

The Buried Forest

Kenosha

There's a buried forest just south of the city of Kenosha. Along the shore of Lake Michigan, in the area known as the Southport Dunes, shifting waves eroded the sand to reveal evidence of a deciduous forest that thrived there over 6,000 years ago. Roots and branches of trees, uncovered by the violent wave action, have been carbon-dated to be approximately 6,340 years old.

Four stumps embedded in a 12-inch layer of black humus overlying a stratum of clay were exposed in 1961. The tree remnants, according to experts from the University of Wisconsin, the Forest Products Laboratory, the Kenosha and Milwaukee Museums and the U.S. Geological Survey, are identifiable as

three red oaks and one elm. The diameters of the ancient trunks ranged from 12 to 15 inches. The wood is black and spongy. Phil Sander, a Kenosha conservationist and naturalist who has made several discoveries along the beach, says the trees probably grew during the last interglacial stage and were reburied during a temporary re-advance of the last ice sheet. The shifting sands are constantly re-covering the ancient stumps as they reveal other roots and branches, some identified as ash and oak.

The study of the buried trees is important for several reasons. The types of pollen still in the logs can tell us about the kind of vegetation abundant during the Pleistocene geological epoch, as well as the date deciduous trees began to establish themselves in Wisconsin.

Source: Phil Sander, Kenosha