

THE KENTUCKY RIVER NAVIGATION

The Kentucky River Navigation is one of the oldest still operating in America. Locks and Dams 1 through 5 go back to 1836-1842, constructed by the state under their Chief Engineer Sylvester Welch, who was also the engineer for the Allegheny Portage Railroad in Pennsylvania.

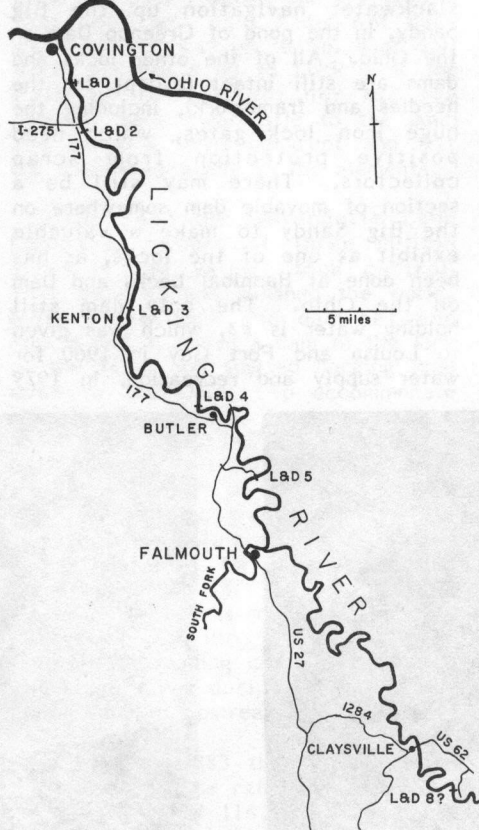
The first locks, 1 through 5, were of stone with 38x145' chambers. Locks and dams 6 and 7 were begun at the same time but money ran out so they were not finished until the Corps of Engineers took over the navigation in 1880, completing locks and dams 6-14 to Beattyville, 255 miles from the Ohio, by 1917. All of these locks have 52x146 to 148' chambers; locks 1-8 are of stone, the rest concrete.

Of particular historic interest (but no longer visible except at very low water) is the bear trap lock at Beattyville, the first ever constructed by the Corps. Built in 1886, it had two 60' wide bear trap gates which could be dropped suddenly to shoot log rafts and flatboats down the river to the navigable section. Unfortunately, too many crew members panicked and deserted their craft when about to shoot the gates, so the bear trap gates were soon abandoned. A regular lock was begun but it, too, was abandoned while still unfinished.

Today the original coal, oil and passenger traffic on the Kentucky has dwindled to one towboat with three barges carrying sand through locks 1-4 to Frankfort, taking about 1-1/2 hours to pass through each lock. In 1981 the Corps decided to suspend operation of Locks 5-14. However, the spectacular palisades and scenery along the river have made this part of the navigation extremely popular with pleasure boats during the summer, so beginning in 1985 the upper ten locks have been operated on summer weekends by the state. An evaluation after three years of state operation will decide the life or death of the Kentucky River Navigation. Extensive use of the waterway, especially by out-of-state boaters, would do more than anything else to influence the decision favorably. It is impossible to make a complete round trip on a weekend, but the most spectacular scenery - the palisades of the Kentucky - is found between Locks 6 and 8, a feasible objective for a weekend excursion. Whatever happens, it is vital to prevent actions which will preclude reopening of any of the locks. The lockhouses, too, need continued

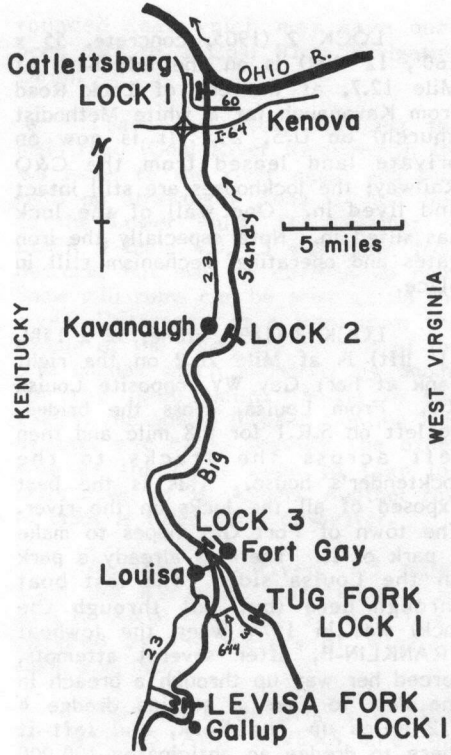
who recommended construction of 21 locks and dams to extend slackwater navigation up to West Liberty, 231 miles from the Ohio. Kentucky placed the first 5 (up to Falmouth) under contract in 1837, and Locks and dams 7 and 8 in 1839. The locks had 31x150' chambers of stone boated up from Portsmouth, Ohio. Unfortunately, financial difficulties forced the abandonment of the project in 1842, after the first five locks and dams were almost complete.

Some of the dam remains may have been removed by government snag clearing in 1888-1892, but there should



Locks and Dams on the Licking River

still be remains of the locks. LOCK 1 was at river mile 3 (3 miles above the mouth) on the right bank at Three Mile Ripple, 0.1 mile below the Louisville & Nashville RR bridge. LOCK 2 was at Six Mile Ripple (mile 6), 0.6 miles above the I-275 bridge; LOCK 3 at Dutchman's Ripple (mile 22-3/4), 0.4 miles downstream of Kenton; LOCK 4 at Willow Ripple (mile 34-1/4), 1.2 miles above Sandy Branch; and LOCK 5 at Hendricks Ripple (mile 44), 2.9 miles below Kincaid Creek. A site which may be that of LOCK 8 has been found by Mr. H.W. Batte, 5 miles upstream from the U.S. 62 crossing near Kentontown. The river should be searched at low water for the other sites. (Historical information supplied by Dr. Leland Johnson and David F. Ross.)



Locks and Dams on the Big Sandy

To reach LOCK 1 on LEVISA FORK (1909, concrete, 55 x 160', 11' lift, left bank, Mile 35.1) go back 1.3 mile on Rt.3, left on Rt.644, 2.8 miles then left onto U.S.23, and 5.7 miles then left onto an unmarked dirt road (#2038) for 2.4 miles. The lock is at the bottom of a steep bluff just after a hairpin curve; some of the gate mechanism is still exposed. There were some lock buildings 700 feet back down the road; others were across the river in Chapman. At least one of the lockhouses at Chapman was sold and moved 1/2 mile toward Gallup. This may mean that a number of former lockhouses around the country are still intact, but not where we would expect them.

For more information see THE BIG SANDY by Carol Crowe-Carraco (University Press of KY) and MEN MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS. For more on pushboats see also the S&D REFLECTOR for March 1966 and March 1975. Many thanks to Jerry Sutphin, the Huntington District, and the late Bob Kennedy of the WATERWAYS JOURNAL for help with this section.

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The Licking River was surveyed in 1837 by the Corps of Engineers,