



# Prairie Smoke

Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter  
Issue 10      September, 1991

join us for the second annual  
**Autumn on the prairie**  
September 21, 1991      10 am - 5 pm

## displays

Indian Lore  
Prairie Plants  
Prairie Wildlife  
(snakes, turtles, birds,  
rodents, coyotes)  
Land - history/geology  
Prairie photography  
& art

## demonstrations

Prairie planting  
Controlled burn  
Brush cutting

## sale items

Prairie books  
Prairie seeds  
Food & Drinks

## schedule of events

10 am Displays Open  
10:30 - focus on plants  
leader: Chris Bronny  
11:00 - Prairie restoration demon-  
stration - Dennis Lubbs  
12:00 - Tour - focus on butterflies  
leader: Sally Baumgardner  
12:00 - Tour - focus on plants  
leader: Tim Keller  
1:00 - Brush control demon-  
stration - Ed Pleskovitch  
1:30 - Story Teller  
2:00 - Controlled burn demon-  
stration - Mike Crowe  
2:30 - Tour - focus on plants  
leader: TNC representative  
3:00 - Tour - focus on plants  
3:00 - Childrens' milkweed scatter-  
ing - Sally Baumgardner  
3:30 - Story Teller  
4:30 - Tour - focus on birds  
leader: Anne Haverstock

free admission and parking

JOIN US !

Nature Conservancy Members, this plea is directed to those members who now are primarily just donating money. I do not mean to belittle that aspect of our programs. I think it is time for some members, who are able, to step up the next logical plateau in the development of a conservationist, and that step up is to physically volunteer your services.

Most of the work accomplished at the various sites, and in some cases all of the work, is done by volunteer labor. This accomplishes many things. Two important items are: cutting out the major expense of hiring people to do a job that volunteers can handle, and the volunteer develops an intimacy with the site, by that I mean love and concern for all aspects of the land -- plants, animals, insects, mammals, reptiles, soil type, water, etc., etc., etc.

The intimacy means a knowledge of a site that no one else has, it is gained by spending time at the site. You see what is happening first hand, by talking with other volunteers you learn what they know and appreciate their particular project. No one person can know every detail of a site. No one person can do all the work. People grow older, or become physically unable to do their job, or sometimes they "burn-out" and need a rest. Someone else must pick up the load. There is a minimal loss of time and knowledge if many people are involved in each aspect of the work.

It isn't necessary for a person to become indentured or enslaved to a site. Any time you spend helping to plant, pull weeds, count species, burn, whatever, will be appreciated. Some things only happen once or twice a year such as burning prairie, but, as burning is labor intensive, requiring many helping hands for a safe burn, lots of people are required -- only for one or two days at a time. Oh, of course, you will be pestered to help in other areas, if that's holding you back, don't worry about it! You don't have to help with everything, just refuse. Pick your area to work in. Don't feel guilty. Do what you are able.

Enlist the help of friends and relatives then the time spent on the site can be an extension of family time. Go out to a site, such as Nachusa Grasslands, enjoy the peace and quiet to renew the feeling inside you. Call it a mini-vacation or retreat. Try to envision the feeling of solitude the

first settlers felt on those great expanses of openness.

Nachusa Grasslands has a great variety of plants, animals and soils; maybe you have an interest in wetlands, or high sandstone knobs or wooded areas. Many different types of habitat can be explored, studied and maintained. Each area has its specific plant and animal life. You can't become an expert in all areas, and maybe you don't want to anyway. If you learn about two or three plants a year you'll find yourself fairly knowledgeable in a few years time.

The good feeling of pride is another benefit. Pride in the fact you have helped preserve something worthwhile, something that can't be replaced. You receive the reward of appreciation from others, and not just in your own vicinity. Person from other parts of the country can enjoy our work. When you go on vacation contact other preserves or nature area and have an automatic friend. You share a common interest. You also have the advantage of a new and different area to explore.

As you see there are many reasons to volunteer. We need your help physically, mentally and financially.

To volunteer for Nachusa Grasslands call Sally Baumgardner - 708/655-4295 or Ed Pleskovitch - 815/626-8746.

Thank you.



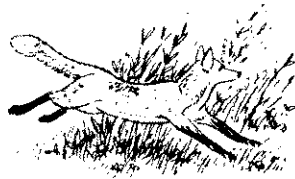
Ed Pleskovitch

Students from Oak Park River Forest High School with their instructor Mike Ellis, working out of Loreda Taft Campus. They cut multiflora rose and eastern red cedar at the Grasslands on June 26, 1991. The kind of volunteers we need! THANK YOU.

## REASONS

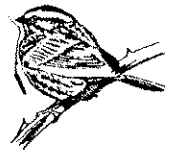
...by Ed Pleskovitch

### To Help The Environment



1. YOU FEEL GOOD, A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT, PRIDE.
2. IT'S HEALTHFUL - PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.
3. YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE.
4. YOU LEARN AS YOU WORK, I.E. BIRDS, PLANTS, TREES, INSECTS, ETC., ETC.
5. IT OFTEN IS PEACEFUL AND QUIET.
6. CAMARADERIE IS AT AN ALL TIME HIGH.
7. YOU LEAVE A LASTING MARK ON THE PLANET AND PEOPLE.
8. WE ALL WILL HAVE TO EVENTUALLY OR DIE.
9. FAMILIES GROW TOGETHER.

### Not To Help The Environment



1. IT CUTS INTO YOUR PARTY TIME.
2. YOU CAN GET DIRTY AND SUNBURNED OR WET AND MUDDY OR CUT AND SCRATCHED.
3. YOU COULD OVERDOSE ON THE OUTDOORS.
4. PEOPLE MIGHT DEMAND MORE FROM YOU PERSONALLY AND PHYSICALLY.
5. CALLUSES ARE UGLY.
6. DOING SOMETHING FOR NOTHING IS STUPID, ISN'T IT!?
7. AFTER I'M DEAD WHO CARES WHAT HAPPENS?

## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

...by Ellen Baker

The April planned tour, lead by Tim Keller, was a visit to the wetlands to see the skunk cabbage. The day was also wet!

Mid-May was delightful, with the shooting stars and the turtle shell appearance of the wild cream indigo in full bloom on Dot's Knob. It was a sight to behold. The bird's foot violets and other spring flowers added the touch of spring. Little bluestem grass was starting to cover the fall burned earth.

June brought the Natural Area Guardians from Mercer County. Dot Wade and Hazel Reuter guided groups to see the coneflower in full display. A picnic lunch was enjoyed at Franklin Creek State Park after the tour. There we shared our common concerns for the native areas of Illinois.

July's scheduled tour was preceded by record breaking heat. The radio warned people to stay out of the heat, but Bo ziadysk drove 98 miles to share his research project. Bo is collecting much information. The few who attended certainly were enlightened as they watched the collection of information. All should

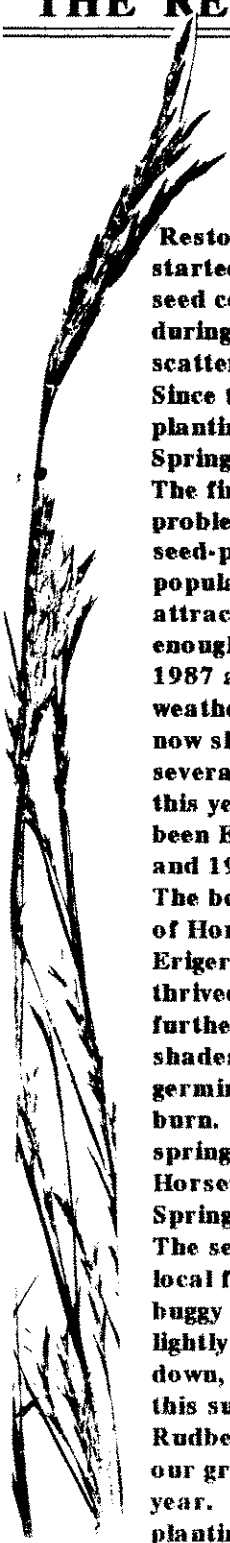
be aware of the significance of the metal and wooden posts he uses to mark his research area. The area within the metal posts are 5 year test plots and should not be walked on, nor seed collected on, or in anyway disturbed. The scientific data will be altered by human presence on the site. Remind yourself and others who may not be aware of the value of staying off these sites.

This highlights the scheduled tours. A Chicago area group sold, at a money raising event, a Grasslands Tour and Picnic. It was a joy to guide and share Nachusa Grasslands with a city group. Pat Armstrong and many others have toured our area. Birding is very popular.

Your help is needed to estimate the number of persons visiting Nachusa Grasslands. Please sign the guest book in the mailbox by the entrance sign. Note the number of persons and date. Any comments are always welcome too. Your signature is not necessary, but welcome.

If you'd like to be a guide for the Grasslands do contact me, Ellen Baker - 815/456-2283.

## History



Restoring the cropland at Nachusa to prairie was started in the fall of 1987. Local volunteers led seed collecting expeditions in and around Nachusa during the fall harvest season. Seeds were scattered for the first time in the late fall of 1987. Since that first planting there have also been plantings in the fall of 1988, Spring 1990 and Spring 1991.

The first two plantings have had their share of problems. The simple act of organizing a volunteer seed-picking network in an area with a low population base is difficult. We have had problems attracting enough interested people to help harvest enough seed for the land we have to plant. The 1987 and 1988 plantings were also plagued by dry weather and poor seed crops. These plantings are now showing signs of starting to come around, with several species flowering and fruiting last year and this year. A problem with these fall plantings has been *Erigeron canadensis*, Horseweed. The 1987 and 1988 plantings were sown into bean stubble. The bean stubble had such a tremendous seed bank of Horseweed that it was almost a monoculture. *Erigeron canadensis* is a winter annual which thrived under our fall planting scheme; furthermore it is very competitive in the short run, shades the ground in early spring preventing germination, and does not produce adequate fuel to burn. These factors led to a decision to switch to spring plantings into cultivated ground to avoid the Horseweed problems.

Spring 1990 was Nachusa's first spring planting. The seeds were blended with ag-lime and oats at a local fertilizer plant and spread with a fertilizer buggy into disced ground. The planting was then lightly harrowed. The 1990 planting has settled down, with many early successional forbs flowering this summer, such as *Monarda fistulosa*, *Rudbeckia hirta*, and *Ratibida pinnata*. Some of our grasses are also flowering and fruiting this year. With annual burn maintenance, the 1990 planting is going to be an exciting place to watch a prairie develop.

One problem with using ag-lime and a fertilizer buggy is that the light fluffy seeds when mixed with lime prevent the lime from flowing, and cause bridging in the buggy. Two loads of limestone had to be shoveled by hand into the conveyors of the fertilizer buggy. This is terribly demanding on those riding in the buggy doing the shoveling. With this in mind, we considered involving volunteers to sow the seed in 1991. A mass mailing produced about 25 volunteers who spread over

2000 bulk pounds of cleaned and uncleaned seed over disced ground. At Nachusa we prefer to plant in former soybean land that has been lightly disced.

The twenty-five volunteers spent all one Saturday walking in bands, in circles, zig-zag and helter-skelter, sowing different seed mixes over different soil types, slopes and exposures. A special thank you goes to the crew leaders, Kathy Motto, Sally Baumgartner, Jet Hall, and Mike Crowe, for their efforts getting the people and seeds in the right places.

The 1991 seeding area was then sown to oats and lightly harrowed. A few weeks after the planting, small fuzzy-stemmed seedlings of Blue Stem grass were already evident. The 1991 planting should be a success in the years to come.

Over the years, as these large prairie plantings have been engineered, we have also been overseeding into existing knobs, wetlands, and savannas as the seeds have become available. Nachusa owes a great deal of thanks to many people who have made contributions to the restoration effort. A special thank you is extended to Pat Armstrong, Chris Bronny, Hazel Reuter, Deb Osmer, Isabel Johnston, Tim Keller, Dot Wade, Steve Packard, and all the seed picking leaders and interns.

## The Future

Hundreds of acres of prairie, wetland and savanna remain to be restored at Nachusa. In terms of converting cropland, our main emphasis is on restoring Mesic Prairie, Wet Prairie, and Sedge Meadow areas. These areas are currently cropped and tilled. As the seedings progress, the tile systems will be disabled, making the Nachusa landscape much wetter. Our successional restoration will be equally divided between wetland, dry mesic prairie, and savanna.

We need seeds of all species of native plants from within 50 miles of Nachusa. We can use them somewhere on the site. Restoring Nachusa is like building cars on an assembly line. On parts of the assembly line, we're still designing. On other parts we're still building the frame, and on still other areas we're adding the details. All these things are going on at once. We're building prairies on agricultural land with tough adventive "meat and potatoes" plants, and we're carefully adding conservative species to our existing remnants. We have a place for any seeds you can offer. Diversity is the key to a healthy restoration. At Nachusa we need diversity in these areas:

**(1) Species Diversity.** Our broad range of habitat means we can restore a broad range of species.

**(2) Genetic Diversity.** We need a broad genetic base within a species to insure that any species has the genetic resources to survive the unknowns of our changing world.

Seeds from any single source may not have the genetic resources to survive for a significant length of time. We need seeds from a number of sources to insure a broad adaptable genetic base.

**(3) Successional Diversity.** Nachusa is a large preserve, where large grazers will be interacting with the plant life. Certain species will thrive and prosper under some disturbance. But this same disturbance is going to stimulate a seed bank of agricultural weeds. We need our native early successional species to displace the introduced early successional species. Every hoofprint and gopher mound should come up to Evening Primrose, Yellow Coneflower, Flowering Spurge and Black-Eyed Susan, not Foxtail, Canada Thistle and Smooth Brome. The seed collecting efforts in the past have produced tremendous amounts of seed. We need volunteers to lead groups of pickers at Nachusa and the surrounding areas to insure an adequate volume of seed to continue to convert our cropland and old pastures to prairie and wetland.

Seed collecting efforts are scheduled for every weekend of August through November. If you would care to lead or participate in a picking, please attend an orientation picking on Saturday, Aug. 31, from 9 to 12 at Nachusa Grasslands, or call 815-379-9060. We encourage people to organize seed collecting efforts in the fringe areas, to do something for Nachusa without necessarily being there. We have chosen a 50-mile radius as our seed source. This includes all or part of the following counties: Jo Daviess, Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, Kane, DeKalb, Ogle, Carroll, Whiteside, Lee, Kendall, LaSalle, Bureau, Henry and Putnam. Interested people anywhere in these counties are encouraged to organize and lead local collecting expeditions at remnants and eventually bring the seeds to Nachusa. A goal is to have several collecting efforts each weekend. This will give us the desired diversity we need, increase the amount of seed, and increase our genetic base within the seed. To be an effective leader of a seed collecting day does not require a tremendous knowledge of plants. Novice collectors that know the basic prairie plants do quite well.

Participating is a good way to learn plants and picking techniques by sharing knowledge with others who help collect. We will try to briefly train leaders in plant identification and picking techniques during our August 31 orientation. Those interested in attending should dress appropriately, and bring paper bags and clippers.

People often ask for a "hit list" of species to pick. Because of the tremendous habitat variation in Nachusa, the "hit list" would be very long and intimidating, and probably scare off potential volunteers.

An alternative is to pick seeds by habitat. When you're harvesting seed in a good conservative remnant, pick all species that are ripe and keep them bagged separately. Each bag should be labeled with the collector's name, date, site, habitat and some type of plant name, be it scientific or common. Even names such as Aster, Goldenrod, Sedge, Bulrush, or Rush are acceptable. There is usually enough of the plant included with the seeds to get a positive identification.

Target communities for the Fall 1991/Spring 1992 plantings will be Dry Mesic Prairie, Mesic Prairie, Wet Prairie and Sedge Meadow. We need as many people as possible concentrating on the Mesic Prairie, Wet Prairie and Sedge Meadow seeds. The bulk of our cropland we're converting is going to be mesic to wet.

The following points summarize the goals for seed collecting for Nachusa:

- (1) Collect seeds from a large number of sites.
  - (2) Collect seeds from a variety of habitats.
  - (3) Concentrate on early successional species.
  - (4) Collect spring, summer, and fall flowering species.
  - (5) Collect a variety of lifeforms--grasses, sedges, vines, shrubs, and trees.
  - (6) Collect the beautiful, the benign, and the bizarre; a good native plant can be ugly.
- More information on seed collecting will be available to those interested by calling 815-379-9060 evenings, or at the orientation picking and at Autumn On The Prairie.



## Volunteer Orientation

A very successful Volunteer Orientation Day was held at the Grasslands on July 13. Over 40 people came to hear how we are planning to restore the native plants and communities, and how we are doing this. Thirty-five new volunteers signed up to help!

We are very pleased with the high level of interest that show up in the responses of the new volunteers. Many agreed to be added to our weeds patrol, seed collecting days, brush and tree removal crews, and we certainly have a lot of interest in our spring and fall burns.

Several people volunteered special skills: Bob Parenteau from Freeport has agreed to prepare a detailed map of Nachusa Grasslands and will research the historic land uses of the various parcels that make up this unique preserve. Some teachers indicated a willingness to help and learn and then pass along their new-found knowledge to their students! And a few more volunteered to use their writing skills and publicity contacts to help Nachusa Grasslands be more well known.

Much thanks goes to Gene St. Louis from DeKalb for producing clean, crisp posters (with his own beautiful photos of the prairie!) to help publicize the July 13th event. And thanks, of course, to our intern, Amy Prosser, for getting the posters distributed. (Editor's note -- Special Thanks to Amy for her excellent help in getting out the special issue of Prairie Smoke dealing with the Volunteer Orientation Day!)

We hope to develop a telephone chain so all volunteers can be invited to attend the activities that interest them, without incurring large phone bills on any one person's part. Most work days can easily be scheduled in advance, but all are dependent on reasonable weather. Days of controlled burns are very highly dependent on favorable weather, and last-minute phone calls seem to be the only way to communicate our needs.



BRINGS YOU PRAIRIE SMOKE,  
THE NACHUSA GRASSLANDS NEWSLETTER.

ILLINOIS FIELD OFFICE, 79 WEST  
MONROE, CHICAGO, IL 60603 -- PHONE  
312/346-8166

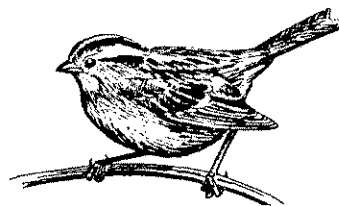


Gene St. Louis

## Seed Collecting

On Saturday, July 27, five people came out to harvest seeds, in weather that was extremely pleasant. Sally and Amy were accompanied by Bob Parenteau, Gene St. Louis and Judy Snyder, and we headed for the Meiners Wetlands to look for bulrushes and sedges. After wading through a neck-high (almost) monoculture of Queen Anne's Lace on the top of the hill, we descended into the lush, green sea of vegetation, the sedge meadow. Here we found a classic definition of "Nature's Bounty" -- seed heads were at a robust, golden maturity, drooping over with ripeness.

We harvested a large, wonderfully rich, mixed bag of 3 species of sedge and one of bulrush seeds. Our reward was the presence of the Black and Yellow Argiopes, also known as Golden Garden Spiders. These orb weavers bask in the sunny, tall vegetation, where they wait for flying insects. Their dish-sized webs with the characteristic white zigzag band in the middle provide a perfect snare for their prey, as well as a sticky surprise for careless seed-pickers! These prairie predators, as well as the dry weather, are keeping the population of "pesky" insects in check, making seed gathering at Nachusa Grasslands a very pleasant and worthwhile activity. Do join us next time!



Two types of bird studies were accomplished this summer. First, was the continued atlasing of Nachusa, which gives us the base line breeding species diversity for the site. Second, was a population census that should give us some estimates of bird densities in the major habitat types. The results of the census may not be tallied until the end of the year, but the atlas work has brought about some nice results. Because of our increased hours in the field, there was an expected rise in the numbers of species using the site during their breeding season. Of the 85 species sighted, 50 are confirmed breeders (up from 32 in 1990) with another 20 species highly probable.

Jim Chiropolos, a young architect from Des Plaines, spent more than 60 hours atlasing Nachusa Grasslands. His unflinching attention to this job is the real reason we saw such a wonderful increase in confirmed species. During the breeding season Jim sighted the Illinois endangered Cooper's hawk, and the Illinois threatened veery. His only disappointment was never spotting the single pair of upland sandpiper present. Maybe, this will keep him coming back, so we will continue to benefit from his birding skills.

## Species Closeup 1991

**1991 UPLAND SANDPIPER** - Only one pair of this Illinois endangered species returned this year.

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** - This Illinois threatened bird was not using Nachusa Grasslands proper, but was seen along approaching roadsides.

**VEERY** - The veery seen in 1990 was back in the same area, north of Kittentail Knob. We were not able to confirm the breeding status of this Illinois threatened bird, but we have high hopes for next season.

**BELL'S VIREO** - A pair successfully fledged young near the northwest edge of Coyote Point.

**BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** - At least 4 pairs nested this summer. None were seen last year, so I wondered what attracted them this year?

**COOPER'S HAWK** - This Illinois endangered bird was seen chasing through our wooded western edge.

**TURKEY VULTURE** - As many as 5 at a time circled overhead throughout the summer. Jim saw 2 on the ground at Coyote Point.

**SEDGE WREN** - In mid-summer 2 males were singing south of Doug's Knob.

**YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** - Several pairs were in our savannas.

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** - Although we've only sighted them twice in the last two years, we feel they were nesting in the neighboring pines, where they likely found the lichen used in their nests.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** - Seen often at the south edge of Nachusa.

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** - Two pairs were nesting close together. One pair had an adult male in typical plumage and the other had a male in first spring plumage (check a guide to see the difference). The younger male was later seen feeding a cowbird. This species is often preyed upon by the cowbirds.

**BOBOLINKS** - Four males were seen at one time, so this seems to be an increase over the two seen last year.

**DICKCISSEL** - This was a dickcissel summer. Many were using interior habitats as well as the edges.

**GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS** - Abundant! Abundant! Abundant! I can say without qualification this is the most abundant breeding species at Nachusa. I will be more specific when the census is tallied.

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** - This species spent the summer in the northwest savanna, but never let us see behavior that would confirm its breeding.

**LARK-SPARROW** - Although adults were not as visible as last year, fledged young were seen in July.

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** - An elusive male was seen and heard on one occasion.

Remember, even if you occasionally bird Nachusa Grasslands, we can use your observations. All sightings help us see the yearly picture of how these wild creatures use the Grasslands. Send your day trip observations to: Ann Haverstock, 724 Hawthorne Lane, Geneva, IL 60134.

The summer of 1991 at Nachusa Grasslands has brought a few changes and as always new goals and duties. Nearly 50 new volunteers have joined in the restoration to help in weed removal, seed collecting, brush-control, controlled burns and several specialty contributions. With a continued effort by the volunteers of Nachusa, the process of restoring the land will truly be a dream come true.

Thus far, the most troublesome weeds continue to be White sweet clover and Multi-flora rose. It is of the utmost importance that a continued effort take place to remove these plants from the area. The most effective control is hand removal, which of course requires many workers consistently keeping ahead of the weeds. This is where you can help, by participating as an individual or by organizing a group work day at Nachusa.

In order to empower the individual volunteer and allow them to work at their own convenience, I have been working on two special projects. The first is a volunteer center for message exchanges, seed drop off, notices of work being done each day and the latest information regarding Nachusa Grasslands. It is located in the red building west of the yellow house. Be sure to make note of your visits to Nachusa and record where you will be working so others may join with you and amplify the work done. The second project is a volunteer manual which explains the various restoration jobs and general information about Nachusa Grasslands and prairie

restoration. It is my hope that these two efforts will make it easier to participate and ensure an organized and well informed volunteer community.

This summer has proven to be quite a spectacular season, with each week bringing new flowers in record numbers, more lush greenery and fortunately, seemingly low numbers of biting insects. If you have not had the pleasure of visiting this summer, I urge you to come see the many splendors Nachusa Grasslands has to offer. I hope to see you on the prairie at one of the up coming work days and look forward to working with you. As always, if you have any questions or suggestions contact me by phone at 815/453-2561 or write P. O. Box 432, Ashton, IL 61006.

#### MUSIC SEEN NOT HEARD

The fire-flies rise in staggered unison, to dance their summer's eve dance once again.

Bursting up with a flash....pause....flash... mate to mate, predator to prey.

Across the fields and in between the hills, shining out their signals, speaking in light.

An ancient flight of timeless words, a tradition of mystery, music seen not heard.

.....AMY PROSSER

-8-



PRAIRIE SMOKE  
897 UNION ROAD  
AMBOY, IL 61310

US POSTAGE  
PAID  
AMBOY, ILLINOIS  
PERMIT NO. 58