

HISTORY OF THE SALEM WOODS NATURE TRAIL IN HIGHLAND PARK

In 1976 a nature trail was built in Highland Park by Salem High School students directed by teacher Julia Yoshida with the assistance of Sally Ingalls, then Curator of Natural History at the Peabody Museum. Points of interest were marked on the trail and an accompanying self-guiding handbook was prepared. The Salem Girl Scouts repainted the original trail numbers in 1990.

In 1991 The Friends of Salem Woods reprinted a condensed version of the handbook along with a map prepared by Salem State College student Colleen Donahue, Julia Yoshida's drawings and an introduction written by Rob Moir, then Curator of Natural History at the Peabody Museum.

In 1993 Salem State College student Russ Almstrom and biology professor Alan Young more accurately determined the position of the trail, and a revised map was produced by Kym Pappathanasi of the Salem State College Digital Geography Laboratory. The Friends of Salem Woods constructed and installed a trailhead sign, marked new points of interest and trail junctions with cedar posts, and prepared a revised Trail Guide which again incorporated some of Julia Yoshida's drawings from the first handbook.

In 2005 & 2006 some sections of the trail were relocated to avoid badly eroded or wet areas, and a new short side loop trail was established. The main trail and long 1.6-mile loop comprise the "Yellow Trail" marked with yellow paint blazes that provides a 2.3-mile walk; a short side loop designated as the "Blue Trail" marked with blue blazes affords a shorter 3/4-mile walk. Boy Scouts re-painted the blazes in 2006. Side trails are not marked with blazes.

In 2007 Salem State College geography graduate student Jennifer Sumael and professor Marcos Luna created the most accurate map to date using GPS technology, and professor Alan Young revised the text portions of the Guide with assistance from Jeanne Stella. The result is this new full-color Trail Guide.

The Friends of Salem Woods encourage you to enjoy and respect the beauty of this small remnant of the wilderness that once covered the North Shore region.

Please do not cut, pick, remove, or plant any wildflowers or other plants.

TRAIL GUIDE

START (Trailhead Sign)

1: Next to the trail by the small swamp on the left grows Poison Ivy (3 leaves) climbing a Willow tree. Jewelweed growing next to the Poison Ivy is said to relieve its itch. The vine to the right of the tree is Virginia Creeper or Five-leaved Ivy, whose foul-tasting berries are an important food source for birds, but whose leaves, which contain oxalic acid, may produce a burning, itching rash and blisters in people who are allergic. Sensitive Fern grows throughout the swamp and is so-named because it wilts soon after being picked. Another common small plant in this swamp is Horsetail, a descendant of tree-sized specimens during the age of dinosaurs. This is a good area to spot House Wrens, Gray Catbirds, Woodpeckers, and frogs.

2: Just past the swamp, there is a large, overhanging Winged Euonymus and several more along the left side of the trail. This species, whose stems have ridges or "wings" along their length, is native to Asia but is often used locally for landscaping (sold as Burning Bush. On the right side of the trail, note the stand of Star-Flowered Solomon's Seal, which re-sprouts readily from underground rhizomes after a fire, and the common Hayscented Fern (look for sori or spore clusters on the undersides of fronds). Right next to the trail is a Bigtooth Aspen tree, whose leaves turn bright yellow in the fall, and behind it is a Tupelo or Sourgum tree, whose leaves turn bright red.

3: To the right of the boardwalk is a Cattail marsh that is being overtaken by invasive Purple Loosestrife and Red Maples. Try to spot Red-Winged Blackbirds, and listen for Tree Frogs and Spring Peepers. This is also a good location to see Eastern Screech-Owls in pre-dawn hours. Highbush Blueberry and Sweet Pepperbush are common along the trail after the boardwalk.

4: At end of a very short side trail on the right are several characteristic wetland fern species -- Marsh, Sensitive, Cinnamon, and Royal, in addition to Arrowwood Viburnum, and Red Maples, whose leaves turn red in the fall. On the left side of the main trail, growing on the site of a 1975 forest fire, is a clonal colony of Poplar or Quaking Aspen, whose leaves quake or tremble in even the slightest breeze.

FIRST BRIDGE: Common plants growing here include Creeping Buttercup, Wild Iris, Golden Ragwort, and Skunk Cabbage, whose flowers are able to sprout in the early spring by generating heat to thaw the frozen ground. The unpleasant smell of the leaves attracts insects that pollinate the flowers.

Just after the first stream crossing is the beginning of the 0.3-mile side loop "Blue Trail" for a 3/4 mile total walk. The main "Yellow Trail" continues straight ahead. Along the Blue Trail are a large stand of club moss and a patch of Greenbrier (see Yellow Trail sites 8 and 10 for more information on these species).

SECOND BRIDGE: Joe Pye-weed, Boneset, and Purple-Flowering Raspberry grow here.

5: There is a short side trail on the left to golf hole #5 tee. As you climb "Bittersweet Hill" on the main trail, note the invasive Asiatic Bittersweet vines covering and smothering the trees, and another Winged Euonymus on the right side of the trail.

6: Opposite a large boulder with the number "10" (an earlier site designation) is where the long Yellow Trail loop returns. Two ferns, Common Polypody and a hybrid Woodfern, grow on the hillside. In this area grows False Solomon's Seal, with reputed medicinal value; Cranberry Viburnum, whose white flowers in the summer become scarlet red berries in the fall; and Barberry, with its three-spined thorn-leaves. Chipmunks are common in this area.

At the "T" intersection, the Yellow Trail proceeds to the LEFT. The 1/4-mile trail to the right is badly eroded but rejoins the Yellow Trail after site 18 if you want a shorter (1.3 mile) walk.

7: As you climb the hill, note the much drier, upland soil and associated plant species, including trees such as Black and White Oaks, White Pine (with needles in bundles of 5), Eastern Red Cedar (which is actually a Juniper, not a Cedar), and Black Cherry; and low-growing plants such as Lowbush Blueberry, Canada Mayflower (Wild or False Lily-of-the-Valley), and Common Cinquefoil (related to the strawberry). On the large "Lichen Rock" at the top of the hill are a variety of lichens, which grow very slowly and can live in seemingly inhospitable places but are susceptible to air pollution. Field Hawkweed, with flowers that resemble dandelions on long hairy stems, and Dyer's Greenweed, with dark shiny leaves and yellow flowers, also grow here. The latter plant was brought over from England in 1628 by Governor John Endicott at the request of our first settlers, who needed the flowers to dye their wool and flax. There is a large expanse of primitive common moss on the right side of the trail.

8: As you descend from this high ground there is an even more ancient plant, the small, low-growing clubmoss, Lycopodium (known locally as Princess Pine), a remnant species of the plants which, like Horsetails, grew to tree size during the Carboniferous Period some 300 million years ago, and were main contributors to the coal deposits we have today.

9: To the right is a high cliff face with a variety of plants growing out of the crevices, including Common or Rock Polypody, mosses, and small trees (whose expanding roots, together with freezing water in the winter, enlarge the cracks and break chunks of rock off the cliff). Amid this rock debris at the base of the cliff grow several fern species, including Cinnamon, New York, and Marginal Woodfern. Ahead and to the left is a large grove of Paper Birch trees, whose leaves turn bright yellow in the fall.

Note: Trail ahead is steep and slippery when leaf or ice-covered.

At the top of the hill is a short trail to the left which provides a scenic overlook to the "Valley of the Birches." Due to erosion problems, the main trail has been relocated so that it proceeds to the right around the rocky outcrop.

10: On the hillside just before the "trip-trap" boardwalk, note the evergreen Common Greenbrier or Catbrier vines with their glossy, green, heart-shaped leaves and thorny stems, of great benefit as food and shelter to small mammals and birds, but rather an unpleasant experience for anyone who falls into such a brier patch. In Massachusetts, Greenbrier once was called "Biscuit Plant" because a juice obtained from the fresh roots was used to make bread. Flowers such as Bluets, Great-Spurred Violets, and Wild Irises, as well as Green Frogs, can be found in the wet areas near the boardwalk.

11: At the top of the hill beyond the boardwalk, note the native woody shrub, Staghorn Sumac, with its large fuzzy brownish-red fruits at the top. Although the leaves are similar in appearance to those of Poison Sumac, Staghorn Sumac is not poisonous and in fact belongs to a different genus than Poison Sumac and Poison Ivy.

A side trail to the left passes through a swampy area and ends at golf hole #3 green. In the swamp, a secondary side trail to the right leads to a nice overlook of Ducks Pond and continues to the railroad tracks.

A short distance past the side trail to the golf course, the main Yellow Trail veers left. The right fork is a 0.1-mile cutoff trail that rejoins the main trail after site 15, eliminating the 0.5-mile loop to the Thompson's Meadow overlook. The cutoff trail includes Pitch Pine and Black Cherry trees. Look for fox scat (droppings) in this area.

12: On the left side of the trail before crossing the stone wall, is a Mountain Ash with several rows of holes made by the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a medium-sized woodpecker which has a black head with a red crown and a yellow belly. When you cross the stone wall, which marks the eastern boundary of Highland Park, you will be on Salem Conservation land. Interestingly, the wall extends right through Ducks Pond visible to the north. It was built prior to the installation of the railroad tracks that blocked the flow of a stream, creating the pond. When the railroad tracks come into view, there are two side trails on the left 30 feet apart which lead to the tracks and, if you cross the tracks, to the Forest River trail.

13: Overlook of Thompson's Meadow (headwaters of the Forest River and owned by and secondary water source for Marblehead). Aggregate Industries / Lynn Sand & Stone on Swampscott Road is visible in the distance. Note the invasion into the marsh of the common reed, Phragmites. Look for Muskrats, Painted Turtles, Great Blue Herons, Wood Ducks, Canada Geese, and numerous other migratory bird species.

14: The high ground above the marsh is a nesting area for Snapping Turtles (look for bits of white eggshell left behind by hatchlings).

15: The very large Black Oak tree in the valley is estimated to be well over 100 years old and is believed to be the largest tree in Salem Woods.

Cutoff trail from before site 12 rejoins the main trail on the right.

16: Climbing the tree on the stream bank to the left is a large woody Poison Ivy vine that unfortunately was recently cut by someone. Poison Ivy flowers and produces berries only when it grows up a tree like this impressive specimen. All parts of Poison Ivy are toxic. Skunk Cabbage is prevalent in the swamp to the right.

17: Look for Bigtooth Aspen, Barberry, and Goldenrod along the trail.

18: The footings of a former Boy Scout tower are still visible. This is the highest point in Salem Woods (140 feet above sea level). The smokestacks of the power plant in Salem are visible to the northeast. On a clear day you can see over Swampscott to the Atlantic Ocean. Note the prevalence of small Pitch Pine trees (needles in bundles of 3), which can survive in dry, nutrient-poor, sandy conditions. The side trail to the southwest leads down to the Fafard condominium complex.

At a fork, the main Yellow Trail goes left. The badly eroded abandoned trail to the right leads through an old forest fire site, and rejoins the main trail between sites 6 and 7.

19: Shelf Fungi are common on fallen logs near the trail. Sphagnum moss, the ground cover in the wet areas to the left of the trail, is used by florists in wire baskets and was used to dress wounds during the Civil War, due to its ability to retain moisture.

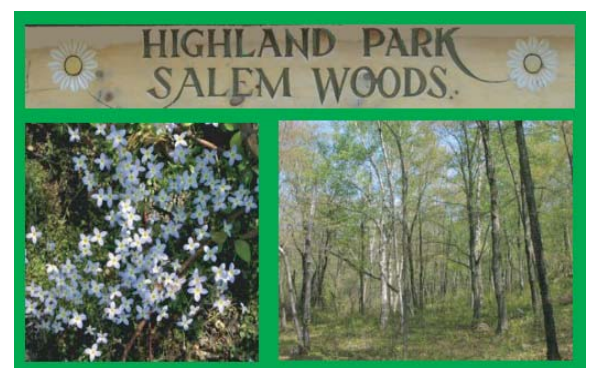
At the next fork, the main Yellow Trail goes left. The right fork connects to the abandoned trail mentioned above.

The Blue Trail enters from the left on the high ground. The Yellow Trail descends and reconnects to the early part of the trail at site 6 near the boulder with the circled "10." You have completed the loop. Turn left to return to the trailhead sign at the START of the trail.

~End~

Salem Woods Nature Trail in Highland Park

Trail Guide



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