



# Ice Age Drift

Newsletter of the Dane County Chapter  
Ice Age Trail Alliance

FALL 2009

## Cross Plains Is Big Success

By Dave Jenkins

Almost 200 volunteers showed up in Cross Plains for four days in mid-July to construct nearly a mile of new trail in the hills above town.

Aided by cool weather, the volunteers contributed nearly 2,400 hours of sometimes demanding (but always satisfying) labor to start building an extension northwest across lands recently protected.

The Alliance plans to complete the extension next year, but most of the tread that was finished or fixed in July is now open for hiking. The Cross Plains trail segment is now a continuously-marked stretch of two miles, including its route through the village. The urban route and a loop trail received upgraded signage during the project.

Although July's focus was building new trail, some volunteers refreshed a half-mile path originally laid down in 2004. Others worked on final landscape sprucing for the new headquarters on Main Street. They finished in time for the official dedication, attended by many of the volunteers, on the evening of July 18.

Several local groups and firms provided assistance, including those from American Girl, the Madison School and Community Recreation program, Quarles & Brady, Edward Jones, Cross Plains Lions, scout troops and American Legion Post 245. The Natural Heritage Land Trust, which previously helped to acquire the Hickory Hill property, contributed several staff mem-

*please see Success on page 4*



Photo by Rachel Roberts

*Phillip Onani, Black Earth, wields a McLeod (a forestry rake/hoe) to even out new trail tread during the Cross Plains project in July.*

## Trail and Bridge Building Highlight Fall Events



### Volunteers Needed Now for Montrose Project

If you think our chapter doesn't pay enough attention to the pathway itself, take a closer look at our fall schedule, included with this issue. Trail and bridge building events are plentiful almost to Thanksgiving.

Our fall slate starts just days from now with the **Town of Montrose connector project** near Belleville/Paoli. It will draw volunteers from across the state for more than three days of work starting **September 24**. The new link will traverse quiet rural lands and span a Sugar River tributary to connect scenic hillocks and rustic former farmsteads with the Badger State Trail. Click on "Register for an MSC Project" at the bottom of Alliance's home page ([www.iceage-trail.org](http://www.iceage-trail.org)) to sign up.

After Montrose, it's on to **Cross Plains** for three work-

days to extend and fine-tune the tread we built in July just northwest of the village (see story above). We'll also take a couple of October side trips to Indian Lake to walk in the moonlight and mark our nearly forgotten route through one of Dane County Parks' prettiest gems.

In mid-November, we'll build another type of bridge. It's a 150-foot puncheon, a boardwalk that will span a muddy morass along **Badger Mill Creek**. The puncheon project is part of concerted upgrade efforts begun this summer on a one-mile portion of the **Verona segment**. Led by Dave Lonsdorf, we will upgrade a sector readily accessible by many people but most recently noted for chronic wet spots.

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**Chapter Website**  
[www.madison.com/communities/iceage](http://www.madison.com/communities/iceage)  
**Foundation Website**  
[www.iceagetrail.org](http://www.iceagetrail.org)

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# The Magnificent Dragonflies

By Jean Lang

Cruisers, skimmers, meadowhawks, and shadow dragons. With names suggestive of military aircraft, spectacular dragonflies abound in southern Wisconsin in late summer and early fall. As they patrol footpaths, forest clearings and waterway edges, these powerful fliers and formidable predators spend their few weeks of adult life chasing down small insects, looking for mates—and impressing us with their beauty and agility.

Wisconsin is rich in dragonfly species, with at least 108 recorded here. Some are widespread. Others are associated only with a particular type of water body, such as a rocky forest stream, a northern bog or a marsh area. Aficionados often use binoculars to observe distinguishing features of species, such as eye arrangements, sizes and shapes of abdomens, and color and vein patterns on bodies and wings.

Like birds, the male commonly is flashier than the female. For example, the male widow skimmer is a good-sized dragonfly with a powdery bluish-white abdomen and a large black patch, bordered by a large white patch, on each of its four wings. With its dramatic black and white attire, this dragonfly really grabs your attention when it zips by. The female on the other hand is less conspicuous. Her abdomen is brown and yellow like a twig, while her wings lack white splashes and have fainter black markings.

To add to the complication of identifying species and sexes, it usually takes from one to three weeks for just-emerged adults to develop full adult colors. These young adults may cruise inland along clearings and sunny pathways. Only when they are sexually mature will they head to a preferred waterway to search for a mate.

As the summer winds down, the most common dragonflies are the orange-red meadowhawks, a group of species that enter adulthood in August and September and continue flying into mid-October. Often several will gather on shrubs or fence lines, their bodies aligned to gather the sun's warmth. Because meadowhawks mate so late, they lay their eggs in grass or mud along a shore where they will not hatch until the high waters of spring reach them.

Another species that flies into mid-October is the green darner, a rather large dragonfly that favors marshes and has beautiful blue and green coloring. It is one of the few migrating dragonflies. The adult darners returning north in very



early spring have hatched from eggs laid in the south.

Watching dragonflies is instructional and entertaining. It can be confusing to keep track of who is who if there are several males competing for territory. However, if you patiently watch a perching species, you will soon see that each individual consistently returns to just two or three selected perches—at least for that day. Each species is particular about its type of perch. Some perch on the ground or close to it; others on twigs or leaves a few feet off the ground, and some in trees. Some larger species are in constant motion from sunup to sundown.

Dragonflies are fast and agile fliers and probably have the best eyesight of all the insects. Their very large compound eyes have 30,000 lenses and see color. They can move their heads to follow the motions of friend, food or foe. When hunting, dragonflies commonly fold their legs under their bodies in a basket-like arrangement, enabling them to scoop up and eat mosquitoes and similar prey on the fly. They consume a tremendous number of mosquitoes and gnats.

Though dragonflies are large and colorful adults, they begin life as small underwater nymphs with a squat, spidery appearance. In nymph stage, they live in debris on the bottoms of ponds or streams or in submerged vegetation, where they lie in wait or stalk their prey.

After as many as 10 molts, the nymphs crawl out of the water and onto a dry, open spot. In a little while, their back splits open and a soft, pale-looking dragonfly pulls itself out of the old exoskeleton. Over a few hours, their wing nubs will unfurl, fill with blood, and dry into a hard, strong and straight appendages.

*The best places to see dragonflies near the Ice Age Trail in Dane County include the kettle ponds south of County M south of Verona, and wetter areas along Badger Mill Creek, at Lodi Marsh, and in the mosquito-rich Brooklyn State Wildlife Area. Ed.*

## Fall Events, continued from page 1

Another planned **Verona** improvement is rerouting the trail uphill, away from the creek and southeast of the gravel quarry, as it heads west and south from the Lincoln Street footbridge to County M. We'll start clearing the new route on Halloween morning. Then we'll skip the madness on State Street for our own costume and board game party in Belleville later that afternoon.

No fall would be complete without a few days devoted to planting more prairie, a great family-friendly outdoor

activity for those from Brownie/Cub Scout age on up. The first planting on **November 7** is at bucolic **Liebetrau Prairie**, looking out at distant Blue Mound from high atop the ridge between the Black Earth and Spring valleys.

Despite all the building and sowing, plenty of invasive species removal work remains on the schedule, and more may be added. Indeed, those qualified for prescribed fire duty may be called to crew a controlled burn in November, conditions permitting.



Photo by Ron Endres

## United Way Events Draw 130 Brush Killers

More than 130 United Way volunteers toiled during five half-day sessions to clear land near the Ice Age Trail of invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn.

The late August brush clearing was the first step in restoring areas of oak and hickory savanna at Prairie Moraine County Park near Verona and in the Valley View property west of Middleton.

The volunteers were part of United Way of Dane County's Days of Caring Program, in which area businesses give employees paid leave to work for participating nonprofit groups. The Ice Age Trail's share totaled more than 350 hours of donated labor.

Dave Lonsdorf organized and led the Prairie Moraine events, while Tom Wise managed the Valley View work. Several other members of the Alliance's Dane County chapter served as assistant leaders.

*At left, United Way Days of Caring volunteer Ted Columbus of General Casualty/QBE Insurance prepares to add to a mammoth brush pile at Valley View savannah restoration project.*

## Getting Our Drift and Keeping on Track

If you're like me, you have a cluttered desk but an organized computer. If so, you probably used Don Ferber's monthly e-mail newsletter as the up-to-date, Dane County Ice Age Trail calendar that you could always find in a jiffy. No doubt you've also missed the newsletter (if not the puns) since Don left.

We hope to resume some version of the e-newsletter shortly, but it will be more automated than a manually-maintained, 1200-name, e-mail list sliced into smaller sub-lists to avoid spam blocking. Finding someone able and willing to take on the task has taken some time.

We likely will succeed thanks to Gale Petersen, a website designer by trade. Petersen is a relative newcomer to our core of active participants, but she has stepped up to start improving our electronic communications with our members and volunteers. Some of you met her building trail at the Cross Plains project in July. We hope to see the

fruits of her technological labors well before the next *Drift* hits your mailbox.

Meanwhile, there are lots of other ways to keep updated on Dane County activities. The Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) maintains an events calendar on its website. Just click on the calendar tab and select Dane County in the chapter drop down list to display only Dane and statewide events.

The Dane County chapter also has a site at [madison.com/communities/iceage](http://madison.com/communities/iceage) with a Dane County events calendar. We are looking at other ways to increase our visibility, such as buying our own domain, building our own Facebook presence, or adding to the Alliance's page (search for Ice Age Trail Alliance within Facebook).

However you find out about us, come on out on the trail!  
-- Dave Jenkins

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

### DANE COUNTY CHAPTER ICE AGE TRAIL ALLIANCE

2110 Main St., Cross Plains, WI 53528

*Thank you  
for supporting  
the work of the  
Ice Age trail with  
your membership!*

#### Membership Categories

<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Blazer	\$500 +	<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Supporter	\$75-149
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Protector	\$250-499	<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Maintainer	\$35-74
<input type="checkbox"/> Trail Guide	\$150-249		

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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bers for some muscle work as well.

Other volunteers came from across the state and, in the case of Phillip Onani (pictured on page 1), from across the ocean. Onani now lives in Black Earth, but he was less than a month removed from his native Kenya when he enthusiastically threw himself into building trail just a bike ride away from his new home.

"My face was stuck in a big smile as I saw how beautiful the trail is," Tom Gross said after reviewing the completed work. Gross was one of the main chapter representatives (along with Andrew Bent) on the project team. As the new segment monitor, he will help ensure that the new pathway stays in prime shape.

At right, Eric Lord, Black Earth, dumps duff waste away from new tread at the July Cross Plains project.



Photo by Eric Sherman

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