

St. Olaf Natural Lands Afternoon Adventure: West Prairie Loop

● **Access Points:** Access West Prairie Loop from [Campus Drive](#) (which you can reach from the [far Tostrud parking lot](#)) or from the southern end of [Prairie Loop](#)

Length: 0.9 miles

Time: 15-18 minutes

Accessibility: West Prairie Loop is a 10-foot mowed trail with one bench in the middle. There are a few small dips, especially near East and West Coyote Pond, on the

southwest end, but it is otherwise flat.

Trail

Description:

West Prairie Loop actually isn't a loop; it's an open, sunny, curving trail that gives a wide overlook of

our largest prairie restorations. This path offers a picture-perfect view of Big Ole and a chance to see what [oak savanna](#), a habitat once common to the upper Midwest, looks like. See the mammoth, wide-leaved [Bur Oaks](#)? Those gentle giants have, over

hundreds of years, learned to withstand scorching prairie fires. Runners and dog-walkers love this trail.

Points of Ecological Interest:

At this time in the season, you can't miss the [New England Aster](#) in its bright magenta clumps. Flitting amongst them are resolute [Goldfinches](#). Taking a stand too are late-season bunches of milkweed and fluffing [Field Thistle](#). Towards the north end of Campus Drive, you might see some [Tall Sunflower](#) and brick-red [Curly Dock](#) (whose leaves are edible come spring) too! Stay until the sun starts to falter, and this place comes alive with the song of frogs and crickets, especially near Coyote Ponds.

More information at stolaf.edu/naturallands

Pictures: New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*) (left) and American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) (right)

Photo Credits: Wesley Braker and Shenandoah National Park



