

# Glacier may have Created Parfrey's Glen

## *Tales of Earlier Days*

By Bob Dewel

Just off County Highway DL, perhaps five miles east of the North entrance to Devils Lake State Park is the unique Parfrey's Glen, another of Sauk County's great natural areas. Here, in a secluded and only marginally changing natural area, one can find a treasure of flora and fauna.

Unlike Peewee's Nest and the Natural Bridge mentioned in previous stories, this rocky gorge was not spared the destructive forces of the glacier ten thousand years ago and may have developed as the glacier melted. A massive flow of water could have eroded the sandstone walls producing the gorge. Indeed it is a work in progress today after heavy rains, thanks to the rapidly flowing stream from the bluffs above.

The area is beautiful but fragile, and strict adherence to the trail is required, some parts of which are regularly washed out when the stream flow is heavy. This is a walking tour, about one third of a mile being required to reach the waterfall at the head of the gorge.

The area differs from the rest of the Baraboo Bluffs, in that the narrow gorge and forest never receives direct sunlight, with a temperature colder than the surrounding areas. Large areas of growth consist of flora normally found in cooler northern areas of upper Michigan and Canada. The canyon walls rise nearly 100 feet at one point and in many areas are covered with moss.

Canfield called it "a lively stream, which tumbles and leaps through the gorge and down the bluff, (the latter) having a fall of some four hundred feet within a distance of half a mile". Contrast that with the Baraboo River's fall in Baraboo—40 feet in four miles. The sandstone walls have, pebbles of quartzite imbedded. The water is quite hard.

Designated in 1942 as Wisconsin's first State Natural Area, it bears some resemblance to Durwards Glen, a similar glen a couple miles east in Columbia County. Parfrey's Glen is administered by the adjacent but much larger Devils Lake State Park. Lange, in "Ancient rocks and Vanished Glaciers" includes it on his suggested geological tour of the Baraboo bluffs.

Parfrey's Glen is named after an Englishman, Robert Parfrey, who arrived in 1865. Grist and saw mills had already existed on a small scale since 1846, cutting timber and grinding grain. He developed the area as a more commercial venture. Its proximity to Merrimack, as it was spelled then, made it a familiar place to early travelers.

We cannot over-emphasize the fragility of this natural area, even more so than Natural Bridge, Peewee's Nest and in fact much of Sauk County. Those who came before us, including not only the early settlers but generations of Native Americans, have respected and preserved the pristine areas which we now enjoy. We can do no less for our descendants.



*Parfrey's Glen*