

# Keeping your eye on nature

The three of us — Marian Moran, Susan Rodewald Thomas and I — were driving up to scout out Camp Upham Woods where Marian and I are to teach a class for the UW-Extension in late August: *The Spirit of The Land*.

My prior experience with these two should have taught me that they were gifted with exceptional vision and I should have known that they would be as sharp-eyed as Dynie Mansfield counting his change at the malt shop in Manitowish Waters.

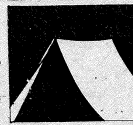
After all, hadn't Susan Rodewald Thomas, as Program Coordinator for the Extension's Environmental Resources Unit, arranged for Bob Resch to teach a winter camping course in the Upper Peninsuls — a live class in the dead of winter?

And hadn't Marian Moran, as head owl of Extension's *Nature of Night* course, led us all, safe and sound, through that inkpot walk in Cherokee Marsh?

Thus, it was no great surprise that Marian was spotting vetch along the waysides where I saw only Tommy Bartlett billboards.

Or that Susan spotted the high, gliding vulture, and Marian confirmed it, where I saw only a hawk?

Or that coming into Wisconsin



## North Country Notebook

JUL 24 1979  
By George Vukelich

Dells, one of America's Great Plastic Places, Marian shrieked and pointed triumphantly.

"There," she said. "In the cemetery. A deer. A live deer."

And there it was. A deer, a live deer, plain as the nose on my face, munching on the red cedar. I don't think anybody else saw it because most of us don't slow down and peer into cemeteries when we pass them.

I remembered Aldo Leopold writing about watching a certain country graveyard, wherein one corner lived the compass plant, or cutleaf Silphium. It was the sole remnant of Silphium along the whole highway, perhaps the whole western half of the county.

"What a thousand acres of Silphuims looked like," Aldo had speculated, "when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo, is a question never again to be answered, and perhaps not even as Ked."

He also reported that a road crew later removed the cemetery fence and cut the Silphium.

"If I were to tell a preacher of the

adjoining church," Aldo concluded, "that the road crew had been burning history books in his cemetery, under the guise of mowing weeds, he would be amazed and uncomprehending."

Later, we paddled canoes up the Old Channel, around Blackhawk Island. Past Echo Rock, the Isle of Pines and Rockbridge Gorge. At the main channel, we floated off a lovely, empty sand beach and watch the tourist boats squeeze their way into Coldwater Canyon and its delicate microclimate.

We worked our paddles as the wake came surging across the river, and I was thinking of Aldo and the *Spirit of The Land* and those words

that appeared in *Wisconsin Trails* so long ago: Sunday mornings, in the canoe, I went to fish down in the slough. Not really to fish, but fishing too, while everyone else went to pray.

Some must truly think it best to go to church and feel thrice blest, but church is mostly an old birdnest. What once lived there has flown away.

This is not where they expect God's face. In town, they built a finer place. They must be expecting a God of their race: Soft. And housebroken. And brittle as clay.