



THE TRAIL BLAZER

The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of Take-A-Hike

March/April

2009

Out of the Fields and into the Field Museum

by Greg S

Bitter, sub-zero winter weather won't keep Take-A-Hikers down. We do what any other hardy nature-loving adventurers do – we go inside. This January we went to the expansive (and warm) Field Museum of Natural History.

At first we weren't sure that we would get in. The museum recently changed its hours, and we got there an hour before it opened! Luckily, there was a warming room for us. Once in the museum we didn't know where to start. There's so much to do that you usually run into exhibits that you haven't experienced before. Some of us went immediately to the nature photography exhibit called "Yellowstone to Yukon: Freedom to Roam." I was glad because I like wolves.

Almost anything that interests you can be found at the museum. Are you into old dead people? Check out the mummies at "Inside Ancient Egypt."



Insects float your boat? The Field has one of the largest collections in the Western Hemisphere.

Colorful and dazzling sights thrill patrons at the Grainger Hall of Gems and the Hall of Jades. Of course, no one can miss seeing Sue, the largest, most complete, and best preserved Tyrannosaurus rex fossil ever discovered. Yes, the large, hungry-looking skeleton is real (not a model).

One favorite exhibit of the group was the "Evolving Planet" – a journey through 4 billion years of life on Earth,

from single-celled organisms to towering dinosaurs, fierce ice-age mammals and our extended human family.

If you think your home or workplace is a hostile environment, you should see the history of the world. After going through the timeline of disasters that led to numerous mass extinctions, you might just appreciate your life a little more. You can learn about how humans are causing mass extinction on a scale never before experienced on Earth and also what scientists are doing about it.

The Field Museum is always bringing in special exhibits, such as the upcoming "Real Pirates: The Untold Story of the Whydah from Slave Ship to Pirate Ship" – how cool is that? You can bet I will be back, with or without Take-A-Hike.



Lincoln Park Zoo and Conservatory

by Jerry R

Outdoor outings in winter are always questionable but this year we lucked out. The weather was made to order for a lovely day in Lincoln Park. We gathered the troops in the Lion House and headed out to view animals from the four corners of the world. I think everyone's favorite exhibit was the Regenstein Center for Africa Apes. The newly opened facility gave us a wonderful opportunity to observe gorillas and chimpanzees in a natural like setting. Sometime it's almost as



much fun watching the people react to animals. Don't you wonder what the animals think of us looking in?

Another favorite of the group was the reptile house. I discovered that several TAH members and volunteers aren't real fond of snakes. One of the zoo keepers was wandering around with a small Boa which only the children seemed to want to handle.

Lunch is always a good time for us to chill out and catch up with friends. There seemed to be one complaint that resonated with the group and that was the price of food. We decided on our next trip to the zoo we would purchase
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Volunteer Drivers Needed

Volunteer drivers are the backbone of Take-A-Hike. To facilitate the growth of our organization and to continue the great services we provide for our members, we need to continually develop a pool of insured drivers. If you or any of your friends and family are interested in driving for events, please call the TAH voicemail line (312-409-9094) or email us at (take_a_hike1999@yahoo.com)

Take-A-Hike is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for persons living with HIV/AIDS by providing free year round nature activities.

Take-A-Hike activities are drug and alcohol free.

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March and April Schedule

River Trails Nature Center Maple Syrup Festival March 15, 2009

For 10,000 years, since the last glaciers melted away, the Des Plaines River Valley has been home and highway for plants, animals and people. Only a few hundred years ago Native Americans paddled their canoes along the river and hunted bear, deer and elk along its banks, while trappers and fur traders came searching for beaver in its waters. A fragment of that world has been preserved in our Cook County forest preserves. River Trail Nature Center tells the story of native plants and animals that remain in the urban environment. Here we'll walk through sugar maple woods along the river on self-guiding trails, learn of the past and present in the exhibit building, and observe a few of our native animals. We'll also be able to participate in the annual Maple Syrup Festival being held the day of our trip.

Please be prepared for all types of weather. We'll be hiking along the Des Plaines River and the condition of the trail might be muddy. Wear a good pair of walking shoes and don't forget to bring a water container. **Make your reservation by the Wednesday before the outing.**



Otis, James and Winslow enjoyed the visit to the Lincoln Park Conservatory.

North Park Nature Center Gompers Park April 19, 2009

In April we'll explore two beautiful natural areas right on the northside of Chicago. North Park Village Nature Center is located on the northwest side of Chicago and includes a forty-six acre nature preserve and also an educational facility. The Nature Center and preserve are situated within the North Park Village complex, a cluster of buildings located on approximately 155 acres of land. The nature preserve features trails that wind through woodlands, wetlands, prairie and savannas.

Our next stop just a short distance away is Gompers Park Wetland. This wetland has different biotic zones ranging from obligate wetland to mesic prairie. The wetter zones are filled with water loving vegetation such as pickerelweed, bulrush, and arrowhead, while prairie grasses, sedges and forbs such as rattlesnake master make up the tall grass prairie section.

April can be unpredictable and often wet. Make sure you check the weather reports and dress appropriately. We strongly recommend that you wear shoes that you don't mind getting a little muddy. **Please make your reservation for this event no later than Wednesday, April 15.**

TAH has survived on a shoestring budget for over 12 years with funds provided mostly by individual donors. We encourage members and friends to help out with donations of any size. TAH's future depends on you!

Spotlight on Nature

Wild Onions



In 1673-74, Father Marquette and his party journeyed from what is now Green Bay, Wisconsin, and returned by way of what is now Chicago. It is recorded that one of their chief foods was the “wild onion”: probably the Wild Leek and the Meadow Garlic in the woods of Wisconsin, and the Nodding Onion so abundant in the wet prairies around Chicago.

Two of the first plants to push through the ground in spring, along with the skunk cabbage, are the wild leek and the wild garlic. A woodsman will eat handfuls of their tender leaves, which is all right if he stays in the woods away from people. Believe it or not, leeks, garlics and onions are “outlaw” members of the lily family. Their flavor and odor are due to an oil-like vegetable compound of sulfur which is volatile and dissipated by heat, making them more palatable when cooked—particularly if boiled in 3 different waters.

The wild leek, which grows in rich moist woodland soils, has a cluster of bulbs on a short underground stem, and 2 or 3 broad flat tongue-like leaves which wilt and disappear before the plant blooms in June or July. The flower stalk, 4 to 5 inches tall, is topped by an umbel (like the ribs of an umbrella) of a number of white flowers. Cows will eat all the wild leeks they can find, but it taints their milk and butter. The plant was a favorite food of the early hunters and fur trappers. Pioneers had “leek parties” featured by leek soup.

Wild garlic, or meadow garlic, is common in moist meadows and moist open woodlands. It has only one small bulb, much sweeter and more palatable than those of the wild leek, and very



narrow flat leaves. It blooms in May or June, and some or all of the pinkish flowers, at the top of a stem from 8 to 4 inches tall, are usually replaced by bulblets that are excellent for pickles. The underground bulb, if gathered in early spring or late autumn, makes mighty good creamed soup. The young leaves are good in salads, greens, or for seasoning.

Field garlic or Crow garlic, introduced into our eastern states from Europe, has spread as far west as Missouri. Preferring fields, pastures and lawns, and difficult to get rid of. It has a very offensive odor and is one of our most evil weeds. From its very small hard bulb, rise many slender hollow leaves and a flower stalk bearing a dense umbel of small greenish or purplish flowers which are replaced by bulblets about the shape and size of a grain of wheat. If eaten by cows, their milk is worthless. Wheat containing the bulblets is unfit for flour until they are removed.

The nodding onion has an oblong bulb from which grow very slender flat leaves and a 12 to 24-inch flower stalk curving downward at the top, with a dangling umbel of rose-colored or white bell-shaped flowers.

It grows on banks, hillsides and prairies in many parts of the United

States, and formerly was so abundant in Illinois prairies that the landscape was tinged with pink when it bloomed in midsummer. The bulb is good to eat if parboiled, and excellent when pickled. Bulb and leaves can be used for soup flavoring, and the leaves can be cooked like asparagus or used as greens. An old home remedy for coughs and colds was onion syrup; and a remedy for ear aches was a little bulb of wild garlic cooked and placed, piping hot, in your ear.

Caution: Some plants with bulbs and leaves resembling onions, but lacking the familiar odor, are among the deadliest poisonous plants including the Death Camass and Fly Poison or Stagger Grass—both responsible for the deaths of many grazing animals. Hopefully, we’ll get to see wild onions growing when we take our hike in March but we won’t do any sampling.

This article originally appeared in a Forest Preserve of Cook County Nature Bulletin.

Lincoln Park Zoo

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lunch somewhere else to avoid paying the exorbitant prices.

After lunch we headed for a little taste of the tropics at the Conservatory. We timed our trip just right to experience the annual spring flower show. We experienced the beauty of spring with a rare opportunity to view the direct descendents of the great Azaleas that once bloomed at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. In addition, we also experienced a selection of spring blooming plants including Azaleas, spring flowering annuals and spring flowering perennials. It was difficult heading out of the warm confines of the Conservatory knowing that spring was still many weeks away.

Calendar of Events

March 15, 2009
River Trails Nature Center
Maple Syrup Festival

April 19, 2009
North Park Nature
Center and Gompers Park.

May 17, 2009
Swallow Cliff Forest Preserves

June 14, 2009
Jackson Park – Japanese Gardens
and Wooded Island

July 19, 2009
Family and Friends Picnic
Edgebrook Woods

August 16, 2009
Skokie Lagoons

September 11-13, 2009
Campout
Kettle Moraine State Forest
Pinewoods Group Campground
(Registration for this event to begin in August 1)

October 18, 2009
Somme Woods Forest Preserve

November 15, 2009
Ryerson Woods

December 13, 2009
Holiday Party
(Location to be announced later)



TAH Info

To keep up to date on TAH news, it is important for members and volunteers to periodically check TAH voice mail for updates on events, meetings and current group news. Information about TAH is also available on our website.
<http://www.take-a-hike.org>

If you would like to receive periodic TAH updates via email please send your email address to:
<take_a_hike1999@yahoo.com>



312-409-9094

*Thank You
Volunteers*



TOUCHING LIVES

We want to thank the following volunteers:


Field Museum
Greg, Gary, Jerry, Ralph

Lincoln Park Zoo and Conservatory
Greg, Jerry, Gary, Iris, Jim

Birthday Corner

The following people are celebrating their birthday during March and April. Happy Birthday to:

Darnell.	3/1
DavidR.	3/2
Jessie D.	3/8
Jose M	3/19
Otis P.	3/23
AmandaG	4/18
ArtG	4/23



Please let us know if we missed your birthday.