

Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by **Clifftop**

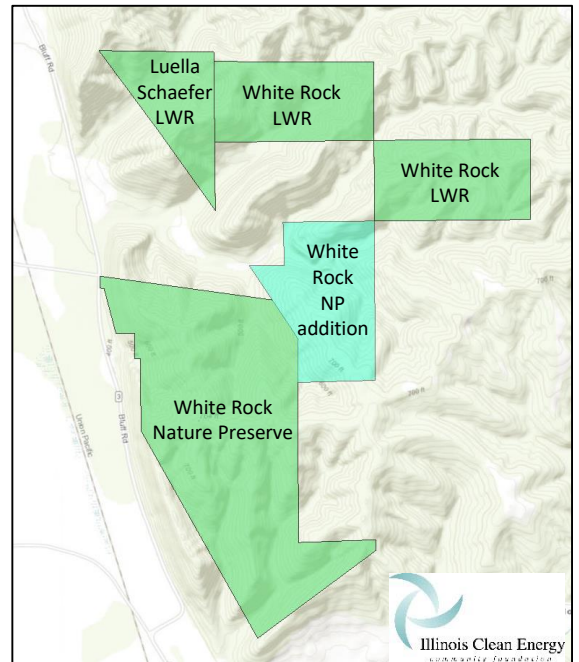
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Building a Trail With AmeriCorps

At the 246th meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission on January 23, the 97.8-acre addition to White Rock Nature Preserve (seen in turquoise on the map at right) was approved for dedication.

Majority funding for the acquisition of this parcel as well as the Luella Schaefer LWR (upper left corner on map) was generously provided by the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF). Per specifications in the acquisition agreement, the property must be open to the public. To that end, Clifftop has become a partner of AmeriCorps St. Louis, a nonprofit based in the Soulard neighborhood of St. Louis whose mission is: "To enhance the professional skills and life-long service ethic of those who serve; to respond to critical unmet needs in the areas of emergency response and environmental conservation; to leverage service of volunteers; and to build the capacity for our partnering agencies and communities we serve."



On January 29, AmeriCorps STL personnel began building a hiking trail/fire break that will connect with the existing trail system on White Rock Nature Preserve. It was a cold, foggy morning when they arrived, but they were not deterred, getting right to work after arriving at the starting point. Fortunately, the sun came out and the fog lifted by midday. The team enjoyed learning about hill prairies and soaking up some sun at Overlook Prairie before calling it a day.



Preserving the Past for the Future

Text and photos by Dr. Alleen Betzenhauser



Petroglyph in Monroe County

Monroe County is a special place and has been for thousands of years. This region of southwestern Illinois is teeming with natural resources that are both useful and meaningful for people today as they were in the past. As an archaeologist who studies past peoples' sites, settlements, and material culture in the American Bottom region, I'm particularly interested in how they viewed their landscapes and how they shaped them and were shaped by them. I was first drawn to the region by Cahokia, the first Indigenous city in what we now refer to as the United States and UNESCO World Heritage Site, located in Collinsville. However, I quickly shifted my focus to investigate Cahokia's southern neighbors to learn how people living far from the bustling city interacted with those living farther north approximately 1,000 years ago.

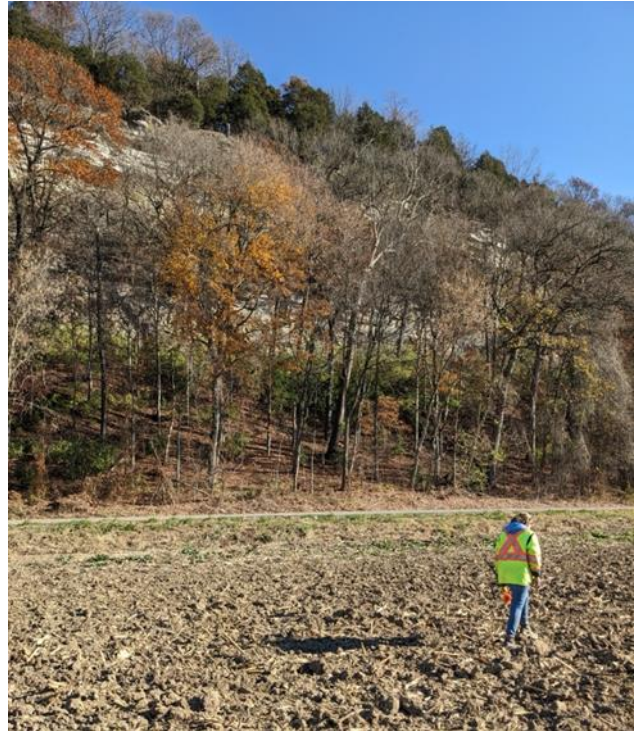


Clay, left, was used for pottery and bricks, while on the right, chert was used to fashion stone tools and limestone was used as building material (e.g. historic house/barn foundations) and food processing.

That shift was partially prompted by my first visit to Monroe County during a field trip through the American Bottom led by Terry Norris, an archaeologist with the Corps of Engineers, and Timothy Pauketat, my advisor at the University of Illinois. During the "Terry Norris Extravaganza" we made several stops at historical and archaeological sites including a Mississippian mound site near Dupou, early French structures in the city of Cahokia (now part of Cahokia Heights) and Fort de Chartres, and Modoc Rock Shelter

before taking the ferry to Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. I was immediately impressed by the white limestone bluffs, hill prairies, and beautiful views overlooking the floodplain and Mississippi River Monroe County had to offer. As an upstate New Yorker, I missed seeing topography while in graduate school in the flatlands of Champaign, so it was a welcomed change of scenery!

I moved to St. Louis a few years later to work with the Illinois State Archaeological Survey (isas.illinois.edu) while completing my dissertation research. The fieldwork included non-invasive geophysical surveys and small-scale excavations at a small mound site near Fountain Creek. I gained an even greater appreciation for the landscape by experiencing it firsthand.



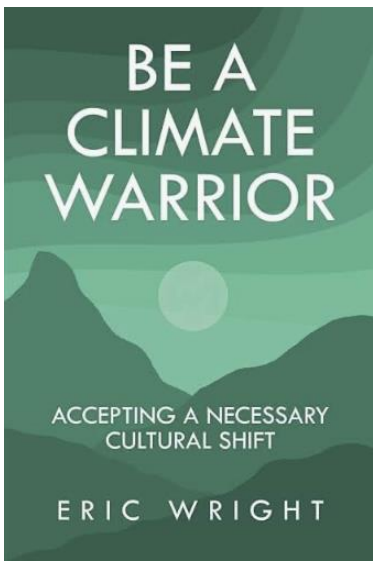
Left, Alleen during her dissertation field work. Right, Alleen's coworker surveying.

I was pleased to hear about CLIFFTOP and their efforts to preserve blufftop and karst areas of Monroe County, but not only because these unique natural areas will be protected from development. The preserves also include archaeological sites and areas with high potential for sites. Like many natural resources, our cultural heritage and history are non-renewable. Once an archaeological site or historical structure is destroyed, we lose any chance to learn from it. Mounds and other archaeological sites have been documented on CLIFFTOP properties, but many were impacted by unauthorized digging decades ago. By preserving the tracts of land on which they are situated, these historical sites will be protected for future generations. I look forward to working with CLIFFTOP to document, care for, and interpret what was left behind by those who were here before us.



Mound on Clifftop property.

Editor's note: Alleen recently joined Clifftop's Board of Directors. She is the coordinator of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey's (ISAS) American Bottom Field Station in Collinsville



Eric Wright, grandson of Clifftop member, Carolyn Wright, has written a book on climate change. "Be a Climate Warrior is an information-driven, nonfiction book about climate change and American society. It is a motivational climate change toolkit that provides individuals guidance on how to contribute to broader climate initiatives while reducing their own carbon footprints. The book casts a blacklight over one's life and their connection to society, illuminating the carbon-scrubbing opportunities that lurk everywhere."

"Overall, Be a Climate Warrior delivers a broader message inspiring the reader to interface with society for the benefit of our climate. You can embark on the journey of becoming a climate warrior by altering your lifestyle, confronting corporations, and becoming more politically engaged. Small steps, smaller footprints. We're all in this together." Amazon.com

Carolyn also contributed a chapter in the book.

Highlights from our Winter Tree ID Field Trip



Despite December 16, 2023 being a cold, rainy day, 25 participants took part in our Winter Tree ID field trip led by former IDNR District Forester, Bear Engbring. To view a video of the trip, please visit our YouTube page at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QswjZ7LJe58>

Photos courtesy Tom Rollins and Joann Fricke.