

## **RYERSON'S WOODS PARK: A RELICT WOODLAND FROM A PRAIRIE LANDSCAPE**

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**Abstract:** Ryerson's Woods is a wooded, 49-acre City of Iowa City park bisected by a deep ravine. It is unusual among Iowa City parks because it has been left in its natural state. The purpose of this research is to analyze the present-day vegetation of the park and to compare it with the vegetation at the time of European settlement. Ryerson's Woods supports at least 183 species with 91% native, and the habitat with the highest percentage of natives (95%) is the ravine. There are at least 10 rare/infrequent species, including Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) and Spikenard (*A. racemosa*), two sedges, *Carex jamesii* and *C. tenera*, Spinulose Fern (*Dryopteris spinulosa*) and Purple Rocket (*Iodanthus pinnatifidus*). The ravine is remarkably pristine and supports extensive colonies of Wild Sarsaparilla, Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum pedatum*) and Interrupted Fern (*Osmunda claytonii*), while the upland, though disturbed, supports a spectacular spring flora with abundant Large-flowered Bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*). The soils data indicate development under deciduous forest in both the ravine and upland, and the earliest aerial photographs reveal that the park was wooded. The General Land Office surveys for the four townships surrounding the site of Ryerson's Woods reveal an 1830s landscape dominated by treeless prairie in the uplands and dense trees in the floodplain, while ravines appear to have been wooded. The ravine in Ryerson's Woods surely is a relict, but the upland may have been either savanna with scattered oaks or woodland. Ryerson's Woods is a remarkable site that warrants recognition as a State Preserve.