



Spirit Mound Trust News

P.O. Box 603, Vermillion, SD 57069

www.spiritmoundsouthdakota.org

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Norma C. Wilson, editor

The Meeting of Earth and Sky

Jim Heisinger

In 1804 members of the Lewis and Clark expedition began their walk to Spirit Mound at the confluence of The Vermillion River with the Missouri. A sign marking the site of the 1804 confluence has been placed in Cotton Park. The Trust thanks Tim Cowman (South Dakota Geological Survey) and Nancy Carlsen (Sierra Club) for their work in the design and development of the sign, a stunning, colorful and scholarly explanation of the wanderings of the expedition members and the meandering of the mighty Missouri. You can see it along the bicycle trail near the Cotton Park parking lot.

Change has been a facet of both the natural environment and our human references to it in Spirit Mound Territory. You will notice on the new sign that Lewis and Clark called the Vermillion River the Whitestone River and also Whitestone Creek in their journal entries of August 24 and 25, 1804. When they returned on September 3, 1806, a journal entry referred to the river as the Red Stone and entered the Indian name Wa se Sha (red paint); the river was given both names Vermilion and Wasshesha by Nicolet before it was designated the Vermillion. In the great flood of 1881 the Missouri River moved south three miles.

During the past year explorers from near and far continued to visit the Mound. Many came for the first time--some from distant states, others from our own area. Some were interested in bird, insect and/or plant identification, or history appreciation. Others were seeking a quiet spiritual place to contemplate their universe. As the prairie ecosystem is restored it will be easier to see this glacial formation as the place where the physical meets the spiritual world and the present meets the past. Thanks to Mark Wetmore for producing the new logo. Like Spirit Mound, it signals the meeting of earth and sky.

The summer of 2006 was beautiful at the Mound; and with the coming years, as the prairie becomes increasingly more diversified, it will gradually become even more spectacular. Last summer we placed signs identifying 26 species of plants. Next summer we will add another dozen botanical labels. We have not forgotten that rocks and topographic features explain some of the mysteries of the natural history of Spirit Mound. Therefore, some of our signs describe the role of the most recent glacier in sculpting the mound and depositing rocks near the summit.

With funding from a National Park Service Challenge Grant, the Trust hired prairie restoration specialist Bill Whitney of Prairie Plains Resource Institute in Aurora, Nebraska to design a management plan to help us achieve our long-term goal of a highly diversified prairie. The plan will include a vision for the restored ecosystem and its components: native plants and invertebrate and vertebrate animals. Most of the restored species were familiar to Native American occupants of the landscape at the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The board is pleased to announce the addition of two new members, Dianne Blankenship and Karen Olmstead. Dianne has long been an outstanding prairie enthusiast in Sioux City, Iowa. Her experiences will be a strong asset for the board when making decisions about management and species diversity.

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Along with many other prairie activities, she serves on the Campaign Cabinet at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center; is Coordinator of the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, an annual weekend event which attracts about 300 people; and is Co-Chair of the 2007 Iowa Prairie Conference. Karen Olmstead, an ecologist, has also joined the board. She obtained grants and contracts leading to a three-year ecological study of Spirit Mound. The information from this study is serving as a guide for the development of our emerging management plan. Karen is Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of South Dakota.

In February our web page should be operational thanks to Vermillion volunteer, Rochelle Pfeifer.

A Glacial Erratic

Mark Wetmore

In 2006, the Trust mounted a sign beside a glacial erratic boulder on Spirit Mound. This is the text of the sign:

This boulder is an example of stones carried here from much farther north by the last glacier, about 13,000 years ago. Geologists call them glacial erratics and use them to indicate patterns of ice flow. This one is granite, which originated in Minnesota or Canada. The smaller erratic just up the slope is Sioux Quartzite from the Spencer, South Dakota area. The granite is probably two to three billion years old and the quartzite 1.7 billion. The gray-green growth on the boulder is lichen, a composite organism made up of fungus and algae.

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie

Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a Sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself.

William Wordsworth, from *The Leech Gatherer*, 1807

Spirit Mound Prairie Restoration

Dianne Blankenship

Bill Whitney of Aurora, Nebraska and his wife, Jan, founded Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI). Dedicated to high-diversity plantings using local ecotype seed, PPRI has planted prairies in Nebraska, managed natural habitat, published research, and provided educational programs. The PPRI land trust owns and conserves over 5,000 acres in Nebraska. PPRI is noted for its success in building collaborative working partnerships.

PPRI's nearest work is at Ponca State Park where they planted a large prairie area adjacent to the river. Other nearby projects include managing a large natural area near Albion, Nebraska, and ownership of a native prairie with adjacent reconstructed prairie near Clarkson, Nebraska.

Spirit Mound Trust Board members anticipate that Bill will create a plan that will increase species diversity, help eradicate invasive species, and establish management guidelines for the multiple areas within the site. Since education has been a significant component of PPRI's work, Bill will include suggestions for educational events and outreach.

Observing the Changing Prairie

Brian T. Hazlett

I grew up taking regular summer camping trips with my father, a high school biology teacher who usually traveled well beyond our home base in western New York State. One of my goals as a college professor is to become better acquainted with North American ecosystems. A summer camping trip provides an excellent method by which this can be done. Thus the family tradition continues.

Generally I can get a good handle on a region after spending a few days exploring it. Prairies, although not inscrutable, resist quick acquaintance. In fact I hardly knew where to begin before I began teaching at Briar Cliff. Fortunately the Sioux City Prairie, a 150-acre Nature Conservancy preserve, lies adjacent to the Briar Cliff College campus.

While spending a summer exploring the Sioux City Prairie, I discovered that prairies regularly change in appearance after a few weeks. The collection of wildflowers and dominant grasses at the end of the summer is quite different from that at beginning of the season. Thus my informal approach to learning about ecosystems would not work with prairies, especially if I were to visit only once during the summer. After a few years, I observed that the basic progression was the same, but from year to year (usually as a response to the season's rainfall) the relative abundance of some plants varied. In dry years there's a marked difference compared to wetter ones. Thus, to really know a prairie, I had to both observe it over each entire season and also spend the various seasons with it. Nevertheless in the end, with this approach I'd be familiar with only one prairie. The next step in my prairie education was to visit other prairies, so that I could get a broader concept of prairie ecosystems.

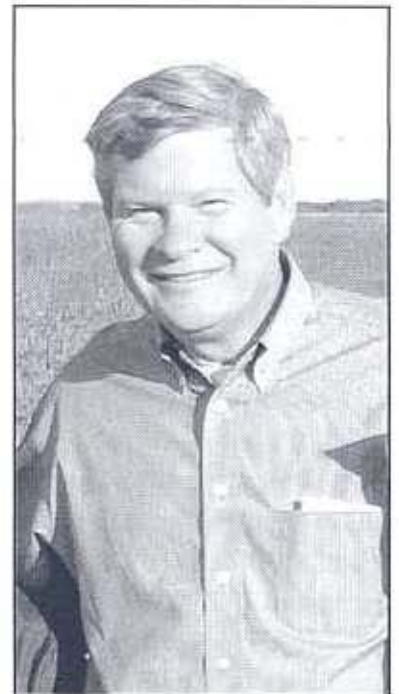
The ease of visiting Spirit Mound makes it an excellent place to begin (or even continue) one's prairie adventures. Here, summer travelers far away from their home bases can catch a glimpse of the landscape from a time when prairies were dominant.

Our Best Wishes to Another Visitor, Senator Johnson

On a warm afternoon, this past election day, November 7th, three long-term supporters of Spirit Mound were returning from the summit when they noticed a lone walker coming up the trail, not the usual visitor because he stopped to carefully read each sign. U. S. Senator Tim Johnson had returned to Vermillion to vote and stopped at the Mound on his way to visit family graves near Centerville. He hadn't seen the Mound since the 2001 check-presentation ceremony, and he was tremendously pleased with the progress since then.

As this newsletter goes to press, Senator Johnson is recovering from surgery performed at George Washington Hospital in Washington, DC, on December 13th. Senator Johnson lived near Spirit Mound as a child. His work was instrumental in the public acquisition of the land surrounding the site. We are grateful to him for his exemplary service to our community, state and nation. We extend our best wishes to Senator Johnson and his family, and we wish him a speedy recovery.

Active Members of the Spirit Mound Board of Directors: Dianne Blankenship, Wayne Evans, Bill Farber, Brian Hazlet, Jim Heisinger, Karen Olmstead, Jim Peterson, Ron Thaden, Mark Wetmore and Norma Wilson.



Senator Johnson at Spirit Mound



Sacagawea Visits Spirit Mound

Mark Wetmore

Sacagawea visited Spirit Mound for the first time on August 30, 2006. Or at least her sculptural representation did. Sculptor C.A. (Carol Ann) Grende followed the Lewis and Clark re-enactors down the Missouri this summer, towing her "Sacajawea Arduous Journey" statue, mounted on a flat-bed trailer. Copies of the nine and a half-foot tall bronze statue are installed at the Great Falls, Montana airport and on the campus of Lewis & Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho.

At least we think this is the first time Sacagawea visited Spirit Mound.

In spite of the Yankton Chamber of Commerce's billboards, she didn't meet the expedition until they were in their winter quarters at Fort Mandan in 1804. But she did travel to St. Louis with her husband and son in about 1809 and return north in 1811. (See "Ft. Manuel: Its Historic Significance" by Irving W. Anderson in the Spring 1976, South Dakota History Quarterly.) It's interesting to think that she may have at least heard the story of the mound as she passed the area, though it's unlikely that she was able to visit it. Sacagawea died at Ft. Manuel in today's South Dakota on December 20, 1812. The clerk at the fort noted in his journal that "she was a good and the best Woman in the fort, age abt 25 years she left a fine infant girl."