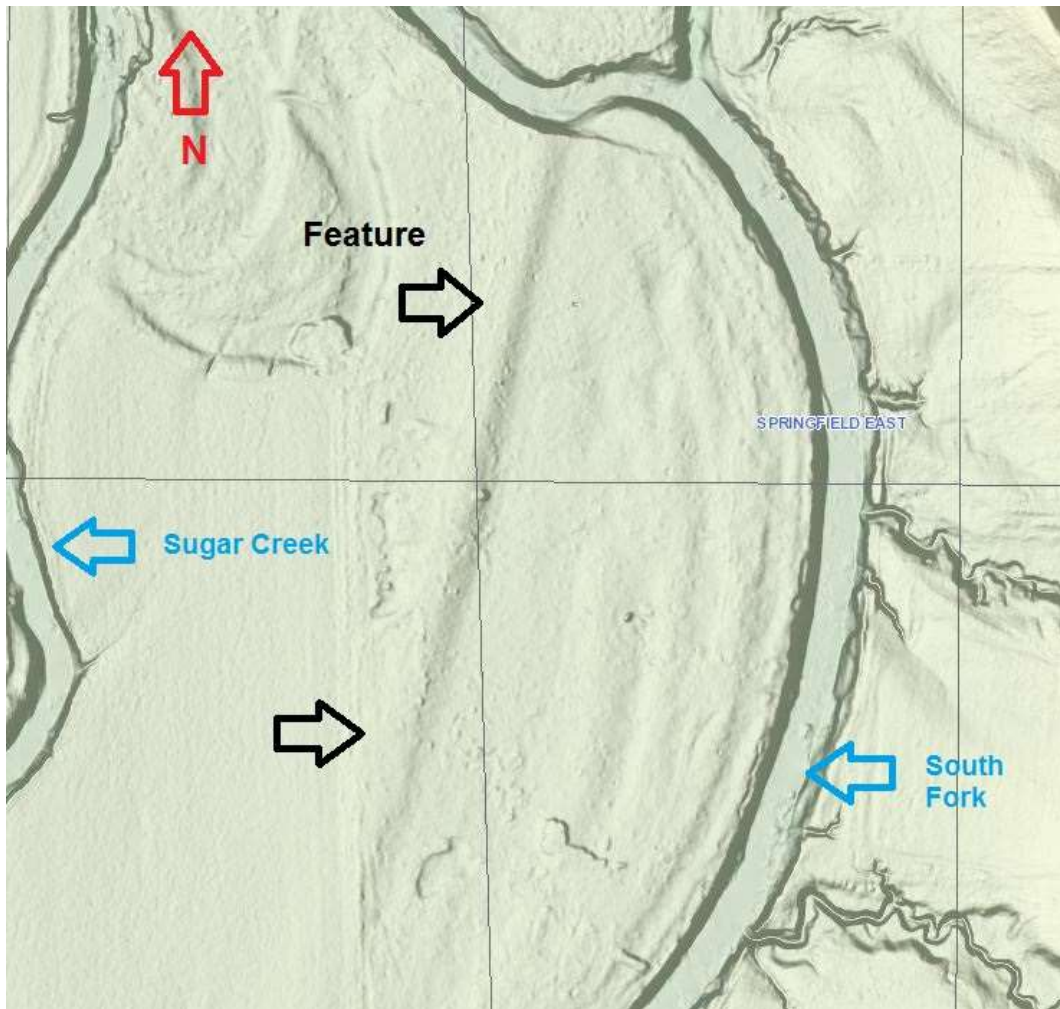


Soil Auger Testing of the potential crossing location of the Edward's Trace at the Sangamon River

Written by: Luke Moore, April 2021

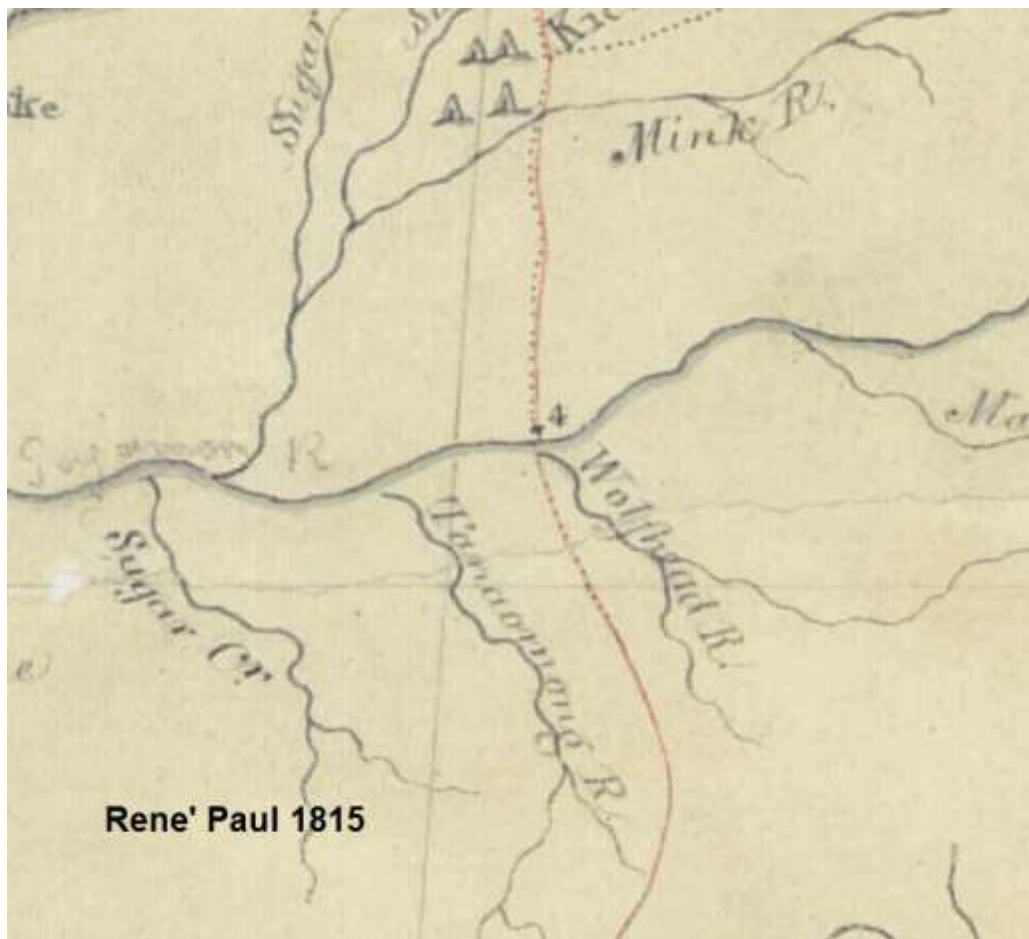


LIDAR image of the bottom ground between the mouths of the South Fork River and Sugar Creek, where they once joined the Sangamon River prior 1910. The elevated feature possibly enhanced the crossing in the bottoms.

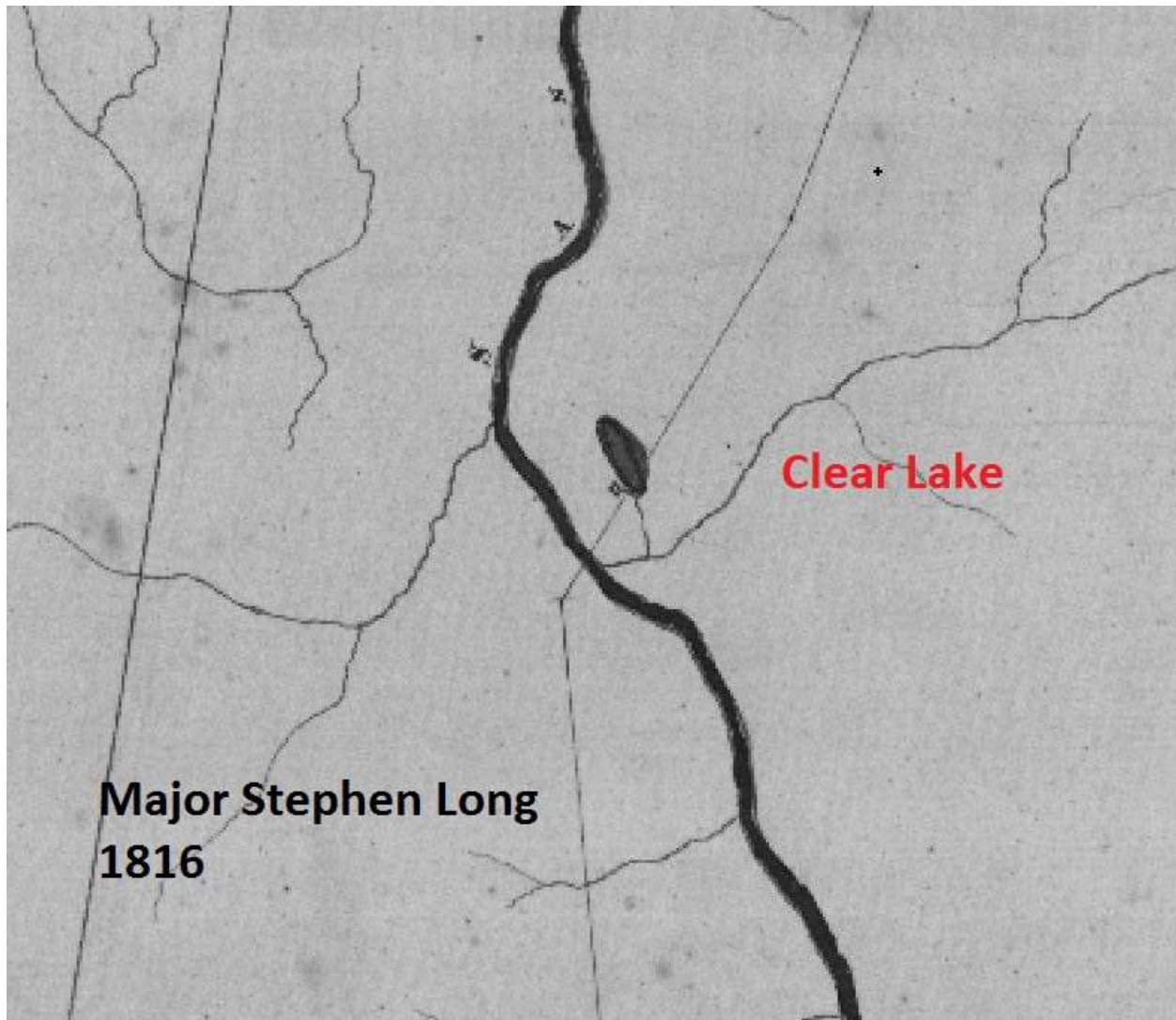
The following is a brief recap of some of the investigative efforts to identify the physical location of an ancient trail, known as the Edward's Trace. Soil samples were recently taken of an elevated soil feature located where the trail is suspected to cross the Sangamon River, east of Springfield, Illinois. The goal was to identify whether the feature was natural, or man-made. The bottoms where the feature is seen is anywhere from an elev. low of 525.0' to a high of 534.6'. At the Riverton gage, 508.3' equals 0.0' on the gage. On 4/2/21 the gage was 12.8'.

Background

The Edward's Trace was an ancient Native American trail that coursed from the area of East St. Louis northward to the foot of Peoria Lake. It was made famous by Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards in 1812, when he marched with some 350 Army and Militia soldiers to attack Native American villages in the Peoria Lake area, thought to have been aligned with British interests in the opening days of the War of 1812. Several maps were drawn shortly after the War, and one map, drawn by Louis Rene' Paul in 1815, labeled the road as "The Edward's Trace", though it was also known as the "Kaskaskia to Peoria Road", and the "Fort Clark Road" in the day. From the maps, plus oral histories, we were able to narrow down the potential crossing of the Sangamon location. In 1911, the Illinois Historical Society published an article penned by retired surveyor, Zimri Enos, who gave a detailed description where the trail lay. From his article, the Sangamon crossing location was described as follows... "*...entering Round Prairie and crossing the Sangamon River between the mouths of the Sugar Creek and South Fork Rivers...*".

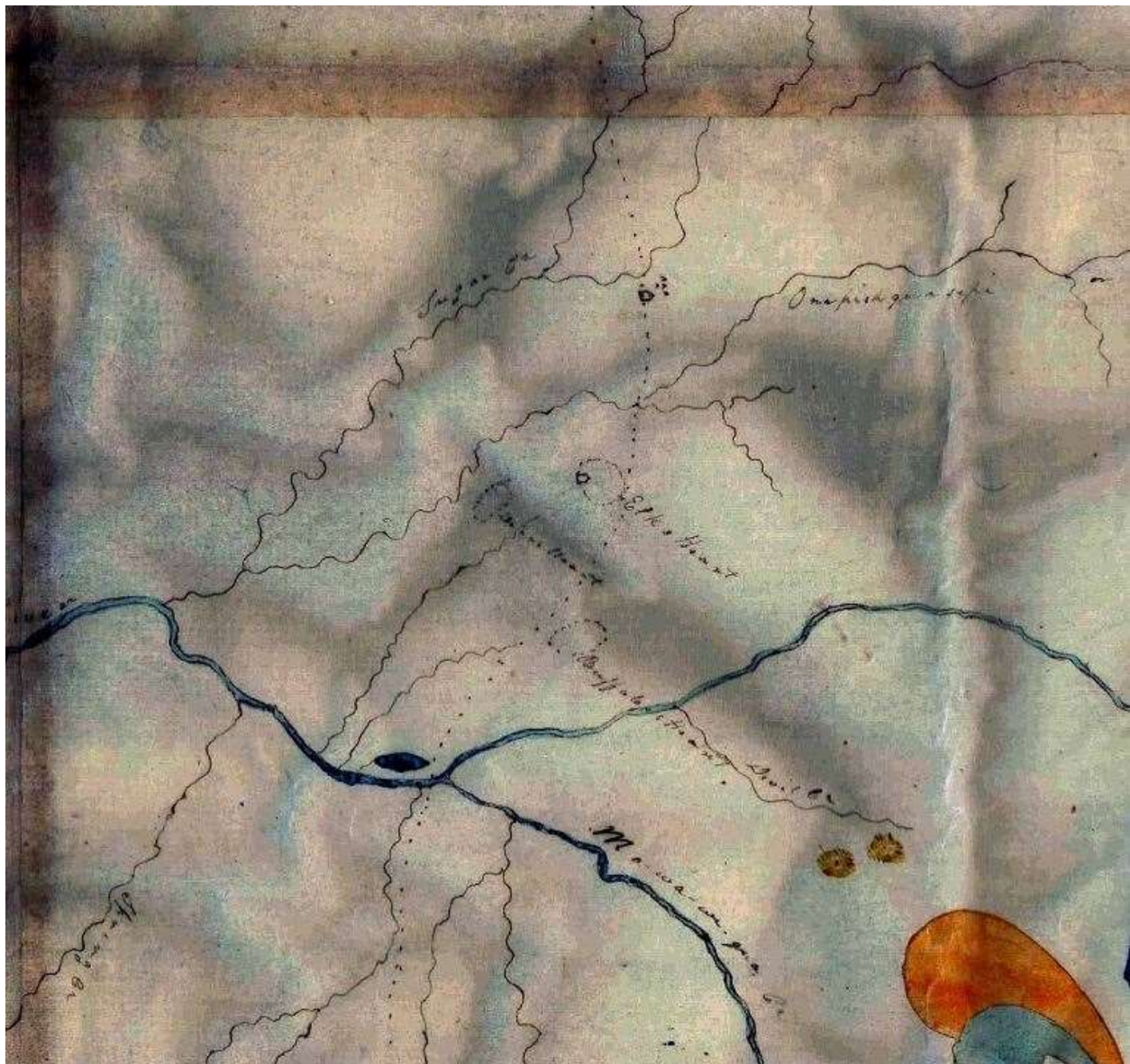


Map of Louis Rene' Paul of 1815, showing the crossing of the Sangamon River downstream of the mouth of the *Wolf head River*, or South Fork River as it is known today. The number "4" remark is where camp was made (4th night from Camp Russell), near the Clear Lake, a well-known water supply for travelers.



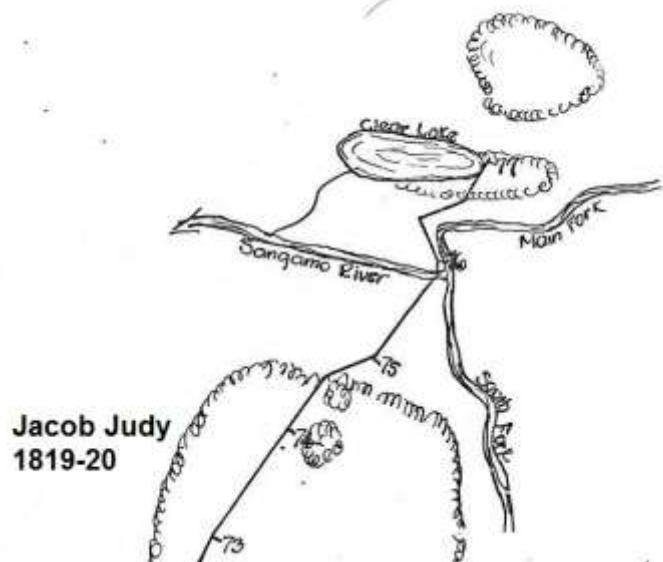
Map of Major Stephen H. Long, Topographical Engineers, 1816. He also shows crossing the Sangamon just below the mouth of the South Fork, though he misrepresents the South Fork as the main watercourse, and showing the North Fork, or Main stream, as a tributary stream. He also shows camping on the north bank, at the foot of Clear Lake (square icon), and am assuming his guide, possibly Antoine LeClair Jr., knew that this was a known stopping place along the trail.

In 1855 Governor John Reynolds wrote in his autobiography, "My Own Times", that during the march to Peoria with Territorial Governor Edwards in 1812 that "... we crossed the Sangamon to the east of present day Springfield, and passed not far on the east of Elkheart Grove..." as they followed the Trace.

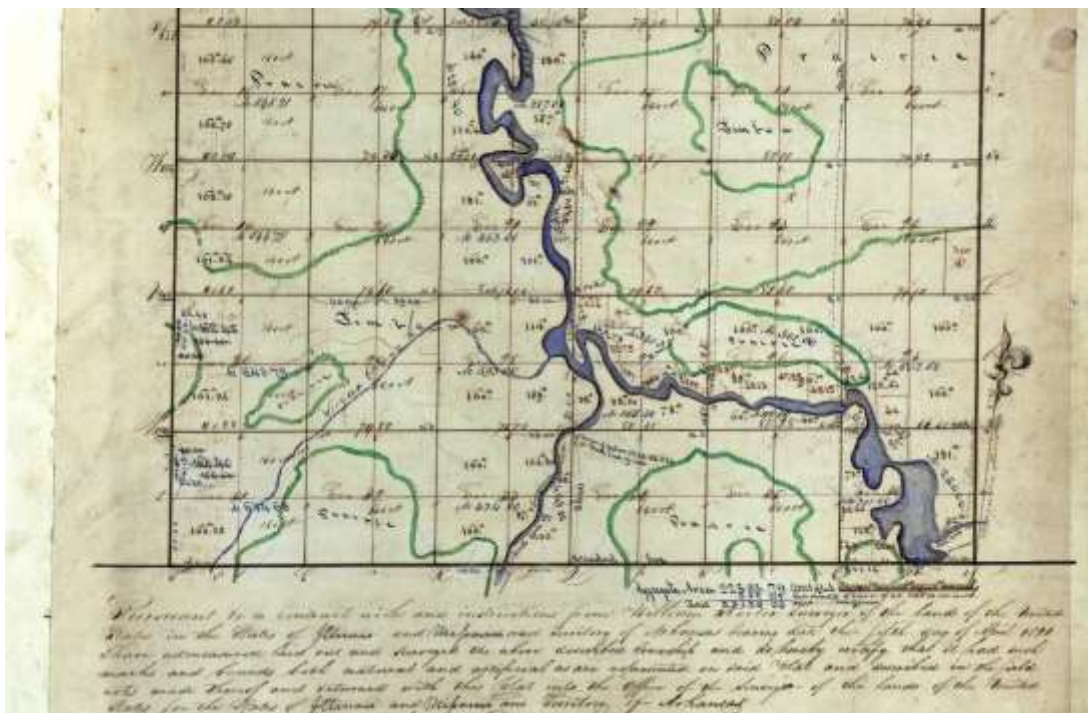


Daniel D. Smith's 1819 Kickapoo Treaty Map, 1819. His depiction of the trail passing between the mouths of the South Fork River and Sugar Creek can be easily seen. He also depicts the trail passing the foot of the Clear Lake, passing to the west of Buffalo Heart, and the east of Elk Heart, on up to Musick's Farm on the Sugar Creek north of present day Lincoln.

Daniel Smith's map was drawn with land marks showing the land the Kickapoo were ceding during the 1819 Edwardsville Treaty negotiations. Certainly there were many trails that crisscrossed central Illinois, but only the Edward's Trace is represented on his map, lending importance to the road as a well-known landmark to Native Americans and Euro-Americans alike.

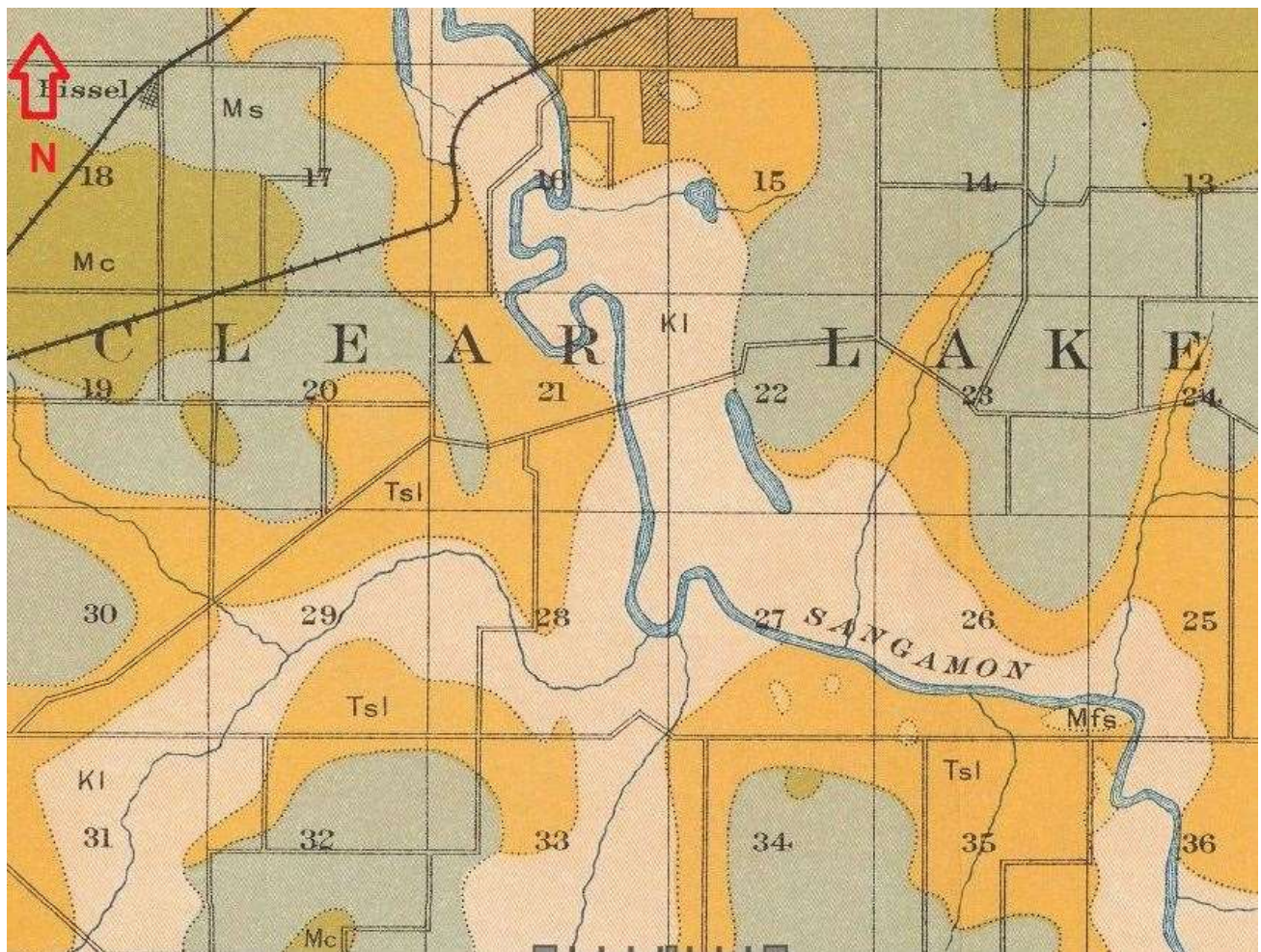


Judy's 1819-20 road map. In the winter of 1819, Jacob Judy was contracted by Madison County to lay out a road from Edwardsville to Clear Lake. He set mile posts as he went, though no posts or stones have been found, or at least written about in historical records that we have seen. His map, like the previous maps, show the Trace crossing the Sangamon just down-river from the South Fork River mouth. He also clearly shows the terminus of the Trace at the foot of the Lake, 77 miles from the Land Office in Edwardsville. Land sales soon followed, and the Clear Lake area was among the earliest Sangamon County settlements.

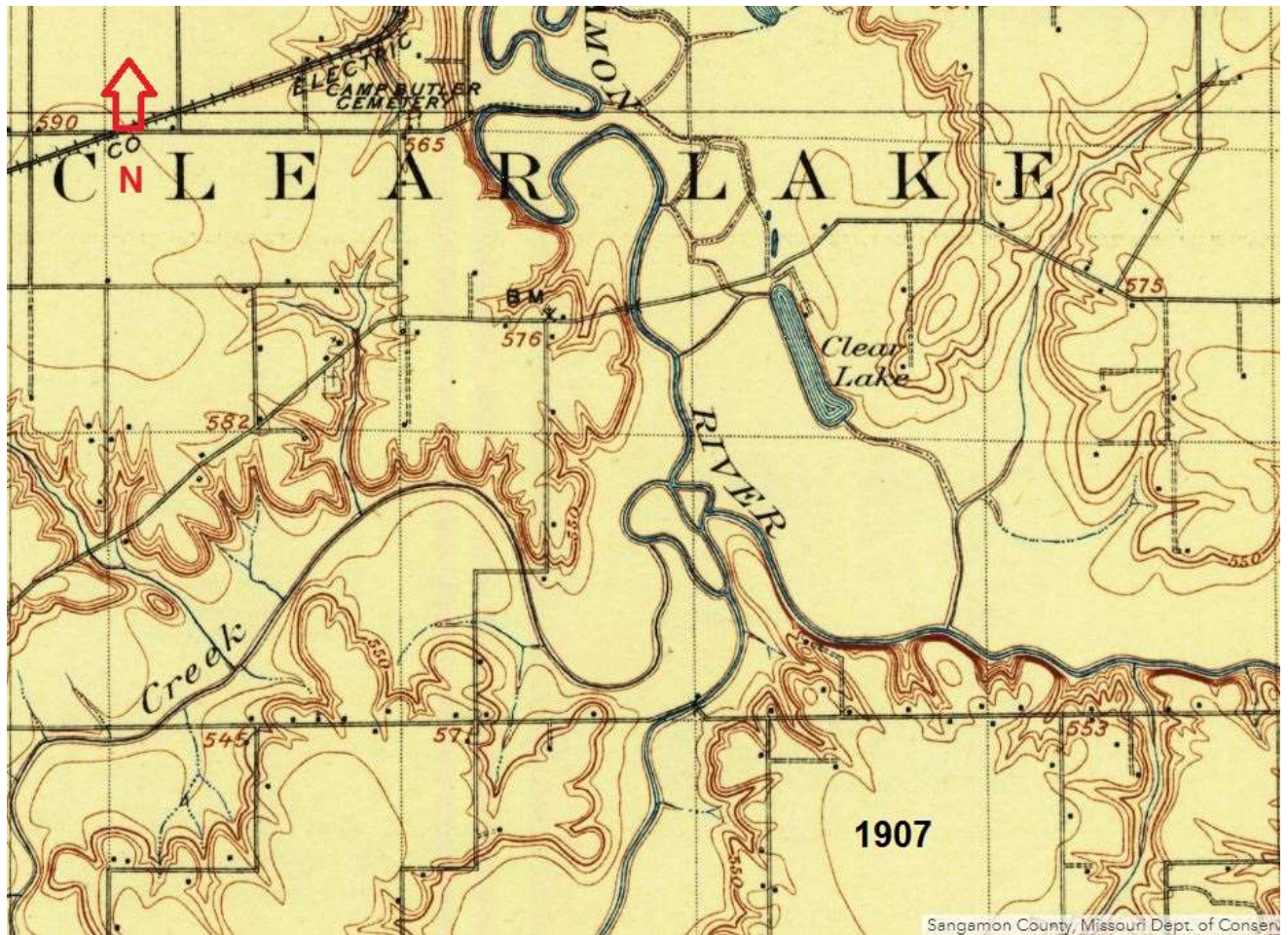


1821 GLO that shows the original river course. Also note that the bottom area was forested.

On more recent topographic images, we see that the Sangamon made a major channel re-alignment, changing its bed several hundred feet to the north. Where once it formed an oxbow bend, it cut-off the neck creating an island seen today. Reviewing older topo maps, this appeared to have happened around 1900-1907. Even though this was a major stream bed re-alignment, all in all, the channel has been pretty stable in this area, considering the alluvial nature of the Holocene floodplain deposits.



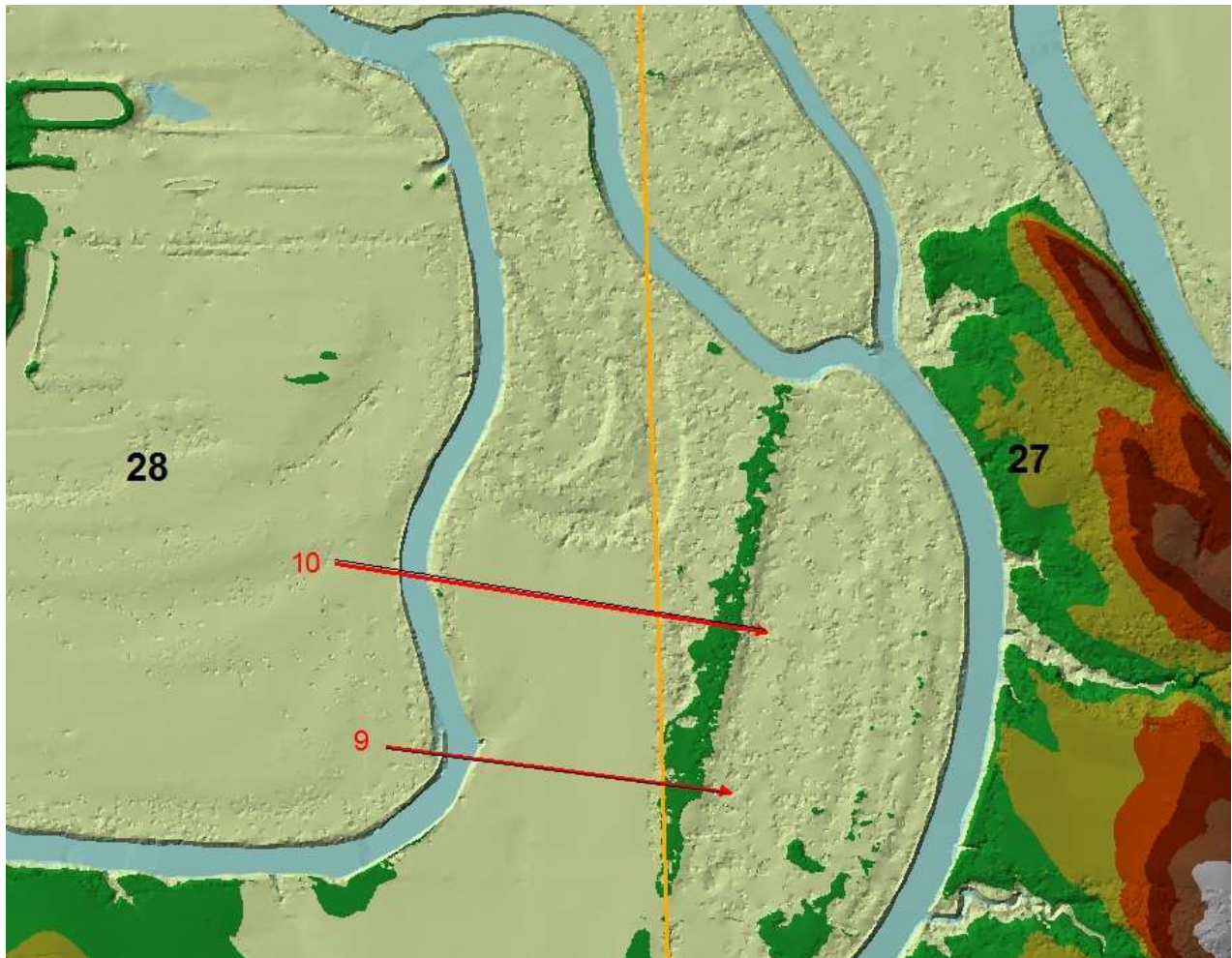
Pre 1900 map that shows the old oxbow prior to the cut off.



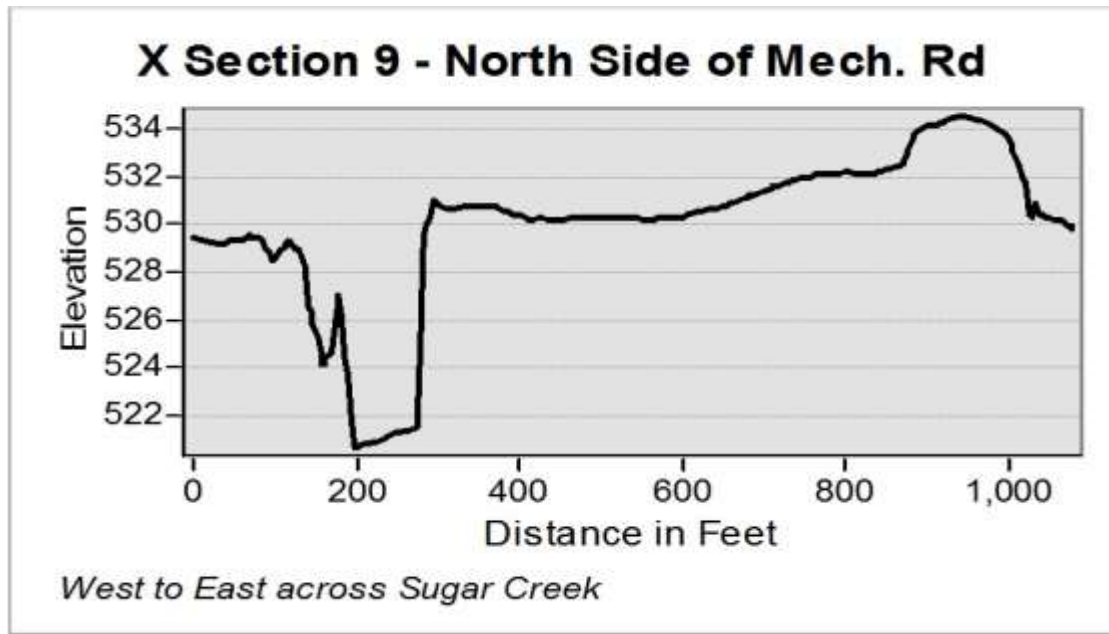
Topographic image post 1907. Note the oxbow cut-off and island creation. The cut off of the oxbow bend likely happened during a high water event between 1900 and 1907, based on maps. Though the river cut a more direct route, the oxbow bend remains, though now is part of the South Fork River. Also note that the shore line of the Clear Lake in its original form, prior to sand and gravel mining. Today the Clear Lake waterbody has increased in size at least 5 fold, as floating dredges were used to remove the aggregate. Where travelers along the trail camped and rested at the foot of the old lake, is now a large waterbody.

The Elevated Feature

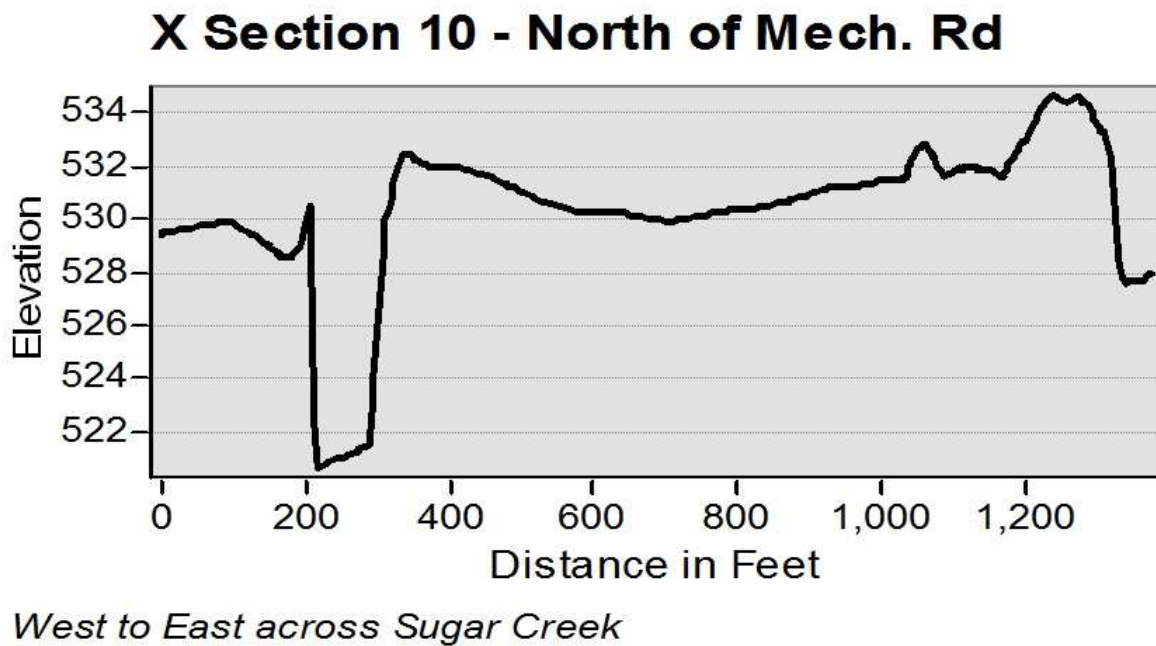
LIDAR imaging of the junction of the Sangamon, South Fork and Sugar Creek showed an elevated feature. What appeared either to be a levee, or elevated roadway, is clearly seen coursing NNE through the bottoms, in a direct alignment where the trail is suspected to cross the old stream bed. Cross cut elevation models suggested the elevation was appx. 2' to 5' higher than the adjacent ground surface of the bottoms area, creating an ideal pathway during high water events. It would take a gage of 26.3' at Riverton to cover the feature, a lot of water.



This image shows the elevated feature, shown in darker green, coursing NNE across the section line. The feature appeared to be engineered due to its straightness, so a natural curiosity was formed as to its creation. It is appx. 1400' in length, and an average of 150' in width at its zenith.



Cross cut section #9. Please note that the width is compressed at 200' increments, with the height at 2' increments, giving a distorted view. Basically, the ground to the west is 2' less, and the ground to the east is 5' less than top height. The elevated feature is appx. 150' wide.



Cross cut section #10. The west side of the feature shows a borrow pit adjacent to the feature where the gravel road that was built to access the trailers/cabins needed some soil to grade the surface in the lowland. The "bump" is actually the gravel road bed, just east of the Section Line of 27-28.

[illegible]

10.

Conclusion

The testing results of the soil samples reinforce that the elevated feature, though as engineered as it may appear, is a natural occurrence in the bottoms. It was likely formed by stream terrace deposits, as the South Fork meandered eastward to its present bed, over a long period of time. With the extra 2' of height, it was likely utilized by man and beast to keep out of the wetness of a river bottom at times of high water, becoming an important element of the trail at the crossing location. Coupled with a fresh water supply on the northern bank at Clear Lake, this area was likely a welcome sight for weary travelers along the trail.



At the northern terminus of the feature, looking NNE, where it once crossed the Sangamon River onto the oxbow. (from file images 2011)

With ongoing studies, it is hoped more will be learned how the trail possibly influenced animal and human movement across the landscape in the Prairie State. Many thanks to Dr. Mike Wiant, Tracy Garrison, David Brady and Jerry Harlow for their continued support of this project. Also, much thanks to the Sangamon County Highway Dept. Engineer, Brian Davis, and the Clear Lake Township Hy Comm., Alex Lyons, for allowing us to access the Sangamon crossing location.

End.