

THE PAINTBRUSH PRAIRIE

NEWSLETTER

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GENSBURG • PAINTBRUSH • SUNDROP • DROPSEED

BILL KURTIS AND FILM CREW VISIT MARKHAM PRAIRIE



This past April a large portion of Gensburg-Markham Prairie was torched, much as prairies have been for eons. Not exactly our normal annual controlled burn, arrangements had to be made months in advance for the blue windless sky requested by Bill Kurtis and his video production crew. The Markham segment is part of a television special that Mr. Kurtis is creating on the "Chicago Wilderness", a term increasingly used to describe and acknowledge our extensive urban preserves. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped: Steve Byers, Joe and Mary Roth, Rich Gnedinger, Mike Kennedy, our faithful Palos Pals and numerous Friends of the Indian Boundary Prairies. Watch your local programming for the hour long show this winter.

PRAIRIE SHOES THAT REALLY LAST!

How about shoes that take you not only through a season but through a lifetime!? In fact, several of them!!

While listening to Public Radio (WBEZ- 91.5 fm) a few weeks ago, I heard bits and pieces of a story about shoes made from a plant called Rattlesnake Master, (*Eryngium yuccifolium*). My ears perked up immediately because I know this prairie plant. Not hearing the whole story I called the radio station. They gave me the web site where the story was found and I then called my local library. The Reference Librarian got on the net and found the article published in the journal *Science* and got me a copy of the complete research report.

AP also put out the news item and it appeared in the local paper. Here are some excerpts:

"There were no spiked heels, wing tips or cross-trainers, but footwear crafted by American cave dwellers thousands of years ago was fashionable, tough, and well-made. Thirty-five specimens of sandals,

moccasins and slip-ons were unearthed in a Missouri cave that was a popular campsite some 9,000 years ago.

The sandals and slip-ons were made with fibrous plants that could be woven into a tough fabric used for the top, bottom and sides of the footwear. the most common material was from a yucca-like plant called rattlesnake master. The leaves were dried and plaited into cording that was then woven.

The cave which is in a bluff not far from the Missouri River, was a spectacular home, by the standards of the time and was extremely dry which preserved the footwear.

Though the shoes were found 40 years ago, only recently have researchers been able to precisely date the specimens."

Isn't it cool to know how prairie plants were used thousands of years ago. If you want complete details of the research report -- 3 July, 1998 Vol. 281 *SCIENCE* www.sciencemag.org.

Patricia Brownlow



Rattlesnake Master