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THE DOCENT NEWS



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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 18th 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

TGP Docent Contacts

Program Coordinator

Dennis Bires

(918) 341-3908

dennisbires@lycos.com

Newsletter Editor

Kim Hagan

(918) 494-8892

kimhagan@sbcglobal.net

Docent Scheduler

Karen Harris

(918) 663-8306

kharris@hollandhll.org.com

New Docent

Recruitment

Dennis Bires: Tulsa

(918) 341-3908

dennisbires@lycos.com

Betty Turner: Bartlesville

(918) 333-7864

BBturner999@aol.com

Reorientation and

Kickoff

Don Bruner

(580) 237-4199 - home

(580) 213-9217 - work

dbruner@groendyke.com

Docent Awards

Monica Murray

(918) 587-3701 - home

(918) 556-5327 - work

monica.murray@oden-ins.com

Nature Room

Doris Mayfield

(918) 743-6922

dbmayfield@mindspring.com

Web Coordinator

George Pierson

(918) 744-0554

zglp01@cox.net

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.

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 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.



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



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 30th to September 30th we conducted nine burns, totaling about 2,000 acres. Hot, smoky, fun!

We also hosted the September 29th – 30th 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.



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

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

