

# MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: "BETWEEN-THE-TRACKS" at ORDWAY.

One very interesting part of the property is that land which lies between the two railroad tracks and their right-of-way fences. As one crosses the nearer track he walks the edge between an oak forest and the high grass prairie, a good vantage-point for observing the contrasts in these two types of habitat. A clump of Quaking Aspens nestles in the edge of the oakwoods, a classic example of a vegetative clone and of considerable botanical interest to strolling students.

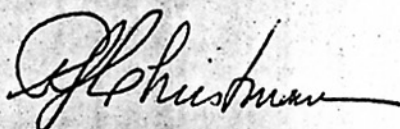
The entire intermedian area may cover an area of about 35 acres and is divided about equally between grassland and woods. The drainage is northward toward the apex of the plot and here a half-dozen unusually tall Cottonwoods have risen to great height, being the tallest on the property, flourishing in the watercourse which carries the runoff, this in spite of the severe burn-scars from frequent grassfires in the past.

At the southerly end of the triangular area is the small permanent pond which straddles the property boundary line. The typical pond community here is in great contrast to the hot, dry grassland, a real haven for the pond creatures and those others which depend upon them in their life-chains.

As one moves northward from the pond there is a dense patch covered by oak forest, where there abounds Hazel and Gooseberries and other underbrush. This is a real bird-haven, lying as it does between the small pond and the grassland and there are many nesting birds in this locale during the early summer. In the deep winter the Chickadees and Nuthatches congregate in the shelter of this wooded spot.

Passing into the grassland one finds a rather good example of a tall grass prairie, where the Bluestem grass and similar grasses and forbs have come to flourish. This area is frequently subjected to fires accidentally set by passing freight trains and the favorable result of such burnings is showing itself over the past few years. Whereas three years ago there had been a considerable and very dense stand of Sweet Clover in this inter-track area this plant has now virtually disappeared and it is an improvement obviously brought about by the grass burnings, which encourage the growth of those plants which have become adapted to the prairieland conditions. At the edge between the grassland and the oak forest there is a definite "invasion" of the sumac shrubs into the grassland; these are the "pioneers" which cause the continuing swithh between forestland and grassland and if left untouched (as is the policy at Ordway) will achieve a balance under those natural factors which come to bear upon the situation, viz. natural fires, winds, disease, insect and bird action, etc.

"Between-the-Tracks" is an interesting study in itself...



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