



THE TRAIL BLAZER

The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of Take-A-Hike

November/December

2009



by Jerry R

This year's campout definitely made up for last year's soggy event. The weather was absolutely perfect and even the biting critters left us alone. Several of us arrived early on Friday to set up camp. In the usual TAH cooperative spirit, the encampment went up smoothly. The forecast called for no rain so we didn't even bother setting up the rain tarps. We did keep them close at hand just in case!

By 7:00 p.m. everyone had arrived and shortly thereafter we were dining on a delicious outdoor meal. We had hamburgers, veggie burgers, Ed's homegrown tomatoes and baked beans (which were the source of many jokes).

With dinner and cleanup completed we gathered around the campfire to get fully into the outdoor

Camping at Kettle Moraine



mood. It's amazing how easy it is to forget the city lights and sounds. At around 10:00 most of the group headed out for a night hike and star gazing. The hike turned out to be a little longer than expected (won't go into that here) but everyone sure slept well.

Saturday morning started bright and early. Most of the campers woke up to the smell of coffee. We feasted on a hardy breakfast and then headed out

for a hike on the Scuppernong Natural Trail. With our resident naturalist Ed leading the way, we learned a lot about the area's plants.

It's remarkable how hungry you get when you're out in the woods. By the time we finished the hike we were ready to return to camp for lunch. Many of us reminisced about how different this year's conditions were compared to last year. We actually were dining under a beautiful sky instead of under a tarp and in a heavy rainstorm.

With lunch complete we were off to Ottawa Lake and the beach. We were pretty cautious as we tiptoed into the chilly water. Instead of making the mistake of going in slowly I took the big plunge. After a few minutes of numbness I was off doing my laps in the deep

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Autumn at Somme Prairie Grove



Sunshine, beautiful colors, rare flowers, secluded hiking, warm temperatures and excellent company were just a few of the things that made the October TAH trip to Somme Prairie Grove perfect. I've visited this area several times already this year and always think to myself how lucky we are that someone had the foresight to set aside and protect the land we know as Cook County Forest Preserves starting in 1869. The area around the Somme Prairie is completely built up today and you know the forest and prairie wouldn't have survived without being protected. The beauty of this area is also insured by the dedicated volunteers who have



worked since 1980 to restore the prairie to its natural state.

Somme Prairie Grove has no parking area so we had to park across the road at Somme Woods. We walked a short distance through the woods, crossed Waukegan Road and entered

the 19th century (minus the noise of the traffic). As with all my other visits to this area, our group had the prairie all to ourselves (at least for humans).

A short distance up the trail we encountered a very rare and beautiful cluster of fringed gentian. These beautiful plants in the past were choked out by buckthorn and almost destroyed by the over population of deer. Now that both the deer and the invasive buckthorn are under control, these rare plants are flourishing. Another late surviving flowering plant we saw was Black-eyed-Susan. This beautiful yellow flower made them contrast to the brown of the

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TAH Is For Everyone

TAH events are geared for people of all hiking abilities. Our members always have the choice of going on a hike or just hanging out in the picnic area and enjoying the beauty of nature. Even if you don't feel up to walking, you're still welcome to join us.

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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Schedule for November and December

**Ryerson Woods
Lake County
November 15, 2009**

The Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area (Ryerson Woods) is unique in the country—nationally recognized for its ecological, historical and architectural significance. Located on the east bank of the Des Plaines River, the area has long served as a natural corridor for travel by land and water. Major Native American trails forded the river at the present site of Ryerson Woods.

Ryerson Conservation Area is one of the best examples of a northern flatwoods forest, a rare northern Illinois landscape. Comprising more than 500 acres, Ryerson Woods supports some of Illinois' most pristine woodlands and several state threatened and endangered species, including the veery (songbird), red-shouldered hawk and Cooper's hawk. Over 150 bird species and nearly 600 species of flowering plants have been seen at Ryerson Woods. The area offers 5 miles of scenic trails that wind through woods to the Des Plaines River. Autumn puts on a dazzling show of color in the maple forest and hopefully we'll see some of the remains of that color.

November can be quite chilly so make sure you dress in layers and are prepared for the cold. We'll hike on one of the trails and then head indoors for lunch. Please make sure that you make your reservation no later than Wednesday, November 11.



**Holiday Party
Potluck
December 13, 2009**

The TAH's 2009 Holiday Party will again be held in the party room at 5415 N. Sheridan. We are planning a wonderful feast and of course our spectacular grab bag. The party will be a cooperative endeavor in the holiday spirit. All members are requested to bring something whether it's a condiment, dessert or a main dish. Food should be microwaveable or brought in a crock-pot that can be plugged in. Iris Rudnick will coordinate the menu. TAH will be providing a turkey dinner. Members and volunteers should let her know what food they're bringing by December 7. Please call Iris before 9:00 p.m. (773.275.1029) or email her at (i_rudnick@yahoo.com)

Members and volunteers are asked to bring a grab bag gift with a maximum value of \$5. Reservations should be no later than Monday, December 7. Please call the TAH voicemail to make a reservation even if you called Iris about bringing food.

The start time for this event is 12:00 p.m. and pick up time will be arranged by the drivers. TAH members and volunteers can also get to the party by public transportation. Contact CTA for exact directions. Parking is available on streets just west of the building.

TAH has survived on a shoestring budget for many 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

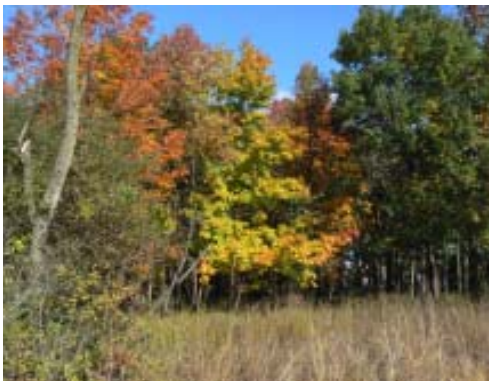
Maple Trees



In autumn the upper reaches of the DesPlaines River — for instance, at Dam No. 1, River Trail Nature Center and Potawatomi Woods — present a gorgeous spectacle when the foliage of the sugar maples, of which there are so many, changes to brilliant hues of yellow, orange and scarlet. The Indian name for this stream meant “the tree from which the water flows”, so the French called it “Riviere Aux Plein”: the river of Maples.

The Sugar Maple, commonly called the Hard Maple, was very valuable to the Indians because, in late winter and early spring, they made syrup, sugar and vinegar from its sweet sap. The early French explorers and American colonists quickly learned to do this and, later, the tree was widely planted in groves and in rows along the roadsides and village streets. Maple syrup and sugar are now important products in Vermont, Michigan and other regions on both sides of the Great Lakes. The sugar maple, officially or unofficially, is the state tree of Vermont, Rhode Island, New York and Wisconsin. Its 5-lobed leaf is the emblem of Canada.

There are about a hundred species of maples in the northern



This picture was taken on our October hike at Somme Prairie Grove.

hemisphere and some of those in eastern Asia also have splendid fall coloring. The European species do not have it and, apparently, only in America do some of the maples have sap sweet and plentiful enough for large-scale production of syrup and sugar. One family trait is opposite branching and the leaves grow opposite one another on the twigs. The buckeye and its cousin from Europe, the horse chestnut, and the ashes, are the only other large American trees that have this characteristic. Another badge of the maple clan is their fruit, consisting of a pair of seeds joined together and each with a long papery wing, which grow in clusters. Botanists call such a fruit a

“samara” but they are commonly known as “keys” and children have fun with them.

The sugar maple is native in southern Canada and all of our states east of the Great Plains but is most common and vigorous in the northern regions and the higher elevations of the southern Appalachians. We have seen giants that were over 4 feet in diameter and considerably more than 100 feet tall. The young trees have smooth silvery bark which becomes darker, furrowed, and frequently with shreddy plates something like a shagbark hickory.

It is one of our finest shade trees, and is third in production of hardwood lumber. The hard close-grained lustrous wood takes a beautiful polish and is valuable for furniture. The accidental trees with peculiar grain, known as curly maple and bird’s eye maple, are especially prized. Maple wood is outstanding for flooring and has many other uses, such as bowling pins, shoe trees, canoe paddles and butchers’ blocks.

This article was originally published as a nature bulletin for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

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prairie grass. The smell of wild mint greeted us before we actually spotted the plants growing along the sides of the trail. There were also many varieties of prairie grasses such as prairie dropseed, little bluestem, big bluestem, Indian grass and many others we couldn’t identify.

The most prevalent trees in this preserve are the oaks. They are flourishing since all the buckthorn has been removed. The oak leaves were

Somme Prairie Grove

changing colors to many shades of brown. The most spectacular color we observed was the bright orange and red of the maple trees.

Given the size of our group and how much we love to talk, we didn’t see very much of the wildlife. I did catch a glimpse of a mouse or mole as it ran across the trail and Jim said he spotted a raccoon. We heard many birds but they took off as we approached.

After hiking for an hour and a half we were ready to eat. We reluctantly left the prairie and headed to the more populated area and Subway. This part of the trip is always enjoyable because we get to catch up with what everyone has been doing over the last month.

Don’t forget to join us on November 15th for the last outdoor event of 2009 when we explore Ryerson Woods in Lake County.



Calendar of Events

November 15, 2009
Ryerson Woods

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

Camping at Kettle Moraine

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water. There were plenty of jokes about what the cold water was doing to various parts of the anatomy by those who chose not to take the plunge.

On returning to the campsite, quite a few of us turned in for our afternoon siestas. I slept a little longer than planned but it sure felt good. Dinner preparation is always fun. We've had lots of experience cooking for the large group and we worked together like a well oiled machine. Those who didn't help with the preparation took

responsibility for the cleanup. Dinner consisted of salad, garlic bread and spaghetti with a choice of meat or marinara sauce.

With dinner complete and daylight fading, we gathered around the campfire. No one seemed too excited about taking another long hike but star gazing was definitely in order. The most prominent object in the sky was Jupiter but we were also able to pick out some of the constellations. I think several people even saw shooting

stars. We all slept like logs after a day filled with great activities.

Sunday greeted us with a beautiful sky and the aroma of coffee again. After another waist expanding breakfast we helped each other take down the tents and load the cars for the trip home. Spending a weekend with good company in a beautiful environment is about as good as it gets. If you missed the campout this year, mark your calendars for next September and join us.

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:

Campout
Greg, Jerry, Bill, Jim, Ed, Gary

Somme Prairie Grove
Greg, Jerry, Jim, Iris S

Birthday Corner

The following people are celebrating their birthday during November and December. Happy Birthday to:

Judy W.	11/7
EdM.	11/18
Dan C.	11/23
Lane B.	11/23
Luis V.	12/18
Walter W.	12/23
Ralph V.	12/28
Gary H.	12/30

Please let us know if we missed your birthday.