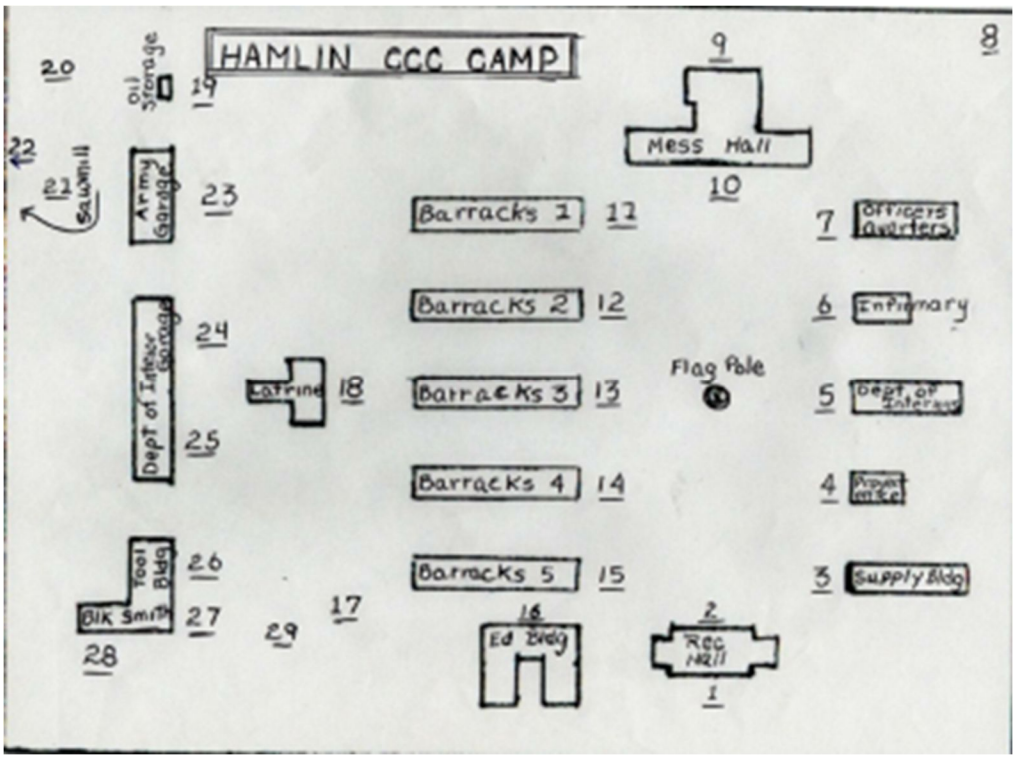
Give Yourself A Tour Around The Hamlin CCC/POW Camp

[Ed Evans, 6/14 - long version]

NORTH is to the left



Before you begin, remember that this camp was used first by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) young men and then by German prisoners of war. The CCC boys lived here while they worked for one dollar a day building Hamlin Beach State Park from 1935 to 1941. German POWs lived here from 1944 to 1946 while they worked on area farms and in area canning factories for 85 cents a day. This field trip will cover both the CCC and the POW camp in the same tour.

Stop at each of the numbered 4x4 posts shown on the above map. If you can, match up the buildings on the above map from time to time with the buildings shown in the aerial photo on page one of the handout available at the kiosk at the edge of the small CCC/POW camp parking lot. The map was copied to resemble the aerial photo, and the map will provide names for the buildings you see in the photo.

More BEFORE YOU BEGIN

As you walk around the camp site, you will see many different colors of flags and a variety of posts marking different parts of the camp. Please do not disturb them.

The flags are marking obstructions that our mowers need to avoid or possible locations of people and photographers in some photos currently being researched.

The white metal posts with red stripes at the top are marking the location of the barbed wire fence that surrounded the POW camp. The US Army required the first strand of wire to be buried in the ground and that strand of wire can be found wherever you see one of these posts.

The white metal posts with yellow stripes at the top are marking the location of light pole guy wire anchors that were part of the POW camp. The actual guy wire anchor can be seen near the post.

The white metal posts with black stripes at the top are marking the locations of the three 8x8 wooden posts that made up the main gate of the prison camp. The original cement that held the posts in position can be seen around the bottoms of the metal posts.

The yellow metal posts with the red stripes at the top mark parts of the sewer system that served both the CCC and the POW camp. Two of the posts mark sewer line "clean outs" that are now covered with wooden lids and one post marks the location of a 20x20x10 foot deep septic tank at the end of the sewer line. (Rainwater still moves through the system.)

There are some unpainted metal posts with a two-foot-long splotch of yellow paint in the middle that also have a yellow topped wooden stick lashed to it. They mark the edges of the five streets that run east and west across the camp. They will be found along the edges of the streets farthest away from the buildings they pass - and they will be located at the centerlines of the buildings along the street. Some of these posts will also be used to mark the perimeter and corners of some of the buildings at the north end of the camp. The corner markers may still have colored plastic cups fastened to the tops.

The short white plastic posts usually mark the locations of interesting artifacts that have been purposely left in place.

When you stop at each post, make sure that you are standing Facing the side of the 4x4 post with the Raised Number on it as you read the description of that part of the camp.

NOTE: Changes are always being made to the site. This tour guide cannot keep up. You will have to allow for these changes until a new edition of the self-tour is written (e.g., Post #1 has already been moved).

GO TO 4X4 POST # 1 AND BEGIN THE TOUR

Post #1: As you can see from the photo in the kiosk to your left and the location of Post #1 on the Tour Map, the building that once stood in front of you was the Recreation Hall. It was 30 feet x 48 feet with a 20x16 foot wing at each end. The rope you see outlines the entire perimeter of the building. The left end wing housed the camp store, and the right end wing had a raised stage used in weekly shows put on by the CCC boys. The middle section had ping pong tables and a pool table purchased by money raised by the CCC boys.

Post #2: You are standing at the front double doors of the Recreation Hall. When the German POWs first came to the camp, this building was not part of the POW camp. [Notice the white post behind you marking the location of the original barbed wire fence.] After a peaceful protest by some of the prisoners who wanted more recreation options, the barbed wire fence was adjusted to include this building. There were no doors in the back of this building but there was a door at each end. This made it easy to make this building part of the POW camp as an afterthought. Make sure you notice the stone walkway at the end of the building to your left. The CCC boys put it there in the 1930s and it has survived just as you see it, for more than 70 Hamlin winters!

Post #3: You are standing in front of the CCC Supply Building. It was 20 feet wide and 80 feet long - two entrances way down on the right side and a set of double doors and a loading dock in the middle of the left side. The cement square on the ground to your left is the original front door stoop in its original location! But don't move yet. All kinds of history surrounds you!

The large, rounded rocks to your right and a little bit behind you are just where they were placed in the 1930s by the CCC boys. The CCC used rounded rocks to mark corners of buildings, intersections of walkways and the edges of streets. The people who tore down the camp in the late 1940s just walked around the big rocks and left them where they were!

Notice the snarl of barbed wire at the base of the tree to your right. When the POW camp was dismantled, over 10 miles of barbed wire had to be disposed of. Not all of the wire was removed from the site. Several coils, like this one, were simply left for mother nature to bury. Most of this coil remains buried.

Now turn around and face the opposite direction. The pile of rectangular pieces of Medina sandstone in front of you is a State Park drinking fountain "kit" that never got cemented together. It was one of many fountains cut from stone by the CCC boys and it remained in a nearby barn when the CCC camp closed. When the camp was reopened as a POW camp, a simple water line was run to this Supply Building and the Army guards who had to take up residence in the building wanted a sink of some kind under their one and only basic faucet. So, they carried the fountain pieces to the Supply Building and assembled them over a hole in the floor that became a drain. [The French drain it emptied into is still in place.] When the building

was hauled out of the camp in the late 1940s, the fountain was tossed out the front door. It landed just as you see it.

To the left of the scattered pieces of drinking fountain is a small rectangular "circle" of cement bricks. A 22-foot-tall guard tower stood at this corner of the barbed wire fence line and bricks were used to decorate the tower's four legs and the anchors that held them to the ground.

The white metal post with the red stripes on top ahead of you and a little to the left marks the exact location of the southwest corner of the POW camp's barbed wire fence line. In fact, the stump of the original 4x4 wooden corner post is still visible at the bottom of the shallow hole at the base of the metal post. A buried strand of barbed wire leads to the 4x4 stump from the north and another strand of buried wire leads to the stump from the east!

Post #4: The 20-foot by 32-foot CCC Project Office once stood over the dent in the ground ahead of you. Its function was to serve as an engineer's office like the house trailers set up on modern construction sites. When a simple water line was run to it when the POW camp took it over, it became the Commandant's Quarters. Over your right shoulder and behind you is a small patio-like pad of flat pieces of cement. This served as pavement just outside a small gate in the barbed wire fence where the guards could enter the prison compound in case of an emergency. [e.g. It was used during the "peaceful protest" of POWs mentioned at Post #2 and mentioned by a former POW we still communicate with in Germany.]

Post #5: The 20x72-foot building that used to sit on this site was sometimes referred to as the Forestry Headquarters. Representatives from the US Department of the Interior lived in the building during the CCC era. Their job was to account for all the government money that was sent to build Hamlin Beach State Park. The building had sinks, showers and toilets. When the camp became a POW camp, guards were quartered here. The original cement door stoop was smashed when the building was hauled away and the pieces can be seen a little ahead of the replacement stoop we have put in place. The two cement squares that served as the stoop at the back door 72 feet away are still in place. A small pile of coal lies to the left of them where a small coal bin used to sit.

[Note: Keep checking the bases of the white metal posts with the red stripes at the top along this street. Buried barbed wire has been forced to the surface by frost action all along here and some of the metal posts were purposely positioned where the wire was visible.]

Post #6: This was the site of the 20x36 foot Infirmary that served the CCC and the POW camp. It had running water (sinks, toilets and showers) and the remains of some of the plumbing can still be found along the left-hand edge of the dent in the ground before you. The main water shutoff for this end of camp was part of this building's plumbing. The flats stones that stood outside the back door can be seen 36 feet in front of you. The cement that used to be the front door stoop is missing and has been replaced by us with a piece of Medina sandstone.

Almost all of the buildings in the camp were built on wooden decks supported by wooden pilings placed a few feet apart in all directions. Every one of these pilings is gone except for one. And that lone piling can be seen in the middle of the dent that developed under this building!

Before moving to the next numbered post, look over your right shoulder and behind you. On the ground between two short white plastic posts, you should be able to see a long piece of the original barbed wire that frost action has brought to the surface.

Post #7: The US Army officers who ran the CCC camp (made sure it was always safe, clean, healthy, and well supplied) lived in this 20x64-foot building. It had two sinks, two toilets, and two shower stalls. The telephone line came directly to this building and the front door cement stoop was the largest and fanciest in the camp. And it is still right where they left it!

At times over 50 armed guards were required to be on the premises when the POW camp was in operation and about 10 of them lived here.

Post #8: Dead ahead of you are three white posts with black stripes. Each post is in a cement form that once held the main gate of the POW camp in place. The gate opening was 12 feet six inches wide and was fitted with two hinged six foot wide "doors" that met in the middle. An iron pipe was dropped into a hole where the middle white metal post stands to hold the gate closed.

The southern section of the barbed wire enclosure ended a few inches past the farthest white metal post (with the black stripes) and then took a 90 degree turn to the left (north). Just around the corner of the fence stood another 22-foot-high guard tower - between the barbed wire fence and the neighbor's property line. [The towers were staggered around the corners in such a way that one tower couldn't shoot into another tower.]

Post #9: You are standing at the back door of the Mess Hall which is completely traced out with rope. You should be standing on a cement loading dock but that is in a nearby pile waiting to be put back together again, someday. Ahead of you would have been the kitchen outfitted with two huge cast-iron coal-fired ranges, each with ten circular movable lids on top that the cooks lifted from time to time to check the fire. At the point where this wing of the Mess Hall joins the "sit down and eat" part to the right, you can still see some of the coal pile that fed the stoves.

Dish washing was done along the left side of this wing of the Mess Hall and the wastewater exited through pipes to a cement trough that was part of what looks like a sidewalk off to your left. After grease and solids were removed from that wastewater, what was left flowed into a septic tank. The 'sinkhole' at the left end of what you thought was a sidewalk is what is left of that septic tank.

Post #10: Now you are standing in front of the Mess Hall. It was 20 feet x 116 feet with a wing off the back side that roughly measured 36x36. The front door was in the center of the building, to your left, where a post to hold up the rope has been driven.

The Mess Hall was built to feed 250 young men in one sitting with plenty of elbow room between them. When the POWs occupied the camp, there were sometimes over 450 mouths to feed and when that happened meals were probably served in shifts.

The Army saw to it that the floor of the Mess Hall was hosed down and scrubbed regularly. The mop water drained through holes in the floor and flowed through an open ditch to the north and then west to a pipe near the latrine. That flow of water probably helped deepen the dent in the ground where the building stood. [The open ditch is still there and continues to function as a ditch.]

Post #11: You are standing in front of Barracks #1, the sleeping quarters for 40 CCC enlistees. The large Medina sandstone slabs on the ground a little ahead of you, to your right, are taking the place of the cement square that used to sit inside the entryway in front of the door into the barracks. We call that cement square the door stoop.

All five barracks were 20 feet wide and 112 feet long and they all had entryways shielding both the front and the back doors from the wind. The cement stoop that was inside the back entryway of this barracks is still in place 112 feet in front of you, but it has been broken into pieces by tree roots.

Other facts about the barracks will be told to you at each of the other barrack's sites on this tour.

Post #12: This is where Barracks #2 stood. Here too, the front door stoop has been replaced by sandstone slabs but there are three cement squares at the rear of this building where there should have been only one cement door stoop. Somehow, the men in this barracks acquired two extra door stoops and all three are all still in good shape! You might be able to see them from here.

The young men in this barracks also built a large, fancy patio outside their entryway and the flat patio stones still haven't heaved from frost action! You probably saw the patio to your right even before you stepped up to this numbered post.

According to the weekly newspapers published in this CCC camp, the young men in this barracks, Barracks #2, most often won the weekly contest for honor points. Many of the points won were given for improvements to their barracks and the fancy patio and extra door stoops were probably part of that effort. The guys in the winning barracks each week got to go into Rochester to a ball game and have ice cream on the way home. Overall, Barracks #2 won that prize more often than the other barracks did.

Post #13: As you read the number on the post in front of you, you are standing on the North-South center line of the camp. The flagpole is behind you and Barracks #3 is in front of you.

[Our tiny flagpole is standing in the exact spot the original 60-foot-tall flagpole once stood. Seventy years of accumulated dirt has been scraped from the original cement flagpole base and the stump of the original flagpole still inside has been forever protected with a lid. Rumor has it that a time capsule is still buried in front of the flagpole but where is the front? And how far in front and how deep?]

In recent years, a bulldozer tore up the area behind you and everything to your left, all the way to the gravel road. The long pile of dirt between this barracks and the one to your right was dumped there in the 1950s to begin turning this entire site into a tree nursery. Fortunately, the project was abandoned after a few weeks' work, but the pile of dirt continues to spoil the view.

In 1935, 36, and 37, seventy five percent of Barracks #3 was used for classroom space as part of the CCC education program. In 1938, an Education Building went up on the west side of the camp and Barracks #3 went back to housing 40 CCC boys with 20 beds down the left side and 20 more down the right side. When the camp was converted to a POW camp, the single beds in all the barracks were replaced with double bunks so that 80 prisoners could be housed in each of the barracks.

Heinrich Willert, one of the former German prisoners we are still in contact with, tells us that Barracks #3 was the sought after barracks. Sixty feet from the back door is the latrine and in the middle of the night, a guy in Barracks #3 had the shortest walk to the bathroom of anyone else in the camp!

The square, cement back door stoop of Barracks #3 has been slid a little to the right, but it is still back there. Over your right shoulder, and behind you a little, is a section of the original CCC camp street just the way it used to look. Until we uncovered it last fall, it was protected for 70 years by a fallen tree that had taken root again. Notice the roll of grapefruit sized rounded rocks along the edge and the homemade gravel fill. The gravel was made in the CCC camp rock crusher.

Post #14: This is Barracks #4 and it is just like the other ones - 112 feet long and heated by three potbellied coal-burning stoves. When the German POWs got here and 80 people were sleeping in each barracks instead of the CCC 40 people per barracks, one of the stoves had to be removed from each barracks. With the extra body heat, three stoves just about drove everybody out!

The front door stoop here has been replaced with Medina sandstone, just like the other barracks, but the back door cement stoop is in place but broken into three pieces.

Post #15: You are standing in front of Barracks #5, and it was about the same as the other four. It had plywood added to the interior walls in the fall of 1939 just like the other barracks. The only unique thing about this barracks is that we have a diary kept by a CCC guy who lived here for a full year. Jimmy Giancaterin was his name and he lived on Emerson Street in Rochester when he signed up for the CCC. His diary has an entry for EVERY day he was here and from it we have learned a lot about what it was like to live in a barracks. He also left us 130 letters that were sent to him while he was here. The addresses on the envelopes all read "Barracks #5, Hamlin New York CCC camp."

Post #16: You are standing between the two main doors of the Education Building which were placed in the side of a building that was simply a "short" barracks, 80 feet long. The sandstone slabs to your left show where the left front door stoop was and the patio stone door stoop to your right marks the right front door and that stoop is all original.

A few months after the Education Building was opened for business, two wings, 20 feet by 25 feet each, were added to the back of the building. The education program at this CCC camp was so popular, the officials had trouble providing enough classrooms for it!

When the CCC camp was converted to a POW camp, this building became quarters for some of the 50 plus guards required to oversee the operation of the POW camp. The POW barbed wire fence is right behind you - halfway between the Education Building and Barracks #5.

Post #17: The wooden board that looks like a post with a rotted top coming out of the ground in front of you is actually a piece of 3x5 tongue and groove lumber that was used to build the roofs of the Duffy Mott warehouses in downtown Hamlin. The local farmers and the canning factory owners in the area had to pay for the conversion of the CCC camp into a POW camp. To cut corners on the expenses, the farmers and the factory owners made Army approved substitutions for certain building materials wherever they could. The Army required 2x6 fence posts, but the Army said the tongue and groove boards would work just as well.

There were over 330 of these tongue and groove "fence posts" driven into the ground to complete the barbed wire fence and every one of them was pulled out at the end of the war EXCEPT THIS ONE. It must have broken off and they said, "to heck with it."

What a find!!! The government would not allow photos to be taken of the POW camp and they didn't even keep any photos of the camp on file in the National Archives. This rotting tongue and groove post became the Rosetta Stone for figuring out just where the Hamlin POW camp fence line actually was.

Barbed wire fence staple holes appear in the side of the post facing you. That means there most probably is a strand of barbed wire buried in the ground, running past this post. We dug a tiny

ditch with a spoon and found that wire. A three-foot length of corroded and caked wire is still in the bottom of that ditch - covered and protected by the slab of sandstone in front of you.

Once we found this clue, we were able to follow the wire with a metal detector around the entire camp!

Note: Post #18 is behind you on the N/S centerline of the camp.

Post #18: You are standing outside the 20x40 latrine with the 13x24 foot wing off the back. The left half of the cement floor in front of you was the washroom. It had six large farmhouse sized sinks that were replaced in 1938 with 20 smaller sinks, each with its own hot and cold water faucet. To the right was the shower room. It had 12 shower heads, and the two drains can still be seen in the floor. A coal fired boiler kept 500 gallons of water piping hot 24/7. A trough type urinal lined the wall to your right.

The cement trench ahead of you was "an 16 holer." A line of eight toilet seats sat over the left side of the trench and eight more sat over the right side of the trench. A partition separated the two rows of toilet seats. Chemicals were dumped into the system every day.

Shortly after the POWs moved into the camp, the latrine burned down. A tent was probably quickly pitched over the toilet seat part and plans were drawn up to rebuild the wash and shower room part. In addition, plans were drawn up to build a second shower and washroom on the gravel floor of the 13-bay garage behind the latrine. You will visit that new shower room when you stop at Post #25.

Post #19: The small cement floor in front of you was under an eight foot by 16 foot US Army Oil Storage Building. It was used to service the trucks that kept the camp functioning and healthy. [The Department of the Interior had their own oil storage building for the CCC trucks that were used to build the State Park. Their oil building was at the other end of the road that was to your right.]

Behind you on the ground you will see a "dam" made of flat stones standing in the ground on edge. This was to slow the flow of oil that might spill from the drums in the building. Not bad ecology for the 1930s!

When the camp was converted to a POW camp, this little building was removed.

Post #20: Ahead of you a little to the right is the NE corner of the POW compound. A flat piece of sandstone on the ground covers a perfect square of barbed wire that originally went around the 4x4 corner post. The post has rotted away but the wire is in pretty good shape.

In front of you is the beginning of an excavation to uncover the paving associated with a small gate through the barbed wire fence. The big rocks were covered with gravel to make a surface

that wouldn't easily erode away. To the left, ahead of you, is a white post with yellow stripes on top indicating that a guy wire anchor for a POW camp light pole is there.

In the roadway that leads to Howden Pond, just north of the POW fence corner, is where another 22-foot-tall guard tower stood. Remember, the tower positions were staggered around corners so that one tower wouldn't ever end up shooting at another tower.

The guns in the towers were never used to foil a prison break but a battle fatigued guard did go berserk one night. He fired the machine gun in the tower ahead of you towards Lake Ontario and woke up the entire camp. Gottfried Schulze, another former POW we write to, wrote us an accurate description of the entire incident. A boy who lived in the farmhouse adjacent to the camp also told us his version of the story. As it turns out, the previously recorded story most people have heard was a bit over embellished!

Post #21: This post is stuck into a pile of coal that is left over from WWII. All the coal used to keep the POWs warm and fire up the boilers in the latrine was dumped here. It was carried from here through the gate in the barbed wire fence line near Post #20.

Post #22: You are standing in the middle of the CCC Sawmill. In front of you is the cement stand that held the axel, arbor, etc. for the four-foot blade that cut all the lumber for the roof beams and picnic tables in the State Park shelters. Lumber for some of the CCC camp buildings and tool handles was also cut here.

The sawmill was 36 feet wide and 72 feet long. A four-cylinder gasoline engine and belts powered the equipment. THE Sawmill remained just where it was built long after the POW camp was taken down and carried away.

Post #23: You are looking into the middle bay of a 5-bay garage, 24x60, used by the US Army to take care of the trucks it used to run the CCC camp. It had no cement foundation and when it was dismantled after the CCC camp became a POW camp, nothing was left to show it had ever been here - except the small dump we found behind it.

Post #24: You are standing near the east end of a very long 13-bay garage, 26x120, used by the Department of the Interior to house the trucks used by the CCC to build Hamlin Beach State Park. The perimeter of the garage is marked by metal posts with yellow topped wooden sticks lashed to them. The posts at the corners of the building may still have colored plastic cups on top of them.

All the bays had gravel floors except the middle two. They had a cement floor with a shared catch basin between them. (The drain is now covered by what looks like a doghouse without a door.)

The garage was taken down and hauled away shortly after the barbed wire fence for the POW camp went up. You couldn't have empty buildings inside the prison for POWs to hide in!

Post #25: You are standing near the west end of the 13-bay garage. When the latrine burned down in 1944, cement was poured over the gravel packed garage floor in front of you and a second washroom and shower room came into being. They even added a clothes washing area complete with double sinks and clothes ringers.

Post #26: The EL shaped building in front of you has three numbered posts around it. This was a very busy building! At Letchworth this building was actually two separate buildings. At Hamlin it was simply called the Tool House.

You are standing at the end of the building that housed most of the tools the young men used in their work each day. There was a wide door in the end of the building to your right and a wide door ahead of you to bring in the big tools.

Post #27: A set of double doors with glass in them were directly ahead of you throughout the 1930s. A sign that read "TOOL HOUSE" hung over the doorway. This was probably the main entrance to the Tool House.

Post #28: We used to think the wing of the building ahead of you was the Blacksmith Shop, but we recently found out that it wasn't. The Blacksmith Shop was actually about 30 feet to the left of the cement floor in front of you! Absolutely no sign of it is present today! Recently acquired photos back up this new revelation.

The wing of the building in front of you was the tool repair shop part of the Tool House. The stains from the oil that dripped from the lathes that turned out tool handles can still be seen on the cement. The white shed that sits on the cement is the gift of an Eagle Scout. We store our tools in it.

The entire Tool House was hauled away when the CCC camp became a POW camp. The Blacksmith shop probably went away at the same time.

Post #29: When the Education Building became housing for the POW camp guards, toilet facilities had to be provided for them. Here stood that facility! It was about 40 feet long but less than half of the floor remains. The rest of the floor was bulldozed way in the early1970s. A huge tree was all that saved what you see here. Forty feet of still buried plumbing, underground to the right, was missed by the bulldozer. You can see a shower drain in the floor.

And that is the end of the tour. Thank you for visiting the site. There is still a lot more to be discovered here and if you want to keep up on the progress, come back often, check out our Website, and join the Friends of Hamlin Beach State Park. You can pick up an application for the "Friends" at the Park Office.