



Ice Age Drift

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

FALL 2008

CATTAILS EVERYWHERE

By Jean Lang

One thing we see a lot of in Wisconsin are cattails. One could say the abundance of these tall water-loving plants is due in part to the Ice Age. After all, it was the great ice sheet that pushed earth and rock around on a grand scale, scouring out depressions and blocking drainage ways to create the irregular terrain in which a wealth of wetlands and lakes could form.

Cattails are often the dominant plants in our marshes and along the margins of ponds, lakes, ditches and other low spots. The common cattail, *Typha latifolia*, has tall, strap-like leaves about an inch wide and from three to nine feet long. It puts up a tight spike of very tiny green flowers that later turn dark velvety brown as seeds begin to form. The mature spike of seeds looks like a furry cat's tail--or some say--a hotdog on a stick.

The 250,000 or so minute seeds hang tightly together on the spike through the fall. But as winter progresses, the seed heads become increasingly tattered. By early spring thousands of minute seeds are breaking loose. Equipped with light hairs like a dandelion's "parachute," the seeds not only travel on the wind but

also drift on the water, waiting to be carried to a muddy bank.

The blowing seeds attach to moist surfaces only. This makes sense: a wetland plant does not want to put down roots in a dry spot where it has no chance of surviving. (A fun experiment for kids is to gently hose an area of bare soil or sidewalk and then sprinkle cattail fluff over it. Then sprinkle fluff over an area of dry soil or pavement. The seeds usually blow off the dry surface but immediately adhere to the wet.)

These tiny air-borne seeds are what bring cattails to any persistently damp and sunny piece of ground. But it is the cattail's underground stems or rhizomes that allow it to expand its territory once the plant is established. Because its thicket of stems impedes water flow, the cattail colony has a natural ability to trap and collect sediments around itself. Annual decay of its fibrous leaves also builds up the substrate and releases nutrients - an ideal environment of silt and litter for the expanding rhizomes to colonize.

In a balanced wetland, cattails live side by side with bulrushes, sedges, water lilies, arrowhead, and other emergent and submerged plants.

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United Way Days of Caring volunteers collecting seed in the Ice Age Junction

United Way Days of Caring Abound on the Trail

By Don Ferber

220 volunteers. 800 volunteer hours. Hundreds of pounds of prairie seeds. Thousands of honeysuckle and buckthorn. That was the approximate tally from the 3 United Way Days of Caring projects this year. The areas cleared from the removal of invasive species work and the many bags of prairie seeds collected were likewise very tangible. But perhaps most noticeable of all was the enjoyment evidenced by the volunteers as they dedicated themselves to their service to the community and the Ice Age Trail.

Friday, August 22 at Prairie Moraine County Park the plan was to clear along the Trail just on the backside of the moraine. In the morning alone, despite some occasional mist, the progress completely exceeded expectations with a large area cleared, and part of a trail/fire break corridor cleared. Working in warm, humid conditions, the afternoon crew of another 40 volunteers cleared the remainder of the new trail corridor and another large area in the glacial meltwater ravine.

Tuesday, August 26, our chapter co-sponsored a prairie seed collecting outing with Dane County Parks. 40 volunteers gathered

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Chapter Website
www.madison.com/communities/iceage
Foundation Website
www.iceagetrail.org

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Cross Plains Ice Age Reserve Planning Process Underway

By Don Ferber

Not many people know that the Cross Plains Ice Age Reserve, with its glacial meltwater gorge and other geological, natural and cultural features, is a special area. Once the master plan is completed and implemented, it is likely many more will know. The National Park Service and Wisconsin DNR have just begun planning for a 1,600 acre area from Highway 14 on the north to just past Mineral Point Road on the south, and west of Timber Lane and Cleveland Road. While not all of this land is currently in public ownership, the hope is to someday have the entire Cross Plains Unit protected as part of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve.

Initial public feedback was solicited in two open houses at the end of August and will continue on at least until 2011 to complete the plan. More information on the general management planning process is available at http://dnr.wi.gov/news/DNRNews_article_Lookup.asp?id=816 or <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/> and choose "Ice Age NST" under "Park". This process provides an opportunity to comment on how you would like to see this area managed and what you might like offered on this site.



DNR Secretary Matt Frank, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, NPS Trails Superintendent Tom Gilbert, IAPTF Executive Director Mike Wollmer, with Village of Cross Plains officials ready to break ground

Foundation Office Moving to Cross Plains

By Don Ferber

July 7, 2008. We were sweating not only from temps in the 80s but also from wondering if the storms would hold off long enough to permit the ground breaking for the new Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation office to occur. But the evening went as impeccably as the planning the Village of Cross Plains had put into the event.

Even with fine food and refreshments, the highlight of the evening was the ceremony that culminated in the ground breaking. In addition to Cross Plains village dignitaries and residents, Secretary of the Wisconsin DNR Matt Frank, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, NPS and DNR staff, and Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation volunteers and staff were in attendance for the ceremony to celebrate the Foundation's upcoming new home right on the Ice Age Trail. This event was even more special for Secretary Frank, who also spoke at our annual conference, since Cross Plains was his boyhood home.

While the new office on Main Street will not be ready to occupy until January 2009, the Foundation has already moved its office to temporary headquarters in Cross Plains. Stay tuned for the grand opening next summer.

Trail Stewards Program ~ Managing the Path of the Ice Age

By Don Ferber

Walking is Wisconsinite's favorite recreational activity. So if you enjoy sections the Ice Age Trail, would you consider providing a bit of TLC for the places you appreciate? That's the basic concept behind the Dane County Trail Stewards program (sometimes called "adopters" elsewhere).

Requirements? Minimal – and flexible. If you like walking a section of the Trail and would like to help ensure that it is well cared for, you're a candidate. Stewards activities can range from simply hiking one (or more) sections of the Trail occasionally and reporting findings, to performing minor trail clearing and signage maintenance, or mowing and removing invasives along the Trail, to whole scale Trail repair and restoration efforts. The schedule? Set your own. Training and tools? We provide those. Fun? The sky (or is it the land?) is the limit. Do it on your own – or bring a friend or 12.

Many Stewards choose a section practically out their back door. Others find a segment that keeps calling them back. For Rachel Roberts, it is the latter. Hiking the Table Bluff segment, she fell in love with it and now goes out there regularly to clear the Trail and eliminate unwelcome plants such as poison ivy to make everyone else's walks more enjoyable. She has

been joined by Anne Koeppel, a Cross Plains resident, for whom this segment is very convenient.

Most of our Trail Stewards on the Brooklyn and Verona segments and north towards the UW Ridge Golf Course live within easy walking distance of the Trail. These stewards use those sections regularly to enjoy the outdoors without driving somewhere.

If this sounds enticing, we have sections in need of stewards or areas where your Trail interests may complement other stewards helping care for that segment. For more information, contact Don Ferber at d_ferber@sbcglobal.net or 222-9376.

Cattails, continued from page 1

Cattails are a favorite food of muskrats and a favorite nesting area for redwing black-birds and bitterns. But in a wetland where Typha form large colonies, they shade out and kill other aquatic plants. By closing off open water channels, the colony destroys fish and waterfowl habitat.

Until the early 1900s, the broad-leaf cattail was the only cattail in this region and was in generally good balance with its wetlands. But then a European species, the narrow leaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*), accidentally introduced into the brackish river of the East Coast, reached our inland waters. It hybridized with the native Typha to produce a plant (*T. x glauca*) that was taller than either parent and was a more aggressive colonizer. In some areas it now covers hundreds of acres and has accelerated the transformation of wet-

lands to wet meadows.

The expansion of a cattail colony can be slowed down by a healthy muskrat population which uproots and removes the plants for food and for the construction of feeding mounds and nests. It's estimated that 10 muskrats per acre will eliminate dense cattails in two years. But at this point, other strategies are also needed.

Though cattails can be pests, they historically were important plants to Native Americans from coast to coast. In winter or times of food shortage, native people cooked the rhizomes which are tough and bland but rich in starch. In spring, the fresh new shoots were eaten, and later, the abundant pollen of the male flowers (at the top of the spike) was shaken loose and collected for a floury cake. It was also common to roast the tender green

female flowers (in the middle of the spike.) When the seeds formed - the soft fluffy part - they were collected for diaper material, to dress wounds, and to stuff clothing or bedding. Cord and rope was made by twisting and braiding the long straight leaves. The Wisconsin Ojibwa wove the leaves into mats that covered the outer walls of their wigwams.

(If you want to try your hand at braiding rope or weaving cattail mats, it is important to cut the leaves green and then lay them out flat for a couple of weeks where they can dry without getting moldy or bent. When you are ready to use them, submerge the dried leaves for several hours, or overnight, in water. They are now flexible, strong and easy to work, especially if you keep them slightly damp while handling them.



photo by Dana Slowiak

Volunteer/Membership Form

DANE COUNTY CHAPTER -- ICE AGE PARK & TRAIL FOUNDATION

306 East Wilson St, Lower Level, Madison, WI, 53703

Membership Categories

<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Blazer	\$500 +	<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Supporter	\$75-149
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Protector	\$250-499	<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Maintainer	\$35-74
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Guide	\$150-249		

YES! I want to volunteer to help complete the trail! Please contact me to help with the following:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Coordination | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter/Write Articles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trail Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Promotions & Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead Hikes | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Tools Maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers' Market | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising/Membership | | |

Times Available: Weekdays Evenings Weekends
Particular Days _____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State ____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 Email _____

Donations or gift memberships welcome!

To donate in another person's honor or to give a give membership, please enter that person's information here:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State ____ Zip _____
 Donation Amount _____

Days of Caring, continued from page 1

on a beautiful August morning to learn about the extensive prairies and gather seeds in the Ice Age Junction. In the afternoon, a similar size crew descended on the prairie at Badger Prairie County Park, and kept the leaders busy filling bags and locating added seeds for them to collect. In addition to the seeds they were asked to collect, nearly everyone learning about how wonderfully tick tree foil sticks to just about all sorts of clothing! The seeds collected will be used to plant additional prairie along the Ice Age Trail and elsewhere in Dane County.

The third project was on August 27 at the Cross Plains Unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve. On this warm and sunny day, we continued to restore savanna and woodland areas, ridding them of invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn. One project also opened up the view of the prairie so that passer-bys could appreciate it from the road. With 30 volunteers each in the morning and afternoon, we made great progress.

Our gratitude goes out to the United Way, the many businesses who gave their employees time off to provide community service, the many people who chose to volunteer, the leaders who helped keep the volunteers on track, and Dane County Parks for the loan of tools and for staff assistance. Through their community service, we now have even more to offer to the community of Trail users.

Thank you!

We thank our United Way and the Day of Caring volunteers from

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|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| Cascade Asset Management | WISC TV |
| US Forest Products Lab | National Mutual Benefit |
| WPS Health Insurance | Metavante |
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| Group Health Cooperative | NCO Community Engagement |
| Isthmus Publishing | Rural Mutual |
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| WEA Trust | Capitol Insurance Companies |
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