

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

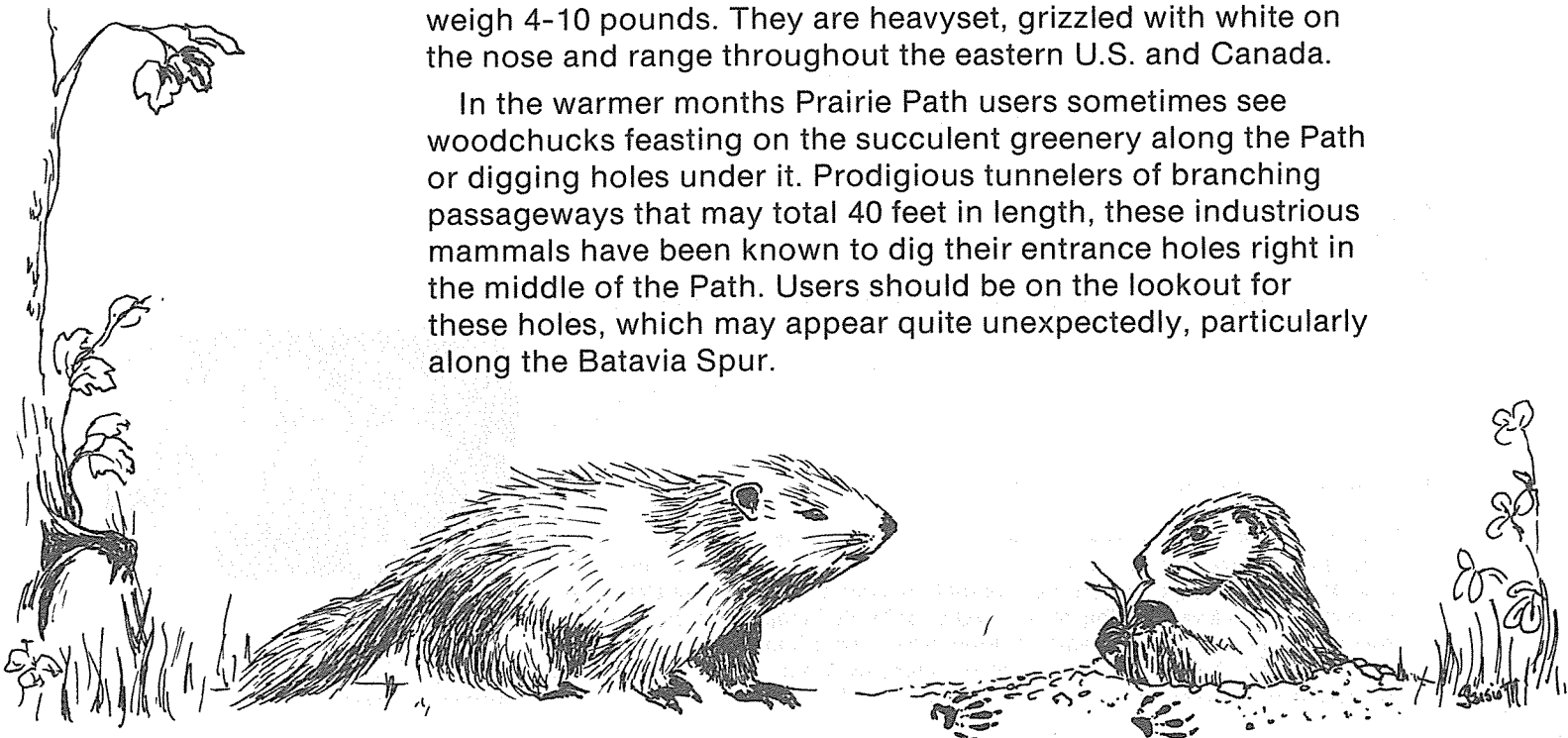
SPRING 1987

What to look for: Woodchucks and their holes

The woodchuck is justly famed as a hibernator who sleeps the cold winter away. As he lies curled up in a grass-lined underground nest from late October until early spring, his body temperature may drop below 40° and his heartbeat and respiration almost stop. Legend has it that this drowsy rodent emerges from his hole on February 2, "Groundhog Day", to look timidly around. If he sees his shadow he supposedly goes back down and guarantees us six more weeks of winter. In reality, the little sleepyhead does come out about that time, but only to seek a mate, and then moves in with her for the rest of the winter. Four or five young are born later in the spring.

Members of a large family of rodents, called *Sciuridae*, which also includes squirrels, chipmunks and prairie dogs, woodchucks are marmots. They are 18-26 inches in length and weigh 4-10 pounds. They are heavysset, grizzled with white on the nose and range throughout the eastern U.S. and Canada.

In the warmer months Prairie Path users sometimes see woodchucks feasting on the succulent greenery along the Path or digging holes under it. Prodigious tunnelers of branching passageways that may total 40 feet in length, these industrious mammals have been known to dig their entrance holes right in the middle of the Path. Users should be on the lookout for these holes, which may appear quite unexpectedly, particularly along the Batavia Spur.



DUPAGE COUNTY BOARD TO RECOGNIZE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH AS TRAIL NAME

A preliminary draft of a proposed resolution to be submitted to the DuPage County Board by the Transportation Committee has been received by Jean Mooring, Illinois Prairie Path board member. The unusual narrative format of the resolution gives a brief history of our not-for-profit corporation's work for more than twenty years to create and build a trail for the benefit of the people of DuPage County on the county-owned former Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway right-of-way. The document concludes, "The DuPage Division of Transportation and the Transportation Committee of DuPage County Board shall commonly refer to and shall continue to, as much as possible, commonly refer to the pathway on the DuPage Parkway as the Illinois Prairie Path in recognition of the volunteer organization that bears the same name."

The members of the board of directors of The Illinois Prairie Path will be discussing the final wording of this resolution with Transportation Committee Chairman Richard Carlson, Vice Chairman Charles Vaughn, and members Carolyn Kulie, William Maio, Ken Moy and Robert Schillerstrom. Other county board members who have provided helpful advice are Connie Zimmermann, Frank Bellinger, Lloyd Renfro, and Chairman Jack Knuepfer. In general our board members are pleased with this long-overdue official DuPage County Board recognition of the fact that a spirited group of volunteers stubbornly overcame every obstacle that man or nature could devise to build this famous trail. We think May Watts and Helen Turner would be pleased too.

HISTORY CALLS!

Patricia Wallace, director of the DuPage County Historical Museum, has contacted our board with a request for materials in connection with the development of the new DuPage County History Gallery. The museum would like to serve as the repository for Illinois Prairie Path records and memorabilia in its archival collections, which would also be available for scholarly research and for special exhibits as needed.

We have a wealth of materials to donate, collected over more than twenty years of trail-building. Choice items include:

- A yellowed newspaper clipping from the *Chicago Tribune* Voice of the People dated September 30, 1963, containing the letter from May Theilgaard Watts that started it all.
- A copy of the famous beautification message of President Lyndon Johnson, February 8, 1965, mentioning the "Prairie Path" in Illinois as a "new and exciting trail project" in a potential "national system of trails".
- A photograph of May Watts and Helen Turner witnessing the historic signing of the first Illinois Prairie Path lease with DuPage County on May 10, 1966, and the pen used by Mrs. Watts to sign the document.



May Watts receives plaque of appreciation from U.S. Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton in Washington, D.C., June 2, 1971.



May Watts and Helen Turner witness signing of first Illinois Prairie Path lease by Paul J. Ronske, Chairman of the DuPage County Board of Supervisors, May 10, 1966. Also pictured: R. R. Rickson, Ray W. MacDonald, and Edward Van de Houten.

- Photographs of May and Helen with IPP President William Nemecek and Open Lands Project Director Gunnar Peterson on June 2, 1971 in Washington, D.C. at the first National Trails Symposium when the Illinois Prairie Path was designated a National Recreation Trail. May was invited to represent the community of trail volunteers and the Path was singled out for mention by Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton as the **first trail** in the United States to apply for National Recreation Trail status (thanks to timely telegrams from IPP board member Phoebe Ryerson).
- A letter of congratulations from President Gerald Ford to Prairie Path Vice President Louise Headen, dated April 14, 1976, when the Path was chosen by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration for honor in the Horizons on Display Program.
- A brief and very entertaining history of the early days of the Illinois Prairie Path by Elizabeth R. and Samuel S. Holmes, who were, respectively, the Path's first corresponding secretary and first attorney.
- A letter from Interior Department Secretary Cecil D. Andrus to Path President F. Paul Mooring, dated December 30, 1977, extending the National Trail designation to cover 5.06 additional miles of the Prairie Path, made possible by the building of the bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River at Warrenville.
- A copy of State of Illinois Public Act 81-93 appropriating \$346,100 to the Department of Conservation "For the acquisition of land in Cook County to complete the Illinois Prairie Path, which land will be leased to the Illinois Prairie Path Corporation."
- A report from the Regional Director of the U.S. Department of the Interior, to President Bill Nemecek, dated May 18, 1970, after an extensive two-day field inspection of the right-of-way by department officials, listing all the problems which had to be overcome before the trail as a whole could be even usable, much less attain the status of a National Recreation Trail. Some of these challenges were met within a year in time for the National Trails Symposium; but the most intractable required many years of determined effort under the leadership of President Paul Mooring. The list of deficiencies which would surely have daunted a less dedicated group included the need for:



Rep. Ted Leverenz, Maywood, (seated front left) and IPP board representatives Eugene Lewis, Sophie Abenante, Jean Mooring, Keith Olson and Lillian Lasch witness purchase of Cook County section of Path by Illinois Department of Conservation, December 20, 1979.