



A mesic prairie grows in an area that has a moderate amount of moisture and full sun, with less than ten percent tree canopy. Sometimes called a tall-grass prairie, these prairies are rare today because they have deep, rich soils built by the extensive root systems of the prairie plants that have led them to be converted into productive cropland. How rare are they, you may ask? According to the WI DNR website, at the time of European settlement (mid 1600s) there were over 800,000 acres of mesic prairie in southern Wisconsin and now there is less than 100 acres. And here's the exciting news: The Gibraltar Segment has 8 acres of mesic prairie!

Mesic prairies typically have a variety of tall grasses, with the dominant grass being big bluestem. They also tend to have flowering plants such as flowering spurge, bee balm, prairie coneflower, lead plant, asters, rattlesnake master, and spiderwort. A few years ago a "bio-blitz" was carried out on the mesic prairie of the Gibraltar Segment and more than 50 native prairie plants are still in existence.

Mesic prairies are fire dependent, meaning that they rely on frequent controlled burning to insure their continued existence. If that doesn't happen they become invaded by trees and shrubs and, in time, become forests. During our chapter maintenance days we cut down the sumac that invades the prairie, shading out the native plants that are looking for the sun, and pile it up for a future controlled burn. Some people may say the sumac, with its bright berries, is pretty and should be left alone. Sumac is like a weed in your garden which may actually be attractive but which grows in the wrong place and threatens the other things in your garden.

While you are on the Gibraltar Rock Segment I hope you'll look at this area in a whole new light and appreciate it as one of the many gems that are to be found along the Ice Age Trail.



Welcome to the Slack Road Trailhead of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail's Gibraltar Rock Segment. From here you can hike north to the Merrimac Ferry's landing wayside at the Wisconsin River. This two-mile trail meanders through woodlands, prairies and provides scenic views of Lake Wisconsin and the Baraboo Bluffs. Take the white-blazed trail for a flatter and shorter route. Take the yellow-blazed trail to walk through a hilly and wooded area. If you are looking for Gibraltar Rock, hike south from here. A one-mile road connects to Gibraltar Rock Road and the Gibraltar Rock State Ice Age Trail Area.

The Ice Age Trail Alliance partnered with StriveOn, an interactive app bringing the trails and community together.

While you are on the Ice Age Trail, be sure to use the Explore button to Read, See & Hear what's all around you.



Connor Pecard, member of the Scouts BSA Troop 113 out of Lodi led a crew in the summer of 2021 to make this trail segment available on the StriveOn app as his Eagle Scout Project. Enjoy the scenery and stations that have been created. Happy Hiking!

designs by kpecarddesigns




Gibraltar Rock Segment

Steenbock Preserve



Steenbock Preserve

 Explore more than just the trail



The Merrimac ferry, the only moving part of the Ice Age Trail, provides transportation across Lake Wisconsin. It is free of charge for all pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. Grab an ice cream on either side of the ferry for a delicious treat as you trek through along the Ice Age Trail.



The Steenbock Preserve is owned by the Ice Age Trail Alliance. On this land, a multi-year effort is underway to clear the trail of invasive species, restore the prairie, increase the biodiversity that once existed, and open up scenic views.

During the summer and fall, volunteer crews work to clear the Trail corridor of invasive species. During the winter, volunteers (including local students for their service day projects) prepare the site for controlled burns of the accumulated brush piles.

Each year more native grasses and flowers flourish, and an impressive view of Lake Wisconsin spread out in the river valley below is revealed.



Cherry tree prior to and after clearing and burning.

This aerial shot was taken in 1937 before the cedar forest took over



The Steenbock property was purchased by the Ice Age Trail Alliance from The Nature Conservancy in 1997. It was originally gifted to The Nature Conservancy by the Evelyn Steenbock Estate; however, it did not meet the mission of that organization so was offered to the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

The 60 acre property is located between Gibraltar State Natural Area and Lake Wisconsin. The property itself is centered on a bluff that rises 200 feet above the surrounding area and yields stunning views of Lake Wisconsin and the surrounding region. The property was purchased to preserve these glacially-influenced view sheds along with remnant prairies, which supports the mission of the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

This property is actively managed by volunteer crews that clear the Trail corridor of invasive species in order to restore the prairie of grasses and flowers that once existed. As the area is cleared, hikers are treated to impressive vistas.



On the Ice Age Trail, you may have noticed 2"x 6" rectangular markings on trees and signposts that are painted yellow, blue, or white. These markings are called "blazes".

- **Yellow Blazes:** Official indicator that marks the main route of the Ice Age Trail
- **White Blazes:** Indicates a "Loop Trail", which takes you off the yellow-blazed Ice Age Trail and later reconnects to it. This offers an alternative hiking experience.
- **Blue Blazes:** Indicates a "Spur Trail" or "Access Trail" which takes the hiker off the main trail and takes them to a point of interest.

At this intersection, you can follow the Yellow Blazes to continue to follow the Ice Age Trail or you can follow the White Blazed, "Loop Trail", that makes a short 0.2 mile reconnecting side loop.



Welcome to the Dispersed Camping Area (DCA) on the Gibraltar Rock Segment. This is currently one of twenty-one DCA's located on the Ice Age Trail. (In order to get to the DCA, take the blue blazed trail to the side of the main trail-it will lead you to the area)

A DCA stands for Dispersed Camping Areas and have been established to give opportunities to multi-day Ice Age Trail hikers to stay the night in an area which may not have convenient campgrounds and campsites nearby. DCA's are primitive camping areas and may lack access to facilities and may be a long distance from a water source. In a traditional sense they are nothing more than a cleared area where hikers may legally camp for a night and does not require a reservation or permit.

The DCA located here is 40ft x 30ft and is surrounded by white pine trees, maple trees, cedar trees, and shrubs. Also located here are some wooden benches as well as a trail log to record your name and journal entry. The closest water source and restroom are approximately 1.5 miles away by the Merrimac Ferry parking lot. The next closest DCA is located about 14 miles south of here on the Eastern Lodi Marsh Segment.

If you plan to stay at a DCA or any other DCA's there are some rules that need to be followed, which are posted at the site:

- Maximum of six people at the DCA and camp within area
- The use of the DCA is for only one night
- No fires are allowed except for backpacking stoves
- Wash yourself and dishes farther away from the site
- Dispose of human/pet waste in 6" cathole if no facility is provided
- Make sure to follow the 7 Principles of Leave No Trace

Plan ahead and prepare	Leave what you find
Travel and camp on durable surfaces	Minimize campfire impacts
Dispose of waste properly	Respect wildlife
	Be considerate to other visitors

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It is important to stay in compliance with these rules as it will ensure the continued existence of current DCA's & future ones.