

Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

October, 2012

Vol. 2, No. 4

The Clifftop Board of Directors
cordially invites Clifftop members to attend

*A Good Day at White Rock
Clifftop Membership Day at our Nature Preserve*

*Saturday, October 20, 2012
11 a.m. until 2 p.m.*

Food and drink will be served and "facilities" will be provided

*RSVP to Membership Chair Joann Fricke by October 18
at cliffmbr@htc.net or call (618)935-2542*

Clifftop's gator, fondly known as "Clifton Gator" by stewardship volunteers,
along with a few borrowed Gators will be available
to transport those who do not care for strenuous hiking.

Parking will be available in the White Rock parking lot on Bluff Road
and along Harris Road which is southwest of the parking lot.

Last year's "Good Day at White Rock" featured the celebration of the public opening of the Preserve and its dedication as an Illinois Nature Preserve. On what we hope will be another autumn day as golden-hued as last year's, Board members want to listen to and discuss with Clifftop members regarding:

- ❖ What Clifftop accomplished in 2012
- ❖ Upcoming programs for 2013
- ❖ How the organization works
- ❖ Plans and projects that members can share

Join us for a fun-filled day to renew acquaintances, meet new friends, reminisce about what our bluff lands mean to each of us and enjoy our Great Outdoors. Clifftop members, of course, are welcome to hike the trails and take in the splendors of fall foliage, late blooms and wonderful vistas.

The RSVP is needed so we can plan for food and drink. Several Board members have already pledged homemade goodies, so don't miss out!

Not yet a member? You can remedy that by completing the membership form on page 8 of this newsletter and sending it along with annual dues to us at P.O. Box 131, Maestown, IL 62256.



Snagged!

by Pen DauBach



Photo courtesy of R & N Tree Service

A portion of Madeline's Rest on White Rock Nature Preserve was under threat – not by erosion or, even, encroaching bush honeysuckle – but by the presence of five very large dead trees. High winds or severe storms could make these snags even more unstable and cause them to topple or lose large branches at any time, possibly hurting a hiker having a relaxing rest.

The snags also were close to our interpretive and recognition signage, and this made removal a very tricky process. Several tree experts looked over the situation, but only shook their heads, saying the dead trees were simply far too dangerous to climb

and trim. They recommended we contact Rhonda and Neal Schaefer, of R & N Tree Service in Red Bud, noting that they had equipment that might almost have been made for such a task.

On a sunny early autumn day Neal, Rhonda and their crew brought their high-lift onto the Preserve to tackle the dead trees. Once Neal made a careful reading of the ground and chose the path he wanted for each felling, they carefully placed ropes and pulleys. Then, as crew tightened ropes to guide each giant as it fell, cuts were made and each tree was brought down exactly as Neal planned.

The snags no longer pose a threat to hikers or signage. I must admit, though, that my attention certainly was snagged by the skill that enabled the R & N crew to put several tons of dead wood exactly where they wanted.



Clifftop has recently let two contracts for local conservation contractors to begin work to eradicate bush honeysuckle and other invasive species on 120 acres of the White Rock Nature Preserve and 86 acres of the White Rock Land & Water Reserve. The work will proceed over a three year period, with an initial invasives treatment and two follow-up treatments. In addition, 8 acres of hill prairies on the preserve will be cleared of unwanted dogwoods and sumacs, which are overtaking the prairies.

Funding for the work was made possible through U.S. Farm Bill conservation cost-share programs. We are now completing applications to several governmental conservation programs to garner additional money to do similar work on the remaining 269 acres of the preserve and reserve.

Guest Views...

An Autumn View of Home

by Lynn Rippelmeyer

When I was a young teenager, one of my favorite ways to spend a weekend afternoon was horseback riding. Lucky, my chestnut quarter horse, and I would set out for one of our two cherished destinations. Due west from our farmhouse lay the Mississippi River. A ride down the mile long field road, through Harrisonville, and across the levee brought us to a woods full of animal trails and the ever-changing riverbank to explore. Competing for the day's adventure, to the east lay the bluffs, beckoning with the challenge of an uphill ride and the reward of the view of the valley below.

The ride to the river could be done bareback, but the climb up the bluff required a saddle and therefore, Lucky's cooperation. For me to put the blanket and heavy

western saddle on him, he had to stand still beside a cement block I stood on to give me the needed extra height. Even when he cooperated, it took both arms, a well-timed knee and all the strength I could muster to swing the saddle up and into place. I cinched the girth as tight as I could, knowing it would have to be re-tightened after we rode for a while and again before we headed uphill. It was a bit more trouble, but I was always pleased when the bluff won our afternoon ride decision.

Once we were beyond our driveway headed east, it was only a short ride down the blacktop before we came to Big Tree Road, named in honor of the beautiful specimen that stood as sentry at the entrance. (editor's note: Big Tree Road is now known as Harris Road.) Its wide spreading branches welcomed the farmers' families who lived off her road, the only people who usually came this way, and Lucky and me.

It would have been a bit shorter to cut across the fields, but damaging crops is something the child of a farmer learns early not to do. Although I longed to replicate Saturday's TV episode of Fury galloping across just such scenery, I doubted that a passing farmer would share my view. Being seen committing such a crime wasn't worth the risk, so we stuck to the grassy ditch alongside the gravel road.

This journey to the bluff via Big Tree Road had its challenges with a bridge and railroad tracks to cross, neither of which Lucky cared for. As a reward for successful crossings, we often stopped so he could get a drink, eat some grass and munch on the carrot I had tucked away for him.

On one particularly clear, gorgeous, fall day, as Lucky refreshed himself, I looked up at the majestic rock formation in front of me. A sheer limestone cliff sparkled in the afternoon sun, rising upward nearly 400 feet into the clear blue autumn sky. The rock face displayed shades of whites, creams and grays pressed against each other, layer after layer, marking the time it took to create such a masterpiece. The brush at its base also demanded attention and praise, with the maples, hackberries and oaks showing off in brilliant shades of oranges, reds and yellows. After re-cinching the saddle, I used the sloping creek bed to my advantage to mount up and continue our ride.

Big Tree Road ended at Bluff Road, which ran along the base of the rock cliffs. Crossing into the first shade we had had since leaving home, a light breeze reached us, flowing down from the wooded hillside. We headed for



Photo courtesy of Lynn Rippelmeyer

the hollow where a creek carried rainwater down a gently sloping grade to the drainage ditch below. Picking our way through the trees now, we followed the creek and deer trails briefly before opting for a shorter but steeper route to the top. I pushed down on the stirrups, gripped with my knees and leaned forward in the saddle to keep my weight over my horse's shoulders, the reins loose to give him his lead. At the steepest parts, Lucky's nose was near the earth as he reached for the next hoof placement in the thickly carpeted multicolored path. Leaning over his neck, I breathed in the aroma of horse, leather and sweat mixed with the woods' thick scents of moist earth, decaying leaves, fallen trees and patches of wildflowers. The sound of his hooves crunching leaves and branches sent squirrels and rabbits scurrying while cardinals, wrens and robins sought refuge in more distant trees. Movement beneath the leaves off to the side told me there were other critters disturbed by our passing as well. What looked like a stick went slithering off into the shadows.



Photo by Tom Rollins, Thomas Rollins Photography

Finally, the slope leveled off and we stepped into a clearing—a hilltop glade. Here on top of the bluff, prairie grasses mixed with goldenrod, asters and tall boneset grew right up to the bluff's rocky edge and around the outcroppings of large, smooth stones. I used thin rope I carried in the saddle to tie Lucky's reins to a cedar sapling growing amidst all the grass a horse could possibly want.

Edging toward the 400 foot shear drop, I stopped one step away from only air. Far above the treetops, I took deep rhythmic breaths to quell the fear and marveled at the spectacular view—the entire valley laid out before me. Looking down, I watched birds catching thermals created by the heat of the sun on

the rocks below. Backing up a bit, I found a large rounded rock with the center depressed and smoothed by the elements, creating the perfect chair for my visit.

Straight ahead, about 5 miles to the west, a similar bluff faced me. It was the western bank of the Mississippi River and the eastern border of Missouri. To the north and south as far as I could see, lay some of the richest farmland in the country, the American Bottoms. The bottoms had once been the riverbed of the Mississippi and topsoil from northern fields had been carried here by the river's waters. When she receded back to a narrower channel along the Missouri side, the river left her gifts, creating rich, fertile soil.

Standing there atop what had once been the eastern bank of the river, I tried to imagine what it was like when the Mississippi spanned from bluff to bluff. I knew the history of European settlers arriving in the early 1800's to create a community and farm the land. To restrain the river's waters and protect crops and home, increasingly bigger and stronger levees were built over the years. Periodically, however, Mother Nature and the river would conspire to reclaim what was theirs. Ignoring the manmade barriers, water would once again fill the expanse between these limestone walls. My folks told great stories about these floods, climbing out second story windows to waiting rowboats. Watermarks on our house walls stood as reminders of the three floods that our brick home withstood before my birth. With the river having such a huge impact on this valley's farms and families, its latest flood stage measurements, trends and predictions were often the main topic of conversation. I couldn't have known as a teen that this imagined scene would someday become a reality in the Flood of '93. However, on this gorgeous autumn day, the levee was in place, the valley and its inhabitants peaceful, safe and secure.

Those early settlers from Europe included my German ancestors. They put down stakes here and called it home: bringing with them their work ethic, love of the land and way of tending it. Now, generations later, we enjoyed the fruits of their labor. The farmland below me was laid out in neatly cultivated squares and rectangles stitched together with railroad tracks, streams, fences and hedges. It looked like one of my grandmother's patchwork quilts, each field a different crop color and texture that changed with the seasons. In the spring, I could imagine Mom's gold satin blouse, my green velvet dress and my brother's brown corduroy pants there in the fields of wheat, corn and plowed furrows. When the wind blew, it looked for all the world like a giant had picked up one

end and had given it a gentle shake, causing a gold and green wave to run from one end to the other.

Like the squirrels in the woods gathering nuts for the winter, that day the tractors in the fields below were bringing in the harvest. From this distance however, the drone of the machinery below was muted, the soundtrack replaced by two bobwhites calling to each other, a busy woodpecker and cranky crows in the distance. I watched a train silently make its way down the track while soundless combines picked rows of soy beans and corn, again changing the color and texture of the masterpiece before me. The valley was a living work of art—a man-made cross-stitched blanket for Mother Earth.

That day's show was "Amazing Autumnn." The sky was bluer than other times of year, the air crisper, the smells earthy and damp. The sounds of animals preparing for winter could be heard in the woods as the geese flew their V formation overhead. The rock beneath me had soaked up the afternoon sun, keeping me warm as the air cooled.

I removed my bandana headband, wadded it into a ball and placed it under my head for a pillow as I reclined on the rock. My face turned to the sun, seeking the warm rays that made their way through the cooling afternoon air. Birds circled above, floating effortlessly. How I envied them with their view of God's creation and man's handiwork. If only my horse could sprout wings, we could soar like Pegasus and rider over this place I called Home.

Editor's notes: Lynn's dream to fly became a reality. She was able to share an autumn view of home from aloft with her grandfathers Ray Rippelmeyer and William Niebruegge, pictured at right with Lynn in the middle.

Today Lynn flies all over the world as a Captain with United Airlines, her routes often taking her over the Mississippi River bottoms and the bluffs near Valmeyer.

After talking with Lynn and reading her article, I have concluded that her bluff excursions with Lucky took place at what is now White Rock Nature Preserve. The photo on page 4 was taken at White Rock and the road visible in the valley is Harris Road, or what Lynn refers to as Big Tree Road.



Photo courtesy of Lynn Rippelmeyer



The Monroe County YMCA is sponsoring the second annual Illinois Ozarks 10K Bluff Trail Run on October 27th 2012, at Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve in Valmeyer. The course begins in Borsch Park in old town Valmeyer and proceeds to the Reserve along Quarry Road and Limestone Lane. The run continues up Salt Lick Trail near Rock City, down Newman Trail, along Johnson Trail, back up Salt Lick Trail from the west and looping back down Salt Lick Trail near Rock City. For more information visit:

<http://www.bigriverrunning.com/racecalendar.php>



Carnivores of Monroe County

By Carl DauBach

Our carnivore neighbors always get our attention. The status and distribution of big cats, coyotes and furtive foxes in our bluff lands capture our imagination.

Rumors and sightings of cougars are ever-increasing; yet, scientific confirmation of truly wild cougars in the state only validates one in Randolph County in 2002, one in northwest Illinois in 2004, and, unbelievably, one in downtown Chicago in 2008. Missouri has had 8 scientifically documented sightings since 2011.

Our beloved bobcats are flourishing in the bluffs, increasingly seen, and now showing up in unexpected places. Fox numbers seem to be crashing and nobody seems to know why. And, of course, the perennially-hated and often-hunted coyotes, will no doubt long outlast all of us.

Clifftop is hosting a public seminar to help us better understand the status of these carnivores in our area. Dr. Clay Nielsen, Professor of Forest Wildlife, at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale's Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory, and Director of Science for the non-profit Cougar Network organization, will give a presentation on Saturday, November 10th 2012, from 1 to 3 PM, at the Monroe County Annex Building, 901 Illinois Avenue, in Waterloo.

The seminar is free and open to the public. Pre-registration by November 8th is required at clifftop@htc.net or by calling 618-458-4674.



Photo by Joann Fricke

Just
for
fun...

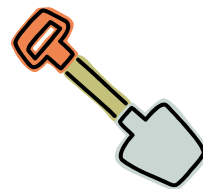
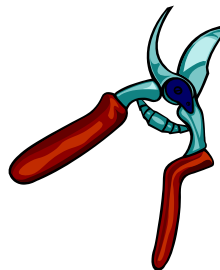


Photo by Joann Fricke

On August 22 it seemed that every critter in the neighborhood was thirsty. The turkey waited his turn until the deer were finished drinking. Note the squirrel in the photo below, drinking from a pie plate.



Photo by Joann Fricke



Volunteer opportunities abound with Clifftop. If we haven't contacted you recently and you'd like to volunteer please send an e-mail to cliffmbr@htc.net and we'll add you to our list. Stewardship can be hard but also very rewarding.



Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Meets in Monroe County

by Joann Fricke

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) held its 212th meeting on September 11, 2012, in Waterloo. The day before the meeting, the commissioners and INPC staff toured the Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve near Valmeyer. Salt Lick Point Stewardship committee members Jim Pflasterer, Bob Mohr and Denny Valentine and INPC Preservation Specialist and representative for Area 7 which includes Monroe County, Debbie Newman, guided the group of 23 on the Salt Lick Point Trail. Along the way, the leaders talked to the Commissioners and staff about hill prairies, threatened and endangered species at the Reserve, stewardship, such as prescribed burning and honeysuckle removal, archeology and other management topics. The field trip also highlighted the great work being accomplished by the volunteer committee, and the important partnership between the INPC, the Village of Valmeyer, and the work of the volunteers.



Photo by Joann Fricke

The INPC consists of 9 Illinois citizens appointed by the Governor to serve 3 year, unsalaried terms. The commissioners hold public meetings 3 times per year to evaluate whether sites presented to them by INPC field representatives qualify for dedication under one of the state's three programs. The Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, completed in 1978, designates the state's more rare natural areas and serves as a guide for the INPC when determining eligibility for protection.

The first of the three land protection options is dedication as an Illinois Nature Preserve. Only high-quality natural areas qualify for this land protection tool. Dedication is the strongest protection that can be given to land and provides permanent protection. The owner retains custody but voluntarily restricts future uses of the land in perpetuity to preserve its natural state and to perpetuate natural conditions. Qualifying lands in private, corporate, or government ownership can be dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

The second option for land protection is registration as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve. Lands and waters of Illinois that support significant natural heritage or archaeological resources qualify for this land protection tool. The agreement to register an area as a Land and Water Reserve determines allowable uses and stipulates management objectives. Registered Reserves may be in public or private ownership. The agreement may be for a term of years or permanent.

And the third option for land protection is designation as a Natural Heritage Landmark. This is a recognition program that introduces a landowner to the concept of natural area protection and allows the state to assist with management of the natural area. It is a voluntary program that increases understanding of the value of natural areas and encourages their preservation by private landowners. An agreement document determines provisions and can be terminated by either party on sixty days notice.

Once an area is protected under one of the Commission's protection programs, the INPC field staff has the duty to ensure that the area is not threatened or damaged. The INPC field staff consists of nine biologists located throughout the state. These Natural Areas Preservation Specialists are educated in the biology of natural areas and trained to assist landowners in the preservation of these important lands. They work with the owners of natural areas to tailor a conservation agreement that protects the natural features of the land while addressing the landowners' use of the property.

For more information on the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission go to <http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/index.htm>.

Join Clifftop

Members receive:

~~ E-mail newsletters

~~ Annual Report

~~ Invitations to special events & work days

~~ Invitations to join committees and work with the
Clifftop Board of Directors

~~ **The satisfaction of Preserving and Protecting
our Natural Areas and Natural Heritage.**

Dues:

\$25.00 annually, individuals

\$35.00 annually, families

\$50.00 annually, supporting

\$100.00 annually, sustaining

\$500.00 life membership



Pen DauBach photo

**To inquire about Clifftop membership,
please e-mail: cliffmbr@htc.net**

Membership Registration: Please print and complete.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail: _____ Phone: _____

Membership dues of \$_____ are enclosed; additional donation of \$_____

_____ I would like to volunteer with Clifftop; please contact me.

Please send your completed membership registration and a check for dues, payable to Clifftop, to:

**Clifftop
P.O. Box 131
Maestown, IL 62256**