

nature

Whitesbog pearl of the Pinelands

Berries, birds, and bogs form natural splendor

story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Steve Snyder
Fort Dix PAO

The berry gods are a strange breed.

Chippewa Indians burned the flowers of blueberry plants and encouraged crazy members of their tribe to inhale the smoke to calm and cure their afflictions. Rock'n Roller Fats Domino, on the other hand, had other uses for it. In 1956 he found his (romantic) thrill *On Blueberry Hill*. His paean to blueberries led the pop charts. And the good folks down at historic Whitesbog village outdo themselves every year celebrating the blueberry with its own festival.

Just south of Browns Mills on Route 545 (fed by Texas Avenue), the annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival attracted over 5,000 visitors at the end of last month. Visitors acute enough to drop in not only got their fill of blueberry products but could check out some beautiful stretches of the Pinelands at the same time.

It's God's country.

Cranberry and Blueberry plants have thrived in the swampy confines of the Pine Barren bogs since the Ice Age.

By 1900 Whitesbog was a prosperous little community of 600, founded by cranberry entrepreneurs Mary and J.J. White. In 1911 the Whites' daughter Elizabeth joined Dr. Frederick Colville to develop the first commercial blueberry. Elizabeth galloped through the Pine Barrens to meet with locals, encouraging them to collect bushes with the plumpest berries.

In 1916, experiments with hybrid strains of blueberries led to the world's first commercial crop.

According to the excellent guide *Nature Walks in New Jersey* (by Glenn Scherer, 2nd



WILD WETLANDS -- Tundra swans, gull-billed terns, whip-poor-wills, white-tailed deer, and fox thrive in the wilds of Whitesbog.



GENERAL STORE -- Crowds visit the General Store at Whitesbog, an institution right out of the 19th century that's stocked with all things blueberry: jams, jellies, preserves, toppings and even chocolate-covered blueberries.

An oddity occurs in late summer when flocks of gull-billed terns can be sighted. They generally hang around the shore but apparently are attracted to insects, tadpoles and frogs living in Whitesbog.

store operates from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Bikers and horseback riders are also welcome.

Whitesbog is owned by the state of New Jersey. The non-profit Whitesbog Preservation Trust is charged with preserv-



PICKING BERRIES

Richard Austin Tracy 1960-2004

Richard Austin Tracy died suddenly at his home in Browns Mills on Tuesday, July 13.

He was 44 years old.

Tracy had worked for the Force Projection Directorate for three weeks before transferring over to the Regional Directorate for Public Works where he worked as a pipe fitter for the last three months.

A native of Norfolk, Va., and resident of Browns Mills since 1965, Rick was a graduate of Pemberton Township High School. A construction worker all his life, Tracy was an avid hunter in his free time.

Tracy is survived by his former wife, Diane, and their two children - Melissa and Richard Jr. of Cookstown. Other family members include his parents, William and Phyllis Tracy of Browns Mills, brothers Robert of Browns Mills, Donald of Vincentown and Michael of Pensacola, Fla. along with a sister, Sherri Cox of Browns Mills.

Funeral services will be held today, Friday, July 16, at 10 a.m. at the Lankenau Funeral Home, 370 Lakehurst Road, Browns Mills. Interment will follow at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Pemberton Township.

Friends may call from 9 to 10 a.m. Friday at the funeral home.

Books guide NJ nature lovers to natural nirvanas

Appalachian Mountain Club Books, based in Boston, has done an excellent job in illustrating the most attractive hiking/walking and water tours readily available to enthusiasts in the Garden State.

The newly-revised second edition of Glen Scherer's *Nature Walks in New Jersey* offers a superb rundown of 40 idyllic hiking trails in the state, not excluding paths near Fort Dix including Whitesbog and the Rancocas Nature Center.

The trail running through Mount Tammany at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and Monument Trail through High Point State Park are just two of the many other interesting paths marked by Scherer.

A whole section is included on trails in the Highlands which promise scenic mountain views and a challenge to the legs.

Whitesbog Ponds is also featured in Kathy Kenley's vastly



Nature Walks in New Jersey, AMC Guide to the Best Trails from the Highlands to Cape May, 2nd edition by Glenn Scherer, Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, paperback, 352 pages, \$14.95



edition, Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, paperback, 352 pages, \$14.95), modern farming techniques using giant tractor-driven harvesters made farming in small bogs like Whitesbog obsolete. Today the village, located in Lebanon State Forest, "offers a 3,000 acre window through which walkers can look back to the year 1900 and view bog agriculture as it was practiced in the Pine Barrens."

The bog also overflows with wildlife, hosting tundra swans, gull-billed terns, whip-poor-wills, white-tailed deer, and fox among other inhabitants.

Birds, too, thrive in the bogs. More than 250 varieties have been spotted at various times, there. Both wading birds and waterfowl are at home in Whitesbog. Birdwatchers can see blue herons, green herons, and great egrets fish waters in the bog. Migrants passing through include the green-winged teals, wood ducks, black ducks, and northern pintails.

A 2.5 mile hiking trail, mainly on the dirt roads, cuts through Whitesbog, offering views of nature foreign to urban America.

From the front of the general store lies a lily pond transformed into a "seasonal wetland overgrown with marsh plants," according to a description culled from *Nature Walks in New Jersey*. The trail continues, cutting through a section dominated by red maple and black tupelo trees. Alias the black gum, the black tupelo turns color in autumn before many other trees becoming the first to drop splendid leaves of a scarlet hue.

Grouse and wild turkeys roam the trail, too, often feasting on - you guessed it - blueberries.

Hikers game to tackle the trail can also avail themselves of wild blueberries, much superior to commercial brands spilling over super market shelves.

The sandy roads in Whitesbog are open to hikers from dawn to dusk. The general

social history.

They do a good job and are, indeed, artists of natural Americana. May they live long and prosper, their legacy surviving in their work and by the noble ethos sustaining it.



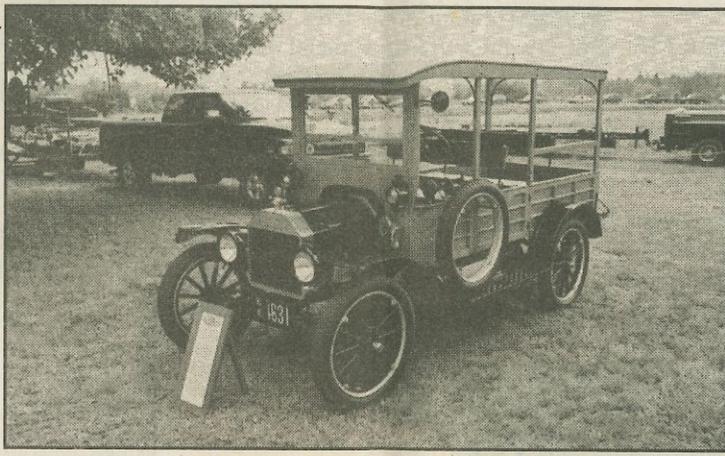
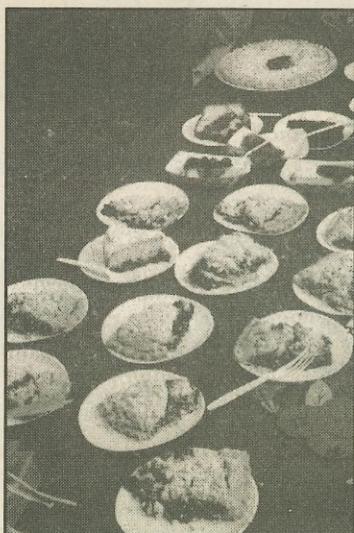
SAWMILL -- Utilizing wood for its many products was an integral part of 19th century America, illustrated by demonstrations of a wood-cutter at Whitesbog.



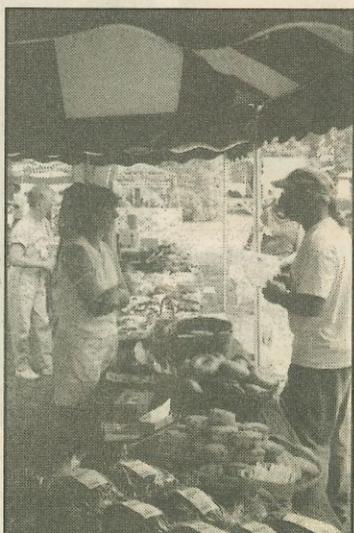
UNTARNISHED BY TIME -- Bottles at on of the Worker's Cottages at Whitesbog reflect products that were once mainstays in America and still retain the beauty of their era.

FESTIVE OCCASION -- Booths bustled with business (right, center) at the 21st annual Blueberry Festival at Whitesbog June 26, vendors selling, among others things, blueberry pies (immediate right) and muffins (extreme right).

Blueberries and cranberries have flourished in the acidic soil of the Pine Barren bogs since the end of the Ice Age. Lenape Indians and early white settlers were among the fruit's first aficionados.



CLASSIC CAR -- A 1916 Ford Model T Depot Hack graced the premises at the festival. It was an early combination of taxi cab and station wagon, used to move passengers from train depots to local hotels.



visitor to the recent Whitesbog Blueberry Festival picks some choice berries. Pint containers went for \$1 as those so inclined went out and picked their own berries.



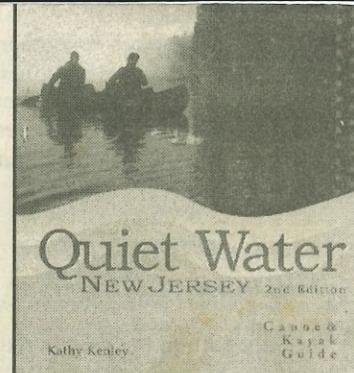
Jersey.

Kenley includes many easy to understand maps and black and white photos in her very thorough study of where and how to enjoy New Jersey's waterways.

With vacations approaching for most of us, I think outdoor guides provide a valuable resource for deciding where to visit - especially on trips that don't cost a fortune and allow one to escape from urban malaise.

So three cheers for the folks at Appalachian Mountain Club and the writers they employ.

- Staff Sgt. Steve Snyder



Quiet Water New Jersey Canoe and Kayak Guide, 2nd edition, by Kathy Kenley, Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, paperback, 208 pages, \$15.95.

the Post

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Writer/Photographers

Staff Sgt. Steve Snyder, Sgt. Pascual J. Flores, Sgt. Shawn Morris

444th MPAD

Commander Maj. Carl Palmer
PA Spec./WDIX Producer ... Sgt 1st Class Kryn Westhoven

Writer/Photographers

Staff Sgt. Joseph Nye, Sgt. Joseph Donnelly,
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