



THE DOCENT NEWS

Of The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program



The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

MAY 2007

For the Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

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RAIN ON THE TALLGRASS

—Betty Turner

Recent rains have replenished the ponds scattered about the prairie. This is a wonderful sight considering how low the ponds were through last fall and the winter. It should be a good year for flowers and the grass.

David and I had docent duty on April 13. Rain began early that day, falling most of the hours we were there with heavy rains at



times. Nearly two inches of rain had fallen by the time our shift ended. Every depression held flowing water, including the bison paths. The ditches were running full.

In our twelve years serving as docents, we had never seen the first pond west of the "T" intersection so full, but we haven't previ-

ously been on the prairie during heavy rain. Water was pouring out the overflow pipe as well as gushing over the northeast edge of the pond next to the road. That flow quickly tumbled into a waterfall as it made its way downstream.



We were impressed that the gravel roads were not muddy and provided solid traction despite the wet conditions.

Very few bison were visible during this outing. Apparently, they found shelter in the trees, hidden from the road.

AN UNUSUAL SOUVENIR

—Iris McPherson

In March when I was serving my docent shift, I had a couple from England come into the gift shop. They were from London and were so excited about their day seeing the prairie, including lots of bison. We had an interesting chat, and I found out that the man is an 8th grade history teacher. It turns out that one of the units he teaches is "The American West in the 1800's", so he talks about the place of bison in the life of those days. At that point his wife suggested I ask him what he was taking home as a souvenir of the bison, so I did. It was a buffalo chip! He said that the students often don't have a clue what he's talking about when tells them about the pioneers on the treeless prairies using buffalo chips for heat and cooking, so now he could show them the real thing. I didn't see the actual item, since it was already packed carefully in a plastic bag in his suitcase. I warned him that he probably wouldn't get past customs with it, but he had high hopes of getting home with it. I was really torn as to whether to tell him that he wasn't supposed to take anything from the prairie, but I couldn't bring myself to do it,



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because he was so excited about having found one. I finally decided, since it was for use in education I'd be quiet about it. Right or wrong he was a happy man.

CONTRABAND

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

As Iris made clear in her article above, visitors are prohibited from removing anything from the preserve. International visitors re-



Rushing overflow

turning to their home countries are strictly prohibited from importing agricultural products. These restrictions are imposed in an effort to check the spread of disease. In Britain, the authorities are particularly sensitive because the country is currently free of rabies; however, I wonder how much longer this condition will prevail now that there is a rail tunnel connecting Britain to the European continent. Persons entering the US are questioned about where they have been and what they are carrying; often sniffer



Water roaring into Dry Creek, downstream from West Pond

dogs are present to detect illegal food products. Remember: Nothing except pictures and experience can be taken from the preserve.

VISITOR STATISTICS

—Iris McPherson

I have now added November and December counts to the 2006 visitor data. There were 398 visitors who signed the book in November, but only 61 in December. I feel certain that the number of people who sign the book drops off when there is no one working at the Visitor's Center, so the counts in December, January and February will probably not reflect the number of people who actually drove up for a visit. The number drops off just because of the weather at that time of year, as well. The total number of visitors who signed in for 2006 was 4,767. That would be a little higher, but I did not have any sign-in sheets for January and February.

We had visitors from 47 states with Delaware, North Dakota and Vermont being the only no-shows. The largest number, not surprisingly, came from Oklahoma with 2613,



Water tumbling from prairie into Dry Creek, west of bridge

followed by Texas, 214, Kansas, 180, Missouri, 169, and California, 122. There were visitors from 39 foreign countries with Germany leading with 54 followed by England with 37.

Looking at the data for the first 3 months of 2007, there were 432 people who signed in. Forty-seven were in January, 29 in February and 356 in March with 32 states and 5 foreign countries represented. Oklahoma, as usual, took the lead with 386, followed by Texas, 15, Kansas, 14, Arkansas, 12, Arizona and Indiana, 11 each. The largest number of foreign visitors was from the Netherlands with 4.

I find it very interesting to see where our visitors live. It would really be nice if we could also get a larger number of them to sign the book. I'd like to ask all of the do-



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cents to be diligent about asking people to be sure to sign the book. I don't expect you to go out and tackle someone who doesn't sign, but perhaps a gentle reminder will do the job.

There have been two groups of people, one last year and another this year, who have signed the book with a location I can't de-



cipher. It appears to be Poccue. I'm sure I'm getting the first four letters correct, but the rest could easily be wrong. I have a feeling they are from somewhere in the former Soviet Union, but I could be wrong about that, too. If anyone has a suggestion, please email me at:

imcpherson@sbcglobal.net

We occasionally have people sign in Japanese, Chinese or some other language that uses a similar type of alphabet, as well as people who sign using other alphabets. Those I just have to put in the unknown category.

BLUE RIVER PRESERVE

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

13 May 2007: The Tulsa World reported today that The Nature Conservancy hopes to create a new preserve along the course of the Blue River in southern Oklahoma, in order to protect a unique free flowing river and

its population of Seaside Alder. It would become the fifth preserve located in Oklahoma and is an indication of the diversity of the ecosystems within state boundaries. Seaside Alder is found in only two places within the continental US, Oklahoma and the state of Delaware. Michael Fuhr, state director of The Nature Conservancy, is reported to hypothesize that Delaware Indians brought saplings with them to Oklahoma from the coast.

PERMISSIONS

The political map of the world is used with permission from the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection at The University of Texas at Austin. See:

www.lib.utexas.edu/maps.

NO TRASH SERVICE

At the Visitor's Center there is no trash service, therefore please carry away your trash for disposal at home. White plastic kitchen trash bags should be available in one of the sink-unit cupboards, to replace filled bags in the waste baskets.

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION

Deadline for submission of articles for inclusion in the newsletter is the 10th of each month. Publication date is on the 15th. All docents, Nature Conservancy staff, university scientists, philosophers, and historians are welcome to submit articles and pictures about the various preserves in Oklahoma, but of course the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in particular.

NEWSLETTER BACK ISSUES

Back issues of the Docent Newsletter, to October 2006, can be found in the two green zip-binders, stored in the Perspex rack by the file cabinet in the office of the Visitor's Center.

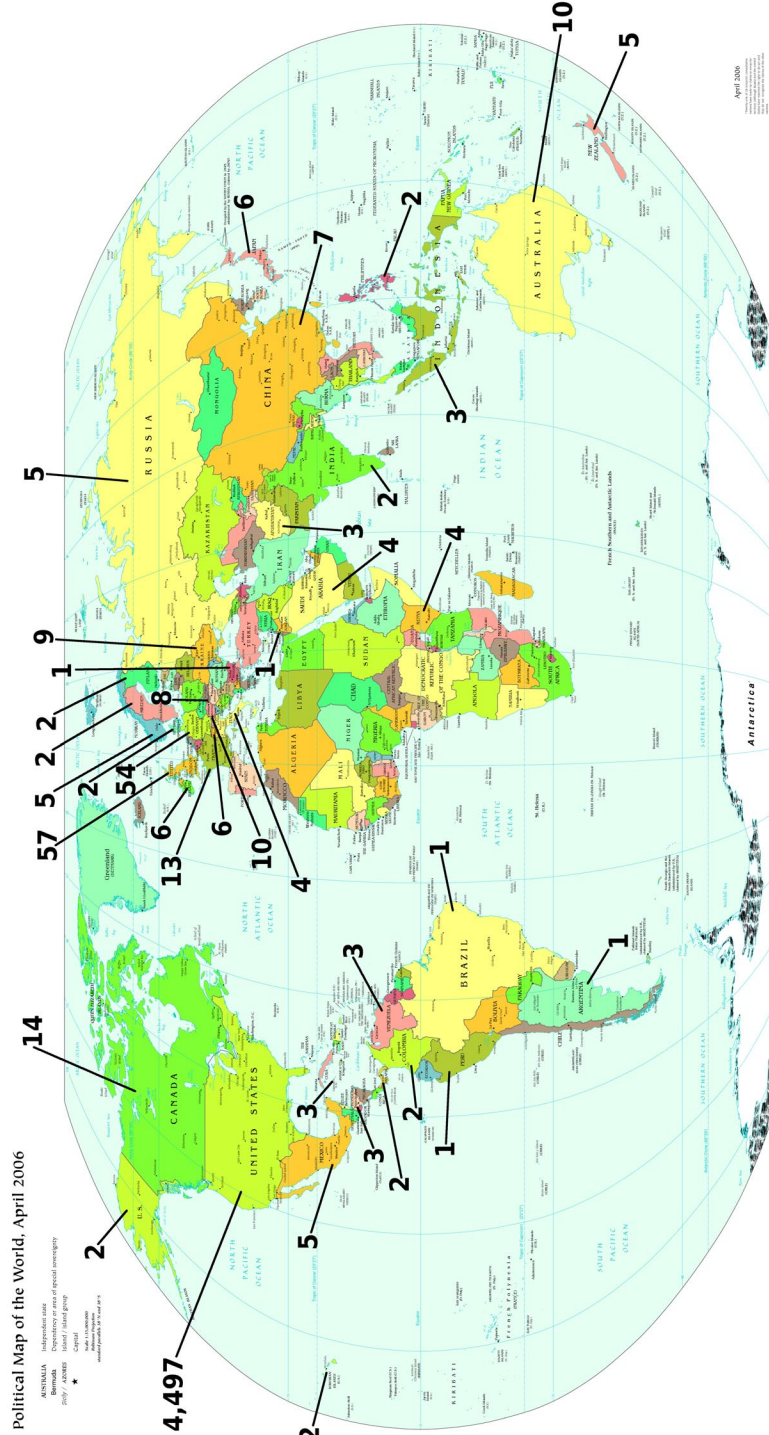




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2006 Worldwide Visitors to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve





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Tallgrass Prairie Docent Coordinators

Program Coordinator	Dennis Bires	918-341-3908	dennisbires@lycos.com
Newsletter Editor	Andrew Donovan-Shead	918-688-7502	awd-s@cloistral.net
Docent Scheduler	Van Vives	918-333-3840	vcarlv@aol.com
New Docent Recruitment	Dennis Bires (Tulsa)	918-341-3908	dennisbires@lycos.com
	Betty Turner (Bartlesville)	918-333-7864	bbturner999@cableone.net
New Docent Training	David Turner	918-333-7864	drenrut@cableone.net
Docent Reorientation	Anita Springer	918-766-0388	anitaspringer1941@hotmail.com
Docent Recognition Dinner	Deana Brewster	918-865-2799	xswbysgirl@aol.com
Nature Room	Doris Mayfield	918-743-6922	dmayfield@mindspring.com
Web Coordinator	George Pierson	918-232-1904	gpierson@tnc.org

The Nature Conservancy Offices & Preserves

Tulsa Office	918-585-1117
Oklahoma City Office	405-858-8557
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve	918-287-4803
J.T. Nickel Wildlife Preserve	918-456-7601
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	918-585-1177
Four Canyon Preserve	580-488-2657