

Prairie Plants

Look for these plant markers along the trail:

- Big Bluestem**
Andropogon gerardii
- Indian Hemp**
Apocynum cannabinum
- Butterfly Milkweed**
Asclepias tuberosa
- Deertongue**
Panicgrass
Dichanthelium clandestinum
- Purple Coneflower**
Echinacea purpurea
- Biennial Gaura**
Gaura biennis
- Jerusalem Artichoke**
Helianthus tuberosus
- Northern Blazing Star**
Liatris scariosa
- Dense Blazing Star**
Liatris spicata
- Wild Bergamot**
Monarda fistulosa
- Stiff Goldenrod**
Oligoneuron rigida
- Sweet Everlasting**
Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium
- Virginia Mountain Mint**
Pycnanthemum virginianum
- Pinnate Prairie Coneflower**
Ratibida pinnata
- Black-eyed Susan**
Rudbeckia hirta
- Fringeleaf Wild Petunia**
Ruellia humilis
- Little Bluestem**
Schizachyrium scoparium
- Wild Senna**
Senna hebecarpa
- Royal Catchfly**
Silene regia
- Prairie Dock**
Silphium terebinthinaceum
- Whorled Rosinweed**
Silphium trifoliatum
- Indian Grass**
Sorghastrum nutans
- Prairie Cordgrass**
Spartina pectinata
- New England Aster**
Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark

The Mad River valley is home to a variety of wetland and grassland habitats, forming and changing during thousands of years. About 6,000 years ago, the climate in Ohio became hotter and drier. Plants and animals of the western tallgrass prairie migrated to Ohio. The climate shifted again, becoming what we are familiar with today — moist and cool. Grasslands gave way to hardwood forest. Prairies were limited to areas where grasses and forbs could out-compete trees due to extremes in temperature or moisture and fires set by Native Americans.

Prairies survived in these places until the arrival of European settlers. The establishment of the Wilbur Wright Field, which later became Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, saved this area from modern agriculture and development that destroyed most of Ohio’s prairies. Today, Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark, at 112 acres, is one of the largest tallgrass prairie remnants in Ohio.

Directions

Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark is located off Route 444 east of Dayton and can be accessed using the Twin Base Golf Course entrance. The prairie is on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base next to the Huffman Prairie Flying Field, part of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Park Hours

6 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Daily



Huffman Prairie Partnership

Huffman prairie became a State Natural Landmark in 1986 due to the dedication of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Five Rivers MetroParks, and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Working together, Five Rivers MetroParks and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base care for and protect the 112 acres today.



Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark



Prairie User Guide

Prairie Care

Before becoming a State Natural Landmark, the prairie was used for growing hay, as an airplane landing area and for parachute practice.

With the efforts of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Five Rivers MetroParks, much of the native plant and animal life has been restored through conservation actions, such as:

- Removing non-native plants to allow dormant seeds to germinate.
- Doing controlled burns in the spring to rejuvenate the prairie by recycling soil nutrients trapped in the dead plant parts. Controlled burns also expose seeds and plant crowns to the sun for better growth, and keep woody plants from shading out the prairie plants.
- Carefully using herbicides to remove invasive plants.
- Re-introducing plant species that had been eliminated.

Prairie Habitat

The first plants you notice in the ecosystem are the tall grasses, but look closer to see blooming plants called forbs. Returning in May and June, the bobolinks and Henslow's sparrows nest in the grasses. Many rare moths are also found in the prairie. In 1994, a scientist discovered a new species of moth and named it in honor of the Wright



brothers, *Glyphidocera wrightorum*. In total, 200 species of moths and 30 species of butterflies have been identified. The state endangered smooth green snake makes its home here, but may be difficult to spot, since it blends so well with its surroundings. Look for the thirteen-lined ground squirrels burrowing near the 1905 hangar replica.

Prairie of the Past

Along with the achievements of the Wright brothers at the adjacent Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark has other significant links to Dayton history.

One of these is the story of John Whitten Van Cleve, born in Dayton in 1801. His father, Benjamin, was one of the founders of Dayton. John Van Cleve was an enthusiastic student of the sciences, language, and the arts. During his lifetime, he was involved in a number of endeavors. Those included serving three terms as mayor of Dayton, working as a city engineer, owning a drug store and founding Woodland Cemetery. Van Cleve also had several accomplishments in local geology and botany.

Van Cleve's fascination with botany started with a \$1.25 purchase of Torrey's *Compendium of Flora of the Northern and Middle States*.

Van Cleve corresponded with Torrey and sent him plant samples to identify. Van Cleve also made a small herbarium of 207 pressed native plant specimens from the Dayton area, many of which were prairie plants. Huffman Prairie was a favorite of his, so it is likely many were collected here.

Van Cleve's herbarium was given to Cooper Female Seminary in Dayton and then later passed to William B. Werthner, a biology teacher at Dayton's Central High School. Werthner later taught Orville and Katharine Wright, bringing them to the prairie to explore, and witnessed the Wrights' historic flights here. The herbarium is now preserved at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery in Dayton.

