



ZION, ILLINOIS



BOB-O-LINK PRAIRIE

1 GLACIAL LAKE CHICAGO


Many thousands of years ago the last of the great glaciers to cover Illinois, once covered the Illinois Beach State Park area. This tremendous "River of Ice" ranged up to a mile thick (imagine a mile of ice towering above you). This glacier scoured and scraped its way through more than 1000 feet of rock formerly present here.

When the glacier retreated (essentially melted) it left tremendous deposits of sand and gravel and a great lake (Glacial Lake Chicago).

This glacial lake has, during the last ten thousand years, dropped to the present level of the lake we call Lake Michigan.

The old shore line of the lake is the prominent land rise directly to the west, and the ridge you are standing on is a former sandbar of the lake (as are all the ridges in the area).

NOTE

As you proceed to the first  notice the typical plants (familiar if you have taken the Dunes-Beach Trail) of these sandy ridges, some of these being: Little Bluestem Grass, Bearberry, Creeping Juniper, Wormwood, Flowering Spurge and Black Oak.



BLACK OAK



2 WET SWALE

Abounding with life forms this former peat bog is wet all year round.

In the spring it is a breeding ground for Frogs (Chorus, Cricket and Leopard) and many insects (Dragonfly, Water Boatmen, Diving Beetles, etc.)

The swale is also a feeding ground for other animals and birds such as the Muskrat, Great Blue Heron, Bitterns, Ducks, Raccoon, Rails, Opossum and a host of others.

The myriad of plants change through the seasons. These range from the common spring growths like the Blue Flag (Wild Iris) Strawberry, Sedges and Rushes through summer and fall with Meadow Rue, various Mints, Marsh Fern, Spiderwort, Anemones, Wood Lily, Marsh Phlox and the Grass Pink Orchid. The latter is of great interest because the rare and delicately beautiful little flower is trying to maintain its existence, in the face of increasing human disturbance. Please do not touch.



BITTERN



ANEMONE



SPIDERWORT



CHORUS FROG

NOTE

As you proceed to the next station, notice that even a little rise in the land will change the growth of the particular section.

3 ROTTING LOG



In nature **EVERYTHING** has use, even if it is dead.

The seemingly insignificant log lying before you is, before your eyes (though very slowly) giving life to a great many life forms.

Some of the possible life forms that could be associated here might be:

A feeding ground for a Salamander.

A hiding place for a Snake as it moves through the area, a growing place for Fungi, a home for a Colony of Termites, or an area for the life cycle of a number of insects.

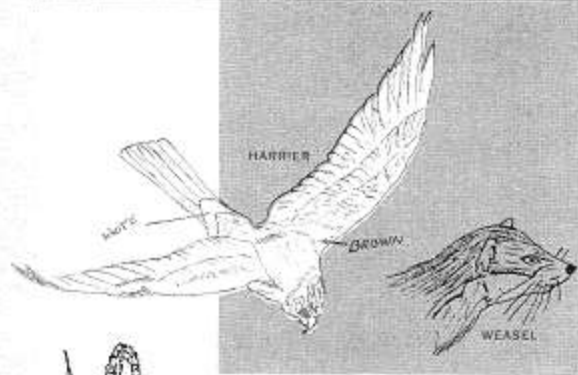
It will take from five to ten years for the entire log to completely decay and give all of its nutrients back to the soil.

It is tempting to inquisitively peer under the log but if this is done the **ECOLOGY** will be upset and may take years to return. **Leave it alone.**

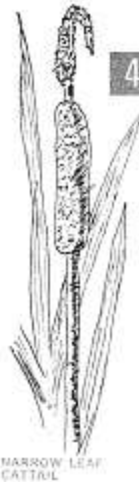


NOTE

On your way to (4) look for the Oak Ridge situation with its accompanying Willows, Grasses and Prairie Clover.



4 CATTAIL MARSH



You are now at a marsh land consisting predominantly of Sedges, Rushes and Cattails.

The Narrow Leaf Cattail is the species present here, growing (again on a layer of peat) to a summer height of up to 12 feet with a water base up to 3 feet deep.

The marsh is teeming with life form such as: Muskrat (look for their mound shaped houses) Raccoon, Foxes, Weasel, Snakes, Frogs, Salamanders, Turtles and hundreds of birds. The birds both nest and live off the marsh. Some of the commoner species are: Redwing Blackbird, Rails, Harrier (Marsh Hawk), Great Blue Heron, Marsh Wren, Bitterns, Coots, Pheasant, Red-Tailed Hawk, Snipes and many others.

(Binoculars are almost a must for observation.)



5 BOB-O-LINK — PRAIRIE

As you look to the southwest you are overlooking a small remnant of the vast prairie land which covered a great part of Illinois. In this small prairie a number of birds nest during the spring and summer months.

Primary among these is the Bob-o-link, a colorful, starling-sized bird, which will burst forth with an almost hysterical song. (Listen for — oh, geezeler, geezeler, gilipity, onkeler, oozelem — oo)

While on migration from South America to the nesting area, the Bob-o-link will feed on vegetable matter, then while caring for its young will consume insects (of which there are many at Illinois Beach State Park). After the family rearing is over the whole family will feed on weed and grass seeds.

In the fall the Bob-o-link's plumage will change to a dull coloration and he will start his long journey south.

See front cover for illustration.



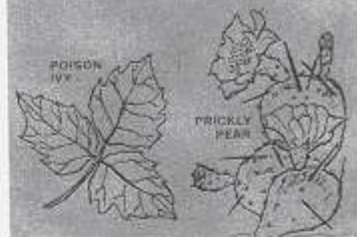
6 ROYAL FERN

In the surrounding swale grows the majestic Royal Fern, poking its crown above almost all the surrounding vegetation (fronds may be five feet long). The light brown, dense clusters at the frond tips are made up of masses of spore cases (reproduces by spores rather than seeds).

Look for the largest of the two ferns present here.

A mucilage taken from the stem is sometimes used in treating coughs.

Plants found near the Royal Fern will be Mints, Marsh Phlox, Wild Iris, Grass Pink as well as Rushes and Sedges.



7 STABLE DUNE — the "climax" of plant progression at Illinois Beach — as far as the ridges are concerned:

In this situation the ridge is completely covered by growth, save for blowout areas (you are now standing in a blowout) where the plants have been sufficiently destroyed to allow the wind to erode the sand away forming a small "valley".

Some of the plants to look for in this region are: the Little Bluestem and Big Bluestem Grasses, False Solomon's Seal, Poison Ivy, Wild Rose, Flowering Spurge and Prickly-Pear Cactus.

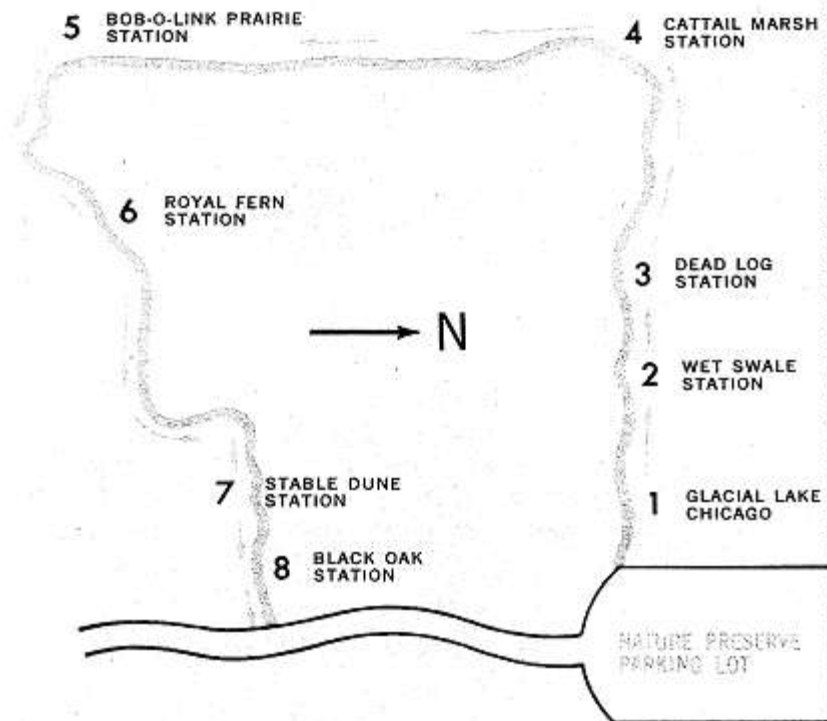


8 BLACK OAK

Around you are many Black Oak Trees, which is the predominant tree of the area. Although they are small (up to 40 feet) in comparison to Black Oaks found elsewhere in the state (up to 80 feet) they are quite old, (many are 125 years and older) due mainly to the poor soil.

As the Oak grows it has a tendency to hollow out in the trunk and large branches. This hollowing makes it possible for a single tree to be an "apartment house" for wildlife, and may hold such animals and birds as Squirrel, Woodpecker, Bluebirds, Wrens, Chickadees, Screech Owls, Opossums, Raccoons, Bats and other smaller life forms.





NOTICE

1. Stay on the trail — trampling kills the plants.
2. Do not collect ANYTHING — leave it to be appreciated by others.
3. No picnicking and no littering — natural beauty is spoiled by unnatural litter.
4. Watch your smokes — better yet don't smoke.

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