

Fall Color Audio Tour Transcript

West Side Loop 2—Schulenberg Prairie

[Narrator] Welcome to this driving tour of the Arboretum's West Side. The West Side has two loops. This is loop two, which takes you past the Prairie Visitor Station. You'll need to veer right on the main route just after Thornhill.

[Narrator] Please take a few minutes to adjust your volume now. This tour works best when experienced between 10 and 15 miles per hour. While you shouldn't have to adjust your audio too much, you'll have a chance at each of the major landmarks on this route to pause and continue. In the meantime be sure to follow all posted signs and rules of the road.

[Cindy] With 1,700 acres to manage, it takes many hands to maintain the Arboretum. There are about 200 full-time employees, approximately 280 part-time and seasonal staff, and we have over 1,400 volunteers to complete various tasks such as pulling weeds, working in the library or herbarium, helping out in the Children's Garden, and visitor services.

[Cindy] We offer young people grades 7 to 12 to join our STEM Pathways youth volunteer program to engage in conservation-mindedness, leadership skills, and career development.

[Jim] Hello, and welcome to The Morton Arboretum! My name is Jim. The Arboretum is spread among its 1,100 acre East Side and its 600 acre West Side. The Arboretum contains more than 220,000 plant specimens representing 4,650 plant species from 40 countries -and those are not just trees. Our collections include shrubs and bushes—those are perennial plants supported by wood—collectively they are called “woody plants.”

[Jim] Within each grouping of plants throughout the Arboretum you will find a black metal tag on at least one of the plants that identifies the plant's common and scientific names, its geographic location, and even when they were planted. There are more than 40,000 of these tags throughout the Arboretum.

[Jim] Of course, our plants are not only here for our enjoyment. They provide food, shelter, and breeding and nesting areas for innumerable insects, reptiles, and mammals and our eight lakes support a variety of fish and water-loving creatures. In addition, more than 250 species of birds migrate through the Arboretum each fall and spring and some 100-plus bird species are with us most or all of the year. That makes the Arboretum a great place for bird watchers! In fact, while recording this I saw an Illinois cardinal fly by the window. How did I know it was an Illinois cardinal? Well, we simply don't allow St. Louis Cardinals on the property!

[Jim] Please enjoy your time here; we hope you visit often.

[Narrator] You should be nearing the Thornhill parking lot. The next section of the tour begins there. Feel free to pause and pull over if you're running ahead or tap on number two if you're running behind. You'll need to veer right at the fork toward the Prairie Visitor Station just ahead.

[Larry] Hello, and welcome to the West Side of The Morton Arboretum. My name is Larry and I will be your interpreter guide as you take your journey to the Schulenberg Prairie today. And as you do so take note that on both sides of the road there are signs that indicate that this is Daffodil Glade. And there's a reason for that—Mr. Morton began planting daffodil bulbs up around the mansion in 1922 and that was carried forward by staff until sometime in the 1950s. As a result, they grow happily every year. There are over 150,000 daffodil bulbs now that come into bloom between roughly the middle of March until the end of April and they are accompanied with Virginia bluebell which have found their way in amongst the daffodils.

[Larry] As we leave Daffodil Glade and head toward Schulenberg Prairie, take a look around you. The woodlands that you see as we proceed through here actually pre-date when Joy Morton bought the property in 1909. It's very old woods, very much left to its natural state. We do do some work in it... If you want to get a sense of woods and what they were like take a walk. It's a lot of fun: Park in little parking lot 24 and then wander on down the path straight ahead of you. That will take you down to Sterling Pond and around the corner along Willoway Brook in its wetland environment and over to Schulenberg Prairie.

[Larry] As you go though, be sure you don't just walk; look around the area as quite frequently you will find in Sterling Pond things like great blue heron fishing or great white egrets fishing or you may find a muskrat or a beaver actually in Sterling Pond.

[Music]

[Larry] As you continue your tour out to the Schulenberg Prairie I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about Ray Schulenberg as he is the founder of the prairie itself. Ray began the prairie in 1962 after discovering a small remnant prairie on the East Side of the Arboretum grounds which was in danger of being destroyed to development and electric highlines. He asked for and received permission to move that prairie to the site where you see it today and did so by scooping buckets of the prairie with tractors and moving them to the current location. They covered roughly one acre of ground and by bringing the soil he brought not only the plants but all the necessary ingredients that go along with them to make it healthy. As that portion of prairie improved and continued to grow throughout the years, Ray would go out and collect seeds every fall from a radius of about 50 miles—no more than that as he believed that was as far as the seeds would come in naturally early on.

[Larry] The prairie as it exists today has been the creation not only of Ray but of many, many volunteers who helped weed and plant additional plants. As you think and look at the prairie realize that what's out here is a very minuscule part of the tallgrass prairies that made up the state of Illinois. Prior to settlement,

the state of Illinois was over 90 percent tallgrass prairies and over the years after settlement began due to farming and other things less than one percent of the natural prairie exists today. Our little 100-acre prairie, reconstructed as it is, is one of the most diverse in the country. It consists of over 350 varieties of grasses and plants that make it very spectacular.

[Music]

[Larry] As you head down now toward Willoway Brook and look across the little bridge, stop for a second and take a look to the left. You will see Sterling Pond. And to the right you will see the wetland area of Willoway Brook as it works its way from the Schulenberg Prairie to Sterling Pond.

[Larry] Now as you continue on the road and you head up to the top of the ridge, you'll see that the prairie plants are following you along the road. And then you get to the top you'll note that the prairie has all of a sudden expanded. Well this 20 acres—roughly 10 acres on each side of the road—has come in on its own over the years and the only thing that the Arboretum does currently is to encourage it to continue to develop by burning it every year or two depending on the season of the year and how the weather conditions are that year.

[Larry] Well, at this point now you are just about to rejoin the main route with the Lake Marmo alternate trail and I am going to leave you here to do that, with this encouragement: that you come back as often as you can and take advantage of the various seasons of the year because there's always something here to see. Have a great day, folks!

[Narrator] You should be nearing the junction near Parking Lot 30. The next section of the tour begins there. Feel free to pause and pull over if you're running ahead or tap on number three if you're running behind.

[Cindy] Well, hello! Now it's my turn to share some of my favorite areas with you as we continue our route. The tall conifer trees you see on both sides of the road at the top of the hill are red pines planted by Mr. Morton as an experimental pulpwood crop. Red pine is a state tree for Minnesota and these trees prefer cooler and wetter climate than we experience here. Of the 20,000 trees that were planted less than 2,000 exist here today. Notice there are not many lower branches on these red pines. This is a natural process called shade pruning. The crown of the top of the pine tree grows quite thick and drastically shades the needles on the lower branches. These lower branches will die and eventually fall off and this leaves the long, tall “telephone-pole” look to the tree with just the tufts at the top.

[Cindy] The road continues through the walnut collection and then we'll take the bridge over the east branch of the DuPage River. This water will flow south and merge with the west branch of the DuPage near Naperville eventually this water will flow into the Des Plaines River, then the Kankakee River, the Illinois River, and then finally the Mississippi River.

[Music]

[Cindy] On the right side of the road you will find Arbor Lake, the deepest of our eight lakes at about 26 feet. It is also one of the cleanest lakes in all of Illinois. Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your support. Morton Arboretum is an independent institution; we do not rely on any federal, state, or local tax dollars. We do depend on you because a good portion of our budget comes from memberships, gate fees, and donations. Members are admitted for free 365 days a year with discounts at the gift shop, class offerings, tram tour tickets, and a library card at Sterling Morton Library. I sincerely hope you will join us.

[Music]

[Cindy] A great thing about the Arboretum is that it's like the seasons: always changing. So there are new and different things to see and do here from the early spring of buds and fragrance, to the warm, sunny days of summer, and then the colorful flowers to the rustling of fall leaves, and finally in winter when you can experience the crunch of new snow under your hiking boots, cross country skis, or snowshoes. I encourage you to explore different areas of our 1,700 acres: Walk the 17 miles of paths, come early in the morning, consider arriving later in the afternoon, and stay until sunset. Bring your own bike or rent one of ours, and feel the wind as you coast downhill. Every day, every trail is a rewarding experience. Thank you for supporting The Morton Arboretum.

[Narrator] This concludes loop two of the West Side tour. If you'd like to take the other loop around the West Side that takes you past Lake Marmo, queue up the West Side loop one and turn left at the stop sign to follow the West Side main route.

[Music]