

Fall 1997



THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

Don't Miss the Many Interesting Sights Along the Geneva Spur

The newest section of the Illinois Prairie Path is the Geneva Spur which was dedicated last year on National Trails Day. One year after its dedication, the Geneva Spur has become one of the more popular sections of the 63-mile Illinois Prairie Path (IPP). The 9-mile Geneva Spur connects the IPP's Elgin Branch in Winfield to the Fox River Trail in Geneva.

This article highlights three interesting areas along the Geneva Spur: the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve, a remnant of the High Lake commuter station, and the City of West Chicago.

By David Tate

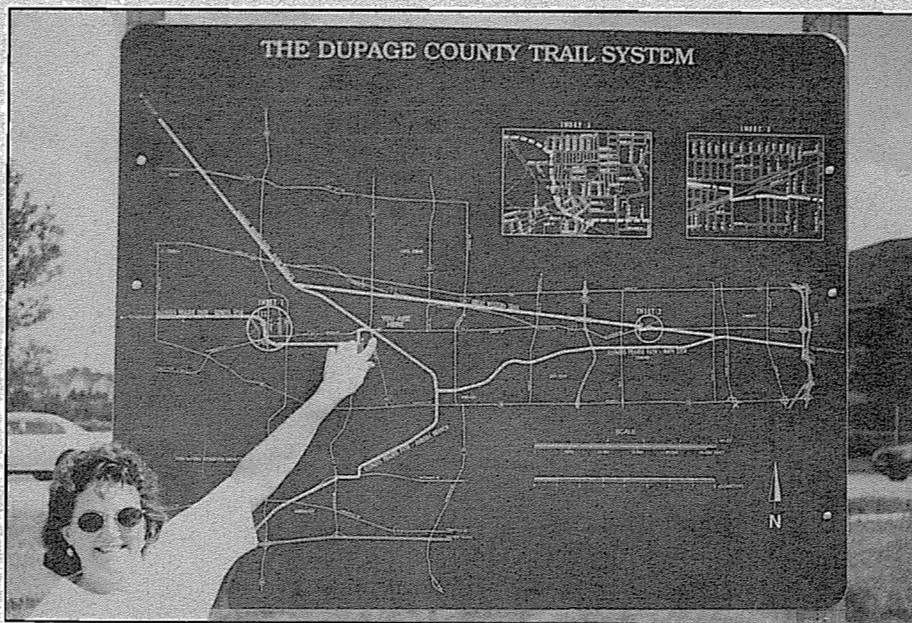
Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve

Within the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve, the Geneva Spur trail runs for 1.5 miles without crossing any roads. A new picnic table area was developed next to the trail that

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A new picnic area was developed in the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve.



Benna Tate uses one of the new DuPage County DOT's trail maps to show the Geneva Spur's eastern trailhead in Winfield at the intersection of Geneva Road and County Farm Road.

IPP Plans 1997 Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars! The Illinois Prairie Path's 33rd annual meeting will be held 2 p.m., Sunday, November 2, at The Abbey, 407 W. St. Charles Road, Elmhurst. The Abbey, an Elmhurst Park District facility, is easy to find and is located about one-half mile east of Route 83 and just west of the York High School. It offers plenty of parking and is accessible with no steps to climb.

At press time we have received a commitment from George Bellovics to speak at the annual meeting. George is the landscape architect and coordinator of the 475-mile Grand Illinois Trail for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, as well as the landscape architect for the \$850,000 of trail improvements that will be made to the IPP's 4-mile Cook County section in 1998. (Bids for the Cook County section are due to the IDNR in December 1997.) One or two additional speakers are also being recruited.



Sights to see along the Geneva Spur . . .

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includes a water pump. The picnic table is located beneath a grove of bur oak trees and overlooks the West Branch of the DuPage River.

The Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve is named after three American Indian burial mounds. The site was occupied at two different time periods: about 50 A.D. (the Middle Woodland period) and also about 500 A.D. (the Late Woodland period).

The mounds and accompanying village site are located about 1/3 of a mile south of the Geneva Spur and 1/16 of a mile west of the West Branch of the DuPage River in a large oak and hickory forest. It is thought that this location was chosen as an Indian village because the nearby river provided a year-round supply of water. Also, the Indians made good use of the hickory nuts from the surrounding forest. They boiled hickory nuts, which would separate the nut from the shell, and then would grind the nuts into flour.

The Winfield mounds are the best preserved Indian burial mounds in DuPage County. Although Indian burial mounds are very common in Wisconsin, few remain in this area



(Left photo)
An IPP display case is located at the Geneva Spur's eastern trailhead in Winfield at the three-trail intersection.



(Bottom photo)
David Tate stands next to one of the three Indian burial mounds in the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve.

due to the plowing of fields by farmers. It is estimated that 95% of DuPage County has been farmed at one time or another.

Aurora archaeologist Douglas Kullen has written two papers on the Winfield burial mounds and village. Copies of these papers are available in the Winfield Library. Also if you would like to learn more about this interesting subject, Doug gives tours of the Winfield mounds in conjunction with Illinois Archaeology Awareness Week in September each year.

At least four excavation parties have dug at the Winfield mound site. The first excavators were vandals who excavated two of the mounds in 1926 and 1927. Then in 1929, a Mr. Cook of Wheaton exca-

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The Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter

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Meetings: The Illinois Prairie Path Board of Directors meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in Rathje Park, 616 Delles Ave., Wheaton, IL 60189



... Sights to see along the Geneva Spur

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vated the third mound before contacting the University of Chicago Department of Anthropology. In 1931 the U. of C. excavated at the site and determined that the mounds were in fact Indian burial mounds. Finally in 1975 and 1976, Wheaton College excavated at the site and from the "prehistoric debris scatter" of artifacts determined that in addition to the burial mounds the site was occupied as a village during two distinct time periods.

Unfortunately, none of the previous excavation parties backfilled their excavations. Therefore, visitors to the site today do not actually see much of the original burial mounds, but rather only the holes where the mounds once were and the mounds of dirt next to the holes. The IPP not-for-profit corporation strongly supports Douglas Kullen's recommendation to the DuPage County Forest Preserve District that the "open excavation units and pitted mounds should be refilled and seeded."

Proceeding west along the Geneva Spur and immediately west of the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve,

you will come in the contact with a second remnant of prior era — the stairs of the High Lake commuter station on the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway.

CA&E Railway's High Lake Commuter Station

The Chicago, Aurora & Elgin (CA&E) commuter rail service began on the 9-mile Geneva Spur in 1909 and continued until the spur was abandoned in 1937 during the Great Depression. The Geneva Spur was the last segment of the CA&E line to be placed into service and also the first segment to be abandoned.

After the Geneva Spur was abandoned, this linear 9-mile corridor lay idle for 59 years until the Geneva Spur trail was opened in 1996.

Today the only visible remnant of the CA&E railroad along the Geneva Spur are the stairs of the CA&E's High Lake commuter station. The High Lake station's concrete stairs can still be spotted today if you look closely on the north side of the path about 150 feet west of Lake Drive. If you are traveling along the Geneva Spur from the east to the west, Lake Drive is the

first small street that you cross as you exit the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve (between mile markers 4 and 5). The High Lake station was a small but sharply constructed brick commuter station that served the residential area on the east side of West Chicago.

As you proceed west along the Geneva Spur (a short distance past the remnant of the High Lake commuter station), you will cross Sunset Avenue. This street was named after the CA&E Railroad's trademark name of Sunset Lines. The CA&E Railroad was referred to as the Sunset Lines because commuters would travel home in the evenings into the sunset on their return commute from Chicago.

As you proceed west along the Geneva Spur, the next two miles of the trail will take you through the city of West Chicago.

West Chicago - The Trail

Navigating the trail through West Chicago for the first time can be a little tricky. The key is to alertly watch for the trail's small green directional arrow signs. After that first trip through West Chicago, follow-

(Continued on page 4)



First-time trail users in West Chicago should watch for the trail's small green directional arrow signs such as this one at the intersection of Main Street and Wilson Avenue.



In the center of West Chicago, the Geneva Spur trail is a 10-foot wide concrete section along Turner Court. West Chicago's new library is on the left.



Sights to see along the Geneva Spur . . .

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up rides should become very easy. This is especially true once you know that (1) the old CA&E Railway ran through the center of the city and (2) the current route of the Geneva Spur trail through West Chicago is always within 1/2 block of the original 1909 railbed.

The trail through West Chicago is probably the best marked trail through any city along both the 63-mile IPP and the 39-mile Fox River Trail. As long as first-time bicyclists traveling through West Chicago watch for the trail's signs, they will breeze through the city. In the center of West Chicago, the trail is a concrete sidewalk 2,000 feet long by 10 feet wide that starts at the West Chicago commuter station and runs westward next to the city's new library.

West Chicago - The City

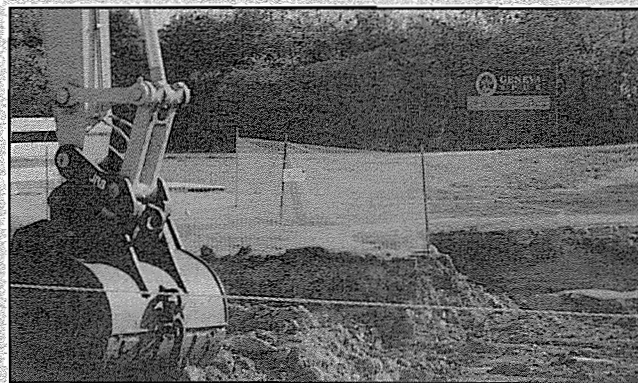
West Chicago has a rich political history. In the city in 1858, Abraham Lincoln, then a candidate for the United States senate, debated Stephen Douglas. Although Honest Abe lost this election, the series of debates that he held with Stephen Douglas made him a nationally known figure and he was elected

president 15 months after the West Chicago debate.

More recently in September 1994, Governor Jim Edgar spoke in West Chicago commemorating the beginning of very large radioactive waste cleanup.

This \$150 million low-level radioactive waste cleanup continues today and is West Chicago's current headline news. A \$150 million cleanup is no small feat for a city with a population of less than 15,000. The cleanup is scheduled to be completed in 2001 and involves removing 500,000 tons (over 2,500 railcars) of radioactive thorium that is being shipped by rail to Utah.

One segment of the cleanup in progress can currently be seen adjacent to the path in Reed-Keppler Park on the west side of West Chicago. Path users do not have to be concerned about the low-level radioactive thorium as only long-term exposure poses health risks.

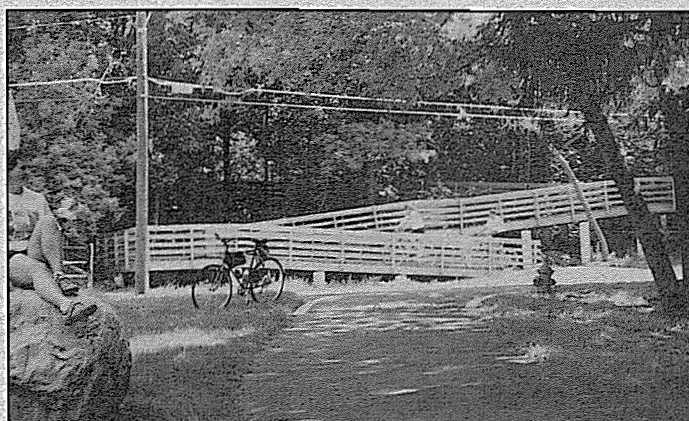


Cleanup of low-level radioactive thorium is currently taking place next to the trail in Reed-Keppler Park in West Chicago.

Beginning in the 1930's and continuing through the 1950's, the Lindsay Light & Chemical Company extracted radioactive thorium from ore for use in gas lanterns. Kerr-McGee subsequently bought the Lindsay factory in 1967 and closed it in 1973. Thorium creates the glow-in gas light mantles. A by-product of the extraction of thorium from ore was crushed "tailings" which, unfortunately, were used as a landfill material throughout much of the city and surrounding areas. It is these low-level radioactive tailings that caused the city of West Chicago to be placed on the EPA's Superfund list of contaminated properties.



The Geneva Spur's Jack T. Knuepfer bridge passes over eight tracks of the Union Pacific and Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railroads.



The trail's switchback bridge at Route 25 is 100 feet to the east of the Geneva Spur's western trailhead.

Illinois Prairie Path Signage Upgraded in DuPage

By Paul Aeschleman

In response to the feedback from IPP users in our 1996 IPP Survey, two major upgrades to the IPP signage throughout DuPage County were recently completed by the Illinois Prairie Path and the DuPage County Division of Transportation (DOT). The projects included the installation of a new set of mile markers and numerous "You are Here" trail maps (see photo on page 1).

The old IPP mile markers, many of which had been in place over 20 years, were replaced after our inspections revealed that markers were either missing, in a state of severe decay, or obscured. The large "You are Here" trail maps were installed to show trail users the system of trails maintained by the DuPage County DOT. These trail maps are located at numerous locations along the IPP and the Great Western Trail at major street crossings, parking areas, parks and trail intersections. The IPP mile marker project was funded by the IPP and supported by the DuPage County DOT. The "You are Here" trail maps were funded, designed and installed by the DuPage County DOT.



Thanks to all the volunteers who assisted with the mile marker project!

We would like to take this opportunity to once again extend our thanks to all of the IPP volunteers and the DuPage County Division of Transportation-- especially Ruth Krupensky, Chuck Tokarski, and Jim Galto -- for their generous support and assistance with these projects.

Many of the IPP volunteers who helped with the mile marker project are shown in the photograph above including: Ron Brown, Jim Pickor, Jim Wear, Mike Szyska, Sylvia Kellog, Tricia Feeley and Sam Keeley, and IPP board members Jean

Mooring, David Tate, Mike Cross, Bob Rawls, Eric Keeley, Bob Bernero, Ken Moss and Paul Aeschleman.

We would also welcome your feedback! If you would like to see more of these types of improvements:

- send a note to the IPP at P.O. Box 1086, Wheaton, IL 60189
- leave a message at (630) 752-0120,
- e-mail your comments to <http://www.mcs.net/~msc/IPP>, or
- attend an upcoming IPP board meeting.

Flashing Light and Other Improvements Made in West Chicago

By Jean Mooring

A push-button flashing yellow light now alerts the speeding motorists on Prince Crossing Road in West Chicago to the presence of Illinois Prairie Path bicyclists crossing the roadway. Few drivers actually slow down, however, so IPP users must still exercise caution. This location is especially dangerous because it is near the bottom of the hill and the sight distance is poor. As requested by a county board member,

the wigwag flasher was installed in May at a cost of \$2,000 by the DuPage County Division of Transportation.

The City of West Chicago maintains this section of Prince Crossing Road. As an additional safety measure, the city has recently installed "No Parking" signs along both sides of this heavily-traveled highway. Further improvements are currently being planned by the city including:

widening lanes; adding a third lane for passing at intersections, subdivision entrances, and major side streets; and adding curbs and gutters and a closed drainage system with storm sewers. A bike path will also connect the IPP Geneva Spur south of Geneva Road to the IPP Elgin Branch and the Great Western Trail. Trail users hope there will also be a new parking facility providing access to both the IPP and the Great Western, perhaps located on the Great Western right-of-way.

National Trails Day Event: A New Trail and A New Award

By Jean Mooring

On National Trails Day (June 7), a steady rain did not dampen the spirits of the hardy souls who celebrated the official opening of the Timber Ridge Trail at the DuPage County Forest Preserve District's Kline Creek Farm. County board members Olivia Gow, Roger Kotecki, "Dewey" Pierotti, and Pamela Rion helped cut the ribbon to open the beautiful new Timber Ridge Trail. The event brought together many environmental groups who set up their booths for networking under a large tent.

Paul and Jean Mooring were presented with the first "Paul and Jean Mooring Trail Award" by The Conservation Foundation's Trail Project. The award honors its recipients for their "Long time dedication and leadership in the promotion and development of a multi-use trails network in DuPage County."

The National Trails Day event was co-sponsored by the Forest Preserve District, The Conservation Foundation's Trails Project and Trail Riders of DuPage (TROD).



Jean and Paul Mooring (center) hold their award flanked by David Tate (left), president of the Illinois Prairie Path, and Ed Barsotti (right), chairman of The Conservation Foundation.



Trail users join Forest Preserve Commissioners Pierotti, Gow, Kotecki, and Rion for ribbon-cutting to open Timber Ridge Trail. Looking on (far right) is Bob Thornberry with the Springfield Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

ISTEA Funding in Danger

By Mike Cross

In 1991 the federal transportation funding program called the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) created new funding opportunities for rail-trails and other bicycle and pedestrian improvements across the country. These improvements are providing new transportation choices for school children and others, building better communities by linking neighborhoods and downtowns with pathways, and improving safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists alike.

As a result of ISTEA funding, Illinois is in the process of building 221 bicycle projects worth \$110 million. In the Chicago area, 110 bicycle projects were approved from 1992 through 1995. Just over 20% of these have been completed

and another 43% are scheduled for completion in 1997 or 1998. As for the remaining projects, five were dropped, two were funded for engineering only, 14 are stalled because of right-of-way problems, and 13 are delayed because of engineering problems.

The current ISTEA program expired on September 30, 1997, and right now Congress is debating the next ISTEA. A recent poll found that 71% of adults support spending only 1% of gas taxes on trails. But, there's no guarantee that these programs will continue or that the formulas that divide the funds won't change.

Big oil companies and highway contractors have launched an all out campaign to take away the less than 1% of gasoline taxes that fund bicycles and family-friendly commu-

nities. Even the American Automobile Association (AAA) wants to raid the biggest source of ISTEA funds for trails.

Now is the time to contact your Congressional representative and send a message to Congress that ISTEA must be re-written with dedicated transportation enhancement funding intact. Let your representative know bike lanes, trails, and bike parking are very important in making Illinois a better place to live and are critical bicycle safety issues. If you are looking for the right words to say, a sample letter can be obtained by sending your address, fax number, or e-mail address to: Bikes Belong in Illinois, 417 S. Dearborn, Suite 1000, Chicago, IL, 60605; fax: 312-427-4907; or e-mail: albike@aol.com.

(Portions of this article were copied from the Rails-to-Trails Trailblazer and the Chicago Bicycle Federation's [CBF] newsletter.)

Vote "YES" For More Open Space

This article is reprinted with permission from The Conservation Foundation Newsletter (Summer 1997) for the information of trail users who know that more open space means more trails. Call The Conservation Foundation for more information at (630) 682-3505.

The DuPage County Forest Preserve Commission has voted to place a referendum question on the November ballot asking voters' approval to sell up to \$75 million in bonds to "acquire and develop land for the purposes of preserving wildlife habitats, trail and greenway corridors, wetlands, prairies and forests and providing flood control."

What will \$75 million buy?

This money will purchase roughly 2,000 acres – about 8 percent of the county's remaining "undeveloped" land.

How will the money be distributed?

Each of the six county board districts will be allocated \$10 million for land acquisition and development. The remaining \$15 million will be used to acquire or develop additional property throughout DuPage County.

What will a "yes" vote cost me?

Approval of the referendum will add about \$16 to the annual property tax bill for a home with a market value of \$150,000. The bonds will be financed over a 20-year period.

How will 2,000 additional acres of forest preserve benefit me?

There will be more of what's good about DuPage County. Most of us think that DuPage County is a very good place to live. The 22,500 acres of existing forest preserves are an important component of our county's quality of life. To maintain what we have come to expect, we need open and green space to keep pace with our growing population.

Can't we wait a few years to do this?

The adage "buy land because they're not making any more of it" is very true in DuPage County. The Natural Areas Study recently conducted by the DuPage County Regional Planning Commission identified 26,000 acres of undeveloped land in 1995. Sounds like a lot. The problem is that the rate of development has averaged more than 3,000 acres per year for the last quarter century. In less than a decade, there will be virtually no undeveloped land in DuPage County.

How will the properties to be acquired be chosen?

Forest Preserve Commissioners will determine the parcels to be acquired. Their decisions will be based on citizen input, the ecological quality of parcels, information from sources such as the Natural Areas Study, and by how the parcels complement existing forest preserve holdings.

How can I help pass the referendum?

The Conservation Foundation is taking a leading role in the effort to pass the referendum. Call us!

Taylor Ave. Bridge Idea is Reborn in Glen Ellyn

By Jean Mooring

Every other DuPage County municipality through which the Illinois Prairie Path runs has at least one Prairie Path bridge, and Ron Renard thinks Glen Ellyn should have a bridge too. The former village board member has been appointed by the village board to be chairman of a task force which will investigate options, research and apply for grants, and coordinate necessary governmental approvals for the construction of a bridge on the Illinois Prairie Path spanning Taylor Avenue in the Village of Glen Ellyn.

Prairie Path users have been complaining for years that the Taylor Avenue crossing is one of the most uncomfortable and dangerous on the whole trail. A collision on August 1, 1997, between a bicycle and an automobile is a good example of some of the hazards at this intersection. The trail is substandard here because of the 13 percent grades on each side of the road. The standard for bicycle trails set by the AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Traffic Officials) requires a 5% maximum grade. The steep slopes encourage cyclists to speed across the road instead of stopping so they will have enough momentum to ride up the hill on the other side. This is probably what the bicyclist was trying to do when he ran into the car on August 1.

Members of the task force include: David Tate, president of the Illinois Prairie Path; Paul and Jean Mooring, longtime IPP board members; Pi Irwin, superintendent of Elementary School District 41; Warren Sennecke, member of the Glen Ellyn Environmental Commission; and Tom Waters, member of the Vision Glen Ellyn "Greening" committee.

1997 Tax-deductible Contributions Can Benefit the Illinois Prairie Path!

It is now that time of the year to make 1997 tax-deductible contributions to the Illinois Prairie Path (IPP) that would supplement your annual IPP membership dues.

The Illinois Prairie Path is a not-for-profit corporation and contributions are tax deductible. **Please remember the IPP when it is time to make your 1997 contributions. Your contributions to the IPP will provide local trail amenities and assure the continuation of trail improvements.**

Along the 63-mile trail, the IPP provides display cases, mile markers, benches, free trail maps, trash barrels, and comfort stations. We also preserve, restore and re-establish prairies along the trail. In addition, the IPP coordinates trail cleanups, makes donations, and works with municipalities, counties and the State of Illinois to promote trail awareness and improvements.

It is also possible to double/triple your gift through your company's matching gift program. The matching gift form, obtained from your company's personnel office, should be mailed along with your check.

Checks made payable to the "Illinois Prairie Path" can be sent to the following address:

Illinois Prairie Path
PO Box 1086
Wheaton, IL 60189

Thanks for your consideration!
The IPP's all volunteer Board of Directors



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