

prairie dock

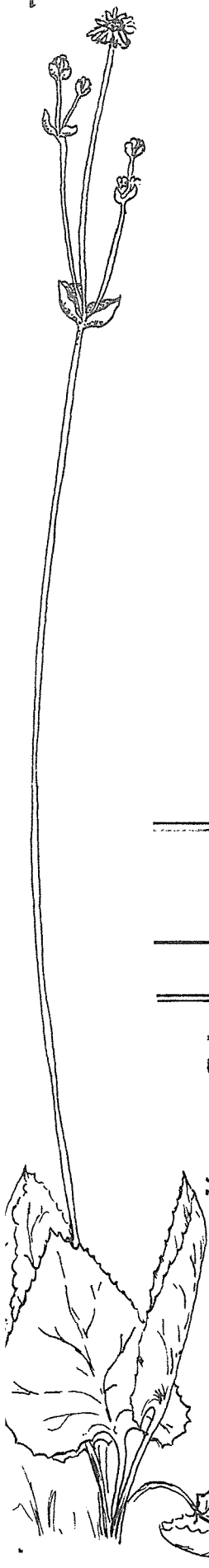
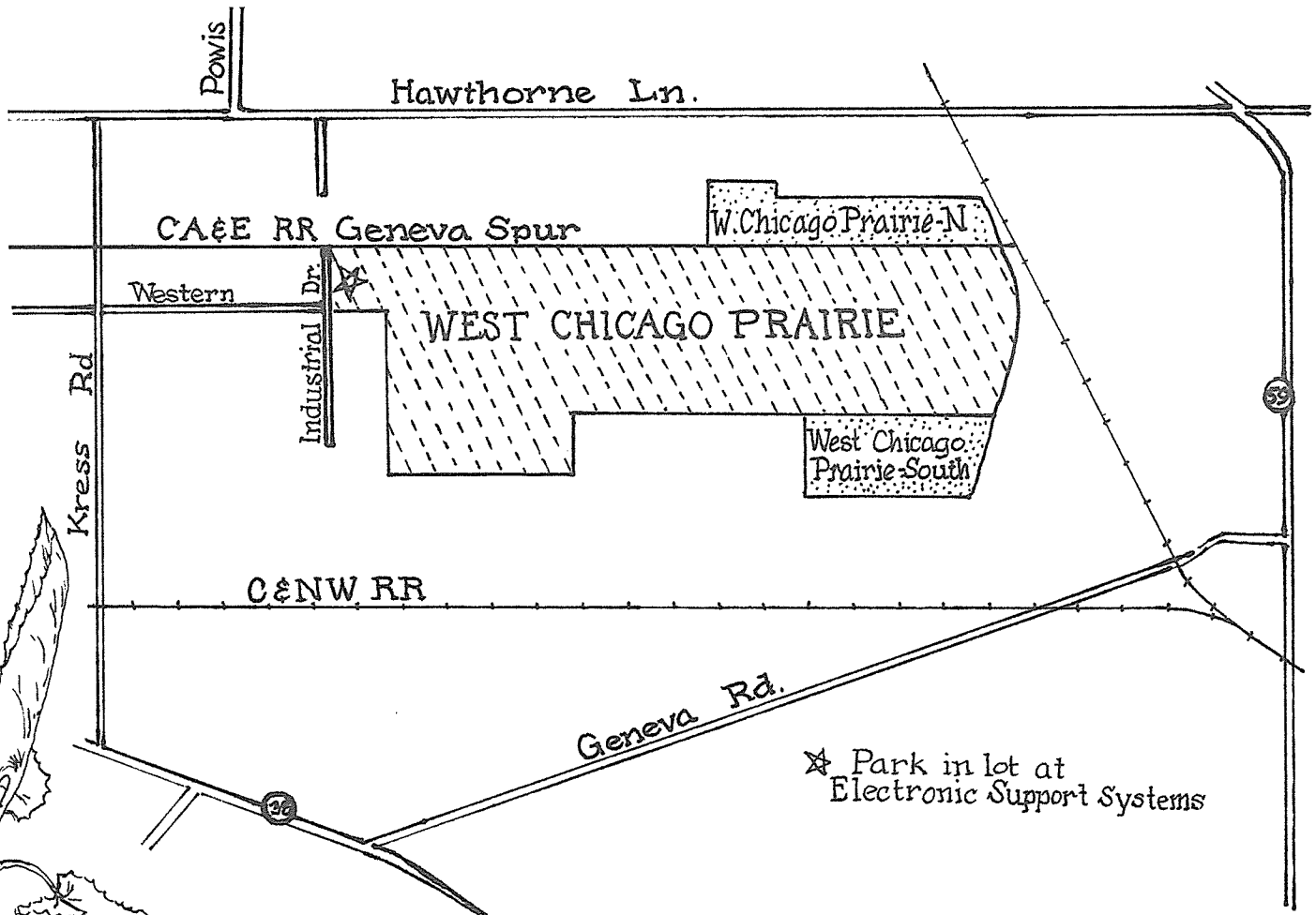
# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

FALL 1986

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR: The West Chicago Prairie

Little native prairie remains along most of the Illinois Prairie Path. The plow, the bulldozer, and alien weeds and trees have generally destroyed the rich soils and crowded out the prairie plants. Only a few tiny patches struggle to survive on the three main branches of the Path. However, alongside the Geneva Spur of the old CA&E Railway there still thrives one big, beautiful REAL tallgrass prairie gracing the rolling landscape of rural West Chicago and enchanting the senses with its myriad colors, scents and sounds. This is now protected as the West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve and is bordered along its northern edge by the CA&E Geneva Spur, owned by Commonwealth Edison and soon to be leased to DuPage County as a part of the Prairie Path trail network. See the map below for the exact location of the prairie.

September is a good time to admire the prairie in its autumn glory, resplendent in purple and gold. Flowers to look for in September are Prairie Dock (many nine feet tall), Blue Vervain, Nodding Wild Onion, Ironweed, Boneset, Spotted Joe-Pye Weed, Tall Coreopsis, Evening Primrose, Pasture Thistle, Bur Marigold, Bottle Gentian, and several species of sunflowers, goldenrods and asters. Come and see for yourself this magical place!



### DuPage County Is Resurfacing Path!

During 1986 the DuPage County Highway Department has been making major improvements on several sections of the Prairie Path. These include pruning, mowing, and resurfacing with limestone screenings, after some preliminary grading as needed. For the seven months ending August 1, Right-of-way Agent Tom Merrion reports expenditures totalling \$115,000 for work primarily on the eighteen miles of trail west of Wheaton. Before the end of the year the main stem between Wheaton and Elmhurst will also be done, he says. The most striking improvements can be seen on the Batavia Spur north of Bilter Road to the Kane County line just south of Butterfield Road and on the Aurora Branch from the EJ&E tracks to the county line. The section southwest of Eola Road had never been surfaced before. Work continues on the Elgin Branch, where unfortunately some newly-surfaced sections have already been severely damaged by horses. (Our advice is to blacktop these sections or to provide separate horse trails.)

The highway department has allocated to this Prairie Path project a large crew and several pieces of heavy equipment including a road grader, a mowing machine, a chipper, a Layton Box asphalt spreader, adapted for spreading crushed limestone, a roller for compacting the screenings, and five six-wheeler trucks (15-ton capacity). Also working under the supervision of the highway department picking up debris on several sections of the Path were five young people, ages 16 to 21, whose salaries were funded by a consortium of eight DuPage County Ford Dealerships in an amount totalling \$8,000. The federal Job Training Partnership Act matched those funds to pay additional workers to complete backyard cleanup jobs for senior citizens.

The members of the Prairie Path Board of Directors have had considerable experience with this type of construction project and thus can appreciate the effort put forth by the highway department and its employees. We are sure that within two or three years they will bring the Prairie Path up to standard as a first-class bicycle trail. We hope Path members will send some letters of encouragement to the department. Address them to Tom Merrion, Right-of-way Agent, DuPage County Highway Department, 130 N. County Farm Road, Wheaton, IL 60187. Letters may also be sent to another good friend of the Path, Jack T. Knuepfer, Chairman, DuPage County Board, 421 N. County Farm Road, Wheaton, IL 60187.

### Report on Prairie Work Days

Board member Larry Sheaffer says that the two prairie work days on June 21 and June 28 were very successful. Nine volunteers worked at one or both of the sites, the North Avenue Prairie and the Wheaton Prairie near Hoffman Park. Using pruning saws and loppers, the volunteers removed many invading woody plants, such as grey dogwood, box elder, elm, buckthorn, sumac, honeysuckle and raspberry bushes. They also picked up litter and junk. Our thanks to: Ron Anderson, Bill and Jean Booth, Bob Hargis, Paul and Jean Mooring, Larry Sheaffer, and Dick and Nancy Wilson.

Although the scheduled work day at Volunteer Prairie south of the bridge in Wheaton was rained out, Larry has been doing regular weeding there during the summer and proudly reports fifty-five species of prairie plants now growing on or near the ramp!



*Cyclists enjoy newly-surfaced Batavia Spur north of Bilter Road.*



*Nancy Wilson pulls weeds at Wheaton Prairie.*



*Paul Mooring, Bill Booth and Dick Wilson hard at work on Wheaton Prairie.*



*Bill Booth hauled out biggest pile of junk.*

### West Chicago Prairie Needs a Little Help from Its Friends

Melvyn C. Hoff, president of the West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group, is asking all of us prairie buffs to write our five county board members urging acquisition of two additional choice parcels for the West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve. They are called West Chicago Prairie - North [abutting the old CA&E Geneva Spur (future Prairie Path) and north of the east end of the forest preserve] and West Chicago Prairie - South (at the southeast corner of the preserve). *See map on front page for exact locations.* These parcels contain wet/mesic prairie, open-water marshes and successional floodplain