

The Long Prairie

This poem is written especially for the dedication of
The Long Prairie Trail
Capron, Illinois-July 14, 1991

It is respectfully dedicated to the
Boone County Conservation District,
in recognition of the vision and commitment
that made
The Long Prairie Trail
possible.

Jack A. Engelsen
July, 1991

member
BCCD Board of Trustees
July, 1980 - June, 1985
July, 1986 - June, 1991

The Long Prairie

They strolled along together, down the trail, their hands entwined.
She looked into his eyes and smiled; his weathered face just shined.
Her questions made him feel alive, like he was young again;
for he was eighty-two years old, and she was only ten.

"Great Grandpa, what has happened here? Tell me all about this land."

"How did it come to be like this? Describe it, if you can."

"My dear," he said, "there's much to share; these questions you impart,
have dwelled in me for many years; they're written on my heart."

"What sounds has this land listened to? What wonders has it seen?"

"What change was wrought throughout the years, beneath its veil of green?"

"What deep vibrations moved its soul, as eons passed it by?"

"Did it stop to contemplate, or even wonder why?"

"For change has been its way of life, and change, its way of death."

"And every passing season brings new change with every breath."

"Four billion years went by on earth, its clues seem lost in time."

"The last six hundred million though, have given us a sign."

"Of times gone by, when earth was new, and land was being formed,
beneath the waves of inland seas, of sun, and rain, and storms."

"Volcanoes and great earthquakes; the land rose up, then fell."

"Great mountains formed, then went away, to start again as well."

"But there was life in many forms, within this strange new earth."

"The seas provide abundantly, they were a source of birth."

"There were jellyfish and algae. There were trilobites and snails."

"Within this place where fishes swam, were heard the songs of whales."

"And ages passed, and species changed, the land emerged once more."

"The seas gave way reluctantly; its creatures moved to shore."

"Some lived in water and on land. Some lived where it was dry."

"Still others saw the clouds above, and they began to fly."

"Adapt or die, accept the change, the time went by in scores."

"The restless earth then ushered in, the age of dinosaurs."

Her eyes grew wide, she shrieked in joy. "Our teacher told us that!"

And Grandpa smiled, he understood, and while she talked, he sat.

She said, "One Duck-billed dinosaur, was Parasaurolophus."

"And crocodiles got started; so did Diplodocus."

"The Sauropods had big long necks; the Pterosaurs all flew."

"And all the dinosaurs laid eggs. Does that seem strange to you?"

"The Stegosaur. The Allosaur. Iguanodon was next."

"But most ferocious of them all; Tyrannosaurus Rex."

"I like Triceratops the best," she said, then paused to think.

"If dinosaurs had walked this land, they would have made it sink!"

She paused again, then wiped a tear, from the corner of her eye.

"Great Grandpa, I don't understand. Why did they have to die?"

"It's not easy to explain," he said, "for no one really knows."

"But dying is a part of life, and on the story goes."

"New creatures now were seen on earth, for some, their blood was warm."

"Adapting to their circumstance, they learned to deal with harm."

"But earth still moved upon its frame, it turned another page."

"The climate soon got colder, as it saw another age."

"This time, great sheets of ice were formed. They moved across the land."

"The ice sometimes was one mile thick, and covered where we stand."

"Four times the glaciers made their mark, they gouged and scraped the ground."

"What cry went out from rocks and rills, as glaciers pressed them down?"

"Then, some ten thousand years ago, the glaciers too, were gone."

"The landscape that we see today, was formed as they moved on."

"Eskers, drumlins, great moraines; from kettles, kames, and fens."

"Deposits of both ice and stone, gave shape, and changed again."

"Great dust storms blew where warm met cold, and soil began to build."

"With seeds and spores, new life then grew, and soon the land was filled."

"A boreal woods of spruce and pine, grew up to claim some space."

"While creatures found both home and food made this a welcome place."

"The Mammoth came, as others did, to satisfy a need."

"Which brought another species too; a strange, creative breed."

"It walked upright; it made odd sounds; it built things with its hands."

"A native, in its early form; this creature's name was Man."

"And seasons came, and seasons passed, for time does not stand still."

"The climate warmed, the pines moved north, some lakes began to fill."

"The dying vegetation formed a bog in low, wet lands."

"Which turned to peat, in places, making homes for many plants."

"The meadow seemed to flourish; soon its roots grew very deep."
"And the trees that followed after, found a foe who could compete."
"For the grasslands had an ally; one that vanquished all desire."
"And destroyed its bitter rivals; its great champion was fire."

"The battle raged for centuries, upon this vast expanse."
"The thick bark on the Bur Oak tree, gave it a fighting chance."
"And so the two lived side by side, in accordance with a bond."
"The prairie and the woodland, for the interval beyond."

"Providing habitat for deer, for buffalo and bear."
"For the beavers in the marshes, and the eagles in the air."
"And for a race of human beings, the savannas role was key."
"Here lived a woodland Indian, the Potawatomi."

"Other tribes have lived here too, the Illinois and Sacs."
"And Winnebago's crossed the land, in search of signs and tracks."
"They used this land, and cared for it. They knew that it was good."
"For in its life, was life for them. They clearly understood."

"But from the East, the winds of change, were gathering once more."
"As people came from different lands, to stand upon the shore."
"There was soon a westward movement, as the word of Promised Land,
gave new hope to many people, and a chance to make a stand."

"Norwegians, Germans, English, Scots, and others settled near."
"Strange new tongues upon the landscape. Did it strike a note of fear?"
"For these men were mostly farmers, and they soon laid out their course."
"Then the land reverberated, from the sound of ox and horse."

"In spite of all this ground had seen, it realized somehow,
that its destiny was changing, as it felt the tearing plow."
"New life was brought into this land; from wheat, and corn, and oats."
"While different footsteps echoed; from the sheep, and cows, and goats."

"Others came to find a future, bringing trades, and crafts, and skills."
"Starting settlements and villages, with stores, and shops, and mills."
"They united for a purpose, using backs, and hands, and tools."
"Side by side, they worked together, building churches, homes, and schools."

"Helgesaw and Shermantown. Scotch Grove and Beaverton."
"Just names that live in memory, that changed as life went on."
"For there came an iron monster, down a trail of wood and steel."
"Belching smoke and breathing fire, with a scream that was unreal."

"So the railroad came to Capron, Poplar Grove, and more as well."
"Those who stopped in Caledonia, found the Chamberlain Hotel."
"Even as the wheels were turning, there was change upon the scene."
"Populations grew in numbers; progress brought in new machines."

"Beside the rails, where wagons rolled, the paths were turned to roads."
"Strange conveyance, without horses, plied them daily with their loads."
"In the fields, the sound of horses, was replaced by puffs of steam."
"Later on the sound of tractors, made those engines just a dream."

"A restless nation, reaching out, rolled onward day and night."
"While overhead, great silver birds soared high in winged flight."
"As humanity moved faster, all the cars, and trucks, and planes."
"Forced the closing of an era, and departure of the trains."

"With declining transport business, and abandonment at hand."
"The last train crashed, ironically, and spilled its loads of sand."
"Like a tiny iron glacier, twisting tracks, its final tale."
"Broken ties and torn up roadbed, as the cars slipped off the rails."

"As it died, a new beginning, once again was being planned."
"For the Conservation District had a vision for this land."
"To create a multi-purpose trail; an outdoor learning tool."
"With space to dream while having fun; a different kind of school."

"A chance to witness Nature's gifts, and ever changing means."
"Recalling moments gone before, which paint some haunting scenes."
"Preserving, then, our heritage, where everyone could see,
all the changes that had happened, and what life was meant to be."

"Once again the land resounded, with the tune of rolling wheels."
"And the sound of passing footsteps, as they hiked across the fields."
"There was peace and meditation. There was wisdom to impart."
"After centuries of changes, it was like a brand new start."

As the twilight fell upon them, and they turned their steps toward home,
she said, "Grandpa, I'll remember, all you've said and what you've shown."
Then she put her arms around him, and when the hug was through,
he bent down and kissed her softly. She said, "Grandpa, I love you."

Then she said, "Did you hear something? Like a murmur; kind of strange?"
"Just voices from the past," he said, "borne on the winds of change."
They strolled along together, down the trail, their hands entwined.
She looked into his eyes and smiled; his weathered face just shined.