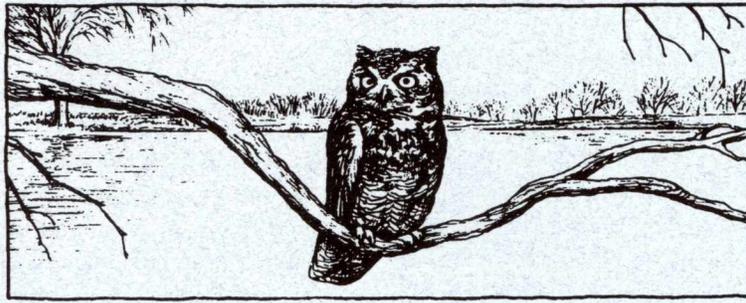


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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ACCESSIBILITY TRAIL: *Connecting the Dots*

--Mark Spreyer

The last time I wrote about our accessibility trail was in the the Autumn 1998 newsletter. In that article, I mentioned that Stillman's education committee compared trail planning to playing a game of connect the dots. That is to say, the original dock was a dot that was connected by the trail to the relocated arbor, another of the dots. As the map indicates, we're almost done connecting the dots.

For new members or for someone who has just picked up this newsletter, a brief review is in order. An accessibility trail, as the name suggests, is a trail designed to be accessible to all visitors whether they walk, roll in a wheelchair, or are guided by a caregiver.

Besides significantly increasing the length of the trail, we also made other improvements. For example, we were fortunate to have **Palatine and Hersey High School** students on hand to help us move our forty-foot arbor to its new home where it welcomes visitors to the trail.

In addition, a prairie demonstration plot was started at the east end of the trail thanks to the hard work of a **Barrington Middle School** student. Visitors who might be unable to negotiate the trail to our established prairies, will now be able to enjoy a colorful sample of native Illinois plants.

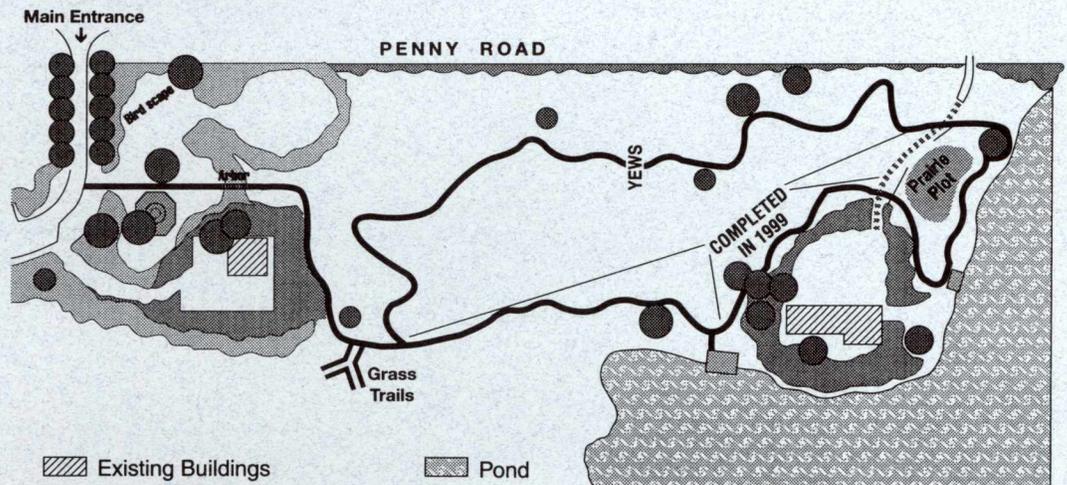
If you haven't seen it yet, the trail is composed of compacted rustic granite. We chose this material because it was felt that a paved surface would be inappropriate in our natural setting. Also, although crushed limestone would be cheaper, it readily leaches into the soil and would change the soil's acidity. This change could,

in turn, harm the wildflowers that visitors are on the trail to see.

What's Next?

If the weather cooperates, an improved parking lot should be under construction in March. The current lot only fits four cars. Also, the severe hook in the drive has caused bus drivers to give yours truly dirty looks as they struggle to turn their buses around. The new design includes a one-way loop that will allow buses to pull in and out without having to back up or turn the bus around.

Once the new lot is done, you'll leave your vehicle and then walk or roll through an opening in the wall and see the vine-covered arbor ahead of you. To your left, inside of the wall that runs along Penny Road, you'll see an old foundation. This corner, we thought, would provide an ideal location for a landscaping demonstration plot.



STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • SOUTH BARRINGTON • IL • 60010

You might be wondering-- with Stillman's 80 acres of meadow, woods and marsh-- why landscape along a wall near the road? We're aiming at visitors who are looking for ideas on what they might plant behind their garage or along a walkway. Hopefully, by using our wall, these visitors will have an easier time visualizing how our plants would look next to their house. In particular, we will have shrubs and perennials that are attractive to birds and other types of desirable wildlife. This "birdscaping" area is next on our list, the next dot to be connected.

To those of you who responded to our annual membership letter, thank you. We count on your support. If you didn't receive our letter, please consider completing the form on the back of this newsletter. You see, when we were kids, all we needed to play connect the dots was a pencil and paper. Here at Stillman, we need your contributions to complete our accessibility trail version of the game.

PROGRAMS

Program Basics: PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending. *Please, no scout groups.*

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the program) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

OWL MOON WALK

Native Americans called January's full moon the "owl moon." In honor of this owl moon, Mark Spreyer will present an indoor presentation on owls. Afterwards, with the help of the almost full moon, we will walk the trails in search of Stillman's Great Horned Owls. Space is limited so call 428-OWLS to make reservations.

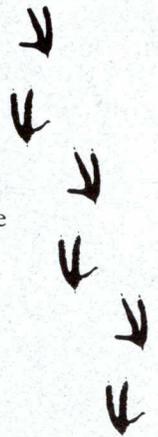
Date: Saturday, Jan. 22
 Time: 6:00PM
 Age: 10 years and up
 Member's Fee: Free
 Non-member's Fee: \$2.00



MAKING TRACKS

Join Susan Allman as she shows you how to recognize the different types of tracks made by winter's active animals. After an indoor introduction, explore Stillman's trails for signs of rabbit, squirrel, deer and fox. If there is no snow on the ground, the program will be cancelled.

Date: Sunday, Jan. 30
 Time: 2:00PM
 Fee: None



COMPASS USE

Learning to use a compass is a practical and fun outdoor skill. Unlike competitive orienteering courses, ours is a compass-guided nature exploration. Remember to dress appropriately as you are likely to encounter thorny shrubs. We'll provide instruction and compasses. **For reservations, please call 428-OWLS.**

Date: Sunday, Feb. 13
 Time: 2:00PM
 Age: 10 years and up
 Fee: None

NAME THAT TREE or THIS BUD'S FOR YOU!

Imagine that George Washington chopped down that cherry tree on his birthday. How could he tell which was the cherry? With the help of Stillman's naturalist, you'll learn how to identify black cherry, maple, sumac and other midwestern trees. Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will help you open your own branch office! Come prepared for the weather. Teachers and garden club members are especially welcome.

Date: Sunday, Feb. 20
 Time: 2:00PM
 Age: 10 years and up
 Fee: None



SUMACS IN WINTER

--Mark Spreyer

One of the shrubs we'll be seeing on our tree walk and planting in our birdscaping demonstration area (mentioned in the cover article) is sumac. While walking the dogs on Christmas Eve, I noticed how a recent snow coated some twigs more thickly than others. In particular, staghorn sumac appeared to be a snow magnet.

Staghorn sumac is one of two sumacs (*Rhus spp.*) that are common in our area. Staghorn is the taller of the two sumacs and is sometimes considered a small tree as it can reach a height of forty feet.

This plant's stout twigs are so thickly coated with hair that they were thought to resemble a buck's new antlers, or a stag's horns "in the velvet." These hairy twigs are also the reason that snow clings so easily to its branches.

The other, shorter, sumac is smooth sumac which, as its name suggests, has smooth twigs. While staghorn sumac is found in less than half of Illinois' counties, smooth sumac can be found in each one. In fact, smooth sumac is one of the few, if not the only, shrub or tree species native to all 48 contiguous states.

Before moving on, there are a couple of other members of the *Rhus* genus that need to be mentioned. Often, when I point out staghorn sumac to visitors, they confuse it with poison sumac. Unless you are in the habit of frequenting bogs, it is unlikely that you will encounter poison sumac which is a virulent plant that should be avoided.

The other untouchable *Rhus* is the well-known and well-distributed poison ivy. This time of year, there are no leaves to look out for but both poison ivy and poison sumac produce drooping, white clusters of berries. If you see these, keep your distance. (Some botanists put these two toxic species in a separate genus, *Toxicodendron*.)

In contrast, both staghorn and smooth sumac grow dense clusters of mildly sticky, fuzzy red fruits at the ends of their branches. I just picked a clump of these berries. They have a tart, some might say acidic, smell and flavor. Native Americans bruised and then soaked these berries in water to create a type of pink lemonade. In California, not surprisingly, a species of sumac is known as the lemonade sumac.

While we look at the sour sumac fruit and see lemonade, birds look at sumac berries and just see lemons. That is, they may be nourishing but they aren't

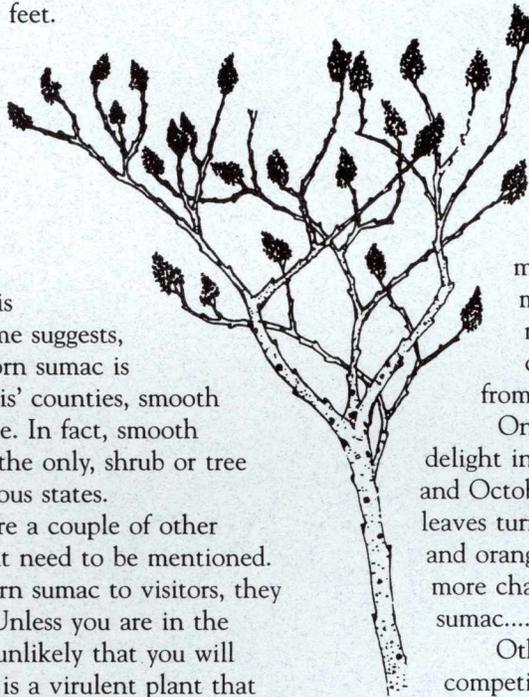
the birds' first choice. Lucky for these choosy birds, sumac fruit persists into the winter months. While other juicy fruits get eaten or shrivel up, sumac remains. Once the birds have picked through nature's savories, they eventually come to the "lemons." Over 95 species of birds, everything from chickadees to turkeys, have been observed eating sumac fruit. Here at Stillman, we've seen colorful birds such as cardinals and red-bellied woodpeckers dining on sumac. Its winter persistence is one of the reasons sumac receives a good rating as a wildlife food.

Should you plant it in your yard to attract wildlife, give it full sun and room to grow.

Sumac reproduces by sending up shoots from the roots of the plant. The resulting clonal thicket spreads with the oldest and tallest stems at the center, and the newest shoots at the edges. During the dormant season, it is these small suckers or root cuttings that you will want to transplant in order to establish sumac in your yard. Keep in mind that sumac is a dioecious species. This means that each sumac clone will be either male or female. So, if you want to see the red clusters of berries, you need to get a cutting from a female.

Once you establish a sumac clone, you will delight in the colorful display it offers in late September and October. Whether it's smooth or staghorn, sumac leaves turn bright scarlet, shading into purple, crimson and orange. As Julia Rogers wrote, "No sunset was ever more changeful and glorious than a patch of staghorn sumac..."

Other trees, like the maples and aspens, are competing with the sumac for attention in October. In winter, the competitors are naked and dormant while the staghorn sumac continues to display its furry red ornaments. It holds its pyramidal clusters of bright berries upright, like a leafless Christmas tree waiting for Santa's return.



NEW EXPANDED WINTER HOURS

We've added two hours to our winter Sunday schedule. Stillman is now open Sundays from 11 AM to 4 PM.

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is also available, by reservation, during the week to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or email us at stillnc@flash.net and we'll be happy to send you one.



Email: stillinc@flash.net
 (847) 428-OWLS
 South Barrington, IL 60010
 33 West Penny Road

STILLMAN nature center



Open Sundays 9-4

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If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$ _____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
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