



Minneopa Messenger

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park
No. 23, October 2003

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Mankato MN 56001

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SUMMER GENERAL MEETING, JULY 17

NEW ASSISTANT MANAGER ELAINE FEIKEMA TO SPEAK TO FRIENDS

The fall general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, October 16, 2003**, at **7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato.

At the meeting Elaine Feikema, the assistant manager of Minneopa State Park, will be introduced to the Friends organization. Elaine will talk about her background and the projects for the park that she hopes to pursue. There will be refreshments as usual.

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PARK MANAGER'S CORNER

Greetings from Elaine and myself to all our good friends. I think the best way to use this space today will be to provide you with updates regarding a variety of issues.

Let's begin with the 2005 annual vehicle permit design. We had our first meeting on September 19 with St. Paul staff to discuss this. It was decided the permit will feature Minneopa Falls. This is the icon around which the park was established in 1905. We may also try to incorporate a theme of "water quality awareness" into any marketing efforts for Parks Nature Store products using the permit design. The permit design will be open to public competition and any art media will be considered. Details on the submittal process will be released later.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

If you look forward to fall as much as I do, you are not thrilled by this early cold weather either. Much as I love to use my wood cook stove for heat, I do not like to have to start it up in September. Let us hope that nice 65-70 degree weather is going to show up now in October. This will give us a chance to enjoy the fall colors and bug-free walks. Fall is one of the best seasons out at Minneopa State Park, so let us all get in a few more visits before winter gets here.

Well, I see by the Sunday, Sept. 28 *Free Press* that Kevin Schieffer is optimistic that the court rulings will be in his favor on the DM&E railroad project. If so, then all he will need to do is find two billion dollars for financing the project. Either route here in the Mankato area will affect Minneopa Park. Also the whole plan keeps alive old, outdated plants back east that should be closed down. What is really needed is for all of us to learn to conserve and get more efficient appliances and light bulbs. This mindset of being more careful in our homes and places of business would solve a great deal of the problem. We also need to look at alternate forms of energy, such as wind and solar. Both of these are becoming cost effective and a few tax breaks would help them develop faster. Why not speak to your elected officials about these ideas?

Christmas is coming and I would like you to think of the gift shop at the Park for some of your shopping. The Friends will have a nice postcard

of the Falls and more Notecards with
[Continued on page 2]
[Park Manager, continued]

Seasonal staff have been notified of their last working day and by the time you read this it will most likely be only Elaine and myself remaining to keep things running. Meanwhile staff have begun to work on hazardous tree removal and will be draining water lines and winterizing buildings the first week of October.

We are in the planning stages of developing an oak savanna restoration project adjacent to the trailhead parking lot. Work will likely continue throughout the winter. The project will entail removal of understory and invasive species, which will eventually lead to restoration of a prairie/grassland component under the oak canopy.

We have now completed the new interpretive kiosk on the east end of the falls parking lot. In mid September the Minneopa Creek Watershed interpretive panel was installed and one week later the contractor finished installing limestone paving stones around the base of the structure. Come check it out, I'm sure you will agree it looks very nice.

A contractor has been hired to replace the cedar shingles on the Seppman Granary and deadline for completion is mid November. The existing roof has a number of holes in it.

Finally, I would like to let our readers know that Bill Morrissey, Director of the Division of Parks & Recreation, will end his tenure in late November of this year. He is planning to continue his career in the DNR Division of Forestry where he spent four years in the 1980's. Bill has been a huge asset to the Division of Parks and has shown great vision and leadership during his service. I'm sure he would appreciate any thoughts you might wish to share with him regarding his many years of dedicated service and join me in wishing him success and happiness in his future endeavors.

Howard Ward, park manager

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[President, continue]

photo contest winners on them. These will make great stocking stuffers. Then the clothing items and great books at the gift shop are always good ideas. But my favorite gift is the year-round pass. This is a gift that gives all year and gets people out to see the great state parks we have here in our state.

Elaine Feikema, the assistant park manager, will be our speaker at the October 16 meeting. Come and meet her and bring any questions or ideas you may have. Better yet, bring a friend or two with you that night. Hope to see you then.

LaVonne Craig, President of the Friends

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FRIENDS NOTES:

The organization needs officers for the coming year, 2004. Harriet Mason and Brand Frenz were named as a nominating committee to find candidates for president-elect and treasurer. If you would like to hold either of these positions, let Harriet or Brand know. And then, they might call you too.

Minneopa State Park was established by vote of the Legislature in April 1905, so in 2005 we will celebrate the park's **100th anniversary**. There should be some events to mark that year, and it is not too early to be thinking about it. Note also, as the park manager says in his column, that Minneopa will be featured on the annual park sticker that year.

Merrill Frydendall gave two public programs on the Minneopa prairie this past summer. One hike focused on wildlife and the other on vegetation. As everyone should know, a walk on the prairie with Merrill is enjoyable and educational. **Thanks to Merrill, again.**

The new postcards produced by Craig Mason say **the height of the Lower Falls is 39 feet**. If you always thought it was 35 feet, as I did, you may be surprised. But Craig and I (separately)

put weighted ropes over the lip, lowered them to the water, and then measured – 39 feet!

ANOTHER DRY AUTUMN

It is **fall and the falls are not falling**. If you have not had a chance to check on Minneopa Falls since summer, you may want to wait a bit. The creek in the park has not been running since September, and the falls are completely dry. Not even a trickle over the edge. The pool at the bottom is fairly full, but the fish living there are nervous. Like all of Southern Minnesota, the land at Minneopa could use some rain. On the other hand, this is a good time to study the creek bed and falls structure, when it is all exposed. And we all know that the creek will run again, and create the lovely misty glade recalled in the lines of the poem:

Come to the falls
Come to the falls
Shadows lie down there
The cool river calls

(from “Minneopa,” by Richard Robbins, 2002)

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The Rambling Editor Looks at Blue Jays

Most of our Minneopa birds -- the swallows, wrens, warblers, and thrushes-- are only here for the warm weather. A few, like the juncos, only come (down from the North) for the winter. And then there are those birds who are permanent residents. The most common year-round birds here are the chickadee and the blue jay.

Everybody loves black-capped chickadees, with their cheerful songs and neat black and white attire. Blue jays are handsome birds too, but not everybody loves them. There are reasons, in fact, that people specifically dislike blue jays.

If you look closely at the richness of its shades of blue and gray, the delicate markings on its wings and tail, and the dignified necklace that frames its strong, crested head the blue jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*, is a beautiful bird. The more you look, the more perfectly designed the blue jay appears to be.

And there are plenty of opportunities to look at blue jays, because they and their little rival the chickadee are the two most common birds at feeders all winter long -- and in the summer too, if you put out food. In this area the blue Jay is usually also the biggest bird at the feeder, and one of the most colorful (although, like the cardinal and the robin, it suffers from being so common that we often forget how vivid its colors really are).

The two charges made against the blue jay are that it is (1) a vicious predator, and (2) a loudmouth. (The same things are said about its close relative, the crow.) It is true that the blue jay’s diversified diet includes an occasional egg or even baby bird from someone else’s nest, but that is hardly unique in the wild. The blue jay can be a predator, but the “vicious” is anthropomorphism. As for the loudmouth charge, again, there is something to it.

In the woods along the Minnesota River where we live there is a fairly large flock of jays, up to 20 birds. They have two leaders, who I call Frank and Jesse. Too often we’re out enjoying quiet time in the country and hear commotion coming. The jays come swooping over the top of the hill and down on us like the James Gang attacking Northfield. Mouths a-blazing, they grab onto high branches in trees around the meadow and rip the evening quiet apart with their raucous calls. Skraaa, guk-guk. The only thing uglier is when you startle a Great Blue Heron and he takes off and just before he drops his calling card for you, he lets out a gargled croaking that resembles an old Toro lawnmower with a bad spark plug running out of gas.

I hope we all agree that the blue jay is no songster. But still, it does have some talent as a mimic, and can also produce a large assortment of hollow, metallic calls that are always interesting, sometimes pleasant. Often when I hear an unfamiliar bird call in the woods here, upon investigation I find or decide that it is a blue jay with still another different song.

And that sums it up for the blue jay – a common and beautiful bird that makes things a little more interesting here, like it or not.

FINALLY, A FALLS POSTCARD AGAIN

Craig Mason, a Minnesota State student with an affection for waterfalls, collected postcards of various natural wonders around the state of Minnesota. And he was surprised when he found that he could not buy a postcard of Minneopa Falls, which is his particular favorite. "There isn't one," he was told.

Craig decided to do something about it. He found a good photograph of the falls in his personal collection and he investigated the procedures for getting it printed on a postcard. When he had that information, he contacted the park, who put him in touch with the Friends.

The governing board was interested in the idea, and Craig came to the August meeting. After hearing his proposal and discussing the question, the board voted to ask Craig to go ahead and have 1,000 postcards printed at Friends' expense. It is a way to raise some money for the organization, but more importantly it fills a need. As Craig pointed out, there should be a postcard of Minneopa Falls, available to buy at the park and in Mankato. Now there will be. The cards are supposed to be done in time for the October 16 meeting.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Oct. 16, Thursday, 7 p.m. Friends meeting, North Mankato Police Annex Building, "Meet Elaine Feikema, Assistant Park Manager."

Nov. 13, Thursday, 7 p.m. Friends Governing Board Meeting, Coffee Hag, Mankato.

Dec. 11, Thursday, 7 p.m. Friends Governing Board Meeting, Coffee Hag, Mankato.

Jan. 15, 2004. Thursday, 7 p.m. Annual Election Meeting of the Friends of Minneopa State Park.

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GETTING THINGS DONE

Our Friends organization has done some good things for the park, but much more is possible. There are projects that are just waiting for someone to push them through, such as the self-guiding nature trail on the prairie, and there are other ideas that members may have, but haven't brought forward. Come forward, suggest your project, and offer to work on it. We can do a lot, if we work together.

The Minneopa Messenger, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001, is edited by Brand Frenz, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.