



THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 1985

What to look for: The Volunteer Prairie

Traveling the thirty-plus miles of The Illinois Prairie Path, one is hard-pressed to find the plant community for which the Path was named. Except for a few small prairie remnants, the original prairie is all gone from the Prairie Path, a victim of natural succession from grassland to woodland.

Therefore, when landscaping for the ramp was discussed, native prairie plants seemed the logical choice. Under ideal conditions, establishing a prairie on the ramp would have been chancy, considering the slope and the amount of seed needed. Conditions turned out to be far from ideal; the completed ramp was steeper than planned, and consisted mostly of clay, compacted by the earth movers to the consistency of asphalt. After many hours of back-breaking rototilling and harrowing, the surface was broken enough to plant. Three areas were planted with 1,000 transplanted seedlings and the remainder of the ground was seeded with seven pounds of flowers and grasses.

The seeded areas will look weedy for several years, but we would not eliminate the weeds even if we could. Holding the soil and shading the young plants, these weeds will eventually be crowded out by the maturing prairie. After years of seeding, transplanting, weeding, mowing and burning, the ramp will be a prairie garden blooming from April to October.

To aid the Path user in distinguishing the native species, a photographic display will be posted in the ramp exhibit.

