

THE DOCENT NEWS

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INTERESTING VISITORS

—Van Vives

A month ago I received email on my web site, www.okprairie.com, from a young man in Zurich, Switzerland. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Fribourg studying philosophy. He expressed his great interest in the prairie country of the United States and said that he and a friend would visit the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in April. His name is Achill Schwetzer and his friend is Reto Lininger. Achill was asked to present a paper on his research at the University of Arizona and afterwards they would drive to Oklahoma to meet me.

I received several emails from him in which he indicated how passionate he is about nature and conservation, as well as interest in the history of the west. I was amazed at how much he read and studied about prairie country. He already knew more about the Flint Hills than I knew. Needless to say I was anxious to meet these young men.

Late on April 19 he called me and said that they were in Pawhuska and hoped to see me the next day. They got there late in the afternoon and had already been to the Tallgrass Prairie and hiked the 3-mile trail. He thought it was fantastic.

I arrived at the gift shop at the same time they did. I did not know which was which, so I introduced myself. Achill was not driving and got out first. To my surprise he had a cane for the visually impaired. They did not say anything about his sight, but it became obvious that he was legally blind. In the sunlight he could see shapes, but indoors he had to put his hand on his friend's shoulder to be led around. All day nothing was said by me or them about this. I felt that Achill was an amazing person who had a defect, but who did not in any way miss the wonders of nature and the prairie. I felt he appreciated that I treated him as a normal visitor to the Tallgrass Prairie.

I spent time giving them my usual information about The Nature Conservancy and the prairie preserve. Since they had already hiked the trail, I took them on the same trail that Mike Palmer took the docents at the Science Building. I pointed out wild flowers and Reto would take Achill's hand and put it on the flower for him to feel. I still have no idea how much of the flower he could see, if anything. He was impressed by every one he touched. I took them to the vista overlooking a valley, just as Mike Palmer had done. There were three large groups of bison in the valley forming a

magnificent view. The two young men spent a long time taking it in and quietly speaking to each other in German.

At the end of the day they could not thank me enough for the experience, but I was the one who was thankful. I looked at the two men and all I could think of was that this was truly an example of human symbiosis, if there is such a thing. Achill hopes to be back in the fall. The last thing he did was to take an envelope to make a donation, but he wanted it to go specifically to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.



Achill Schnetzer & Reto Liniger by Van Vives

HUMAN ECHOLOCATION

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

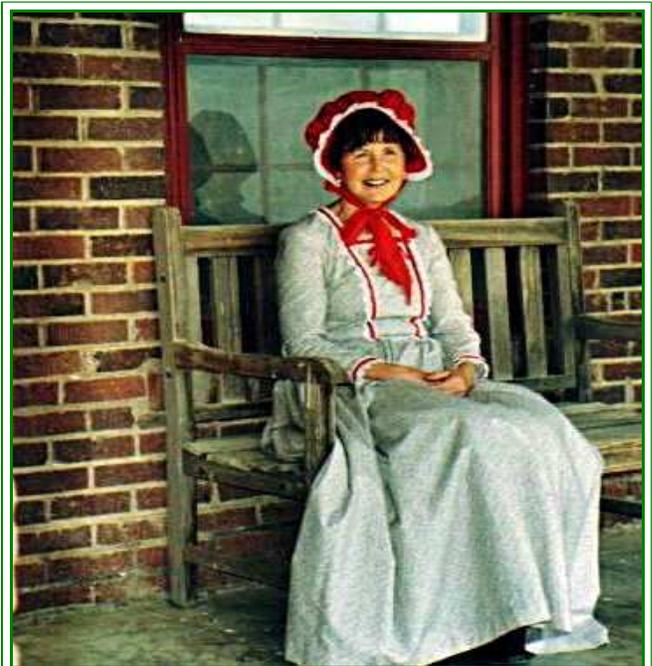
During our exchange of email in preparation of Van's article, I mentioned that I suspected Achill's lack of vision probably results in an amplification of his other senses. Van replied that the paper Achill presented to the Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona was entitled *Human Echolocation and Sense Individuation*. I read the abstract and discovered that I don't know enough to understand. However, I do have some anecdotal evidence.

We all use our stereophonic hearing to locate sources of sound; it is exploited by the surround-sound systems of movie theaters and by our home entertainment systems.

A dramatic example of echolocation is portrayed in the movie *Ray*, about the life of musician Ray Charles who was completely blind from young boyhood. In the movie he is portrayed navigating a room by listening to the reverberations from claps of his hands.

An amazing example of human echolocation is Daniel Kish who "coordinates a mountain biking project which applies echolocation and other techniques to enable independent, high speed movement through complex, unfamiliar environments by blind youth." Daniel Kish is Executive Director of World Access for the Blind,

www.wafb.org.



Prairie Woman by Patti Paoletta

As a trail guide, I instruct children to stop on the trail, close their eyes and listen for a minute then ask them to list all the sounds they could hear. Our vision tends to override our other senses, and our general noisiness scares away creatures, obscuring our immediate surroundings.



Prairie Woman by Patti Paoella

Our senses are important to our experience of the world. I encourage visitors to stop their cars, get out and stand while listening to, seeing, and feeling the prairie. Away from the clamor of civilization, the uncivilized din of television and radio, and the chatter of companions the world expands into five-dimensional splendor unequalled

by any human creation.

PRAIRIE WOMAN

—Patti Paoella

I took these pictures of Rochelle Caudill who is a docent at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. She gives wonderful tours of the bunkhouse and wanted to bring a little more “color” to the experience for visitors to the headquarters. Rochelle commissioned a local seamstress to make her costume.



Prairie Woman by Patti Paoella

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

—Jane Watson

As I have worked at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, I have met many interesting people from all over the world. But, none can compare in the category “interesting” as well as our own Tallgrass Prairie Docents.

I decided to start interviewing the docents I meet and writing their stories for all of us to share, and perhaps get to know them a little better. Did you know that we still have two active docents from the first class of 1994? They are Jo Brooks and Karen Harris. If I have missed others then please let me know.

Jo holds the prairie dear to her heart. Jo grew

up on the Chapman Barnard Ranch. Her mother was a cook for Mrs. Barnard and the cowboys. Her father was one of the cowboys who worked the ranch for many years.



Blue-eyed Grass, Sisyrinchium campestre by Van Vives

Jo attended grade school in Personia. She graduated from Pawhuska High School. To get to school, she caught the school bus at 6:30 am for the forty-five miles commute to town.

She married and raised three sons and one daughter. Jo's four children have blessed her with eight grandchildren. She has kept her love of the prairie alive by bringing her children and now her grandchildren out to spend some special moments on the preserve. They enjoy their walks exploring the prairie and interesting finds such as turtles, or listening to all the sounds of grass, birds, and wind.

Jo plans to work at least two more years in Tulsa for the county assessor's office before she gets to enjoy her retirement. She tries to come out to the Tallgrass Prairie once or twice each month. While working there, she is a wonderful representative for the Nature Conservancy.

In her own words, "I'll keep working as a docent until I am asked not to."

I doubt that we will ever lose one of our best docents who is such a goodwill ambassador and eager recruiter for new docents.

WHAT'S BLOOMING AT THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

—Van Vives

The flowers are a little late blooming this year. A few can be seen from the road, such as the cream and blue indigo. A walk on the trail will reveal many more.



Cream Wild Indigo, Baptisia bracteata var. leucophaea by Van Vives

Blue-Eyed Grass, *Sisyrinchium campestre*: Although the leaves are grass-like and form clumps, the plant is not a grass. The flowers are small, white to blue with yellow centers, and have six petals. A tea made from this plant was used to treat cramps. The Menomini used the plant to hang in their dwelling or on their person to ward off snakes. They also mixed the plant with oats to make horses fat and vicious; the horse's bite was

considered poisonous, but it would not bite the owner.



False Garlic, Nothoscordum bivalve by Van Vives

Cream Wild Indigo, *Baptisia bracteata* var. *leucophaea*: A hairy, bush-like plant with spreading branches. The leaves are alternate and divided into three leaflets. The flower spike is made up of cream colored petals and droops down. The plant was used by Native Americans to treat cuts and fevers. The Pawnee pulverized the seeds and mixed the powder with buffalo fat; this ointment was rubbed on the abdomen to treat colic. Children used the dried seed pods as rattles.



Fringed Pucoon, Lithospermum incisum by Van Vives

False Garlic, *Nothoscordum bivalve*: This is a plant that grows from a bulb. The leaves are slender and grass-like, growing 12 inches or less high. The flowers are white to slightly yellow, having three petals and three sepals. The plant has no garlic or onion odor.

Fringed Pucoon, *Lithospermum incisum*: This is a hairy plant growing less than 15 inches. The leaves are alternate and narrow. Flowers are clustered at the top of the stems. The flowers are yellow, tubular, and the edges are fringed. The Navajos chewed the root for coughs due to colds. They also cooked the roots for food.



Prairie Parsley, Polytaenia nuttallii by Van Vives

Prairie Parsley, *Polytaenia nuttallii*: This is a stout branching plant growing 1 to 3 feet tall. The leaves are deeply notched or divided. The flowers are compound yellow umbels. These plants are almost restricted to eastern Oklahoma and thrive in limestone soil.



Prairie Verbena, Verbena bipinnatifida by Van Vives

Prairie Verbena, *Verbena bipinnatifida*: This is a hairy, branched plant that is upright or prostrate. The leaves are divided into several lobes that are one-half to two inches long. Each flower is five-lobed, tubular, and purple. It prefers rocky

limestone soils.

Other plants in bloom are Prairie Iris, Daisy Fleabane, Purple Indigo, Wood Sorrel, and Blackberry.

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