

# DES MOINES RIVER WATER TRAIL

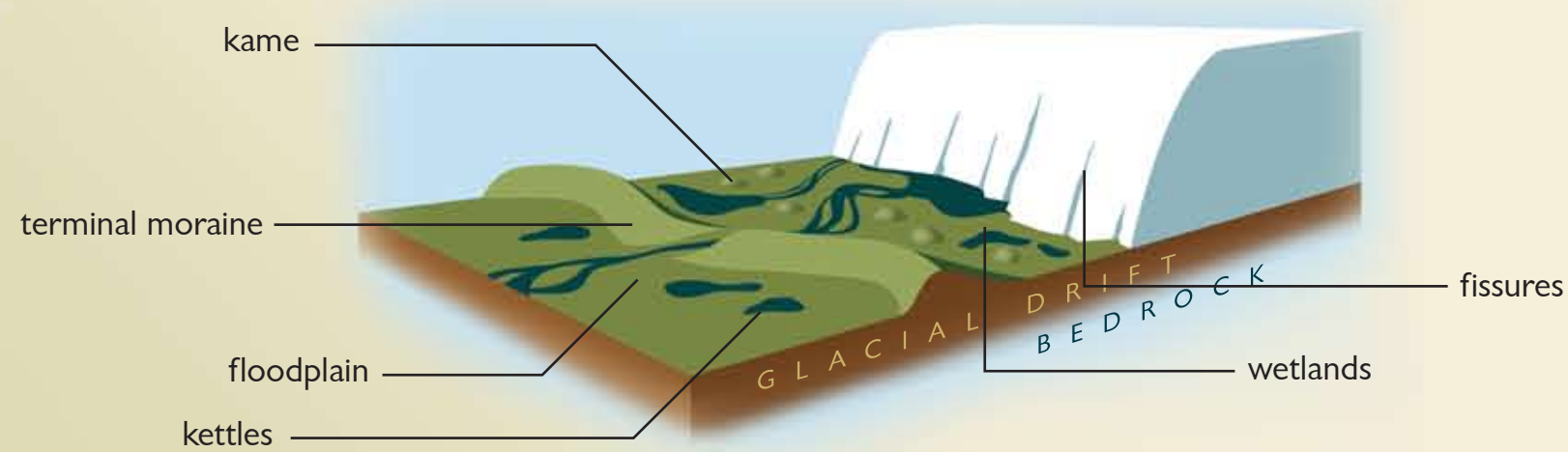


Rocks of granite, gneiss, and basalt—called “glacial erratics”—come from the Canadian Shield far to our north and brought south by the continental glaciers. About 12,000 years ago, the last of those glaciers began to melt. The mighty rivers that flowed from that melt-water include today’s Des Moines River, as well as our other inland Iowa rivers. Those waters were powerful, moving these large boulders and other rock downstream and cutting the steep valley down through the sandstones and shales exposed today.

Many species of fish and mussels and turtles like the soft-shell still are found in the water. Northern water snakes and great blue herons wait in the shallows for a meal of fish or frog.



Wild grape vines drip from tree branches overhanging the water. Elderberries and other shrubs offer fruit in the openings.



Using only its beak and feet, the Baltimore oriole weaves its nest of gathered plant materials, hangs it from a spindly branch 10-30 feet over the water, and then lays its eggs inside. Now, THAT is trust in engineering!



Baltimore oriole nest



Bald eagle



Turkey vulture

The area around Lehigh and south towards the Skillet Creek was the site of the most northerly coal producing area in Iowa. Extensive deposits of fine clay and shale made Lehigh one of the largest manufacturers of fine brick, drain tile, sewer pipe and well pipe. At one time five brick and tile plants were in operation and raw clay was shipped in addition to finished products.

The Skillet Creek area was home to a grove of sugar maples and was once called Sugar Grove. Old histories recount that Native Americans from Tama came up to collect sap near Lehigh until the coming of the railroad in 1875. The area was home to lumber and flour mills and up to 5 operating coal mines in 1894 until the coal played out and the town of Hardscrabble was abandoned in 1897.

