

An unusual barbwire fenced area – what purpose did it serve?

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A rectangular area 230 feet by 350 feet enclosed by a very unusual latticework barbed wire fence with four-inch angle iron fence posts spaced at 10-foot intervals – what does that bring to mind? This unique fence likely was a government project judged so by the extensive over-engineering. The four-inch angle iron posts were securely placed with a substantial amount of concrete in each hole. Not a one of them that remain can be moved or are in anyway loose in the ground. The small anchor posts that stand approximately 18 inches tall are located at ninety degrees on either side of the four-foot tall fence posts. These posts served to anchor a strand of barbwire from the companion fence post as well as the one ahead by 10 feet and the one behind by 10 feet.

This unusual fenced in area came to my attention when Ed Westcott shared with me some photographs he had made of the fence in 1999. He also told me that Joe Lenhard had taken him to the site. Ed loaned me his photographs and written description of the fenced in areas and suggested I might want to research the unusual area's original use. I jumped at the chance.

My first thought was to get Joe Lenhard to take me to the site. He is my neighbor and a fellow Rotarian, so I felt sure he would help. Of course he readily agreed. We set the date and I anxiously looked forward to the day when we could go see the unusual fenced in area.

When our appointed time arrived, Joe took me to Gum Hollow Road and headed in toward Country Club Estates. He took the first left after the bridge over Gum Hollow Branch and parked behind the apartment buildings there. We crossed back over Gum Hollow Branch just upstream from the apartments on foot on a metal footbridge. There is a wide path that is actually an old roadbed that we followed for several hundred yards walking up stream.

If you have never hiked anywhere with Joe, then you have no idea what I had let myself in for. Joe walks at least three miles every day. I don't know his exact age, he is obviously up in years, but you could never tell that by how he hikes. He has only one speed – flat out. He walks and talks at the same time. After the first few brisk strides, I knew I would have to keep up or he would just leave me behind. Thank goodness he did not ask many questions, but spent the time telling me about the area. All I had to do was grunt and say “uh-huh” and “Is that so?” That was a good thing as I was already winded and could not have gotten out a full sentence anyway.

We had to cross Gum Hollow Branch at least three times and each crossing brought the uneasy thought that if either of us fell in the stream we were in for a chilling experience – but we crossed successfully with only the very bottoms of my pants legs getting wet.

Within less than one-half mile from where we left the truck we saw the first signs of the fence. I was excited and got out my camera, but Joe said to wait as the more complete sections of the fence was up ahead a bit more. We crossed over where some trees had fallen on the fence and immediately saw the stream running through the middle of the fenced in area. Just to our left was an obvious place where concrete had been poured to create a walkway near the stream and the remains of concrete footings for a small footbridge. The evidence of all this concrete indicated some substantial use of the fenced in area. Its location with a stream running through the middle of the enclosure seems a deliberate choice. What was all this used for? Joe and I speculated as to the original purpose for the fence as we walked along and photographed its unusual arrangement of the barbwire.

Each fence post has three strands of barbwire crossing the top of the angle iron fence post reaching from three anchor posts on one side of the fence to three anchor posts on the other side of the fence. Attached to these three anchor strands are four strands running horizontally along the sides and equally spaced along the brace wires. Of these nine strands, one strand runs between anchor posts on either side of the fence posts at ground level and one strand runs from the top of one fence post to the other fence post along the top of the posts. Two strands are equally spaced along the brace wires on either side of the fence posts. Additionally, there are three more strands running from fence post to fence post equally spaced vertically on the fence posts from ground level to near the top of the post.

Surely this fence was designed for a very special purpose. What could it be? One thought that we have all had is that it might have been a “hog feedlot” where herds of hogs were kept and fattened to provide pork to the large

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number of people who lived in Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project days. However, we immediately developed a problem with this theory.

The northwest boundary fence for Y-12 runs right behind Country Club Estates and this fenced in area is located just northeast of the houses and right up against that Y-12 boundary fence. Additionally, the boundary patrol road is built up about five feet from the surrounding land area and the special barbwire fence goes right up to the chain link fence and one of the posts we photographed is mounted up on that raised earth for the boundary road. This indicates the barbwire fence was installed AFTER the boundary road and chain link fence was installed.

Bill Sergeant told me that the boundary roads were built and chain link fence was installed in late 1948, way too late for the Manhattan Project pork delivery project we speculated might have been the original reason for the fenced in areas. There were actually three of these fenced in areas along this boundary line but the other two locations have been altered more by the construction activities building Country Club Estates.

So, we are at a loss as to exactly what these three huge fenced in areas were built to do. If anyone has any ideas or knows anyone who could shed some light on these mysterious and quite sturdy fences, please let me know. Send e-mail to draysmith@comcast.net or phone 482-4224.



Joe Lenhard points to the concrete structures where the fence crosses Gum Hollow Branch

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Joe inspects the angle iron fence posts



Close up photo of the top of the fence posts showing the crisscross pattern

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Joe stands by the fence post that is near the elevated patrol road and chain link fence