



Wisconsin Ducks History

75 Seasons of Fun and Adventure

The post-World War II days saw a tourism boom across the Midwest, and nowhere was that more apparent than Wisconsin Dells, an area world-famous for its scenic natural beauty. Boat tours had thrived here since the turn of the century, and entrepreneurs looked for new opportunities to showcase this amazing wilderness.

At the same time, hundreds of amphibious ducks were being offered to the general public through army surplus. These plucky veterans of the invasion beaches were soon playing a variety of roles in civilian life — fire department and coast guard rescue vehicles, museum pieces for public and private collectors, even as personal watercraft.

In Wisconsin Dells, a new use for the Duck was about to be hatched. Milwaukee businessman Mel Flath had an idea. War veteran Bob Unger owned a duck. Helen Raab and Herman Breitenbach owned land along the Lower Dells of the Wisconsin River and Lake Delton. Together, they began a land-and-water sightseeing attraction in Wisconsin Dells — launching their maiden voyage in the summer of 1946. By the next season, the operation expanded to 37 ducks (through time and ownership changes, that fleet has grown to 92 vehicles).

While Unger bowed out, Flath continued to manage the Duck tours through 1952, then sold the entire business and Duck fleet to Dr. R.O. Ebert. The location of the duck dock changed (moving approximately half a mile north on Highway 12), but the tour didn't — Dr. Ebert continued to route his Ducks through acres of scenic wilderness in association with Breitenbach and Raab. Today, these trails through fern dells, hidden gorges and along the Lower Dells of the Wisconsin River are known the world over as the famous "duck trails" of Original Wisconsin Ducks®.

After the 1955 season, Dr. Ebert sold his Duck operation to an ownership group of local Wisconsin Dells boat tour operators who formed Wisconsin Ducks, Inc. The tour was officially named Original Wisconsin Ducks in 1956.

Today, the legacy continues, with hundreds of thousands of people riding the ducks every year. And while many changes, advancements and innovations have taken place over the years, our long-standing tradition of providing "fun and adventure on land and water" continues to be fulfilled every year, on every single tour.