



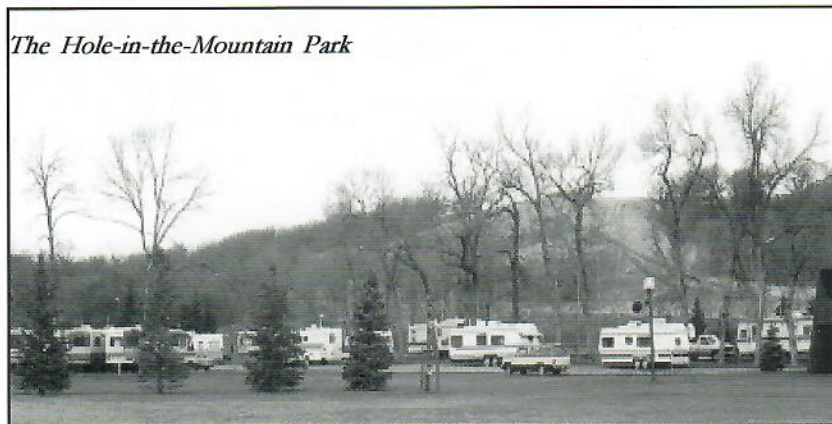
The Railroad Park, featuring the gazebo

THE RAILROAD PARK

The events of the early days of Lake Benton were often related to the railroad, trains, the depot and the Railroad Park. The city had a municipal band which performed at the beautiful gazebo band stand, which was the main feature of this park. The picture shows the original band stand with the Osbeck girls. Through the years, the band stand was allowed to deteriorate, and by the early 1950's there was only a raised platform with a railing all around it. This was used for the high school band concerts, which were performed here until at least the early 1950's. When was the band stand torn down? And why? It sure would be a beautiful addition to our present downtown to have this beautiful gazebo from the past reconstructed. Then we would need a summer band, popcorn stand, fancy street lamps, flower pots full of summer flowers, and on and on and on.

HOLE-IN-THE-MOUNTAIN PARK

Driving east along Highway 14 on top of Buffalo Ridge to Lake Benton, MN, you would never dream that the last hill would deliver you into a beautiful valley. It's much like the feeling you get riding a roller coaster. And, if you look either way as you descend that steep hill, you would see the Hole-In-the-Mountain Park. This park was named for the old Indian name used for the area "Hoski (hilly) He (mountain) ohdoka (hole), a Sioux phrase which has also been shortened to



The Hole-in-the-Mountain Park



Ed Van De Vere, first park manager, with the new sign for the park

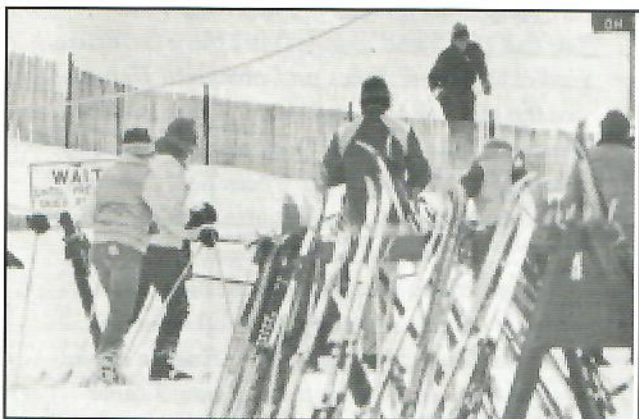
Hehdoka. The Hole-in-the-Mountain or Mountain Pass is an opening in the Coteau des Prairies, a glacial formation of very large hills and a very small inner valley through which Flandreau Creek passes. In February of 1967, a group of people met in Ivanhoe to try and fill the growing need for recreational facilities for area residents and the touring public. The County Board of Commissioners, at that time, appointed a liaison committee composed of John Holmes, Tyler; Vernon Enke, Lake Benton; Charles Barber and Mel Neihaus, Ivanhoe; Rev. Harold Biederman, Hendricks; and Arnold Claassen, County Agent from Ivanhoe. Russell Zimmer of Lake Benton, Don

Bartz of Ivanhoe and Duane Johnson of Tyler joined this committee at a later date. The park proposal was approved June 4, 1968 with the purchase of 196 acres of land from George Anderson and 22 acres from Floyd and Clifton Peterson. The total cost was \$21,853.00. The Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the amount of \$11,145.00, and the State Department of Conservation in the amount of \$5,463.25, reimbursed Lincoln County. Actual cost to the county for the initial purchase of the park was \$5,244.75. The log cabin George Anderson grew up in is still there for visitors to view. Boundaries of the park were marked and a caretaker hired. Pioneer grave sites in the park of William and Charles Taylor were marked in May, 1971. William Taylor (first white man to settle in the area, 1862) died in the 1870-1871 blizzard. Charles Taylor, a Civil War veteran, died in the blizzard of 1872-1873 and Isabel Taylor Gilronan, who died in August of 1879, are also buried there. The latter is a grandmother of the late James Gilronan of Lake Benton. His dad placed a cement slab over the graves in 1912 to mark them. Originator of the ski slopes was Carl Westli of Pipestone. The first tows were installed about 1924 or 1925 in the area south of Lake Benton. In

1952, the tow was built around a power plant of a 1939, completely overhauled, V-8 engine. The tow also used large steel drive pulleys. In about 1976, Carl Westli offered the service for skiers and tobogganers west of Lake Benton in the Hole-in-the-Mountain Park as a "hobby" rather than as a business enterprise. There was a tin box at the tow for contributions for which Westli hoped to collect enough to pay for his travel expenses and that's all. The tow operated only on Sundays. Ed VanDeVere was hired as the first park manager. Other employees have been Ervin Janssen and Leonard Koster and



May 13, 1971, pioneer grave sites marked—Ed Van De Vere, Hole-in-the-Mountain County Park Supervisor, is shown with the sign marking the pioneer grave sites.



The ski tow at the Hole-in-the-Mountain Park

numerous part-time employees. Presently the Hole-in-the-Mountain Park has 26 campsites with electricity and water and 30 electrical sites located in the horse campground. The park is approximately 800 acres of woodland and prairie land. Throughout the park you will find historical sites along the five miles of hiking/horse trails. The park also offers two picnic shelters and the chalet which includes shower facilities. The chalet can be rented for various family functions. Hole-In-The-Mountain offers downhill skiing during the winter months. The slopes are 1,100 feet long with a vertical drop of



The Hole-In-The-Mountain flower bed: Gladys Trautman and Muriel Grooters have maintained a beautiful flower garden at the entrance to the Hole-in-the-Mountain Park.

134 feet. The hill is served by a multi-lift handle tow. The park offers ski rentals and owns a snow machine. Daryl Schlapkohl is the present park manager, first hired in 1979-1999 and from 2001-present.

NORWEGIAN CREEK COUNTY PARK

Norwegian Creek is located 1 mile north, and 1 mile east of the city of Lake Benton. The park is 128 acres located on the western side of Lake Benton lake. Norwegian Creek has 30 campsites with electricity and water. Facilities include 2 picnic shelters, a bathhouse with showers, a fish-cleaning shed, and RV dump station. Norwegian Creek offers a hiking trail, a swimming beach, and 2 boat launches.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

A 775-acre prairie preserve 1.5 miles south of the city of Lake Benton in Lincoln County is owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy. The first tract of the preserve was acquired in 1978. Several tracts adjacent to the preserve were purchased by the Nature Conservancy and transferred to the DNR as Wildlife Management Areas. Historically, most of this land had been used to pasture sheep and cattle on the steep slopes and parts of the floodplain. The upland flats were cultivated. When acquired by the Nature Conservancy, most areas had been altered to some extent from their pre-settlement condition; the vegetation had shifted from taller prairie grasses, such as big and little bluestem and Indian grass, to drier species characteristic of prairies farther west such as needlegrasses, wheatgrasses and grama grasses. The preserve is managed by prescribed burning and the native prairie vegetation on the steeper slopes has recovered well in recent years. Areas of old fields are being replanted to native species. The preserve is good habitat for rare prairie-dependent insects including 25 species of butterflies such as; Dakota Skipper, Ottoe Skipper, Uncas Skipper, and Pawnee Skipper. The Dakota Skipper was first discovered near Volga, SD, and survives on only a few scattered virgin prairie habitats in the Dakotas, Iowa and Minnesota. There are over 60 species of grasses, sedges, and rushes; 10 species of trees and shrubs; and 200 species of wildflowers found here.



In 1913 there were tennis courts in Lake Benton, located where the school playground is now. The homes across the street are those of A.E. Soderlind and Ernest Osbeck, currently owned by Willie Oltmans and Jack Burk.