



# Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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## EF Zero Tornado Devastates White Rock Lands

By Joann Fricke

The National Weather Service has designated the tornado that touched down just south of Valmeyer on Saturday, April 15, as an EF Zero. While that doesn't sound so bad, the trees at Clifftop's White Rock properties beg to differ. A workday at White Rock Land and Water Reserve was scheduled for Sunday, April 16, but that quickly gave way to helping clear downed trees and debris from the driveway leading back to the trailhead for the nature preserve and then to assess the damage on the nature preserve.

The five volunteers who signed up for the workday cleared 15 trees from the trail system and left three that were beyond their level of expertise. A professional sawyer came in a couple days later to take those trees down. While not all of the property has been assessed for damage, a conservative estimate is that 1,000 trees are down or damaged.

Using an abundance of caution, we have temporarily closed the parking lot and trails to the public in case some of the trees that were weakened in the tornado come down. Please respect our decision and watch our Facebook page for information on when it will be open again for passive recreation.



At the junction of White Mine and Ridgetop Trails, north and south.



At left, volunteers determine the best way to tackle the downed tree over Ridgetop Trail, South. At right, this twisted tree is proof of the rotation typical of a tornado.



## Why Do I Like the Outdoors?

By Rita Diehl

This was the question presented for a brief article in Clifftop's newsletter. For me, a shortcut response might be the words of a very wise man.

*"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." -Albert Einstein*

It is always a surprise to meet anyone who claims to not like the outdoors. But it seems to happen relatively more often in our increasingly urbanized, suburbanized, climate-controlled, and social media dominated world.

It might be that anyone who does not like (or is uncomfortable with) the natural world has never had the opportunity to spend much time actually outdoors. What the outdoors has to offer cannot, unfortunately, be fully replicated by representational media (film, photos, etc), as helpful and enjoyable as that might be. There is an intangible aspect of the natural world and our response to it that simply needs to be experienced and explored in person to allow for full appreciation.

Admittedly, I was not always cognizant of any appreciation for the outdoor world. This is likely because it was an integral part of my daily existence while growing up in Monroe County. In the late 1940s, my parents built a house on one of the smaller, more accessible bluffs in the middle of my grandparents farm north of Columbia; as kids, we had adjoining forests and creeks where we played and explored, a father who hunted, fished, foraged, gardened and carefully scrutinized the weather, and a mother who restricted television watching, often ushering us out the door with instructions to 'go play outside and stay out of my hair.'

We regularly enjoyed spectacular sunsets from the bluff overlooking the Bottoms and Jefferson Barracks Bridge. The universe represented by the night sky was still free from urban light pollution. Family vacations were week-long camping affairs taken somewhere with decent trails and a good lake for fishing, swimming, and water-skiing.

It was not until leaving home for school that I learned about the effort often required to find a place without obstructions or distractions in order to watch the colorful drama of a sunset or sunrise, to hear the quiet rustle of the wind through trees, or to follow the aerial

acrobatics of birds. It was then that I missed the beauty and the wonder of the outdoor world as I knew it and realized how my connection to it seemed essential to my existence.

There can be and often is a more spiritual aspect, an intangibility, to experiencing the natural world. This may be different from admiring its beauty and its majesty. This may also be different from what Neil deGrasse Tyson describes as an 'intellectual playground' where we identify, learn about, and value various elements. What is the name of that wildflower? Is that an elm or an ash? Was that a quail call or a mockingbird (imitating a quail)? Recognizing components of the natural world and distinguishing 'this' from 'that' is a powerful magnet of attraction for the outdoors; it provides a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and 'a next level' recognition of the complexity of worlds we call the earth and the universe.



This sunset is not a view from Rita's childhood home, rather, it was taken overlooking original Valmeyer.

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While enjoying the excitement of exploring or experiencing the natural world, there is sometimes a feeling or emotion.....something that cannot be described with words. Something that soothes your soul. Something that makes you feel a connection to something much larger or a sense of place in the larger scheme of things. Something that allows you, as Rachel Carson once observed, 'to find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.'

Is it fair to call these somethings either a 'spiritual experience' or a 'spiritual encounter?' If perhaps you find yourself happier and more content after spending time outdoors, that is what I call it.

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## Clifftop Hosts the Spring 2023 Meeting of the Illinois Speleological Survey

By Bob Weck, Clifftop Vice President and ISS President

Clifftop's Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve is an ideal meeting location for the Illinois Speleological Survey. ISS is a group of volunteers interested in locating, mapping, and conserving the karst and cave resources of Illinois. The preserve includes a significant portion of Fogelpole Cave, and the general area contains more sinkholes and caves than any other part of Illinois.



Saturday morning planning meeting lead by Aaron Addison before teams set out for the day. Photo by Tony Schmitt

On Friday April 7, 2023 ISS cooperators began arriving at the Wightman Preserve from around Illinois and nearby regions of Missouri to participate in a weekend of cave exploration, mapping and biological surveys. The focus of the gathering was to resume the on-going project to fully survey Fogelpole Cave and document any new entrances. Fifteen cavers were divided into four teams for the fieldwork on Saturday.

Teams 1 and 2 (Matt Bliss, Dan Lamping, Bob Osburn, Gary Resch, Tony Schmitt, Shawn Williams) entered Fogelpole Cave via the "Lemonade Entrance" and surveyed over 1000 ft of cave passage. The survey techniques included using a laser rangefinder and compass to measure the passage dimension, direction, inclination, and distances between survey points. Sketches of the cave passage were made. Later, the data and sketches will be combined to construct a map. Team 3 (Aaron Addison, Jeffrey Gosnell, Rick Haley, Ralph Sawyer) was escorted by Susan Rick to explore potentially new cave entrances on property east of the Wightman Preserve. These entrances were pits and required the cavers to use ropes and vertical caving gear to safely enter. GPS location data were collected to check against the documented caves in the Illinois Cave Database.



Tony Schmitt (in distance) and Shawn Williams (foreground) in a major side passage of Fogelpole Cave. Photo by Dan Lamping

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Team 4 (Nathan Carran, Justin Elden, Mary Kusch, Ben Medley, Bob Weck) was the "bio-crew", with the objective of conducting a census of the highly variable cavesnail population in the main passage of Fogelpole Cave. Justin Elden set up a macro photography station in the cave to photo document the diversity. Snails were observed, along with short-tailed spring isopods, cave-loving amphipods, a cave flatworm, and freshwater sponges. The presences of sponges in the cave stream was only recently documented and seeing them in our survey was a source of excitement among the team. The day ended with a business meeting of the ISS directors in the shed, followed by food, drink and a campfire.



Albino cavesnail from Fogelpole Cave (photo at left). Short-tailed spring isopod and pigmented snail from Fogelpole Cave (photo at right). Photos by Justin Elden



Cave flatworm from Fogelpole Cave (photo at left). Freshwater sponge found on a rock in the Fogelpole Cave stream (photo at right). Photos by Justin Elden



Cavers gathered around a campfire at the end of the day. Photo by Tony Schmitt

The Illinois Speleological Survey thanks Clifftop, board members Paul Jansen and Susan Rick, and neighboring landowners for their generous hospitality.

# Callery Pear Could Soon Be Considered Invasive in Illinois

What was once considered the go-to tree for landscapers and homeowners could soon be listed as an invasive species in Illinois. The Bradford Pear (a cultivar of Callery pear, *Pyrus calleryana*) has worn out its welcome due to its propensity to invade natural areas. As reported on the website for WTTW, a Chicago PBS TV station, the Terrestrial Plants Committee of the Illinois Invasive Species Council plans to assess 10 plants, Callery Pear among them.

As the committee has no authority to regulate the sale and use of plants, the assessment will determine if they should make formal recommendations to the agencies that do, such as the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Department of Agriculture. The Illinois Exotic Weed Act regulates most terrestrial invasive plants that invade natural systems. Making changes to this act requires proposing a legislative change and working with the Illinois General Assembly. A change to this act would mean the plant can't be bought, sold or transported in Illinois.



Callery pear was introduced to the United States from China in 1916 by the U. S. Department of Agriculture for development of fire blight resistance in the common pear. In the 1950's, the ornamental value of the tree was recognized and resulted in the development of several cultivars, most notably 'Bradford.'

The Bradford pear's popularity has led to overplanting in communities. However, despite the fact that each cultivar was bred to be sterile, as new varieties were introduced, cross pollination occurred, which led to fruit fertility.

Now we have a problem. Birds eat the fruit and disperse the seeds far and wide, producing dense infestations of trees in fallow fields, rights-of-way, and other natural areas. The photo at left is of the property below Miles Cemetery. As you can see, Bradford pear has practically taken over that natural area. Left unchecked, they pose a threat to native vegetation by crowding out native

communities.

What can we do? For starters, encourage people to not plant any cultivar of Callery pear. Cutting the trees down and herbicide treating the cut stumps is a way to eliminate them in the landscape. Some organizations have offered free trees to folks if they can provide photo documentation that they cut one down in their yard.

Here are some native alternatives to plant instead of Callery pear. If you have your heart set on a white flowering tree, flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and serviceberry, also known as shadbush, (*Amelanchier*) are excellent choices. Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*) is another fine choice for white flowers. However, note that it is not native to this area, rather a bit farther south in Illinois, but close enough. For those that prefer more color, Eastern redbud (*Cercus canadensis*) blooms in that lovely purple color you see scattered throughout our woodlands in early spring.



To those of you who have already renewed your Clifftop membership, we offer our sincere thanks. If you haven't yet renewed, please consider doing so at your earliest convenience. We appreciate your support. A membership form is available here: <http://www.clifftopalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/membership-form.pdf>

# Upcoming events...

**Native Snakes of SW Illinois—Sunday, May 21, 1:00 p.m. White Rock Nature Preserve, 6438 Bluff Road, Valmeyer.** Presented by Justin Elden, Curator of Herpetology & Aquatics at the St. Louis Zoo. Learn about the reptiles that make our area home. Hugh Gilbert will provide a few live snakes for up-close examination. As an added bonus, attendees will get to visit Rattlesnake Glade, if they so choose. Space is limited to 25, so contact Joann at [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) to reserve your spot!



**Prairie Walks—Saturday July 15, August 19 and September 16, 9:00 a.m. Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults.** Join Clifftop board member, Laura Schaefer, for a 1 mile walking tour of the prairie. The walk will take place along the ADA accessible trail. Laura will help participants identify the native prairie plants along the trail, teach about plant adaptations and prairie ecology. Meet at the pavilion. Dress for the weather and bring a drink to help stay cool. As an added perk, participants in the September 16 walk will be allowed to collect native seeds to take home!



**Laura's Native Garden Tour—Saturday July 22, 10:00 a.m. 300 West Harrison Street, Millstadt.** Visit what was once three city lots turned into a native plant paradise filled with beautiful flowers and home to many species of native bees and other pollinators. Learn how you can do the same.



**Starry Night-Perseid Meteor Shower—Friday or Saturday, August 11 or 12. Time: TBD. Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults.** Presented by Dr. Michael J. Krawczynski, assistant professor in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Washington University, St. Louis.



Moving?



Please be sure to notify us of your new address. Send updates to [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) or call 618-935-2542