



My Favorite Part of Wisconsin

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

I frequently make reference to the driftless area of Wisconsin, both in conversation and in writing here in *The Grass Roots*. That's the part of Wisconsin where I grew up and still love so much. I always have assumed everyone knows where that is and what it means.

Wrong on both counts. Finally, one of you asked what I meant by that phrase.

First, my apologies for being presumptuous. Not everyone is interested in geography, especially when you are not from the place in question. And not everyone studied Soil Science, a discipline at the UW-Madison where essential geography is taught so you are able to understand the genesis and morphology of soils in Wisconsin. That study leads to an appreciation of landscape features common to various part of our state, too.

The driftless area of Wisconsin is the southwestern portion of the state. It refers to the part of Wisconsin that was NOT covered by a glacier during the last glacial advance, 14 - 15,000 years ago.

The term "driftless" comes from the word "drift." Drift is another term for glacial till, the material that is carried along by the glacier (actually inside the glacier itself). Drift is actually a very good word when referring to the material that has been deposited by glaciers on the ground surface.

So, by putting the suffix "less" behind drift, you get the descriptive word that means the absence of glacial till or drift in an area. The term "driftless area" suddenly makes a lot of sense because there isn't any glacial drift or till in southwest Wisconsin.

I can remember learning that geologists believe that the southwest portion of Wisconsin could be the only area of its kind in the world that was surrounded on all sides by a continental glacier but not glaciated itself.

When the last glacier was coming down from the north thousands of years ago, it followed the path of least resistance - the soft bedrock of the Lake Superior and the Lake Michigan basin directed the lobes of the glacier to the south and the southwest. The lobes rejoined in Illinois and Iowa, leaving small driftless areas in northwest Illinois and in northeast Iowa that look the same as southwest Wisconsin.

The lack of glaciation in southwest Wisconsin results in the hill and valley country you see today. It is never more beautiful than it is in autumn, a perfect time for a ride through this area of unique geology. And few places can sport more scenic golf courses than the driftless area of Wisconsin. ♣



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