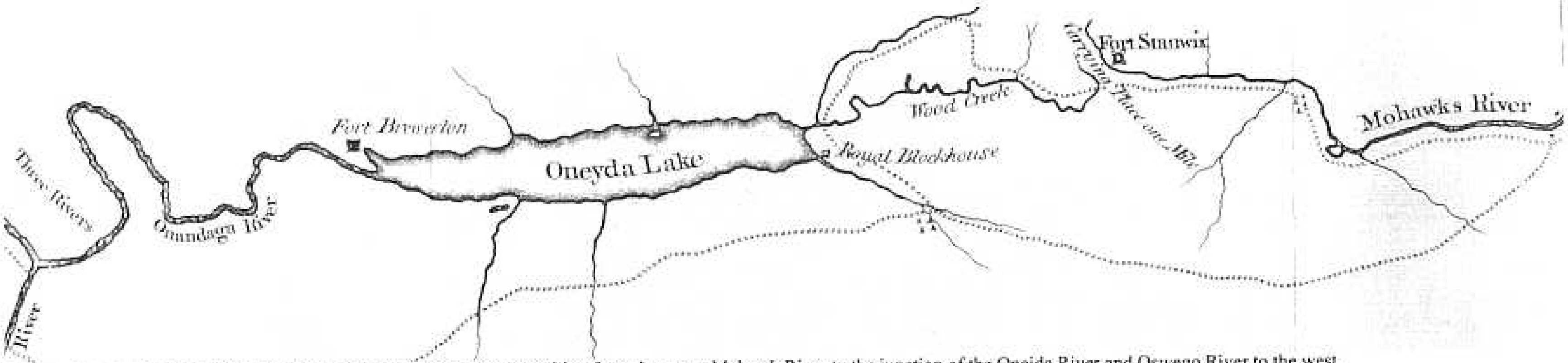
An old aerial photograph from the 1930s (right) clearly shows the relationship of this cut to the modern channel of Wood Creek. Another cut to the southwest appears to be of a similar nature, but it was the result of a natural chute cut-off in prehistoric times. (Compare the channel alignment in each view.)

The old channel of Wood Creek in 1793, measured in the abandoned channel, is only a couple feet deep, while the modern channel has eroded to many feet deep due to run-off promoted by deforestation in the nineteenth century.

New York State Museum
The Durham Project: Fact Sheet for NYSM/DEC Field Trip – September 29, 1998

Historic Wood Creek: Canal Cut #1 - 1793

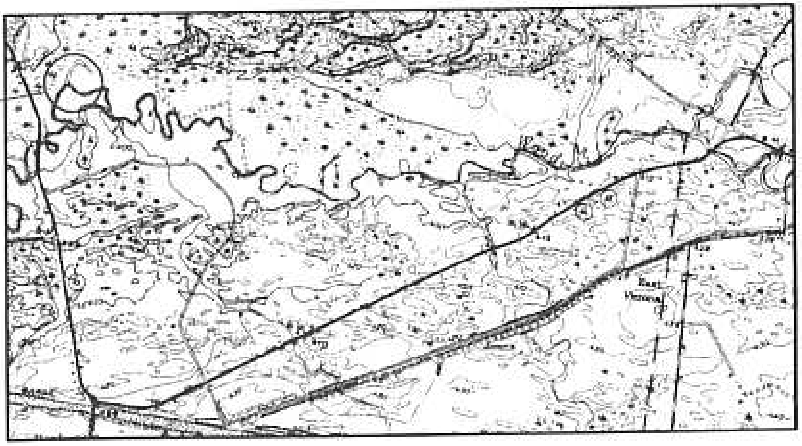
Wood Creek was the lynch-pin of an international navigation corridor that connected the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes via a series of inland waterways from prehistoric times until the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.



Section of a map drawn in 1772 that shows the inland waterways stretching from the upper Mohawk River to the junction of the Oneida River and Oswego River to the west.

In 1792 a private canal company – *The Western Inland Lock Navigation Company* – was formed in New York State to improve this inland navigation system, and in the summer of 1793 this company began cutting thirteen short "canals" across the necks of the worst of dozens of sharp meanders in Wood Creek – thus shortening the distance between Rome and Oneida Lake by 6 miles!

Archeological remains of the first of these historic mini-canals – some of the oldest artificial waterways in North America - can be still seen along the east side of Route 49 west of Rome.



This site is one of nine out the original 13 that survived the construction of the Barge Canal in the early 20th century.

Due to the state of preservation at the site, this location is one of the most historic places along the old inland transportation route.