

A CELEBRATION OF PRAIRIE

Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie. John Madson. 1982, Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, Massachusetts. 321 pages. \$13.95 (cloth).

A warm invitation to join in celebration of tallgrass prairie has been issued by John Madson, by way of his fetching new book.

The celebration features the natural and human history of prairie, effused with an aura of wonder and respect. It is a historical sampler plus "gee whiz biology" at its best, spared the trite ejaculations.

Out of the creative combination emerges a sense of place and an apprecia-

tion for our tallgrass prairie heritage. The reader is transported in time and space to boundless tallgrass prairies of the past and to existing remnants, led to view them from perspectives of explorers, settlers, and contemporaries. The geographical, temporal, and topical breadth of the work casts a broad perspective on the Midwest, that is, the midcontinental corn belt zone, also called the Central Lowland Province.

In comparison with one of its few close analogs, *The Prairie World* of David Costello, Madson's work has less detail and a more depictive literary style. The two books are further distinguished by their centers of geographic reference, Costello's lying in the mixed grass prairie of the central Great Plains, while Madson's is the tallgrass prairie of Iowa and Illinois. There is, nevertheless, both topical and geographical overlap between these works.

Images conjured up in Madson's narrative are complemented and highlighted by scattered black-and-white illustrations. An index, bibliography, and list of prairie preserves enhance the utility of the publication, although the latter two are not complete.

The list of preserves, in particular, is a unique and welcome feature. It is organized by the 12 states, and includes site name, acreage, county, and approximate location. However, there are inconsistencies and gaps in describing special features, ownership, and sources of information, as well as gaps and a few inappropriate inclusions in the list itself.

The greatest merit of Madson's publication lies in the text, which might be used directly in natural history courses or as optional reading material for field biology courses. But the largest potential user groups will be reading it out of curiosity, rather than as part of a formal educational curriculum.

This book certainly belongs in the libraries of high schools, colleges, universities, and nature centers. It is also recommended for consideration in community libraries, depending on their proximity to the tallgrass prairie. Finally, it deserves consideration as an addition to personal libraries, as an introductory-level prairie primer and as an exceptional opportunity for prairie revelry.

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