

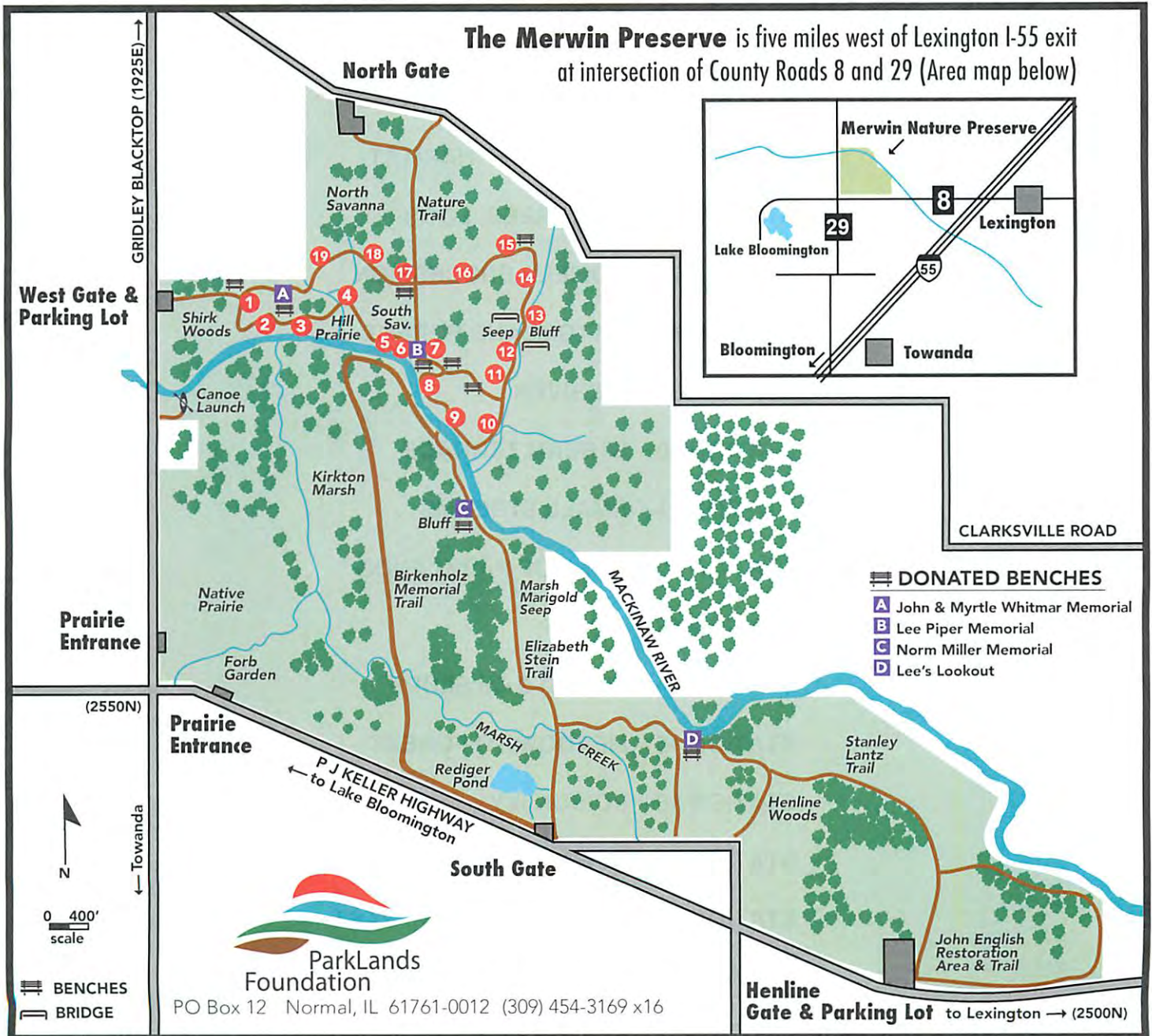
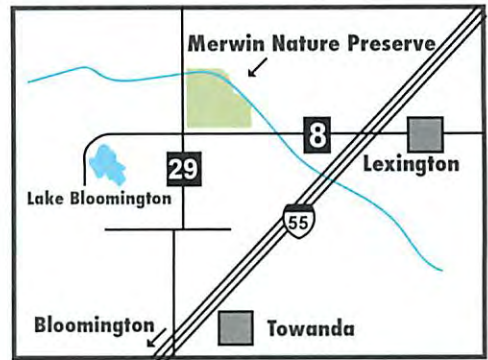


# Merwin Preserve

## Trail Map



**The Merwin Preserve** is five miles west of Lexington I-55 exit at intersection of County Roads 8 and 29 (Area map below)





## **MERWIN NATURE PRESERVE**

**STATION 1 – UPLAND FOREST**

**STATION 2 – MERWIN MEMORIAL**

**STATION 3 – PRAIRIE REMNANT**

**STATION 4 – SPRING WILDFLOWERS**

**STATION 5 – RIVER BLUFF HABITAT**

**STATION 6 – DEAD TREES, LOGS**

**STATION 7 – OLDFIELD SUCCESSION**

**STATION 8 – BOTTOMLAND FOREST**

**STATION 9 – THE RIVER**

**STATION 10 – STREAM TERRACE**

**STATION 11 – SMALL STREAMS**

**STATION 12 – OAKS OF PARKLANDS**

**STATION 13 – A SEEP**

**STATION 14 – EFFECTS OF SLOPE**

**STATION 15 – MEADOW TO FOREST**

**STATION 16 – POISON IVY**

**STATION 17 – DEER HABITAT**

**STATION 18 – OUR GEOLOGICAL PAST**

**STATION 19 – ROSE PROBLEM**



## STATION 1 UPLAND FOREST

Many of the forests of McLean County border the major streams.

The dominant tree species on well-drained sites within this preserve are white oak and shagbark hickory. Several white oaks surround this station. Note their light colored trunks and their leaves with rounded tips on the lobes. This species is the Illinois State tree. It is long-lived and attractive. The wood is valued for flooring and trim. Deer, squirrels, and other wildlife prize the acorns.

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## STATION 2 MERWIN MEMORIAL

The rock and plaque in front of you memorializes the Merwin Family. Loring Merwin, the great-grandson of Jesse W. Fell and a longtime advocate of many community causes, was the primary founder of the ParkLands Foundation which was created in 1967 following many months of meetings with different groups in McLean County and enlisting several community volunteers to assist in its development. ParkLands will stand forever as the product both of the dream and the persistence of Loring Merwin.

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## STATION 3 PRAIRIE REMNANT

Several species of prairie plants still grow in this opening and along this bluff. They include the dominant prairie grass named big bluestem, and a diversity of prairie forbs that includes hoary puccoon, bush clover, and yellow coneflower. These species thrive on this site because of its southern exposure, which makes it sunnier and warmer than the surrounding areas. The wide, horizontal branching of the spectacular white oak a few yards ahead to the right of the trail is also a reminder that these woods once were open.

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## STATION 4 SPRING WILDFLOWERS

The Merwin Nature Preserve contains many wildflowers that grow in Central Illinois. Near this site in late April and early May, red trillium, white trout lily, Jacob's ladder, dwarf larkspur, spring beauty, yellow violet, May apple, and wild columbine are quite common. Other species such as hepatica, bloodroot, bluebells, and Dutchman's breeches are found elsewhere on the tract. Most of these species are referred to as “ephemerals” because they complete their annual life cycles early in the spring, before leaves appear on the trees, reducing the sunlight.

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## **STATION 5 RIVER BLUFF HABITAT**

At this site we find a colony of shooting stars which have become quite rare in McLean County. Shooting stars reach their peak flowering in early to mid-May. It is typically a prairie species, but it grows as well in savannas and dry, open woods. ParkLands' first efforts at savanna restoration began at this site in 1989. The colony of shooting stars had diminished over the previous decade due to encroachment by trees, especially ironwood, and the shrub blackhaw.



## STATION 6 DEAD TREES, LOGS

Some people believe trees should be "salvaged" for lumber before they die or should at least be removed shortly after they fall. Dead trees, however, as well as living trees with cavities, are valuable to wildlife. Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Tufted Titmice, House and Carolina Wrens, White-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, Eastern Bluebirds and Great Crested Flycatchers are all birds of this area requiring a cavity for nesting. Both fox squirrels and flying squirrels also use tree cavities. As the dead trees are attacked by insects, they provide a source of food for many birds, especially woodpeckers.



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## STATION 7 OLDFIELD SUCCESSION

This field was once a pasture with only a few large trees. As long as cattle grazed here, only thorny species such as osage orange, hawthorns, crabapples, honey locust, multiflora rose, and briars could reproduce themselves and these species created a thorny shrubland out of this area. However, with the cattle now gone, other species such as elms, cherry, and ash are becoming established and over time this area will continue to develop into a forest. Shingle oak is one of the species of oaks that often invades open areas and fence rows and is abundant in this area.

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## STATION 8 BOTTOMLAND FOREST

The woodland on the Mackinaw floodplain is different from the upland forest. Dominant tree species here are silver maple, sycamore, cottonwood, hackberry, green ash, red elm, and American elm. The understory is composed of wood nettle and Virginia waterleaf. Bluebells are a common spring flower and put on a marvelously astonishing show in mid-April in these bottoms, making them into acres of blue. The nettle is to be avoided because of the poison-filled hairs on the stems. If these touch the skin and are ruptured, the fluid produces a brief, stinging rash.

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## STATION 9 THE RIVER

The Mackinaw River is one of the highest quality waterways in the state. Its valley forms a valuable green belt across McLean County going into Woodford and then Tazewell Counties. It flows gently, dropping an average of about one foot per mile. Depending on rainfall, canoeing and kayaking can be excellent in spring and early summer. Beavers are common along the river, and although you may not see one, evidence of their activities is often visible.

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## STATION 10 STREAM TERRACE

This immediate area is slightly higher and better drained than the lower flood plain. Black walnut, Ohio buckeye, American basswood, hackberry, and bur oak favor this habitat. In early May, Blue-eyed Mary, a small, attractive spring ephemeral and an annual is common near the station marker. This species resembles a violet but is a member of the figwort family. This site also has an abundance of grapevines. The soils in the river valley were deposited by water and are called alluvial soils.

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## STATION 11 SMALL STREAMS

This small stream is typical of the Mackinaw's tributaries. In spring, many species of small fish ascend from the river to breed.

Darters are often common near the rocks. Several species of minnows are usually found here. Both raccoons and mink hunt these localities. Mink tracks often are seen in winter when the stream is partially frozen. Brown-eyed Susan, giant lobelia, and bur marigold (sticktight) are three fall wildflowers that are common here.

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## STATION 12 OAKS OF PARKLANDS

Six species of oaks are found on the Merwin Nature Preserve. Bur oak attains the largest size of all the oaks in the area. It is common here by the stream. There is a tremendous grove of old bur oak near the North Gate. About 25 feet up the slope from the No. 12 station marker are several chinquapins oaks, also referred to as yellow chestnut oaks due to the shape of the leaf. They are identified by their dark green leaves with a wavy-margin and a grayish underside and by the elongated acorns. Chinquapin often grows near the base of slopes. They are handsome, but slow-growing.

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## **STATION 13 A SEEP**

Water collecting above a relatively impervious layer of clay seeps from the hillside and has formed a small, marsh-like habitat across the creek. This area remains wet most of the year and provides a good environment for sedges, mosses, liverworts, and such flowers as marsh marigold and jewelweed. The marigold is found at only five places in McLean County -- two of them on the Merwin Nature Preserve.



## STATION 14 EFFECTS OF SLOPE

Slope direction often has an effect on the composition of the plants of an area. For example, sugar maple is abundant on the south side of the Mackinaw River with its north-facing slopes. These sites, or "microenvironments," are somewhat cooler because they receive less direct sunlight. Sugar maples are less abundant on the south-facing slopes on this side of the river. Several of our spring flowers are affected in the same way. Hepatica, bloodroot, Dutchman's breeches, and squirrel corn are found on north slopes across the river. On this side, they are restricted to the north-facing slope directly across the stream from this station.



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## **STATION 15 MEADOW TO FOREST**

The area ahead of you was a meadow in 1972, when it was planted to more than 15,000 trees and shrubs. The shrubs, planted for wildlife food and cover, were gray and silky dogwood, autumn olive, and honeysuckle. At the time we planted whatever species were available, and unfortunately, autumn olive and honeysuckle have become serious pests in ParkLands. Two tree species native to this area, red oak and black walnut, and several not occurring naturally in this area such as alder, tulip poplar, and white pine, with small numbers of sweet gum and river birch were also planted here.

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## STATION 16 POISON IVY

You probably have noticed that poison ivy is particularly abundant along this part of the trail. Its three-parted leaves and often reddish stem distinguish poison ivy. This plant often is common in such sites as this. Poison ivy prefers well-lighted habitats, thus it becomes abundant along trails and in similar open places. Care should be taken to avoid contacting leaves with bare skin. But take solace in remembering that poison ivy is a valuable food plant. Deer graze on the leaves and stems; the white colored berries are relished by songbirds.

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## **STATION 17 DEER HABITAT**

There is a substantial population of deer in this region. You often can see them if you are quiet as you walk the trails. Deer are more numerous in the area in winter. Many move away in spring and summer. At that time, the animals may range 15 to 20 miles to spend the summer in farm fields of the county. With removal of crops in the fall, the animals drift back to the cover of woodlands.

The herds here congregate around December, and break up in March.



## STATION 18 OUR GEOLOGICAL PAST

This granite boulder is called a "glacial erratic." It is a monument to our geological past. The last continental glacier (the Wisconsinan) retreated from this area about 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. These glaciers carried large amounts of rubble with them. They left ridges of this material, called moraines, at the point of their greatest advance. The melting glaciers dumped tremendous quantities of debris called "till" or "drift." In much of the county, there is 300 to 400 feet of till on top of the bedrock.

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## **STATION 19 ROSE PROBLEM**

Multiflora rose demonstrates the problem with exotics. You probably have noticed the profusion of multiflora rose growing over much of our unmanaged areas. The immediate area has very little multiflora rose (and a considerable amount of the native and fruit-bearing blackberry brambles) thanks to current management practices. Multiflora rose was introduced into Illinois following World War II to control erosion, and to provide wildlife habitat. It is a nuisance, spreading into pastures and woodland. Unfortunately, autumn olive spreads in the same manner.