

Bluffviews

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When Logging Goes Terribly Wrong

By Joann Fricke

I, personally, have never considered logging my property, for profit or otherwise. I have only heard stories of what a mess loggers make, leaving deep ruts if it is muddy and leaving large trees lie if they choose not to take them. As I understand it, logging can be profitable and improve the forest by allowing more sunlight in for the favorable growth of new saplings. You, dear readers, are also familiar with the disdain I hold for non-native foreign invasive plants. The following is a true account of where logging and invasive species collide.

In 2017, a conservation colleague experienced an EF 4 tornado on her beautiful, biodiverse property, destroying 1,000 mature, old-growth trees. At the time, she mourned the loss of the trees and feared the onslaught of bush honeysuckle and the changes in plant composition. With the help of prescribed fire, hiring contractors and personal sweat equity, things were turning around. New colonies of rare plants showed up in places where none had been seen before. Faith in Mother Nature was nearly restored.



However, a neighboring landowner, about 4 or 5 properties away, had done a salvage harvest on his tornado devastated property and about three and one-half years ago she noticed Japanese stiltgrass growing on her land along a creek that runs from that neighbor's property onto hers. The conclusion was that the loggers had not taken the time to clean their equipment after working in a stiltgrass infested area and brought it into her extended neighborhood.

Japanese stiltgrass is a prolific seed producer and spreads quickly. It was introduced to the United States in the early 1900s as packing material for porcelain and other goods shipped from Asia. It likely escaped from the packing material. It can grow up to 4 feet tall and so thick it is almost impossible to walk through. There is little hope for our colleague to contain it with few other landowners along the creek interested in eradicating invasive species. It is fairly easy to pull, but who has the time, energy or money to keep up with that task year after year?

Without any public education programs for loggers, hikers or ATV users to clean their boots and equipment, this infestation will likely continue. Please consider this article a plea to clean your personal boots and equipment and demand that any contractors you hire do the same!

Tales From Above and Below The Bottom Lands

Text and photos by Gary Vogel

My fascination with The Bottoms began in the 1950's as a grade schooler when my parents took me for many drives along Bluff Road to places like Fort de Chartres, Pierre Menard's Home, and Fort Kaskaskia. These were fascinating places for a kid to visit offering so much history of the area and incredible scenery along the bluffs. Was there ever a better place for a kid and his friends to play cowboys than Fort de Chartres? But the bluffs called my name!

By the late 1960's, I was a teenager with a passion for hiking, exploring, photography, fossils, geology, landscapes, and anything science. I was now able to drive, so my friends and I made frequent trips to the Bluffs between Columbia and Fults. We hiked the base of the bluffs and convinced ourselves we were real explorers. Our treks were often rewarded with gastropod (shell) fossils, crinoid stems (the local Native Americans used these as beads), and even a few small trilobites. Add on a few bleached animal bones and you have filled the treasure box of a young boy!

We learned about Illinois Caverns while talking with the friendly locals . That really changed my life. Numerous trips were made over the next few years "exploring" that cave. I had the good fortune of meeting Father Paul Wightman and Armin Krueger. Armin was the caretaker for the Illinois Caverns and an amazing man. He loved caving. He loved to share stories about the local caves. But most importantly, he loved to hear the stories about the caves that others had explored. With Armin's guidance I learned about Fogelpole, School House, and several smaller caves in the area. This was the 1960's and 1970's. Most caves weren't gated. Lawyers had not yet gone crazy suing everyone. And, land owners were usually willing to grant access if you asked nicely and displayed some level of knowledge about spelunking. Having majored in biology in college, I found the creatures that we encountered in these caves to be most fascinating. Amphipods, frogs, bats, salamanders, a few fish, and even a crayfish or two. I was able to enter Fogelpole cave many times back then. Even though it does not have a lot of impressive cave formations (stalactites, stalagmites, flow stone, bacon rinds, etc) it is still one of the more impressive caves because of its size and length.

Interestingly, especially on hot summer days, as you climb down the steep sides of the large sink hole that leads to the cave entrance, you pass through a thermocline where the top half of your body feels quite warm but the bottom half feels much cooler. Why? The cold air of the cave flows out of the entrance and being heavier than the warm air outside fills the bottom of the sink with cooler air. A most interesting phenomenon.



Fast forward a few decades. I returned to Fogelpole for a nostalgic trip into the cave. And to my dismay, the cave had been gated! I was disappointed for myself but happy for the cave. We had always tried to follow the basic wilderness rule of "Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints." Unfortunately, many did not. The caves became littered with trash, discarded batteries, and food wrappers. And worse, many novice sport cavers would dump their used carbide charge onto the rocks or even into the streams. Not good for the troglobites trying to survive in the cave. Gating caves became a necessity to protect their fragile environment and the delicate life that lives in the darkness.

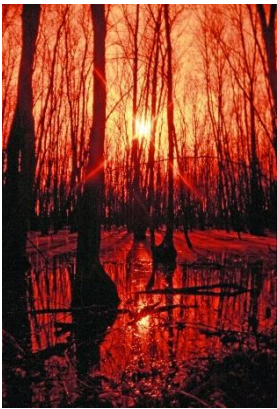
I spent a lot of time trekking through the prairies above the Mississippian karst. My friends and I were convinced that there had to be more cave systems in this sinkhole plain. There had to be other large caves



formed in the karst just like Fogelpole but nature had not provided an entrance to the surface...yet. So back in the 70's and 80's we spent weekends in the prairies exploring sinkholes. Amazingly, back then, most of the property owners were agreeable...some not so much. But after 4 or 5 years and 50 or 60 sinkholes, we decided that if there was an immense, undiscovered cave system beneath us, it was not ready to be found. Our goal had been to explore sinkholes, but along the way our passion became the beautiful prairie land filled with flowers, groves of trees, sinkholes and ponds. I kept thinking somebody should preserve this sinkhole filled, prairie land before someone builds subdivisions on it or worse. **Yay Clifftop!!!**

A few things that impressed me from my travels through The Bottoms:

Frost flowers are very rare, very delicate formations created by the right combination of breeze, humidity, temperature and micro landscape. Like a snowflake, each is unique. And like a snowflake, they disappear quickly. The "flowers" are formed when the ground is not frozen but the air temperature hovers around freezing. The "flower" grows when water is drawn up through the capillaries of a plant stem, extruded through the stem, and then freezes.



Just a bit south of the White Rock parking lot lies a small wooded area between Bluff road and the railroad tracks. The area often has water pooled around the trees creating a swamp like landscape. We were cruising Bluff road back in the 1990's and grabbed an interesting photo, enhanced with a red filter, of the sun setting through the trees. I shared the photo with a local farmer who told me, "That is Pinkle's Woods. It is haunted." As the rather gruesome story goes, after the Civil War, a group of soldiers were heading North through Pinkle's Woods. They brutally murdered a mother and her child in the woods. At night the ghostly form of a woman can still be seen roaming the woods searching for her child. The Bottoms abound with local legends, myths, and ghost stories!

Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve is further South on Bluff Road. This is a great hike with stunning views of the valley below if you can manage to climb to the top of the wooden stairway. I was always intrigued by the piece of farm equipment that was left on the top of the bluff long ago. Trees have actually grown through it. It must have been there for a while because one tree is quite large. But you have to wonder, why was it left? What happened that day? Why did the farmer never come back to reclaim it? Ah, the mysteries of The Bottoms.



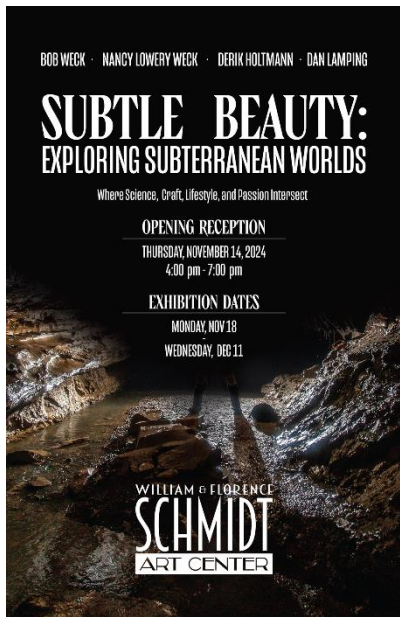
A few closing thoughts...

In the heart of a vast prairie meadow, lies a hidden world where nature's wonders mingle in quiet harmony. The meadow stretches as far as the eye can see, golden grasses sway in the gentle breeze, dotted with bursts of wildflowers in purple, yellow, and blue. Large trees stand like guardians at the meadow's edge, their branches growing in every direction, creating pockets of shade beneath them.

This place is special, for it holds secrets that only a few have ever discovered. Nestled among the grasses and flowers are ponds—glimmering patches of still water that reflects the deep blue sky above. Each pond is a sanctuary for life. Frogs croak from the edges, dragonflies skim over the surface, and beneath the water, fish dart between reeds and lily pads.

The wind whispers, "Help Me....".

These special places must be protected forever! Keep up the great work Clifftop!!



Subtle Beauty: Exploring Subterranean Worlds

Southwestern Illinois includes the most cave-dense parts of the state. According to the Illinois Speleological Survey, there are over 300 caves documented in Monroe, St. Clair and Randolph Counties, which include the largest and most biodiverse caves in Illinois. The slow but inexorable forces of erosion and dissolution have carved caverns from the limestone bedrock, decorated with flowstones and stalactites and inhabited by a diverse community of subterranean organisms. These fragile ecosystems face many human-caused threats, including nutrient runoff and the introduction of invasive species. To raise the awareness of caves in the area, the Schmidt Art Center on the Campus of Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville is hosting an interdisciplinary exhibition of cave themed art called Subtle Beauty: Exploring Subterranean Worlds. The show opens Thursday November 14th from 4pm to 7pm and will run from Monday November 18th through Wednesday December 11th. The exhibition features the works of four Clifftop members who are active in the cave conservation community.

Nancy Lowery Weck, MFA, is a ceramic artist whose work is inspired by caves. She is the landowner of Stemler Cave Nature Preserve. Nancy's contributions to the exhibit will include functional and sculptural pottery. <https://www.instagram.com/postoakpottery/?hl=en>

Derik Holtmann is an award-winning photographer whose cave work has been recognized by the National Speleological Society. Derik's contributions to the exhibit will include photographs of cave scenes, formations, and cave-dwelling animals from Illinois and Missouri. <https://www.derikholtmann.com/>

Dan Lamping, president of the Missouri Speleological Survey and board member of the Illinois Speleological Survey, is an award-winning cave cartographer whose work has been recognized by the National Speleological Society. Dan's contributions to the exhibit will be large format maps of Illinois and Missouri caves. <https://www.mospeleo.org/>

Bob Weck, Clifftop Vice President and President of the Illinois Speleological Survey proposed the exhibition, is contributing a few ceramic works (with help from Nancy) and is coordinating the exhibition with the Schmidt Art Center. <https://ilspeleo.org/>



If you were unable to attend our **SW IL Hill Prairies** program, it was recorded and can be viewed on our YouTube channel at this link: https://youtu.be/uQGVn913fTQ?si=EWKIE_rI2T78VtzQ



If you were unable to attend our **Isolated Wetlands** program, it was recorded and can be viewed on our YouTube channel at this link: <https://youtu.be/s43Ae8XdLJA>