

# Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

October, 2011

Vol. 1, No. 1

## WELCOME

by Joann Fricke

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Bluffviews, a quarterly newsletter for the members of Clifftop. We hope to inform you, entertain you, make you smile and maybe make you think. If you have suggestions for future issues, please let us know at [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net). We welcome your input. Don't hesitate to send pictures, poems or stories about why you love the bluffs.

When I was elected Membership Chair in January, 2011, little did I know what adventures awaited me. I have made presentations to groups as diverse as the Active Older Adults at the Monroe County YMCA to the Clovers 4H Club from Maestown. I have manned booths at several local events where the weather has played a prominent role more often than not. I also gave a presentation at the Morrison-Talbot Library in Waterloo. There was a small, but very attentive crowd. In the photo below, taken by Paul Feldker, I demonstrated the proper use of a flapper during prescribed burns.



After the library presentation, one of the audience members contacted me to arrange another speaking engagement for early next year for a local DAR chapter. If you know of any groups or clubs that need a speaker, I am available and grateful for the opportunity to spread the word about Clifftop.



## SPREAD THE WORD

You know why you joined Clifftop—because you love the bluffs and want to preserve them for many generations to come. Help us to spread the word about the work we do.

Possibly the best way to let others know about Clifftop is word of mouth. When you meet new people ask them if they are interested in conservation, especially conservation of the bluff lands. Talk about the acquisition and future of White Rock; the beautiful views from the trails at Salt Lick Point and Fults Hill Prairie; any upcoming Clifftop sponsored events, burns or work days. Share your enthusiasm. It might be contagious!

If your listeners catch the Clifftop virus, give them a copy of the membership form (on page 6 in this issue) to fill out and send to our post office box with a check for their dues. If you are reading this and have not yet become a member—don't delay! We welcome members from near and far. You aren't required to help on work days, but if you are willing and able, that's a plus for us.



# Guest Views...

## HOW THE BLUFFS CHANGED OUR LIVES

By Lucy Engbring

When news came that our family had to move to Southern Illinois, we were sad to leave our old farm house in West Bend, WI. No more swimming, boat rides, or fishing in nearby Wallace Lake. No more hikes in the countryside.

But being a military family, and used to moving, we were always up to the challenge of discovering a new place to live. Little did we know we would settle in the lovely Valmeyer bluffs, where a walk in the woods lifted up spirits like magic.

On the trail along the creek you might find an old arrowhead, or an Indian artifact left behind by those who were there before us. There's an almost spiritual feeling knowing you are stepping on the same ground. A bouquet of fragile wild violets, bouncy Dutchman's Breeches, and bright marsh buttercups brings Mother



Nature indoors while the dishes are being washed, and life turns cheerful again.

With all that the bluffs have to offer, one of the most incredible sights is the fall foliage, painted in endless brilliant colors for all to enjoy. I feel that the bluffs were responsible for enticing three of our sons to become wildlife biologists. They couldn't have made a better choice. Our son John can give you a better picture of what the bluffs meant to him as he was growing up. His story follows:

## THE VALMEYER BLUFFS

By John Engbring

Back when our family moved from Wisconsin to the old town of Valmeyer in 1967, the town was a pleasant farming community nestled at the base of the bluffs. The quarry was fully operational, and in the calm evenings, a plume of white limestone dust would drift out along the bluffs and over the bottoms. "That dust is good for the crops," the locals would say.

Outside the small town, three main features defined the landscape of our world—farmland, the Mississippi River, and the bluffs. As kids, we spent time in all three, but the forested bluffs were where we played and grew. Within a week of our arrival on a sweltering July day, we were exploring the bluffs, readily accessible from our house in town. The range of our meanderings stretched from Trout Hollow in the north to the Monroe City Hollow in the south. At the time, we harbored no concept of how unique a resource lay at our doorstep. We just knew that it was an alluring geography, a mix of trees and animals that continually piqued our curiosity and never ceased to keep us entertained.

We hiked, built forts, camped, searched for fossils, climbed trees, collected insects, picked mushrooms, hunted squirrels, and just hung out. We could sit at the top of the bluffs and look down on the Mississippi River bottoms below. From above, one could make out the old river sloughs that once meandered through the bottoms, Moredock Lake being a conspicuous feature. Our imaginations would drift—Native Americans and early explorers once tread these same scarps, and enjoyed the same vistas.

The ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, and heat didn't seem to bother us as youngsters. In fact, the bluffs could be a sanctuary on hot summer days before we had air conditioning. We clambered through cool stream valleys, and would run our hands over the smooth, white bark of huge sycamores. We found box turtles wallowing in muddy ravine pools, keeping cool and moist.

The bluffs exposed us to nature and the outdoors. Our first acquaintance with a variety of plants and animals came via our experiences in the bluffs—squirrels, deer, snakes, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and a variety of birds, trees, and plants. In the summer we would nibble on the fruit of the May apple, and in the fall the occasional pawpaw. My first sighting of a bobcat was on a cliff ledge just below Salt Lick Point; the cat silently stole across a log, only to vanish in front of my eyes when it realized that it was being watched.

Our appreciation for wild things grew through the years, even for the scarier things, like poisonous snakes. We never considered them a serious risk, and we came to savor the uncommon discovery of a rattlesnake curled in the



leaves on the forest floor or under an overhanging rock ledge. An adult timber rattler, recently shed, has one of the most striking and beautiful color patterns of any snake in Southern Illinois.

We loved to camp in the bluffs. One time we built a wickiup, a teepee-like structure made of long poles and covered in dry leaves. It was substantially sized, and several of us could gather inside. We would build a small campfire in the middle and sleep in a circle with our feet toward the fire, talking, telling jokes, and listening to night noises outside.

We experienced the bluffs through all seasons, and each season harbored its own particular beauty. One winter evening, my brother, Paul, and I, decided to camp out in the bluffs. It was cold, with snow on the ground; the thermo-

meter read 11 degrees below zero when we started hiking into the bluffs, and dropped to 17 below that night. We had no tent, and were both surprised that we woke up the next morning with no frostbite and all our digits intact. But waking to snow-covered bluffs, with icicles clinging to cliff faces, was an adventure.

We were always in the bluffs, even at night. Mr. (Bob) Heavner, our Ag teacher, was fond of the nocturnal pursuit of raccoons, and we would regularly accompany him and his dogs on long treks through the bluffs. The forest was a strange and different world at night—we could usually see no farther than the 15- or 20- foot circumference defined by our carbide lights. Large trees and rocks assumed spooky shapes. During raccoon season, the leaves were on the ground, and on crisp nights, they scrunched loudly as we ran up and down ravines, following the howling of the hounds.

For me, the bluffs were a biological laboratory, rich in flora and fauna. Garnished with my experiences in the bluff, I went on to spend a career as a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm not sure that children today spend as much time in the bluffs as when I was young. With computer games and the Internet, there are many more distractions. And, frankly, children need to be spending time with those inventions if they expect to be prepared for today's world. But, the Valmeyer bluffs remain an option for exploration and adventure, replete with lessons to learn about the intricate and elegant relationships of plants, animals and their habitats.



### About the author:

Helen was born to Herman and Emma Garleb in Braunsburg, IL, now known as Fults. The family moved to Boxtown at some point and in 1918 settled just outside Merrimac where her sister, Vera, was born. Helen attended SIU Carbondale and did some substitute teaching. In 1937 she married Clarence Schaefer. They lived most of their married life on Schaefer Stock Farm located north of Harrisonville. Helen was very active in Home Extension and taught Sunday School at St. John UCC in Valmeyer for many years. She started writing poetry at an early age and continued into her senior years, typing most of her poems on a manual typewriter. The poem at right was written over 50 years ago. As this was her favorite among all her sister's compositions, Vera embroidered a wall hanging with the verse during the 1970's. Joann Fricke transcribed the poem for the inaugural issue of Bluffviews.

## OCTOBER IN THE HILLS

by Helen Garleb Schaefer (1911-2003)

*I see its pictures painted  
Like no artist can portray  
For God's lone hand is everywhere  
The Master in His way.*



*A burst of red struck here and there  
A splash of purple hue  
Yellow, orange arranged just right  
Like no one else can do.*



*Take a stroll into the woods  
And linger if you please.  
Magnificent! The art displayed  
God's work amongst our trees.*

# WHITE ROCK~~~ROCKS!!!

By Pen DauBach

From the very first day – December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – when friends and supporters gathered at the Monroe County Courthouse to celebrate the acquisition of this splendid 475-acre natural area tract, White Rock continues to dazzle. While Clifftop and the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development both jointly own the land, Clifftop manages and oversees all infrastructure, stewardship and activities on the lands.

Getting the large 306-acre south tract ready for public access and passive recreation has kept Clifftop busy for the past nine months, but with the continued eager hands-on assistance of volunteers and workers, the site will be celebration-ready on October 22<sup>nd</sup>.



Stewardship of such a natural area site is a large responsibility. Clifftop's Board decided early on that good planning makes sense. With the support of the Grand Victoria Foundation, the Board retained Long Forestry Consultation to write a Forest Management Plan for the entire acreage. Mike Long's plan is a detailed guide, replete with GIS references, topographic maps, and analysis for best management practices. Thanks to Long's work, we know the locations of every honeysuckle-infested area; necessary maple culling practices; and the way ahead to make the White Rock lands a model of good stewardship practices and wildlife enhancement methods.

Another of our first tasks was to decide how to close the former 1.75-acre room-and-pillar White Mine that lies adjacent to the access trail. Safety considerations made this a must-do operation, as people could injure themselves clambering through leftover rubble from the mine's first life; moreover, the mine's second life as a poultry production area in the 1950's resulted in deep, fluffy piles of chicken manure scattered along corridors and in rooms. This presented an even greater risk, as old bird manure anywhere in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys – at essentially a 100% rate-- contains spores of the disease-causing fungus *Histoplasmosis capsulatum*.

Rather than just close the mine, Clifftop's board decided to give it yet a third life. Beginning in February a team of scientists from the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Speleological Survey, the Subterranean Ecology Institute, and Bat Conservation International, devised a plan to create conditions in the former mine that would mimic those of a natural cave. Our hope, and that of the advisory team, is that the former White Mine becomes a habitat that is friendly to cave-dependent and cave-dwelling wildlife, such as bats and several types of invertebrates.

Before the habitat transformation began, volunteers donated nearly 300 hours to plot and then map every feature (including each pile of chicken manure!) within the old mine, to provide baseline documentation for the experiment. After a water wash-down to eliminate the risk of fungus-

containing dust from being disbursed, leftover equipment from both mining and poultry production was removed and a series of sensors were installed to allow constant monitoring of internal conditions.

With generous funding from the Grand Victoria Foundation, Clifftop began a multi-part project to seal the mine from unauthorized entry yet allowing critter access. Moving in the three tons of steel needed for this task meant laying in a trail to support the traffic. The principals of Southern Illinois Farms, who granted access easements to us on this trail area, gave permission for the heavy equipment use. Greg Wiley, of Valmeyer-based Wyco LLC, coordinated and installed trails with careful planning to prevent soil erosion.



(continued on page 5)



Along with the able work of Greg and Wyco staff to help seal entries with heavy equipment, still more Clifftop volunteers contributed another 250+ hours of work to close the mine. The last opening to be shuttered utilized large stones found on site. All entrances now have been sealed. The closure allows us to maintain an even airflow throughout the interior and to stabilize temperature and humidity to create cave-friendly habitat.

What's next for White Mine? Will the "third life" project work? We'll hope, watch, and monitor and try to discover what creatures accept the invitation to the transformed habitat and take up temporary or permanent residence.

In the meantime, Clifftop volunteers have continued other work on the property. As with all bluff properties, steep slopes mandate carefully constructed trails, enhancing the "lay of the land" with drainage swales for water run-off that prevents gullies and soil

erosion along pathways. Following the advice of IDNR's landscape architect, Rex Peterson, White Rock's trails-to-the-top have been carefully installed by Wyco LLC personnel using heavy equipment and surfacing rock, much of it scavenged from the former White Mine. The flat and nearly level Ridgetop Trail, which runs for nearly two miles along the north-south axis of the 306-acre Nature Preserve, has been trimmed, cleared and is nearly ready for hikers, thanks to the intensive labor of Clifftop volunteers. The same volunteers – never willing to pass up the opportunity to get rid of a nasty invasive plant – also cleared bush honeysuckle from the trail edges. The actual definition of *edge* was occasionally a point of disagreement among volunteer crew members as some restrained themselves to a working definition of 5 to 6 feet, while others, with Paul Bunyon-esque enthusiasm, sought to fell honeysuckle forests of rather more expansive measures.

Despite the occasional honeysuckle groves (fewer of 'em now!), the nature of nature at White Rock is healthy and resilient. The Forest Management Plan tells us what needs to be done; volunteers say "I will" ensuring that the work will happen; the former White Mine hints at what might be; the landscape offers promise for all our tomorrows.



## WHITE ROCK HISTORY

### Glass pieces tell a story about the former White Mine

Dorothy Brandt donated pieces of glass slag and history to Clifftop recently. The long-time community volunteer and resident of Maeystown said the glass pieces once lined a garden area at her father's home in Valmeyer. Many more remnants of glass disappeared, along with so much more, as a result of the 1993 Great Flood.

Dorothy remembers taking occasional rides with her father, William Thiele, as he hauled limestone from the former White Mine. The very high calcium content of the limestone was a critical formula component in the manufacture of high quality glass, such as mirrors and plate glass. Mr. Thiele, sometimes with middle-school-aged Dorothy along for the fun of the ride, trucked the stone across the Mississippi River on the ferry that ran between Harrisonville and Herculaneum, MO, from 1936 – 1943. The trip continued with the short drive to the Pittsburgh Plate Glass works at Crystal City, MO. And occasionally, Mr. Thiele hauled back pieces of slag – refuse from the giant kilns that turned silica sand, limestone and other ingredients into valuable glass – and put the waste to decorative use.

Dorothy has asked that Clifftop keep two pieces of the glass and keep fresh the history of the former White Mine, a request we are so pleased to be able to honor.

# 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](mailto: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**



# INVITATION

Please join Clifftop and the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development for a celebration of the opening and dedication of White Rock Nature Preserve, Monroe County, Illinois.

*The celebration will begin at 12:30 p.m. Saturday October 22<sup>nd</sup> and will take place at the Nature Preserve, near the former White Mine. Join us for some social time and snacks with friends and neighbors and have a first look at this premier natural area site as the trails are opened to public hiking. We'll take time for a few formal remarks beginning at 1:30 p.m., and then you may explore more of White Rock Nature Preserve.*

*Parking for the day will be at old-town Valmeyer's Borsch Park. Bus transportation will be provided to and from Borsch Park and White Rock Nature Preserve at 15-minute intervals beginning at 12:15 p.m.; the buses will make the return trips from White Rock at 15-minute intervals beginning at 3 p.m. and continuing until 4 p.m. We hope many will enjoy the short, ½ mile hike to the former mine site.*

*We hope to see you and hope you can come see White Rock beginning at 12:30 p.m., Saturday October 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

*Please let us know if you will attend so that we may plan transportation needs. Please e-mail [Clifftop@htc.net](mailto:Clifftop@htc.net), or 'phone, 618-458-4674. RSVP is required by October 12th.*



# WHAT IS CLIFFTOP?

by Carl DauBach

Clifftop is an all volunteer, local, conservation organization focused on preserving and protecting the Mississippi River bluff land corridor in a portion of St. Clair County, Monroe County, and in northern Randolph County.

Clifftop was founded in 2006 and is an IRS-recognized 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, incorporated in Illinois. Clifftop serves as a conservation clearing-house, trying to assemble the necessary technical, financial and manual resources to preserve and protect portions of our corridor's premier natural areas and wildlife habitats.

Clifftop also is a member of, and serves as administrative agent for, a partnership of other local conservation organizations in an effort to combine and leverage resources and to facilitate joint, collaborative conservation activities. These partners include regional Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and National Wild Turkey Federation biologists, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, scientists with the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Illinois Speleological Survey, and the Subterranean Ecology Institute, the Monroe County Extension Service, the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development, the Kaskaskia Valley Audubon Society, the Friends of Stemler Nature Preserves, and the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee.

We, and our partners, are working toward four overarching goals:

1. Conduct public information and education programs on conserving the corridor. Since 2007, we have hosted or jointly-hosted 7 workshops, 9 field trips, 28 seminars and presentations, and 2 festivals, all focused on the conservation and natural history of the corridor. Clifftop has garnered \$24,000 in small grants to help pay for some of these public outreach activities.
2. Improve & incentivize landowner natural area stewardship. Since 2006, Clifftop volunteers have contributed 3750 volunteer hours helping private landowners and IDNR with hill prairie and glade restoration, native seed collection, and conducting prescribed burns. In 2009, in a first-ever-in-Illinois milestone, Clifftop and NRCS completed a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative agreement to introduce focused USDA conservation funding for local bluff landowners. To date, 53 landowners, on 3347 private acres, have been approved for \$656,264 in Federal conservation program funding to implement improved stewardship practices.
3. Increase science-based research in the corridor. Understanding our corridor's rich biodiversity and the statewide importance of our unique natural areas is fundamental to making the case for its preservation and protection. Since 2009, faculty (and their students) and staff with the Illinois Natural History Survey, the University of Illinois-Urbana, the University of Idaho, Eastern Illinois University, Southeast Missouri State University, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, and Southwestern Illinois College have all launched research projects in the corridor.
4. Protect some of our most important natural areas. IDNR currently manages 2052 state-owned acres in the corridor. INPC manages 1319 acres of privately owned land enrolled permanently in conservation easements. The Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development (SWIRC&D) holds donated conservation easements on 108 acres in the corridor. In December 2010, Clifftop and the SWIRC&D, in a first-ever such joint venture in the state, purchased the 475-acre White Rock tract in Monroe County. Funding for the \$1.2+ million purchase also is a case of collaboration, as the two organizations received grants from the Vital Lands program of the Grand Victoria Foundation, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, and a State Wildlife Grant, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program administered in Illinois by the Department of Natural Resources. A portion of the acreage has been enrolled with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission as a Land and Water Reserve; 306 acres of the tract have been enrolled as a Nature Preserve. Both Clifftop and the SWIRC&D continue to work on additional potential land acquisition projects to ensure that natural areas are in existence so they may – as John Engbring writes in this issue -- continue to thrill, entertain, and inspire generations to come.



In January of this year, our Board of Directors decided to make Clifftop a non-voting, membership-based organization. The reasons were several-fold. A membership helps define what Clifftop is. A membership brings more residents to the causes of local conservation, enlarges our stewardship workforce numbers, affords more opportunities for participation in our special outreach programs, and, through a modest annual membership dues program, helps us fund operational expenses that cannot be paid for in other ways. We have been very successful at garnering non-local grant monies to pay for smaller public outreach activities and a large land acquisition project. We are a no-frills, bare-bones, all volunteer organization, with little administrative overhead. Our annual operating costs are a little over \$4000--which includes website hosting, a post office box, stamps and sundry small, necessary things. Our biggest expense is insurance, \$3000 a year. Our public outreach programs, stewardship work, and White Rock property, a part of which will be open to the public, all require insurance. Your membership dues will help fund these necessary operational expenses.