



Ice Age Drift

Newsletter of the Dane County Chapter
Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation

WINTER 2009

University Ridge Segment

*Local segment characterized by natural beauty
and broader meaning to conservation*



*A view along the University Ridge Segment
Photo by Mark Szymanski*

By Mark Szymanski

Despite snow and low temperatures, the segment of the Ice Age Trail at the University Ridge Golf Course hosts many visitors in winter. Indeed, ski tracks on this winding path suggest ways this season could further the Trail's appeal. On a cold Sunday in December, it furnishes visitors with a great display of life, even absent golfers and college athletes. The chirps of sparrows and the squeaky creaking of swaying trees break the silence of the snowy landscape. Insects fly over faded animal tracks, and leaves on brush rustle in the wind. The surface of the snow in the dense oak forests is peppered with

*please see **University Ridge** on page 2*

Moving Beyond 50

You ain't seen nothing yet!

By Don Ferber

Well, actually you probably have seen a lot we have accomplished – but there's a lot more, and more bigger things, yet to come. With new offices in Cross Plains they hope to move into in January, and more staff, with hopefully another one next year, the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation has reached a new level of maturity. Statewide we have excellent trail building skills, honed by the growth of the Mobile Skills Crew and the dedicated volunteers and staff who take these skills with them wherever they go. Here in Dane County, we're incorporating a mix of trail building and maintenance activities with land stewardship and restoration efforts. We have some great Trail to hike that traverses many fine restored prairies and woodlands that offer hikers an experience of native landscapes and plant communities.

Did I say "Foundation"? After our annual conference this April, that may no longer be true.

*please see **Moving Beyond 50** on page 3*

DID A COMET KILL THE MAMMOTHS?

By Jean Lang

What really happened to North America's mammoths and other large mammals toward the end of the Ice Age? Many believe the Clovis people hunted them to extinction. But another theory, evolving since the 1980s, is that a comet exploding over eastern Canada caused the rapid demise of woolly mammoths, giant elk and bison, horses, and other megafauna.

For the past several years, a score of scientists have been seeking evidence of an "extraterrestrial event." They say it may explain why about 13,000 years ago that giant mammals, including mammoths, disappear from the fossil record, signs of the Clovis people abruptly disappear, North America experienced a 1,200-year long resurgence of frigid conditions.

Those who hold the view that ancient Clovis man pushed mam-

moths, horses and camels to the brink, ask, "Where's the crater?" They argue that Clovis man, known for his large fluted spear points, had a history of extinguishing species wherever he went.

Critics also note that geologist Allen West and nuclear physicist Richard Firestone, outspoken proponents of the comet theory, have outlined not only a smorgasbord of possible "impact events", but also a sometimes confusing array of devastating after-effects. Still, their refreshing speculations have caught the attention of many scientists who have joined the search for supporting – or discrediting – data (Their thoughts and those of anthropologist Ken Tankersley, and paleoceanographer Jim Kennett can be found in *The Cycle of Cosmic Catastrophes*, Richard Firestone, Allen West, and Simon Warwick-

*please see **Mammoths** on page 2*

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in this issue

Annual Meeting.....pg 4 Membership Form.....pg 3

University Ridge, continued from page 1

animal tracks and freshly fallen twigs.

A gentle organic pulse is palpable along this portion of the Ice Age Trail, a segment characterized by its natural beauty and broader meaning to conservation. Winding through the golf course and an adjacent training ground for UW's cross-country runners, this piece of the Trail serves as an excellent example of multiple-use land. It demonstrates the great outcomes that are possible when disparate groups cooperate to preserve Wisconsin's natural landscape.

This trail segment winds throughout a 640-acre square bordered by four major roads. The eastern end is at the OJ Noer Turfgrass Research Facility on County Road M, with the western terminus at Woods Road. Trekkers beginning at Woods Road are greeted by a large Ice Age Trail sign standing before an oak woods and a wooden fence. The trail meanders for a distance before going east to the

Noer facility, and the changes in elevation provide enjoyable views and a sense of uninterrupted intimacy with the land.

The unobtrusiveness of the golfing is one of the most impressive features of the Ice Age Trail at University Ridge. Hikers are only on the central path of the golf course for a moment; they cross golf cart paths a handful of times, along with the road leading to the golf shop. Otherwise, the golf course remains peripheral to the Trail, allowing enthusiasts to observe the natural aspects of the area without significant distractions.

The golf course seems most distant when the trail plunges into the oak forest occupying the first third of the western section. Past the forest, the land opens up to reveal extensive areas of turf. Groups of trees dot the trail, from which fields and golf course obstacles are visible. Moving further eastward, visitors come upon a moraine, a remnant of glacial activity that is the main source of geologic interest at the University Ridge Trail segment.

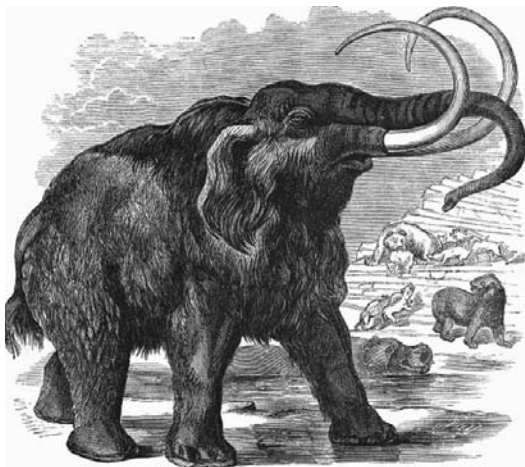
From high points on open land, housing developments and traffic are also visible along the surrounding roads. Although this might seem somewhat incongruous, it offers reason for optimism. As

please see University Ridge on page 3

Mammoths, continued from page 1

Smith, Bear and Co., 2006; in the National Geographic Channel video "Mammoth Mystery;" and at various internet sites.)

The continental ice sheet plays an important role in this story. Researchers suggest the comet, possibly a six-mile-wide mix of debris and gas, exploded over the ice sheet between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay, releasing the energy equivalent of thousands of atomic bombs. Because the dense, two-mile thick ice sheet at ground zero both absorbed the impact – and subsequently melted – there is no single, obvious crater. (Deep pockets in Lake Michigan and Hudson Bay have been suggested as possible crater sites of this or other impacts.)



Woolly Mammoth by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins

Comet proponents believe the blast vaporized the immediate area and sent shattered ice, molten debris and superhot gases flying for thousands of miles, igniting wildfires across the continent. It also may have triggered volcanic activity. The megafauna and Clovis man were largely destroyed in the fire or subsequently starved.

From sites as diverse as Ohio, the Carolinas, and California's Channel Islands, scientists have located similar-aged soil layers (13,000 years old) containing concentrated ash, and high levels of potassium-40 and iridium – both commonly associated with meteorites. In the ash layer at many of these sites researchers have also recovered an unusually high number of tiny, glassy carbon fragments and carbon spherules containing microscopic nanodiamonds and helium gas – features also associated with comets or meteorites and their 7000-or-more degree temperatures. Below this ash-laden soil line, Clovis people's fluted spear points are common. Above it they are rare.

Smoke from the widespread fires, as well as dust from the impact, may have loaded the atmosphere with particulates which triggered a long period of precipitation and subsequent flooding over parts of the ravaged landscape. The impact allegedly melted a vast quantity of water locked up in the northern ice sheet. The flush of freshwater into the North Atlantic suppressed the Gulf Stream, which normally warms the coast of eastern North America. What followed was a climate change that reversed the continent's thawing trend for more than a thousand years.

Firestone, West and others believe the comet's arrival was the third event in a sequence set off by a supernova explosion that occurred 250 light years from Earth. First came a major shock wave of radiation 41,000 years ago, followed 7,000 years later by a bombardment of magnetic, iron-titanium grains that pelted Earth at about 1000 miles per hour. Then, 23,000 years later came the comet shower.

The asteroid that killed off the dinosaurs was a "planet killer," but this comet was a "continent killer," says West. The continuing search for evidence is definitely a story worth tracking in the years ahead.

Trail Outreach

By Don Ferber

Not all the places you can find us, or opportunities we offer, are directly on the Trail. To obtain new supporters and volunteers for the Trail, being "On the Trail of the Ice Age" includes extensive outreach efforts to reach potential users. This winter, we will be at the Garden Expo, February 13-15, and Canocopia, March 13-15, educating an eager public about what the Ice Age Trail offers.

Likewise, once spring really arrives – as marked by the beginning of the Saturday Dane County Farmer's Market on the Capitol Square – we avail ourselves of this opportunity to present ourselves to the public, many of who arrive from a considerable distance. It's a logical place to be too, since it's not only the Capitol, but a glacial drumlin sculpted thousands of years ago by the last ice age.

If you'd care to help us with our valuable Trail outreach, contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net or 608-222-9376. Or just stop by at our table at any of these events to say hello.

Moving Beyond 50, continued from page 1

Based on work by a committee, feedback from members and consultants, and the board's recommendation, members will be voting on a new name "Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc." in April. Many people felt that this reflects much of what we're about now – creating alliances to build the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. We hope you'll come to the annual conference and vote, or send in the ballot from the Mammoth Tales.

While the Foundation's move in 2009 to its new offices on Main Street – right on the Ice Age Trail – is anticipated to occur this winter, the opening ceremonies will take place this summer in conjunction with a major Mobile Skills Crew trail building project in Cross Plains. This major event will be an opportunity to continue building not only trail, but our relationship with Village residents and other members and volunteers. As if that wasn't enough, we'll follow that up with a second MSC project in September north of the Brooklyn Wildlife Area.

Toss in National Trails Day in June, a slew of ongoing Trail building and restoration activities, new interpretive signs at Valley View, and lots of hikes, and we'll have a major year to remember! Come on out and see for yourself!



Photo by Mark Szymanski

University Ridge, continued from page 2

Andrew Bent, a UW professor and a Trail volunteer observes, "The real novel thing is that it's in an area with a lot of development pressure." Along much of the trail, the evidence of suburban encroachment is scant; and when evident, is fairly unobtrusive. The impression the University Ridge segment leaves is one of strong promise for islands of land conservation in the midst of sprawl.

This section of the Ice Age Trail benefited immensely from UW Ridge institutional support. Bent stated that the golf course staff and the University athletics department were "very willing and obliging partners in making the place more open for use." When officials wanted to alter the Trail's original course, they expressed an interest in providing hikers with a quality experience. In return, the golf course aesthetics would improve, and the land could be enjoyed by more people who would then support its preservation.

University Ridge officials encouraged the placement of signs throughout the trail. The results are evident at every step. Hikers rarely are more than a hundred paces from an Ice Age Trail sign or yellow blaze, and every golf path intersection is flanked by posts bearing the Ice Age Trail logo. With frequent signs, few obstacles, and wooden bridges that cross two small creeks, this is a fine example of a user-friendly trail.

A number of convenient features are offered to Trail visitors. Parking is open to Trail users during normal parking hours. For parking, use the main entrance off of County PD west of County M. The Ice Age Trail is just off the first parking lot to the right. Though the Noer Facility does not provide parking or services to hikers, the Golf Course offers a snack bar and restrooms that visitors may use. Dogs are not permitted on this section of trail.

To see a unique stretch of the Ice Age Trail that shows how cooperative land use efforts can provide significant benefits throughout the year, readers should strongly consider paying a visit to the Trail segment at the University Ridge Golf Course.

Chapter Annual Meeting and Elections ~ Jan. 25



January is the time when we celebrate a year of accomplishments, and thank our volunteers for their exemplary efforts. It is also when we elect chapter officers for the upcoming year. Our slate of officers for the upcoming year includes Gary Werner as Coordinator, Theresa Werner as Assistant Coordinator, Tom Gross as Treasurer, and Rachel Roberts as Secretary. Gary, Theresa and Tom, have offered to continue in their positions for another year, while Dave Lonsdorf graciously volunteered his position to Rachel. However, we're not losing Dave, but rather gaining Rachel and her enthusiasm, and allowing Dave to concentrate his efforts on Prairie Moraine County Park and other chapter activities.

The time to gather for this special event is January 25, 2009 at 6 PM. The place will be the Cross Plains Public Library at 2107 Julius St. We'll commence with a potluck and social time, to be followed with chapter elections, a retrospective of the past year's achievements, and a look ahead to this next. Whether you have volunteered or not, all are welcome to join us to help support the chapter and our volunteers, and learn more about the Trail. Your support, interest, and feedback helps the volunteers know their work is appreciated, and provides us with feedback on future directions.

And we also promise great food and warm times on a cold January night!

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