



Ice Age Drift

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Operation Fresh Start

Article by Dave Jenkins

A lot of the drudgework of maintaining the Ice Age pathway as a national scenic trail in Dane County historically has fallen to a group of mostly older, white, well-educated or professional men volunteering on weekends. Thanks in part to more backing from Dane County, an increasing portion of the brush clearing and other land stewardship work is being accomplished by young people enrolled in Operation Fresh Start.

OFS is an educational and work training program for troubled youth seeking both a high school diploma or GED and the work habits and experience necessary to get and keep a self-sustaining job. For them, restoring a pleasing landscape is not merely a goal, but a means of building job skills, responsibility, maturity and a work record.

This fall, several OFS conservation crews have been working with IATA volunteer David Lonsdorf at Prairie Moraine County Park near Verona, clearing invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle from a neglected area on the east side of the park. Although well off the trail, the many users of the park's off-leash dog exercise area can readily see the results of their work.

The crew members working there come from varied backgrounds. For example, Alisha Hunt is a single mother who was starting her first week on a crew when I stopped at the worksite. The program allows Cortez Dobson to make use of jail work release privileges and has him on track to graduate from high school in March. Landon Fisher, originally from rural Rio, is a Madison La Follette High School senior who was "messing up" in school, but hopes to earn his diploma now that he can get some more time outdoors.

Participants must contribute 900 hours to complete the program, typically over seven or eight months, during which they receive a living allowance. Besides first aid, CPR and OSHA safety training, they spend about 20 percent of their time in the classroom. They receive a \$2700 stipend for educational expenses upon successful completion.

Besides using hand tools and manually hauling and piling the cut brush, crew members may learn to use power brush cutters and leaf blowers, and to apply stump herbicide to prevent regrowth. Conservation crew members also may clean up trash in the parks, collect prairie seeds, help with prescribed burns and spray garlic mustard in season. Several years ago, one crew helped complete the tread on the Ice Age Trail loop at Springfield Hill.

For some trainees, the conservation crew work is their first extended exposure to the outdoor natural world. The hard skills learned are useful for future groundskeepers or landscapers. Dobson hopes to obtain that sort

of work, perhaps with the City of Madison. Several program graduates have gone on to work as arborists, noted Andrea Rieck, one of the conservation crew leaders.

But perhaps a bigger emphasis is "a vision of young adults having a path forward," according to Dave Schlueter, who has worked as a crew leader for five and one-half years. He stresses "soft" job skills, like the teamwork

triangle of communication, trust and respect within the work group. "I really hammer on work ethic," Schlueter, who has a social work degree, says. Noting that many of the trainees must learn such basics as calling in if they are going to be absent from a scheduled activity, Rieck agrees.

So does her soft-spoken crew member Jaleel Hopson, Madison. He began OFS in July and will finish in a month or two. He then plans to attend Madison Area Technical College to study business management.

Hopson says that the most valuable part of OFS for him is that "they help you with anything you need. There are lots of people you can talk to if you have stuff on your mind. They teach you how to be professional." *Continued on page 2...*



OFS trainees Cortez Dobson (left) and Alisha Hunt cut brush // Photo by Dave Jenkins

Annual Meeting – Elections

The Dane County Chapter of the IATA will hold its annual meeting on Sunday, January 28, 2018, at the Rosemary Garfoot Public Library, 2107 Julius St. in Cross Plains. Entry is through the side door on Jovina St. Doors will open at 5:30 for set-up with a pot luck dinner at 6:00. A business meeting featuring the election of officers for 2018 will follow. The candidate slate offered by the nominating committee includes: Coordinator –Tess Mulrooney; Co-coordinator, Anne Helsley-Marchbanks; Secretary, Mark Graczykowski; Treasurer, Michele Amacker. Among other items, the agenda will include approval of the budget for the coming year. The event will conclude with a program of information and/or entertainment.

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While Lonsdorf acknowledges that some volunteers find working with OFS crews frustrating, he has been working with them for about four years and recently joined the OFS board. He enjoys being around young adults and experiencing their world while exposing them to the outdoors.

His advice for a successful experience with OFS crews is to build a good relationship with the leaders, who are responsible for their crew's performance. Also, remember that they are trainees from difficult or troubled backgrounds working their first jobs, not professional level crews, and adjust your expectations accordingly, Lonsdorf says. Take an interest in them and treat them with respect. "You won't get anywhere by yelling at them," he adds.

Before acceptance into OFS, an applicant must go through two or three interviews with Bill Kean, participant resource manager, and several other OFS staff. The main objective of this screening process is to assess the applicants' readiness and commitment to make changes in their lives, Kean said. An OFS organizational goal is for 80 percent of the enrollees to successfully complete the program.

Besides Prairie Moraine and Springfield Hill, OFS conservation crews have worked at many Dane County parks, for the Swamplovers Foundation near Cross Plains and for other conservation groups, such as Groundswell Conservancy (formerly Natural Heritage Land Trust).

In addition to the conservation crews, OFS operates several construction crews that perform remodeling work on affordable housing.

Birding Along the Ice Age Trail

Winter

"I please myself with the graces of the winter scenery, and believe that we are as much touched by it as by the genial influences of summer." -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Article by Liam Tsao

During the depths of winter, the Ice Age Trail might seem like a lifeless, desolate place. Yet beneath all of the snow and ice, extraordinary birds can still be seen. In the fields, look for the American Tree Sparrow, a dapper bird dressed up in shades of gray and brown. More common is the Dark-eyed Junco, a sparrow-like bird with dark gray and white plumage. In these same open areas, lucky observers might spot the Northern Shrike, a predatory songbird with a striking black mask. This species has earned the name "butcher-bird" for its habit of impaling prey—usually other songbirds and rodents—on barbed wire and thorns.

The wintertime is also a great opportunity to seek out raptors along the trail. While present year-round, the Red-tailed Hawk is especially conspicuous in the winter time in the prairie areas of the trail. In forested areas, the Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks dart between trees like ghosts, pursuing songbirds as prey.

In these same forests, birders might be rewarded with sightings of some of Wisconsin's woodpecker species. The most likely are the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, two look-alike species that share a black and white body with a red cap. Also possible is the Red-bellied Woodpecker, a larger species with a zebra-patterned back with some red on the head. Lucky birders might even spot the Pileated Woodpecker, a giant, crow-like species with a

distinctive red crest on its head. Though this species is uncommon, it leaves behind huge gouges in trees wherever it goes, making its presence easily known.

Winter can offer a great opportunity to observe some of Wisconsin's owl species. In open areas, observers should be on the lookout for the Short-eared Owl, a streaked owl with glowing yellow eyes.

While this bird is most active around dawn and dusk, it is unusual among owl species in that it will hunt during the daytime as well. During the evening, the forests also hold many owls. Birders should keep their ears open for the soft hooting for the Great Horned Owl, as well as the characteristic *who cooks for you* call of the Barred Owl. In the darkness, it can be hard to see these birds, but hearing these elusive denizens of the night is an unforgettable experience.

Sometime in late February or March, winter finally loosens its hold on the Ice Age Trail. The sun shines brighter and the temperature begins to rise. What was once covered with a blanket of snow and ice begins to show itself again. The birds pick up on this change, becoming more active—singing and collecting food. Spring has arrived.



Liam Tsao

Spring

"One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring" -Aldo Leopold

Perhaps no sight is as awe-inspiring to birdwatchers as the northward migration of birds in the spring. Billions of birds hurtle through Wisconsin, coming from locations as exotic as Brazil and the Caribbean, each driven by the desire to breed. The Ice Age Trail offers an excellent opportunity to observe these species, with a variety of different habitats making species diversity high.

The early springtime is dominated by the return of waterfowl to Wisconsin. Anywhere along the trail that there is standing water, birders can expect to see a variety of ducks and geese, including Mallards, Teal, Canada Geese, and Shovelers. Lucky ones might also see flocks of Tundra Swan winging northward, their trumpet-like calls betraying their presence. Seeing their exquisite white plumage silhouetted against the sky is one nature's great treasures.

In the woods, early spring also heralds the return of the American Woodcock, a bizarre shorebird that feeds on earthworms on the forest floor. At dawn and dusk, watch for this species' courtship display, a magical combination of aerial acrobatics and strutting. Listen for the Woodcock's characteristic *peent* call wherever there is sufficient tree cover. Enthralled by the dance of the Woodcock, the naturalist Aldo Leopold noted that "the drama of the sky dance is enacted nightly on hundreds of farms, the owners of which sigh for entertainment, but harbor the illusion that it is to be sought in theaters. They live on the land, but not by the land." The Woodcock is truly an amazing bird. *Continued on page 3...*

By late April, the forests and prairies of the Ice Age Trail come alive with the songs of returning birds. In the forests, up to 25 species of warblers can be seen, each with their own distinct plumage. While most will continue northward to breed, some will remain in Dane County until August before migrating South again. Especially of note is the brilliantly blue Cerulean Warbler, a threatened species in Wisconsin, which can be found breeding along the trail in the Indian Lake area. More common are the Yellow-rumped Warbler, the Yellow Warbler, and the American Redstart. Lucky observers might also catch a glimpse of the Scarlet Tanager, a crimson-red bird glowing jewel-like from the foliage. Also be on the lookout for other migratory birds, including flycatchers, vireos, and thrushes.

The prairie can be just as rewarding in the spring. In the early morning, the chorus of Song Sparrows, Bobolinks, and Meadowlarks echoes through the fields, beautifully complementing the blooming wildflowers. Goldfinches also make their homes in this habitat, their yellow plumage accenting the colors of the prairie.

In more marshy areas, springtime is dominated by the Red-winged Blackbird. Look for its jet black plumage and listen for its deafening *churree* call anywhere there's standing water. Additionally, birders should be on the lookout for the Common Yellowthroat, a masked warbler that likes to skulk through cattail marshes. While elusive, this species' sweet, undulating call betrays it, often resulting in amazing views. Toward the larger end of the spectrum, the springtime also brings the return of the Sandhill Crane to Wisconsin. Listen for this species' bugle-like call throughout the Ice Age Trail, especially in open areas.

The spring can also bring surprises. While walking the trail near Brooklyn State Wildlife Area, my mother and I were lucky enough to spot a Yellow-breasted Chat, a bizarre warbler-like bird that was recently put into its own family. Though this species is retiring by nature, it is easily identified by its unique call, a loud mix of hoots, gurgles, and cackles. Watching this species forage methodically through an oak tree was one of my favorite birding experiences. The bright yellow Chat is a harbinger of the summer months yet to come, while representing the amazing birds that can be found on the Ice Age Trail. Get out there and enjoy them!

Liam is a high school student in Madison. Watch for his article on birding in summer and fall in a future Drift.

Dane Drifter Update

Article by Gary Wensing

We are wrapping up year four of Dane Drifters and added 66 more to our group this year to give a total of 228 people registered. 23 more completed the program this year giving us a total of 98 who have complete all our Dane County hikes. Remember, there's no time limit, so anytime after you registered, you can finish all our segments and turn your log in to get your patch! Please congratulate the following who completed everything since our last newsletter:

If you want to join the Dane Drifters or learn more info, contact Gary Wensing at kensinginn@tds.net or see the Dane Co page on the IATA website (<http://dane.iceagetrail.org/home>).

Whether you're working on the program or not, everyone is welcome to join us on group hikes on our trail segments. Watch the IATA events calendar for future hikes and check the Ice Age Trail Alliance Rock and Dane County Chapters meet up group (www.meetup.com – search 50 miles from Madison.)

Join the Dane Drifters and then hike all the beautiful IAT segments in Dane County. You'll earn this cool patch and a certificate of completion.

Congratulations to the following Dane Drifters!

Ryan O'Leary
Madison, WI
Trails Segments

Michele Walker
Monona, WI
Trails Segments

Alison Radzicki
Monona, WI
Trails Segments

Thomas Albee
Brookfield, WI
Trails+Connectors

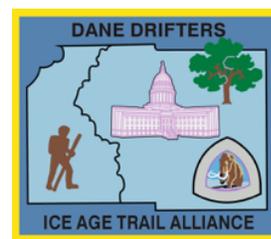
Russell Albee
Brookfield, WI
Trails+Connectors

James Anello
Shorewood, WI
Trails+Connectors

Rob Lyke
Madison, WI
Trails Segments

Christy Meuzelaar
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Trail Update

This is a summary of the highlights of Trail construction in the past year, arranged north to south:

- The Lodi Segment reroute is signed and open; follow-up tasks are needed in 2018.
- At Leibtrau (Pine Road) the ARC (archaeological) survey found no concerns and new trail was mowed in. Parking lot, tread construction, signage and more is needed in 2018 before the route officially opens.
- At Cross Plains, the new route heading south is flagged and the ARC survey was conducted. There is an area of concern. Alliance staff is working with other parties to determine next steps.
- At the Cross Plains Complex, a new route has been flagged and the ARC survey was conducted for all but the 0.4 mile on NPS land. There were no concerns. The portion of the route on NPS land will be surveyed by NPS in the spring. On-the-ground work is cleared to commence for all but the NPS portion. A new parking lot is planned for county land along Old Sauk Pass Rd.
- Construction of Hwy PD has resulted in a new bridge over that road and the Trail is again open for business.

In 2018, there will be Mobile Skills Crew projects at the CP Complex in April and in the village of CP in August.

Stay tuned –better yet, get involved!!



Winter Calendar

For more information visit
www.iceagetrail.org/events

Brooklyn Hike, Snowshoe or Ski
February 4 at 10 am with Dan Wallace

Cross Plains Hike or Snowshoe
February 11 at 10 am with Gary Wensing

Savanna and Trail Restoration
Various Locations and Leaders
Fun starts at 9 am!
February 4, 10, 11, 17, 18, 24 and 25
March 3, 4, 10, 11, 17 and 18

Indian Lake Full Moon Hike
April 29 at 6:30 pm with Gary Wensing