



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.


A PRAIRIE BEAUTY at ORDWAY.

In Minnesota there is never a definite cut-off between winter and spring. One often finds the days of April seesawing between thawing days with "the feel of spring" and those raw, troublesome days of snow and sleet when winter seems to have come back. The result is that winter usually just "wears out" and becomes summer.

Every year, in that tenuous period which could be called "late winter" or "early spring", I walk along the ridge trail southward to the nose of a hill which leads sharply down to the Lake. There in the midst of the forest is an open area of about 100 sq. meters which looks to the south and receives the first warming rays of the returning spring sun. Here each year, sometimes among stubborn patches of snow, appears the Pasque Flower.

The Pasque Flower (*Anemone patens*) is a member of the Buttercup Family but looks like a big crocus and is called "May Flower" in the Dakotas. For some reason it appears at Ordway in only two locations in small savannah-like openings in the oak forest rather than in our grassland areas where one would expect to find it. We are near the eastern geographical limit of the plant's range. Its blossoms appear first, poking upward through the dried debris of the winter; the 5-to-7 large pointed petals are lavender or purplish-white in color. It is a short plant, standing only 18-20 cm. above the dead winter grasses. Its rosette of silky-haired leaves and stalks is soon hidden by the oncoming vegetation so that in less than two weeks after blossoming it is obscured from our sight for another year until winter breaks and this beauty of the prairies signals us that spring has returned to us once more.

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