



Aweme Bioblitz 2004

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The Aweme Bioblitz was held on the Criddle-Vane homestead at Aweme, MB on June 5 and 6, 2004. Somewhere near 60 people attended this Bioblitz. People attended this gathering from Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota and South Dakota and even as far east as Nova Scotia. There were tours, conducted by members of the Criddle-Vane Heritage Committee, of the Criddle and Vane homes, the entomological laboratories and the homestead grounds; Gene Fortney of the Nature Conservancy of Canada toured us around the Yellow Quill Prairie and the adjoining Assiniboine River Wildlife Management Area explaining the history and significance of these protected areas.

The idea of a Bioblitz is to record and collect organisms associated with a locality or habitat. Mixed grass prairie such as that found at Aweme and the Yellow Quill is an ecotonal zone from the shortgrass grassland further west and tallgrass prairie further east. Ecotones often have a richer fauna than the areas they are derived from – this may be one of the reasons that this area is renowned for the number of species collected there.

Collecting was a lot of fun and highly varied. Anyone who has had the pleasure to be in the field with Robert Gordon (retired, USDA Scientist), from North Dakota, with his knowledge and desire to seek out unique scarabs will know whereof I speak – the collecting stories, anecdotes and natural history did not stop. Beetles and moths were the groups sought particularly among insects but it was quite nice to mingle with a variety of collectors using a variety of sampling techniques, from soil coring, bait trapping, night lighting, ripping bark, and picking insects off fungi, to traditional sweep net-

ting. Isn't it interesting how sitting around a black light at night is analogous to sitting around the campfire? Most of the same activities are incorporated. But the collecting was not limited to insects. Excursions to search for rare molluscs were led by Joe Carney (Brandon University) and Jim Duncan (Manitoba Conservation) and while the river was too high and limited the sampling time it was still a unique and profitable experience to learn more about endangered clams within the river system and their natural history. Botanists from the University of Manitoba were examining plant communities and collecting plants for the Herbarium. Michele Piercey-Normore, a lichenologist in the Department of Botany at the University of Manitoba, was collecting lichens and bryophytes – her enthusiasm for lichens is infectious. There are many things to be said for studying organisms that do not move! Of course, there was the usual complement of bird watchers. The Aweme homestead was made an official heritage



The Yellow Quill Prairie and the Assiniboine River.
(Photograph by Anita Stjernberg).



area on July 17, 2004 and it is now the Criddle-Vane Heritage Provincial Park. It is very good news to know that this area has been conserved!

The Criddle-Vane Homestead Heritage Committee arranged for refreshments on both days of the Bioblitz. This group has done an outstanding job of promoting the awareness and significance of the Aweme area. The CVHHC is in the process of restoring and rebuilding Norman Criddle's First Entomological Laboratory. See box below.



Norman Criddle's first entomological laboratory. The first entomological laboratory in western Canada.
(Photograph by Anita Stjernberg).

Restoration project for the Criddle Laboratory

Thanks to all those who made generous donations to the restoration project for Norman Criddle's first entomology laboratory on Prairies. We have reached our goal of \$5000, or will when the Province makes their donation as promised. The materials have all been bought. When doing a restoration project such as this you can't just walk into the local lumber store and purchase the materials. To match the original cedar siding we had to have it specially milled. Other materials had to be ordered from across the country.

We began actually working on the lab last fall. Taking off the pieces of siding - saving what we could and numbering those pieces to be returned to the same spot on the wall. A job requiring a gentle hand when working with 90-year old cedar. Some interesting artifacts were found in the earth around the building, ink bottles, three pair of strap on ice skates and a few odds and ends we aren't sure of.

The restoration was begun and the building stabilized for the winter. With the help of the soldiers at CFB Shilo we hope to be back at it this spring under the guidance of the restoration carpenter from Parks Canada. Both these groups have been very generous with their time and expertise.

Do you have photographs of the lab? Now that the building is underway we are trying to find photographs of the inside of Norman's lab so the inside can be restored too. We would also like to put some interpretive signs up inside the lab when it is finished, showing Norman working and telling more of the story of the importance of the site. Please contact the committee at the address below if you have any photographs you could share.

If you are still interested in make a donation to the project it would go to either the restoration of the building or to putting up some signs inside the lab telling the public about Norman Criddle and his importance as a scientist on the Prairies. (Please make cheques payable to the "Friends of Spruce Woods" who will supply the tax receipt.)

Thanks again for your support, hope to see you at the homestead this summer.

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