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Henry S. Conard

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A Fen in Southwestern Missouri

By HENRY S. CONARD

In "A Report on Greene County" by Edward M. Shepard in Geological Survey of Missouri, Volume 12, Part 1, 1898, we find the following description of "Shaking Mound Spring" in n.w.¼ Sec. 15, T29N, R24W. "Here the water rises from the summit and seeps off all over the low mound, which is 12 ft. high, and 50 x 70 ft. in dimension." It "is most remarkable from the fact that it shakes all over when walked upon. Poles are easily sunk through the tenacious turf down to a distance of 6 to 10 feet into the black muck that makes up the bulk of the mound. **** Cattle are frequently mired in the bog. **** it is a rare example in the South, of the peat bog which is not uncommon in the more northern regions."

A man whom I met near the place at the time of my visit on May 20, 1957, called it "smoking mound," because it emitted smoke for a long time—always, he thought. Apparently the mound had become dry many years ago, had caught fire, and had smouldered for a long time, as peat beds are wont to do. The spot was indicated to me by 2 or 3 old wooden posts about a foot tall, in a field in front of Prospect Church, 3 miles north of Plano. The posts were said to be of usual length, but had sunk into the mire. There was no visible elevation of the area above the surrounding pasture, but evidently water was seeping out and spreading over the ground to the north and west.

I found an area 10 or 15 feet across dangerously soft and shaking. There was a web of roots and herbage on which one found a precarious footing. Beside the plants listed below I found tufts of the fen-moss: *Drepanocladus aduncus polycarpus*, just as it occurs in the fens of northwestern Iowa (Conard, 2). There was no sign of Sphagnum, nor could it ever have been there, for the water that wells up must be from one of the subterranean channels that honeycomb the limestone rocks of southern Missouri. The water must be calcareous, though I found no sign of tufa, as is common in Iowa. The *Drepanocladus* is warrant for calling this place a fen rather than a bog (Anderson, 1).

On October 12 Dr. Lora Bond of Drury College kindly visited the fen at my request, and collected some plants, listed below. She wrote: "it is as dry and hard as bone now." "As the fen dried during our arid late summer and early fall, many weeds—but especially cockle-

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burs—invaded. The bur plants are so thick that it is impossible to step between them!”

So, this odd phenomenon has almost vanished, due to the inroads of man and his domestic animals and weeds. I hope the Silver Lake Fen (Iowa) may be spared a like fate.

Plants of Shaking Mound Fen

Collected May 20

Carex lurida Wahl.

Carex vulpinoidea Michx.

Eleocharis calva Torr. ?

Hypericum mutilum L. ?

Collections of Dr. Lora Bond, Oct. 12, 1957

Eleocharis obtusa (Willd.) Schultes

Polygonum pennsylvanicum L.

Polygonum punctatum Ell.

Amaranthus (Acnida) tamaricinus Nutt.

Amaranthus (Acnida) tuberculatus (Moq.) J. D. Sauer ?

Ipomoea hederacea (L.) Jacq.

Bidens polylepis Blake

Xanthium strumarium L.

Ambrosia artemisiifolia L.

Ephemerum cohaerens

Aphanorhegma serratum

I am indebted to Professor Robert F. Thorne for the identification of the vascular plants of the fen.

References

1. Anderson, W. A. A fen in northwestern Iowa. Amer. Midl. Nat. 29:787-791. 1943.
2. Conard, H. S. Vegetation of Iowa. State Univ. of Iowa Studies in Nat. Hist. 29(4). 1952.

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