

Sassafras Trail



A self-guided interpretive trail



Jenny Wiley

State Resort Park

THE SASSAFRAS TRAIL

An Introduction

The Sassafras Trail is located across the road from the Jenny Wiley State Resort Park Campground, next to the Courtesy Fishing Dock. This trail was built by the American Hiking Society Volunteers on October 15-21, 1995.

The .75 mile loop trail meanders beside Dewey Lake and is an easy walk with minimal inclines. You should allow 45 minutes to an hour to complete the trail.

Please take a minute to familiarize yourself with the trail rules and regulations. Other people will use this trail so take great care to pick up any litter along the way and leave the trail in better shape than you found it. Remember that all plants and animals, including snakes, are protected by State Law.

Along the trail, you will notice posts with numbers. Please match the numbers with the information in this booklet. If you would like more information about becoming a volunteer for the American Hiking Society, call (301)565-6704.

Enjoy your hike!

1

Dewey Lake: Named after a local post office which was named for Admiral George Dewey (1837-1917), the hero of Manila Bay. This lake was formed in 1951 by construction of a dam across John's Creek, a 99 ¼ mile stream descending from near Pike County. Dewey Lake is 18 ½ miles long with 52 miles of shoreline and is controlled by the United States Army Corp of Engineers.

The primary purpose of the lake is to reduce flood waters from the 207 square mile watershed above the dam. When the water goes through the dam, it empties back in to John's Creek. From there it travels to the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River and on up to the Ohio River. It also provides enormous recreational opportunities for the public such as skiing, boating, fishing, picnicking, etc.

2

White Oak, *Quercus alba*: The White Oak is one of the most commercially important trees in the Eastern Appalachian Forest. It is high grade wood used for flooring, furniture and even barrels for whiskey. In Colonial times, the wood was used for making the hulls of ships. Today, it is still an important wood in the building of boats and ships. The acorns were mashed, washed and used by Native Americans to make bread. Wildlife such as deer and squirrels forage heavily upon the acorns. Most trees will reach a height of 80-100 feet with a diameter of 3-4 feet.

3

American Hornbeam, *Carpinus caroliniana*: The American Hornbeam is a small, shrubby tree with one or more trunks that are angled with a broad, rounded crown. The elliptical leaves are 2- 4 ½ inches in length and 1- 2 ½ inches wide and are saw toothed. The bark is blue-gray, thin,

smooth and is “muscle like” in its appearance, hence its other common name “ Muscle Wood”. The fruit is leaf like, 3 pointed and hanging on slender stalks in clusters. These hairy, greenish nutlets mature in late Spring. The word “Hornbeam” is from the words “horn” for toughness and “beam” for tree. This tree is a member of the birch family; however, many people have called it a beech because of its similar bark. Deer, grouse, pheasants and quail use the wood as food.

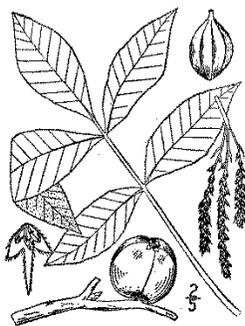
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Hickory Forest: You are now in a Hickory Forest. Most of the trees in this area are “pignut” or “smoothbark” hickories, *Carya glabra*.



Pignut Hickory

The leaves are 8-12 inches long with 5-7 finely-toothed, sharp- pointed, lanceolate leaflet. The fruit is smaller than most hickories and the nutmeat is sweet. Its common name comes from colonial times where the fruit was often consumed by hogs. The tree will reach a height of 75 feet and is known as the most common hickory in the Appalachian forest. The wood of the hickory is hard, heavy, strong and stiff. It is the only tree with all of



these characteristics. According to the USDA, about four-fifths of all hickory wood is used to make and manufacture wood tool handles. In past times, it was used to make wagon wheels because it could sustain tremendous vibration. Another common hickory in this forest area is the Shagbark Hickory, *Carya ovate*.

5

Japanese Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica*: Notice the ground cover creeping around the plants, shrubs and trees? This is Japanese Honeysuckle. The vine produces flowers that are very fragrant. However, this invasive exotic weed can obliterate native vegetation and small shrubs and trees. However, as the trees mature, the sunlight is lessened on the ground level and the Japanese Honeysuckle will begin to die and disappear.

6

Sassafras Tree, *Sassafras albidum*: Do you see the tree with three different shaped leaves? The leaves are deciduous, 3-5 inches long, and may be entire (lobed), two lobed, or three lobed on the same tree. The tree produces blueberry-like fruit that ripens in September and October. The fruit is eaten by deer, turkey and many species of birds. The roots, twigs and bark are very aromatic and produce oil called safrole. When boiled, it produces a Spring tonic known as "Sassafras Tea". In fact, the first flavoring for root beer came from the Sassafras Tree. The FDA banned the use of safrole claiming it was carcinogenic, however, one 12 ounce can of beer is more carcinogenic than an old-fashioned can of root beer. The tree can reach a height of 50 feet.



Sassafras

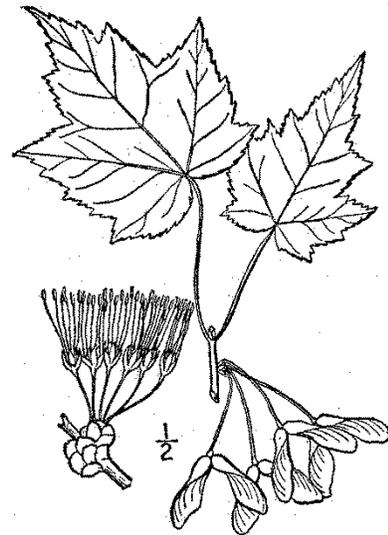
7

Persimmon Tree, *Diospyro virginiana*: The Persimmon tree is found throughout the state in dry woodlands, grassy openings and along abandoned fields. The fruit is very sweet when ripe, and can be eaten

raw or made into puddings. The fruit is an important wildlife food that is eaten by grouse, raccoons, opossums and deer. The dark heartwood is very hard and takes a century to develop. Besides Dogwood and Ironwood Trees, the Persimmon ranks third in wood hardness and is used largely in the production of golf club heads.

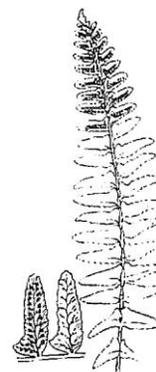
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Red Maple Tree, *Acer rubrum*: There are 13 species of Maples that are native to the United States. The Red Maple is found abundantly throughout the state. It grows in the low lying areas of bottomland forests and along lakeshores and riverbanks. The leaves are 2 ½-4" long and opposite with 3-5 lobes. Notice the thin, gray bark. As the tree grows older, the bark will become more fissured. Maple wood is used to make a wide variety of products...flooring, furniture, crates, cabinets and novelties. You will find that most bowling alleys and dance floors are made from Maple.



9

Christmas Fern, *Polystichum acrostichoides*: This evergreen fern, with fronds 1-2 feet high, grows abundantly on this trail and throughout the entire park. It is probably the most common fern in Kentucky. Notice the crowded groups of sporangia underneath the ends of the fertile leaflets. This fern is especially popular during the Christmas season where it is often gathered to make wreaths, decorations and provide green scenery. The



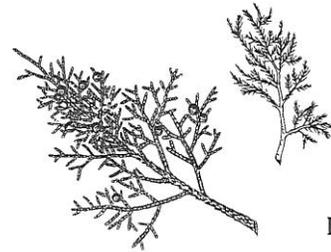
Christmas Fern

new fronds that appear in the spring are called fiddleheads; hence, they resemble the neck of a fiddle. It has been said that fiddleheads are edible and can be prepared like asparagus. The Christmas Fern is also an excellent food crop for the Ruffed Grouse.

10

Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*:

First observed in Roanoke Island, Virginia in 1564, the Eastern Red Cedar is the most widely distributed conifer (bearing cones) in the United States. Growing in 37 states, this conifer has a distinct aromatic wood that is highly resistant to drought, heat and cold. There are many uses for Red Cedar, including cedar chests, cabinet work, carvings, oil for perfumes and medicines, and fence posts. The juicy berries are eaten by a variety of birds, including the Cedar Waxwing, which is named for this tree. For over 50 years later, you can still smell the aromatic cedar smell from things constructed of this wood.



Eastern
Red Cedar

11

Ground Cedar, *Lycopodium fladelliform*: Do you notice the ground cover on both sides of the trail? Ground Cedar is very attractive but it creeps along the forest floor; therefore, it has a tendency to overtake an area. This plant needs lots of acid to grow; therefore, it is usually associated with Pine and Mountain Laurel. Coal was actually formed from plant matter very similar to this plant. However, the plant that made coal stood at or was higher than 100 feet. People in the area gather this plant for Christmas decorations. It is, however, illegal to gather plants on state or federal properties. Locally, this plant is also known by names like “Wandering Cedar” and Crowsfoot”.

12

American Beech, *Fagus grandifolia*: The Beech Tree grows to 80 feet in height and in some cases 2-3 feet in diameter. The leaves are 2 ½- 5 inches long, elliptical or ovate and long pointed at the tip. The bark is smooth, thin and gray. Notice the similarities between it and the American Hornbeam that you saw earlier. The trunks of the trees are like elastic. Notice the carvings on the trees. The carvings and initials on these trees are not only illegal but are very damaging and in some cases means death to the tree. The beechnuts are edible and are consumed



by squirrels, raccoons, other mammals and birds. As you walk, you will notice that beech trees are abundant throughout this area. The mature beech forest can take up to 125 years to develop. You probably find that hard to imagine! Notice that some of the trees are hollow and provide excellent habitat for many animals.

13

Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus* : As you come closer to the end of the beech tree forest, you will notice a tree with a lot of oval gouges on the trunk.

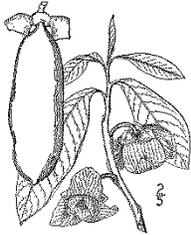
These holes are caused by the Pileated Woodpecker, a large, crow sized woodpecker with a red crest. Woodpeckers have very sharp bills which they use for drilling and chiseling into trees. Woodpeckers can be very useful in the control of insect pests and are very useful in the ecosystem. Even though this is primarily a bird of the forest, it can sometimes be observed at birdfeeders. Other woodpeckers you may



Pileated
Woodpecker

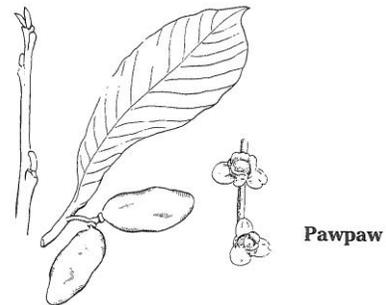
observe include: Northern Flicker (mountain folks call it the Yellow-Hammer), Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. They have zygodactylic feet (two toes in the front and two in the rear), a long tongue and a stiff, spiny tail that acts as a prop when they are climbing.

14



Pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*: The Pawpaw was first recorded by the DeSoto expedition in the lower Mississippi Valley in 1541. The wild fruit is still harvested in this area and is sold in some of the small, privately owned grocery stores. The

fruit, often called the wild banana because it has the same appearance and texture, has a custard taste and matures in September. The leaves, when crushed, have a very distinct smell similar to diesel fuel and will, in fact, repel insects.



15

Tulip Poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*: The Tulip Poplar is Kentucky's state tree. Known as the "Yellow Poplar" or "Tulip Tree" to many, it is



one of the tallest and most beautiful hardwoods reaching heights of 120 feet. Commercially, the Tulip Poplar is one of the chief hardwoods, producing wood for furniture, toys, musical instruments and pulpwood. The flowers resemble a tulip, hence its common name. The Tulip Poplar is not a member of the tulip family; it's a member of the magnolia family.

16

Virginia Pine, *Pinus virginiana*: This area is heavily forested with Virginia Pine. The Virginia Pine is a small tree that reaches the height of 40 feet. Often called Scrub Pine, the trunk rarely exceeds 18 inches in diameter. The needles are 1 ½-3" long and in bundles of two. The wood is used primarily for pulpwood (cardboard boxes, craft boxes, etc.) and lumber. Snow and ice are havoc to the Virginia Pine. If you look closely, you will notice several trees that have been broken by inclement weather. Squirrels, wild turkeys and some songbirds feed upon the Virginia Pine.

17

Cemetery/ Homeplace: The area to your left leads to a family cemetery. In fact, the clear area in front of you used to be the place of a homestead in the 1930s that was owned by the Goble family. The Gobles' also owned the area where the park's campground is now located. There are a total of 11 cemeteries within the park. A lot has changed over the course of fifty years. Do you ever wonder what the next fifty years will bring?