Natural Areas of Cook County

Somme Prairie Grove & Somme Prairie Nature Preserve

“... a flowery grassland with scattered trees—much as it would have been 500 or 5,000 years ago”

Somme Prairie Grove Volunteers
Described in 1977, as “... nothing more than a few small prairie openings within a brushy mess,” Somme Prairie Nature Preserve and Somme Prairie Grove comprise one of the finest tallgrass prairie, wetland, and savanna complexes in Illinois. Classic prairie plant species, leadplant, cream false indigo, prairie brome, fringed gentian, cream gentian, prairie gentian, hoary puccoon, prairie dropseed, nodding wild onion, compass plant, prairie phlox, prairie lily, white prairie clover, blazing stars, and rare orchids, thrive here. Eight rare and critically endangered species also occur, and the Somme preserves have more than 470 native plant species. Wildflower displays stretch out for months. Flocks of Nighthawks frequent the evening sky in summer, and bigger predators, including Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls, regularly nest on site. In the savannas, look for American Woodcock aerial displays, along with an abundance of Indigo Buntings, Eastern Bluebirds, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Other regulars include the Cooper’s Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Warbling Vireo, Eastern...
Kingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Orchard and Baltimore Oriole. In thickets you’ll find Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler. The Great Crested Flycatcher and Yellow-throated Vireo frequent woodlands, and two elusive species, the Wood Duck and Virginia Rail, have recently taken up residence in the wetlands. Narrow foot trails that cover 3.5 miles through Somme Prairie Grove’s 70 acres (east of the train tracks), pass through hazelnut and viburnum thickets, with ancient burr and scarlet oaks overhead, and purple Joe-pye weed and bottlebrush grass below. At Somme Prairie Nature Preserve (west of train tracks) the sharp, green boundary between the best preserved prairie and the grassier, less diverse western sections, illustrates where the prairie lost wildflower species after years of heavy mowing, farming, scraping, or being back-filled. Excellent trail guides to these areas can be found online. Along with the 250-acre Somme Woods Forest to the east, the slow return to health with prescribed fire, seeding reintroductions, and invasive exotic species removal in this preserve has been breathtaking to behold.
To Somme Prairie Grove, park at Somme Woods Forest Preserve parking lot on north side of Dundee Rd. (Route 68), just east of Waukegan Rd (Route 43), and enter on foot from corner of Dundee and Waukegan Rd. To Somme Prairie Nature Preserve, park at post office on Dundee Rd., ½ mile west of railroad tracks, enter from east side of parking lot.

Photos of coyote, Sandhill Cranes, Great Horned Owls, and front cover courtesy of Lisa Culp. Additional photos courtesy of Stephen Packard and INHS staff.

GPS: Somme Prairie 42.139° W -87.838°; Somme Prairie Grove N 42.138° W -87.826°