

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

FALL 1985



What to look for: The View from a Bridge

This bridge spans the West Branch of the DuPage River one-half mile southeast of Prince Crossing Road. Thirty years ago it carried electric interurban cars of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway running between Wheaton and Elgin. Today it is used by Prairie Path hikers and bird-watchers, bicycle riders, and an occasional equestrian.

If you pause to rest a while on the new bench by the bridge, you will see the river meandering through the reed canary grass, cattails and sedges of the neighboring Timber Ridge Forest Preserve. Besides native wet meadow plants the preserve is home to deer, red fox, possum, skunk, raccoon, mink, beaver and muskrat. All have been seen from the bridge by former Prairie Path board member Muriel Smith, who lives nearby. Best viewing time is early morning before eight o'clock, says Muriel. An avid birdwatcher, she also reports sighting osprey and other raptors and hawks, wading birds like king rails, great blue and green-backed herons and sandpipers, and in spring and fall flocks of Canada geese, sandhill cranes and nighthawks migrating along the river. She hears great horned owls hooting early many mornings and three times has seen bald eagles flying over the bridge.

This is a place on the Path to stop, look and listen. You will be glad you did.

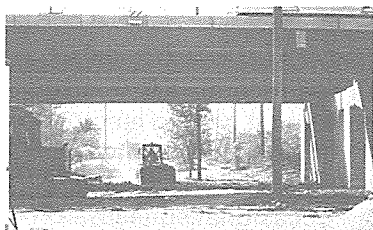


State Highway Projects Impact Path

During the fall of 1985 the Illinois Department of Transportation will be reconstructing simultaneously three bridges over the Prairie Path, one on each of the Path's three main branches. Path board members are gratified by the cooperative spirit of IDOT personnel, who have consulted with the Path during the planning phase of each of these projects and are making every effort to keep the trail open during construction. IDOT has also promised to restore the Path to as good or better condition after construction is completed. The DuPage County Highway Department is monitoring each of these projects on behalf of the county, owner of the Prairie Path right-of-way. Alex Jordan, IDOT Bureau Chief of Construction, has given us the following information for the benefit of Path users:

1. I-290 overpass, Electric Avenue, Berkeley. Structure to be widened and highway resurfaced. Construction began in October, 1984; expected completion date is July 31, 1986. Contractors are Kenny Construction and Eric Bolander. (See photo below, left.)

2. Butterfield Road at Winfield Road. Old railroad bridge to be removed and underpass for St. James Farm and the Prairie Path to be rebuilt. Construction began in April, 1985; expected completion date is December, 1985. Prime contractor is R. W. Dunteman. (See photos below, right.)



Contractor's front end loader levels trail under I-290 overpass, Elmhurst.



Concrete forms for new Butterfield Road underpass. St. James Farm gate is in background.

To keep the Path open, IDOT has installed a temporary concrete barrier separating the temporary blacktop Butterfield Road bypass from the Path along the south side of the Butterfield right-of-way together with a 1200-foot crushed stone Prairie Path bypass along the north side of Butterfield and a temporary push-button stoplight at the old railroad bridge. The Path board hopes this northern bypass can be retained, surfaced with limestone screenings, and extended across Winfield Road to provide access from the Path to Blackwell Forest Preserve. There should also be pedestrian crossing lights at the Butterfield-Winfield Road intersection.

3. North Avenue east of Rte. 59. Old railroad bridge to be removed and a box culvert to be constructed for the Prairie Path. Construction began in August, 1985; estimated completion date is October, 1986. Contractor is Harry W. Kuhn.

The box culvert will have a 14 foot by 14 foot cross section and will be 163 feet long. A bypass trail will be built around the south side of the bridge and a temporary pedestrian light installed at Woodcrest Drive. The bypass will remain after construction is complete as an access trail from nearby residential areas.



Temporary concrete wall east of Winfield Road separates Butterfield Road bypass from Prairie Path. Old railroad bridge and push button stoplights are in background.

Besides consulting with the Prairie Path on plans for these major projects, the Illinois Department of Transportation responds to our concerns in other ways. For example, in May IDOT maintenance crews corrected a standing water problem in the IPP underpass at Rte. 59 southwest of Warrenville as soon as it was called to their attention by Path board members.

Future IDOT projects important to the Path are IPP bridges to be reconstructed over Rte. 83 in Elmhurst and over Rte. 53 between Lombard and Glen Ellyn, the latter made necessary by the construction of the proposed North-South Tollway. Both of these are still in the planning stages.

Volunteer Prairie — Looking Good!

Path board member and biologist Larry Sheaffer reports promising developments as the second Volunteer Prairie growing season draws to a close: "(1) Most of the transplants have survived and bloomed, giving us a good seed source for the future; (2) Much of the prairie grass withstood the spring erosion and will provide fuel for a good fire burn by 1987; (3) Erosion has been curbed significantly. Except for the never-ending weeding and the addition of plants for increased diversity, the rest of the project has been completed. A bench was placed by the sign, and ten native shrubs (*Viburnum*) and a tree (*Pagoda Dogwood*) were planted at the entrance to the ramp and mulched with wood chips. Pictures of some of the colorful prairie forbs have been added to the display case on the north side of the sign."

Editor's note: The board is proud of the work done by Larry and friends to make Volunteer Park at milepost zero the inviting and informative focal point of the Path.



Dennis O'Neill spreads limestone screenings on Com Ed bypass.

Commonwealth Edison Bypass Surfaced in Wayne

On six days between June 10 and June 19 Dennis O'Neill, A-1 All American Services, Glen Ellyn, and his assistant Craig Deutsch hauled and spread approximately 210 tons of three-inch rock, grade #8 crushed limestone and limestone screenings on 1400 feet of trail between Army Trail Road and the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railroad tracks in Wayne. On July 8 they rolled the new surface using a 3-ton roller rented from Bracing Systems, Cloverdale. Total cost of this project was \$3,785.

A section of this new trail segment eight feet wide and approximately 1000 feet long is located on the Commonwealth Edison right-of-way adjoining the Prairie Path to the northeast. The Path has leased this property from the utility to provide bicyclists an easy bypass around the steep hill located on our own right-of-way west of the EJ&E tracks. We hope horseback riders will use the old trail to protect the new limestone surface from damage. Horses can negotiate the hill with ease.

Henry L. Youker Memorial Benches Installed

On successive weekends, July 6-7 and July 12-13, Path President Paul Mooring installed four comfortable rustic benches purchased with the \$800 Henry L. Youker Memorial Fund. The two-stages installation process for each bench entails setting in concrete the two dark brown powder-coated steel legs on one day and attaching the six redwood boards the next day after the concrete hardens. With the approval of the Youker family the benches are located as follows: Next to the sign at Liberty Street south of Volunteer Bridge, Wheaton; near the boulder with the May Theilgaard Watts inscription in Founders Park, Wheaton; beside the bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River southeast of Prince Crossing Road on the Elgin branch of the Path; and overlooking the private Arrowhead Lake on the Aurora branch. The Prairie Path board hopes that a small plaque can be added to each bench so that grateful Path users will know the name of their benefactor.



Paul Mooring installs memorial bench at Volunteer Park.



Path members drive re-bar stakes to anchor R.R. tie steps at Blackwell Forest Preserve.

New Steps at Blackwell Forest Preserve

On July 13 fourteen Path members and friends spent an enjoyable and productive morning building steps of railroad ties and shoring up the eroded embankment on the Aurora branch opposite the Butterfield Road entrance to Blackwell Forest Preserve. Cost to the Path was \$346.03. Besides stabilizing the embankment these steps now call attention to the de facto trail which runs from the Path through a field directly to the Blackwell entrance. The Path board believes that in the near future, or at least when Butterfield is widened to four lanes, this access trail should be improved with limestone screenings and a pedestrian crossing light should be installed. Then access to Blackwell will be equally convenient for Path users coming from either Wheaton or Warrenville.

Wheaton Resurfaces North of the Bridge

During the last week of July a Wheaton Public Works Department crew under the direction of Ray Triplett, Superintendent of Streets, resurfaced with limestone screenings the quarter-mile section of trail between Wesley Street and Lincoln Avenue. They also resurfaced the access ramp at the north end of Volunteer Bridge and installed a drain pipe under the Path at Stevens Park to alleviate a drainage problem. Delighted Path users send their thanks to the Wheaton City Council and staff for this much-needed improvement. A smooth job!

Reports on Spring - Summer Activities

May 11, Volunteer Bridge Work Day, Paul Mooring: Thirteen Path members installed wood railings at the north abutment of the bridge to eliminate any possibility of some benighted biker riding over the edge in the dark. Jerry Martin brought his gasoline-powered auger to drill the holes for the posts. Total cost for lumber and hardware was \$105.42.

May 19, Horseback Ride, Jerry Martin: Eighteen equestrians participated in the trail ride to Pratt's Wayne Woods and West Branch Reservoir Forest Preserves. Jerry hosted the delicious chuck wagon lunch at his home and a good time was had by all.

May 25, Bird Hike, Paul Mooring: Eighteen people including one baby in a stroller walked three miles on the Path and in Timber Ridge Forest Preserve. They saw a doe and 36 species of birds including an Orchard Oriole and Yellow-breasted Chat, the latter attracted by a tape recorded call so that everyone had a chance to get a good look.

June 8, Work Day to paint the bridge over the East Branch of the DuPage River, Jean Mooring: Begun on May 18 by six teens and two adults from Explorer Post #625, sponsored by the Elmhurst Park District, this project was completed on June 8 (a sizzling hot day) by Path board members and friends. The sign project originally scheduled for this day has been postponed until September.

June 9, Hike to Warrenville Grove Forest Preserve, Dick Wilson: Twelve hikers turned out, none of whom were Path members, so Dick gave Path literature to all. Most interesting sight on the hike was the bypass with the special stoplight just for Prairie Path users at the construction area along Butterfield.

June 15 and 16, Overnight Bike Trip to Rockford, Nancy Hesler: Seven stalwart cyclists covered 88 miles in two days and didn't let rain, strong headwinds or two flat tires dampen their enthusiasm. "It was fun", says Nancy, "and we were lucky—the hailstorm missed us completely!"

June 29, Hike, Picnic and Trolley Ride, Jean Mooring: Twenty-one hikers from many widely-separated western suburbs inspected the new bridge over the Fox River Trail at Blackhawk Forest Preserve, which links two new segments of the Fox River Trail in Kane County. They then hiked the trail, rode the trolley, visited the Electric Railroad Fair, and enjoyed a picnic lunch beside the river — a beautiful day and a fun trip.

July 20, Bike Ride on Great Western Trail, Nancy Hesler: Twelve bikers rode seventeen miles to Sycamore, cooled off in the nearby public pool and returned. The most notable participant brought his sixty-five pound 1937 Ranger bicycle which he has carefully restored and rides for REAL exercise.

Fall Activities, Rain or Shine

Saturday, Sept. 14 **Work Day** to install signs. Meet at 9:00 a.m. Leaders: Bob Hargis, 668-7377; Nancy Hesler, 293-1062; Dick Wilson, 299-7882.

Sunday, Sept. 22 **Bike Ride on Fox River Trail.** Thirty-three-mile loop on Prairie Path and Fox River Trail. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Nancy Hesler's, Oak Meadows. Leader: Nancy Hesler, 293-1062.

Saturday, October 12 **Work Day.** 9:00 a.m. Information: Dick Wilson, 299-7882.

Sunday, Nov. 3 **Prairie Path Annual Meeting** celebrating twentieth anniversary of Path founding. 2:00 p.m., DuPage County Historical Society Museum, 102 E. Wesley, Wheaton. Guest speakers will be David M. Eubanks, Program Coordinator, Open Lands Project; Jack T. Knuepfer, Chairman, DuPage County Board; and Philip Elfstrom, President, Kane County Forest Preserve Commission. Cider and cookies. All Path members and friends are invited.

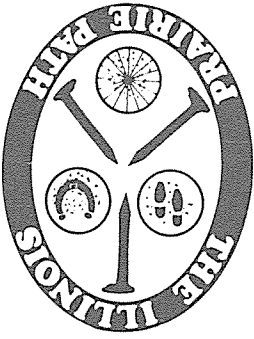
Sunday, November 10 **Fall Hike.** Meet at 9:30 a.m., Warrenville Grove Forest Preserve, Batavia Road, Warrenville, 1/2 mile south of Butterfield Road. Five-mile round-trip hike to Blackwell Forest Preserve. Bring lunch and drink. Leader: Dick Wilson, 299-7882.

— Jean C. Mooring, Editor —

MEMBERSHIP RATES: Individual \$10; Family \$15; Organization/Supporting \$20; Contributing \$25; Sustaining \$50; Patron \$100; Lifetime \$500

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