

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

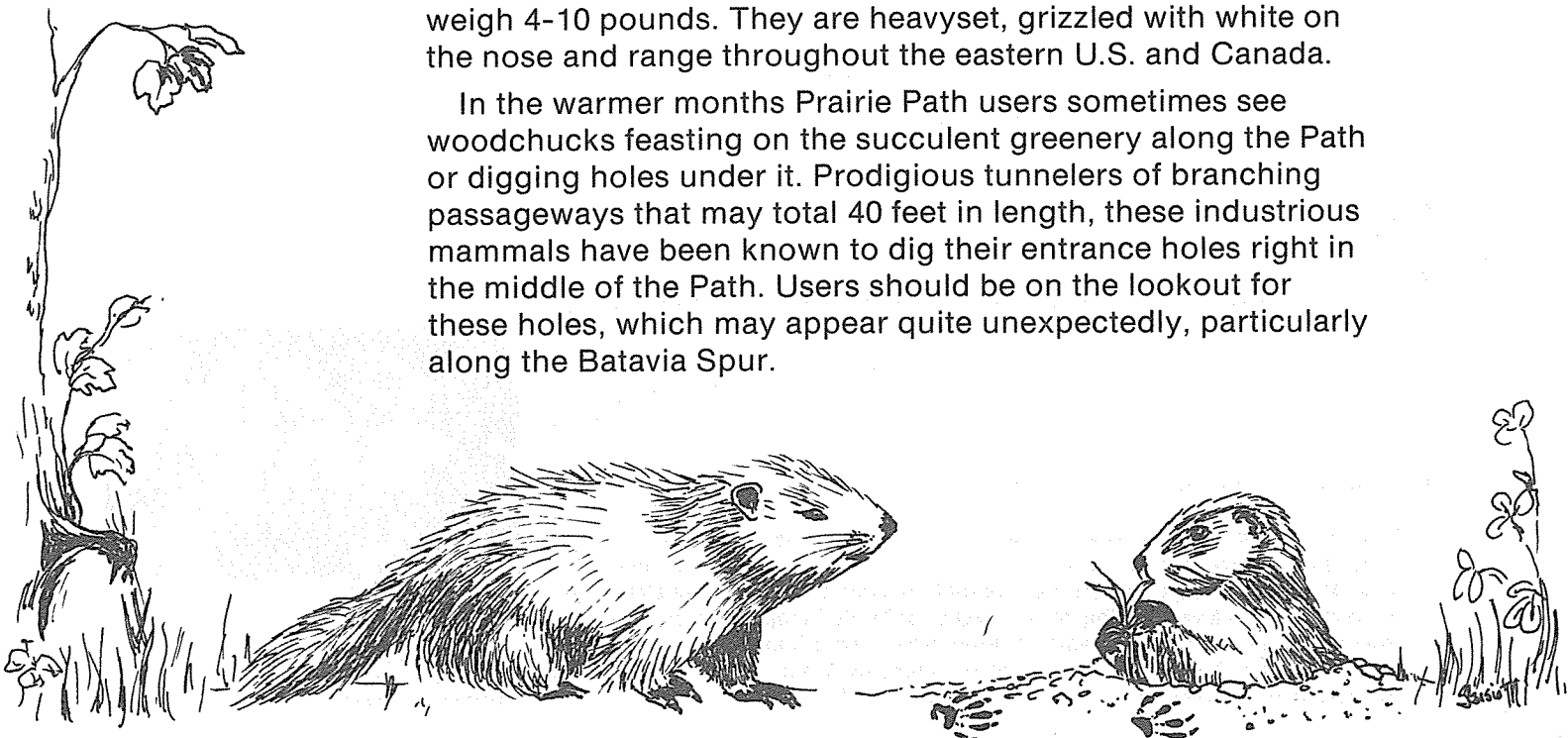
SPRING 1987

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 Nemec 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 Nemec, 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.

- At least a ten-year guarantee of public access to the right-of-way. This resulted in a lengthy nonstop lobbying effort by Prairie Path friends to persuade the reluctant DuPage County Board to extend the lease until 1983.
- Permits to cross three railroads, the Illinois Central, the Chicago and North Western and the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern. All were obtained by Prairie Path board members, especially Path Secretary Eugene Lewis.
- Licenses to cross or bypass several sections of right-of-way which had reverted to private landowners. All were obtained by Path Board Members including Treasurer Joan Hamill.

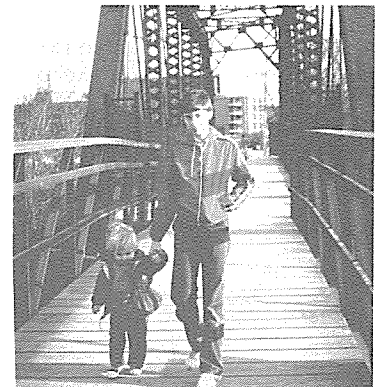


Scenic Illinois Prairie Path bridge over West Branch of DuPage River, Warrenville, was built in 1976.

Fifth and final bridge over East Branch of DuPage River near Lombard was built by Illinois Prairie Path in 1978.



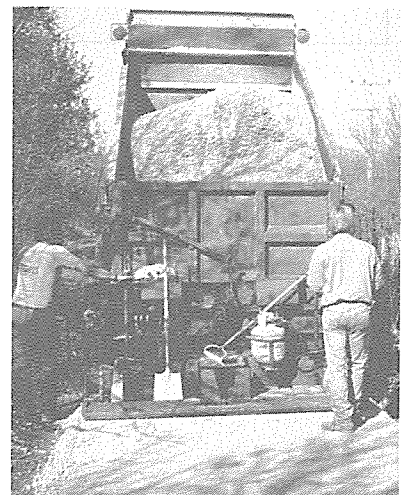
- A bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River at Warrenville. The prefabricated bridge was erected by a contractor for The Illinois Prairie Path in 1976 at a cost of \$30,000.
- A bridge over the East Branch of the DuPage River between Glen Ellyn and Lombard. After the failure of no less than four wooden Prairie Path bridges at the site, the final all-steel fire-, flood- and vandal-proof bridge was installed by a contractor in 1978 at a cost of \$22,000. All funds of course were donated by members and friends of the Prairie Path. (The famous bridge in Wheaton over the CNW Railroad tracks and Front and Wesley Streets was not even mentioned in this field evaluation, probably because it was considered impossible. The impossible did take us a little longer, until 1983, when the bridge was constructed by Prairie Path volunteers and DAVEA students under the direction of Path Vice President Philip T. Hodge at a cost of \$25,000. A pre-construction engineering estimate had been \$250,000!)
- Signs to caution and direct people at all street and railroad crossings. These were installed and have been maintained ever since, mainly by our members led by Dick Wilson, Bob Hargis, and others.
- Cleanup of dumps which disfigured the right-of-way in every municipality from Wheaton to Elmhurst and in the unincorporated areas of every other section too, including the Elgin Branch, Batavia Spur and Aurora Branch. This has taken more than fifteen years, but our volunteers working with cooperating villages and DuPage County have almost completed the job. Litter control is ongoing.



"Volunteer Bridge" in Wheaton, spanning two city streets, one small park, and a railroad, was built by Illinois Prairie Path and DAVEA students in 1983.



First Prairie Path annual cleanups were held in 1970. Volunteers picked up this typical pile of junk from bootleg dumps on the right-of-way in Glen Ellyn. (See photo at left and above.)



In a major Prairie Path surfacing project contractor uses Layton box to spread limestone screenings on Path at St. James Farm, 1981.

- Surfacing and drainage improvements on thirty miles of trail in DuPage County. From 1975 to 1985 The Illinois Prairie Path, mainly under the direction of Jean Mooring, spent approximately \$128,000 contributed by members and friends to surface more than ten miles of the most deteriorated sections.

The Illinois Prairie Path collection at the museum will eventually include files of correspondence, beautifully illustrated magazine articles about the Path, boxes of newspaper clippings, memorabilia such as CA&E railroad spikes found along the Path, IPP T-shirts, logo signs, patches, maps, *Newsletters* and other publications, and thousands of colored slides taken by board members, especially Jean and Paul Mooring. All of these materials reveal the devotion of uncounted man- and woman-hours to a great project. They will prove to future students of history that May Watts was right when she wrote, "Footpaths are defended with spirit by their users."

FOUNTAIN PLANNED AS MEMORIAL FOR HELEN TURNER

The Illinois Prairie Path board of directors announces its intention to install a fountain this year at Volunteer Park in Wheaton to honor the memory of Helen Turner, Path co-founder. Practical and useful like Helen herself, the dual-purpose structure will provide a drinking fountain and a threaded faucet for attaching a hose and will thus offer water both to thirsty Prairie Path travelers and to the flowers in the nearby prairie. Helen loved them all — people and prairie plants. She also liked to be at the center of the action, and so it is fitting that her memorial should be at the geographical center of the Path.

The City of Wheaton Public Works Department has generously offered to install the necessary piping and perhaps the fountain too if The Illinois Prairie Path will pay for the materials. The Helen Turner Memorial Fund now totals approximately \$1,500. Contributions earmarked for the fund may be made to The Illinois Prairie Path, c/o F. Paul Mooring, 295 Abbottsford Court, Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137.

GOOD NEWS FROM MAYWOOD

Len Chabala, chairman of the IPP Cook County Committee, reports that the Maywood Village Board has gotten on the trail bandwagon. The board voted unanimously on January 22 to turn over to the Northeastern Illinois Trails Association (NITA) a fifteen-foot-wide strip of land along the west bank of the Des Plaines River for a trail. This important trail segment will link the Cook County forest preserve system via the Madison Street bridge to the Illinois Prairie Path, whose eastern terminus is First Avenue, Maywood. The land transfer is contingent upon the Cook County Forest Preserve District's providing Maywood officials with a legal survey of the property.

This vote of confidence from Maywood represents a triumph for the volunteers who comprise the membership of NITA. June Rebechini, who spoke to the Maywood trustees on behalf of the NITA board of directors, is a longtime trail advocate and a leading proponent of the Tecumseh (or Heartland) Trail, a 3000-mile national scenic trail which will some day run from the Minnesota-Canada border to the southern tip of Florida. "This new section will be a vital link in the trail in the Chicago area," said Mrs. Rebechini. "Without it (the strip) it's impossible to link the Prairie Path. With it the Cook County Forest Preserve District can connect the trails. It will be well cared for and patrolled and will be a great asset to your community."

Spring Activities, rain or shine

Saturday, April 25
(or as scheduled by villages)

Annual Prairie Path Cleanup in all villages and along entire length of Path. For information contact your local village manager; Bob Hargis, Prairie Path Cleanup Coordinator, 668-7377; or Tom Merrion, DuPage County Division of Transportation, 682-7318.

Saturday, May 16

Work Day. Call Dick Wilson, 299-7882 (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)

Saturday, May 23

Spring Bird Walk in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in far northwest parking lot. Bring binoculars, lunch and drink. Leader: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.

Sunday, May 31

Annual Spring Hike to Timber Ridge Forest Preserve. Approx. 8 miles for the round trip. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Members' Room in Rathje Park, 616 Delles, Wheaton. Bring lunch and drink. Leader: Dick Wilson, 299-7882 (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)

Saturday, June 20

Work Day. Call Dick Wilson, 299-7882 (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)

Saturday, June 27

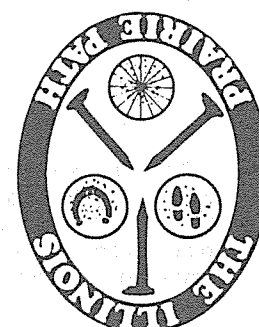
Wildflower Walk at West Chicago Prairie, sponsored by West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at northeast corner of Electronic Supply Systems' parking lot, located on Industrial Drive just north of Western and south of Hawthorne, West Chicago. Leader: Mel Hoff, 790-4912.

—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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