

October 2004

# THE DOCENT NEWS



Published by the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program

Distributed to Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

## What's Blooming? - Van Vives

You may have noticed that August wildflowers were in the *yellow* cycle. Beginning in September we saw some pink, white, and purple along with the yellow.

### Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)

These plants are found along the north ditch about 25 yards west of the walking trail parking lot entrance.



*Cardinal Flower*

### Leavenworth Eryngo

(*Eryngium leavenworthii*):

This is not a thistle, as many people think. It is a member of the carrot family. It is often associated with limestone areas.



*Leavenworth Eryngo*

### Broom Weed (*Amphiachyris dracunculoides*):

The European settlers tied bundles of dried plants to sticks and used them as brooms.



*Broom Weed*

### Boneset (*eupatorium altissimum*)

This is a member of the aster family: Boneset has a small white flower, but is not prominent. Tall boneset has opposite leaves and three veins. False

boneset has alternate leaves with one central vein. Common boneset has opposite leaves, wider than those of the tall and false boneset, and the leaves are toothed.



*Tall Boneset*

### Roundhead Lespedeza

(*Lespedeza capitata* Michx.):

This plant was named after Céspedes, the Spanish governor of east Florida in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the name was misspelled as Lespedeza. It is a native perennial legume that grows two to four feet tall. The Comanche made a tea from the leaves. The Dakota, Omaha, and the Ponca used the stems for a moxa for neuralgia and rheumatism. The small stems were cut in short pieces and attached to the skin by moistening one

end with the tongue; the other end was set on fire and allowed to burn down to the skin.



*Roundhead Lespedeza*

Rough Blazing Star (*Liatris aspera* Michx.):

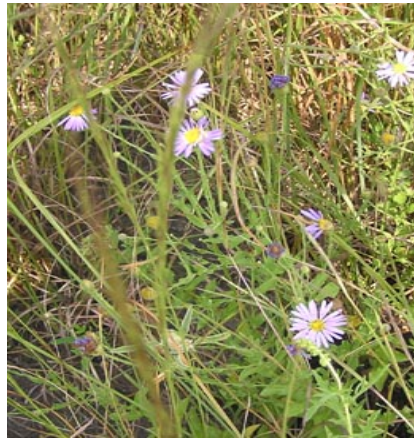
This is a member of the Daisy family. It grows one to four feet tall from a rounded, fiber-covered corm. The leaves are alternate. Early Americans fed the bulbs to horses to increase endurance. Humans used it as a diuretic, a stimulant, and a diaphoretic.



*Rough Blazing Star*

Sky Blue Aster, (*Aster oolentangiensis*):

The plants are usually less than three feet tall. Leaves may be toothed or smooth along the edges. The flower heads are about 1" wide and have up to 25 blue to lavender rays surrounding a yellow disk.



*Sky Blue Aster*

Mare's Tail (*Conyza canadensis*):

This is a member of the Sunflower family. It is also known as *Horseweed*. Native Americans crushed the heads and sniffed them to clear the nasal passages by sneezing. White-tailed deer and livestock browse the plants.



*Mare's Tail*

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Ashy Sunflower, (*Helianthus mollis*):

Grayish green plants that grow to 3" tall. The leaves are stiff, opposite, and up to 6" long and 3" wide. The leaves taper to pointed tips and the edges of the leaves often have small teeth.



*Ashy Sunflower*

Blue Sage (*Salvia azurea*):

This is a member of the Mint family. It grows up to 5' tall, unbranched or with a few branches. The leaves have a rib like pattern of raised veins on the undersides.



*Blue Sage*

Yellow Ironweed (*Verbesina alternifolia*):

This is a member of the Aster family. A tall, coarse, branching plant that grows up to 7' tall. Leaves are alternate, rough, and lance-

shaped, up to 10 inches long, with toothed edges. Grows in moist woods and along streams. This photo was taken along the creek path.



*Yellow Ironweed*



**Science in Action**

- Andrew Donovan-Shead

It seems unlikely that there could be any connection between medieval Viking sailors and the Tallgrass Prairie; yet there is.

For a long time maritime archaeologists have thought it likely that Viking ships were powered by woolen sails. A Norse law that dates from around AD 1000 stipulates that the custodian of the sail shall store it in the church and that he is responsible for the sail in event that the church burns. In 1990, two researchers probed the roof of a 12th-century church in northern Norway; they discovered the remains of a 650-year old woolen sail. Analysis of the sail fragment

showed that it was made principally from the coarse outer hairs of a primitive sheep called *Villsau* (*Ovis brachyura borealis*). An 85-square-meter sail requires about 2,000 kilos of wool, which is the annual production from 2,000 sheep. As you may imagine, a sail for a Viking longboat is a precious item. You may suppose too that the Vikings had more than one longboat and, therefore, needed more than one sail. From this we can infer that the Vikings needed a lot of sheep.

Vikings perfected their husbandry of sheep and managed the landscape to support large flocks; they did so by burning the heaths. Research indicates that Norwegian coastal farmers burnt the heather to promote growth of a rich variety of grasses in summer so that *Villsau* can gain the weight they need to survive on the heath in winter. Sheep grazing encourages the growth of grasses by suppressing the heather. Fire assists the process of keeping down the heather and preventing the land from returning to forest. *Villsau* sheep are extremely hardy, needing no shelter in winter and no extra food at any time of the year. Keeping *Villsau* required a minimum of effort from shepherds; and because the sheep lived outside all their lives, their wool became saturated with lanolin, an efficient water repellent.

(Continued on page 4)

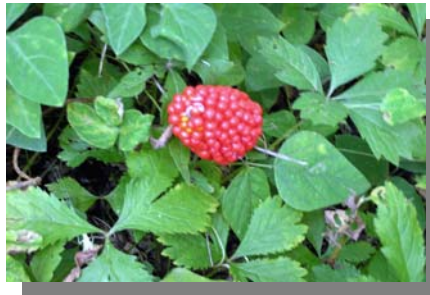
(Continued from page 3)  
 Vikings managed their landscape with fire for exactly the same reasons Native Americans managed theirs, to prevent encroachment of forest and to promote growth of lush grasses; to feed bison for the Plains Indians and sheep for the Vikings. Both the Villsau and the Bison are hardy animals that spend all their lives outside, having no need for food supplements.

This article is based on Nancy Bazilchuk's "The sheep that launched 1000 ships" appearing in the July 24, 2004 edition of New Scientist magazine. You can find more information on Viking ships at the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum web-site, [www.vikingskibsmuseet.dk](http://www.vikingskibsmuseet.dk).



## What's Growing? - Van Vives

While walking along the trail near the creek I came across a brilliant red cone-like fruit. I asked Mike Palmer what it is and he said that it is the fruit of either the *Arisaema dracontium* (green dragon) or *Arisaema triphyllum* (Jack-in-the-pulpit). Since some of the latter was seen earlier in the summer I suspect that it is Jack-in-the-pulpit. The cone-like fruit is about three inches in length and two inches in diameter at the base. It was a spectacular sight among the



poison ivy and Virginia creeper. Mike noticed a bush cricket (white) in the lower left.

Urge visitors to go to the parking lot for the trails and see just how tall the plants are. Better yet, have them walk at least a few yards down either trail. The Giant Ragweed is over 8-ft. tall and so is the Big Bluestem. The following photos were taken in mid August.

*Big Bluestem*



*Wild Quinine (Parthenium integrifolium):*

This plant is also known as American Feverfew. It was used as a substitute for

quinine when the tropical supply of quinine from the bark of the Cinchona tree was cut off during World War 1. The roots were used as a diuretic for kidney and bladder problems. The plant may cause dermatitis or allergies in some people.



*Giant Ragweed*



*Wild Quinine*



## Mark Your Calendar

### Round-Up

Saturday, November 13, 2004  
Meet at the Gift Shop at 2:00

### Docent Recognition Dinner

Saturday, November 13, 2004  
at the Hampton Inn, Sand Springs

### Oil Field Clean-Up

October 16, 2004  
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.  
Meet at Visitor Center

## Rattlesnakes on the TGP

- Van Vives

Visitors often inquire about rattlesnakes, especially if they plan to hike on the trail. I think in the past we docents have mentioned the presence of the Western Massasauga, but not the larger Timber Rattlesnake. John Fisher sighted a Timber Rattlesnake at the south entrance where the blacktop ends and the gravel starts. Bob Hamilton reported that he saw two next to a pond while they were burning. The Timber Rattlesnake is commonly referred to as a *velvet tail* because of the black velvety appearance of the tail in front of the rattles. The Timber Rattlesnake can grow to 35-54 inches in length.

If guests inquire about rattlesnakes we should mention both species.



## TGP Update

- Bob Hamilton

The big news from the Tallgrass as of late would be our summer prescribed burns. From August 30<sup>th</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> we conducted nine burns, totaling about 2,000 acres. Hot, smoky, fun!

We also hosted the September 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Oklahoma Section of the Society for Range Management. The entire meeting was in the new Research Station, with the theme of "Managing for Diversity with Fire and Grazing". Lots of patch-burn talks. About 100 attended.

Docent Day during the roundup is scheduled for November 13<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm. Everyone is to meet at the Visitor Center and must be escorted to the corrals.

The opportunity for the docents to attend the roundup was originally intended to be continuing education and a perk for being a docent. In that spirit, docents are asked to not bring more than one guest. And as always, the docent must accompany the guest.

Remember, the roundup is not

open to the public. We must be very careful to ensure the safety of the staff and the bison.



## New Program Coordinators Needed

This will be Monica Murray's last year as a docent for the TGP. Her work has changed a lot in the last nine months and she is unable to make any future commitments to the TGP. Therefore, this will be her last year to organize the docent recognition dinner. She is looking for someone to take her place for next year and who will work with her this year to plan the dinner. Interested? Please contact Monica at either (918) 587-3701 – home (918) 556-5327 – work [monica.murray@odens.com](mailto:monica.murray@odens.com)

This is also Kim Hagan's last year as Newsletter Editor for *The Docent News*. If you'd like to become a part of the newsletter team, please contact Dennis Bires at either (918) 341-3908 or [dennisbires@lycos.com](mailto:dennisbires@lycos.com)



## Gift Shop Sales Summaries

### July

2003 Sales \$6,399.12  
 2004 Sales \$6,970.60

### August

2003 Sales \$3,596.55  
 2004 Sales \$4,634.00

### September

2003 Sales \$3,572.03  
 2004 Sales \$4,697.43

### Year-To-Date Sales

2003 \$35,812.41  
 2004 \$40,480.52  
**Increase in Sales \$ 4,668.11**

## Docent Schedule October 2004

<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Rusty Brown Van Vives	Pat Jaynes		Larry Hicks		Kim Hagan	Don Bruner TG
<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>
Jenk Jones, Jr.	Duane Price	Deana Brewster Dennis Brewster	Larry Hicks Bonita Warren	Bonita Warren	Imogene Amrine John Boxall	John Fisher TG
<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>
Nicholas Delgrosso	Loretta Vives Van Vives		Larry Hicks Bonita Warren	Bill Rinehart Bonita Warren		Rusty Brown Faye Hadley
<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>
	Neil Garrison		Dave Dolcater			Jan Reynolds Jane Thomas
<u>31</u>						
Barbara Bates						