

Let Us Take a Walk

by Brian "Fox" Ellis, Illinois Audubon Society

Let us take a walk. A walk through time.

The glaciers graced this land with large sand deposits
as the melt water of the Kankakee Torrent scoured this landscape.

Walk with the Illiniwek and Potawatomi as they traversed the sand ridges,
avoiding the wet-footed swamps of the Kankakee River and its tributaries.

They walked these Black Oak Savannas hunting black bear
and searching for rare medicinal herbs that still grow in these sandy soils.

Let us follow the path of the French Voyager, the first Europeans to visit here;
it wasn't far from here that LaSalle was lost in these vast marshlands
mixed with a labyrinth of oak groves.

Walk, don't run, it draws suspicion,
as the self-emancipated people rise up from the South,
seeking to own their own land, to not only settle here, and build a life,
they also seek to provide a refuge for the formerly enslaved folks who
followed them to this oasis
on that path that was neither underground, nor a railroad.

Let us follow the Great Migration
as half-a-million souls fled the Jim Crow laws of the South
to help build that great city on the shore of Lake Michigan.
Some of these folks and their children or grandchildren, sought a quieter, country life,
like the farming life of their parents and grandparents,
fleeing from the city to retire, or, write a new chapter for themselves,
well south of the Southside.
Organic farms, locally lead conservation efforts, and community-building
began and continue to grow.

Today, on this glorious day,
let us walk beyond the gravel parking lot,
past the 6000 square building, a future community center,
out into one of the rarest ecosystems in North America.

Let us sit quietly under the old black oak trees that were a witness to this history.

Let us sit quietly
and rest
assured that this land is now protected
for the generations whose faces have not yet pushed up from the earth.

Let us rest,
acknowledging the work of those who came before us,
and the work before us,
to revitalize this ecological community,
now protected in perpetuity.