

# WILD LANDS- CAPE TOURS

in and near St. Louis





1. [4420 Ohio Ave, St Louis, MO\\*](#)  
[38° 34' 30" N, 90° 13' 52" W](#)

On a bluff above the Mississippi River is a curious hill with a grass-covered summit. The hill is in the City of St. Louis, off of Highway 55, and near the intersection of South Broadway and Ohio Street. A small building—typical of houses built in the 1950s—is carved into the hillside. Around the house are tall, open-grown trees of various species, but also thickets of shrubby vegetation typical of wild urban landscapes. A small road cuts across the topography of the hillside, leading from Ohio Street to the house. A tall fence also cuts across the topography and surrounds the house and the summit of the hill. On the fence are multiple signs, which read, “NO TRESPASSING,” and so trespassing is not recommended. If you find that the signs and the fence have been removed, make a trek to the hilltop summit, where the view is likely to be stunning up and down the Mississippi River.





2. 541 River City Casino Boulevard, St. Louis, MO\*\*  
38° 31' 55" N, 90° 15' 43" W

On the banks of the Mississippi River, next to River City Casino and the mouth of the River des Peres, is a muddy, disturbed vegetated patch. Follow the dirt footpath off of the paved River Trail, and through a thicket of vining plants and river bottom trees. You will find an outcropping of jagged concrete and likely some other kind of detritus. On a sunny day, you might find fishing poles lined up all along the river banks and people lounging on logs and concrete boulders. If you choose to fish, check the St. Louis Region Special Fishing Regulations. Swimming and wading are not recommended. Depending on the height of the water, you may not even be able to find the muddy river bank.





3. 701 Blakey Road, Eureka, MO\*\*\*  
38° 30' 15" N, 90° 35' 54" W

The address and coordinates above will take you to the newest state park in St. Louis County. Route 66 State Park is tucked between the Meramec River, Highway 44, and a rail line heading from St. Louis City southwest toward Springfield and beyond. The new park has a few pavilions for gatherings but is primarily made up of open woodland and trails for hiking and horseback riding. In the center of the park is a mowed field, which is more pasture than prairie. The woodland has a great variety of fast-growing, tall trees, but is densely spotted with short eastern red cedar trees as well. Because of the proximity to the Meramec River and the relatively low elevation of most stretches of the park, the low-lying areas frequently flood. Walk the trails, and, if you have the right shoes, explore the bog areas. Wading and swimming are not recommended.





4. 2201 Mullanphy Street, St. Louis, MO\*\*\*\*  
38° 38' 43"N, 90° 12' 29" W

In this part of North St. Louis, the city gridiron is as present as ever, but the city blocks are only sparsely populated with homes. In the areas with few buildings the surrounding landscape was, until recently, dominated with many native Missouri plants. The plant communities are generally associated with tall-grass prairie, intermixed with escaped non-native perennials. A few years ago, however, an unknown actor began planting corn in all of the spaces between the buildings. Now the landscape in this neighborhood, for the summer and fall, is dominated by a mono-culture of *Zea mays*. The area had been colloquially called, for some time, the 'Urban Prairie', but now many people refer to the area as, the 'Cornfield Neighborhood'.





5. 2199 Dickson Street, St. Louis, MO\*\*\*\*\*  
38° 38' 28" N, 90° 12' 31" W

On the North-side of St. Louis—between Jefferson Avenue and 20th Street, south of Cass Avenue, and a bit north of Carr Street—is an urban forest. The city-owned property has a fence around the perimeter, though there are a few ways to access the forest: by the road near the corner of Jefferson Avenue and James Cool Papa Bell Avenue; by the road that intersects Cass Avenue between 23rd and 25th Streets; or by the trail that begins where 22nd Street ends at the south end of the forest. In the forest you will find stands of skinny Lombardy poplar trees, thickets of bush honeysuckle atop small mounded topographies, and the occasional wide-spreading oak or walnut. You might find eastern red cedars along the dry, sunny spots along the rocky road. You might also find some of the roads covered in moss as well as outcroppings of moss-covered concrete.





6. 5430 Cabanne Avenue, St. Louis, MO\*\*\*\*\*  
38° 39' 28" N, 90° 16' 36" W

In the West End of St. Louis City is a public park known as Visitation Park or Ivory Perry Park. The park has open green space vegetated with mowed grass, a walking trail, and some recreational and symbolic hardscapes. The edges of the park are vegetated with thickets of shrubs and vining plants typically found in wild urban landscapes. The adjacent architecture is eclectic, and the vegetation in the surrounding neighborhood ranges from large trees and turf grasses to wild thickets. Hike the loop of the walking trails, explore the wild edges, run around on the turf, or shoot some hoops on the basketball court. The park does not have much to offer in the way of wild fauna, but once a pack of feral dogs roamed the park, before they were removed permanently because they posed a danger to the community.<sup>†</sup>

# Notes

\* The hill, also known as Sugarloaf Mound, is the last mound in the City of St. Louis known to be built by the Mississippian culture, which predated European settlement of the St. Louis area. All of the other known mounds were demolished for urban development, especially in preparation for the 1904 World's Fair in Forest Park.

\*\* Just north of the River City Casino is the mouth of the River des Peres—the freshwater-stream-turned-channelized-storm-sewer. The river delta is said to be near to the first European settlement in the vicinity of St. Louis City. Legend has it that in said settlement the European and Native people peacefully cohabited. The truth will never be known because the settlement was flooded beyond repair and moved to Carondelet. Now, the site is where the effluent- and petrochemical-contaminated River des Peres water flows into the Mississippi River via a fixed channel.

\*\*\* Before re-branding, Route 66 State Park had a life as a summer vacation town and also as a Superfund site. Near to Times Beach, in the 1960s, the Northeastern Pharmaceutical and Chemical Company offloaded dioxin-contaminated waste oils. Local entrepreneur Russell Martin Bliss used the contaminated oils in his service keeping dust down on the public roads in Times Beach. The waste oil caused a slew of biological illnesses, and in 1982, the CDC recommended the evacuation of Times Beach. The EPA took over the cleanup and finished in 1997. The park opened in 1999, and the EPA removed Times Beach from the Superfund list in 2001.

\*\*\*\* The 'Urban Prairie', or 'Cornfield Neighborhood' was once a fully built part of the city fabric of St. Louis. The neighborhood is adjacent to what was once called the DeSoto-Carr neighborhood—considered by the St. Louis City government to be 'blighted and obsolete' and demolished to build the Pruitt & Igoe Homes. The DeSoto-Carr neighborhood was populated by African-Americans, mostly living in substandard conditions. In many blocks of the neighborhood, the entire population was forced to move to make way for urban renewal. Other parts of the neighborhood continued to decline and most of the original buildings have been lost to arson, brick theft, or strategic removal. Amidst the prairie plants and cornfields original buildings can be found.

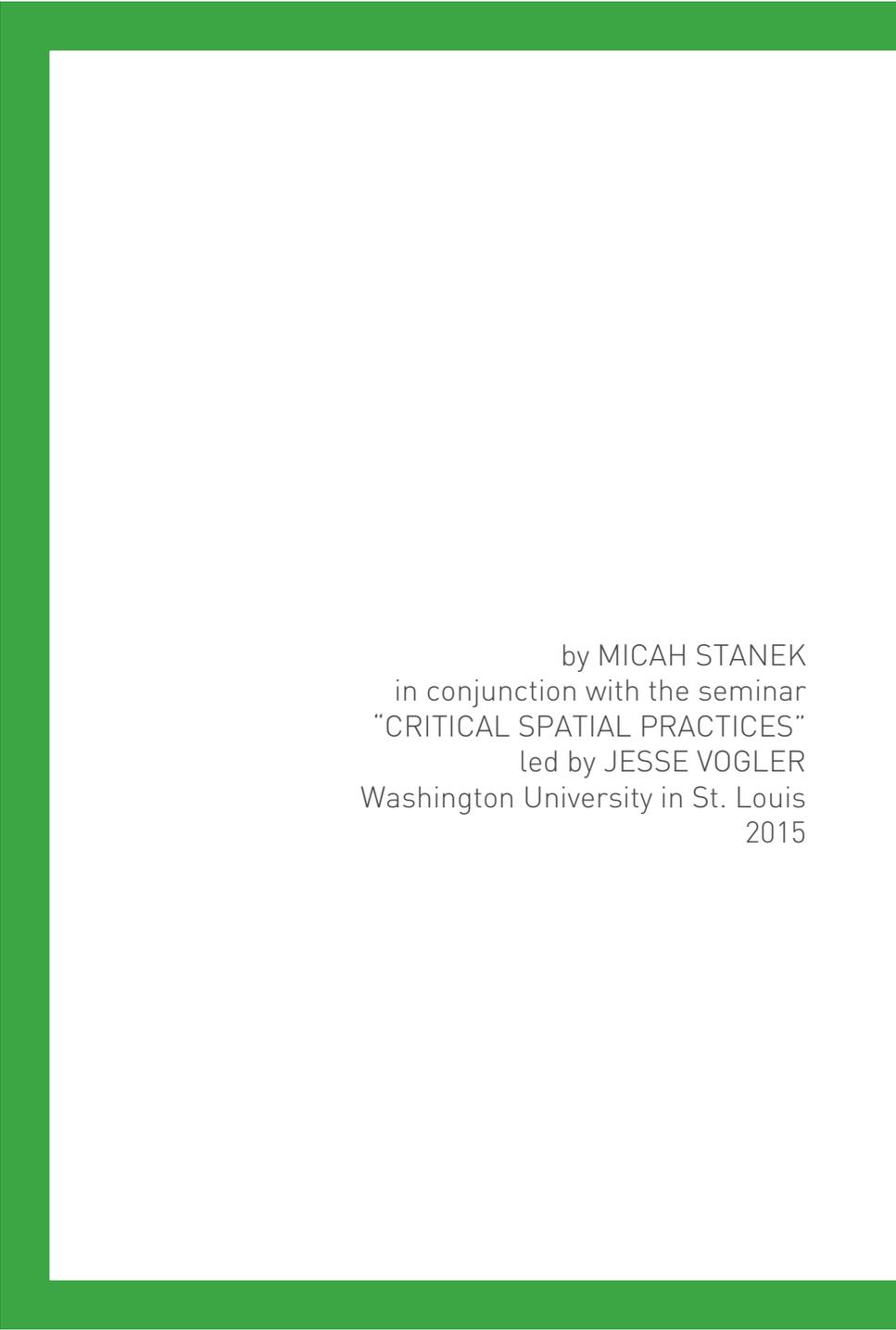
\*\*\*\*\* The urban forest is the former site of the Pruitt & Igoe Homes. Conceived as 'slum surgery' (Architectural Forum, 1951) the project called for the demolition of 57 acres of urban fabric and the construction of 33 housing towers. The 11-story buildings were segregated into the white Igoe Homes and the black Pruitt Homes, divided by Dickson Street. The project was completed in 1955 and desegregated in 1956. The towers were not yet filled, and whites fled, leading to a financial crisis. Without consistent services, the buildings deteriorated, and vandalism and violence ensued. State and federal authorities lost hope in recovery and encouraged remaining residents to move out in 1968.

The 33 buildings were demolished between 1972 and 1976. The city used rubble as fill in suburban development projects, leaving the former Pruitt-Igoe site a brownfield. The city agreed to allow dumping on the site in the early 90s during demolition of city fabric and construction of the Trans World Dome (now the Edward Jones Dome) and convention center. The previously mowed brownfield became a rough topography, mowing stopped, and the urban forest began to grow.

\*\*\*\*\* In the 1960's many of the residents of the Visitation neighborhood—those with the means, mostly white—began migrating to the suburbs of St. Louis. Institutions, like the Visitation Academy and Convent followed, claiming the neighborhood was no longer safe. Disinvestment by residents, by institutions, and by the city have increased crime and stigma on the North-side of the city. The park was renamed Ivory Perry Park in 1989, in honor of the civil rights activist.

Ivory Perry moved to St. Louis from Arkansas in the 1950s, seeking work, but the jobs were few for black workers—who earned 58% the wages of white workers. Ivory Perry organized traffic jams, protests, and political campaigns. Ivory Perry also worked to obtain screening for the many children on the North-side who may be affected by the prolific lead paint contamination. In '88-89, he campaigned for alderman of the 18th ward (his home for many years). Before the election, Ivory was killed by his son, who struggled with mental illness.

† There is also a tree in Ivory Perry Park, surrounded by a fence. Inside the fence is a plaque placed in the memory of Rodney McAllister, a 10-year-old boy who was mauled and killed by a pack of stray dogs in 2001.



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