



Reading the Forest: Clues to the Ecology and History of the 153-Acre Woods

Welcome to the 153-acre Woods! This woodland is home to billions of living creatures - from mammals to microorganisms - whose life spans may be a blink of an eye or centuries. Fortunately, they can now live out their lives here. Citizens banded together and instead of letting 19 homes to be built, they wisely supported preservation of this forest in perpetuity.



- **Beech Hollow**

Magnificent, with an air of nobility and grace, these grand beech trees, and a 1931 aerial map, indicate that this forest has not been logged for a century or more. Here, a brook passes beneath the trees' lofty crowns, and water flows over large boulders. Beech trees can live between 300 and 500 years and produce a chestnut colored, triangle-shaped nut which is nutritious for wildlife and people. Beech's smooth, light gray bark helps ward off heat and is an evolutionary relic of their ancestry in Africa.

- **Ash Cemetery**

Piles of dead trees lie beside the trail due to the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive insect which girdles affected trees, cutting into their cambium layer. Nine percent of New Jersey's forests - or approximately 25 million trees - are estimated to be affected.

- **Witness Tree**

This is a term used for trees which mark property boundaries and for trees associated with events of historical significance, which "witnessed" history. The grand tulip poplar here, alongside rock outcroppings, possibly marked a boundary between fields. History also transpired. In 1937, Upton Sinclair wrote a letter to the owner of neighboring Viewpoint Farm, speculating if Henry Ford might like to add to his museum the old shack Sinclair built in nearby Ridgeview Woods, in which he penned *The Jungle*.

- **Ghost Cedars**

Scattered throughout the woods are vestiges of cedars, which grew up after the farm fields were abandoned and are now replaced by hardwood species like oak, tulip, hickory, and beech.

- **Red Maple Bend**

This sturdy red maple at the bend of the trail is a sign of moist soils, which is where red maples like to sink their feet. In almost every season, some part of a red maple has a dash of red in it - the buds, flowers, leaf stem, keys (or samaras) and leaves.

- **Hillside Springs**

Springs, seeps, and small running streams are a major feature of this north-facing hillside. As the earth warms, water becomes scarcer, so sources of fresh water are increasingly valuable.

- **Triplet Tulips**

Called the King of the Magnolias, the tulip tree is the tallest hardwood tree in North America. D. C. Peattie comments, "This tree is joyous... with the candle-like blaze of its sunlit flowers." Also called 'canoe wood', tulip trees were hollowed out by native Americans for use as river transport. The cedar tree protruding from the base of one tulip tree is a remnant of this forest's agricultural past.

- **Boulder Bench**

This bench is a vestige of when Morocco was neighbors with New Jersey! Two hundred million years ago when the continent named Pangea pulled apart and broke, magma bubbled up in the fractures and hardened. Millions of years of erosion has exposed this gray diabase rock.

- **Spice Bush Tunnel**

The lemon-scented leaves and twigs make a restorative tea, and the red, lipid-rich fruit offer energy for tropical migrating songbirds that "gas up" on their thousand-mile journey home.

- **Skunk Cabbage Swamp**

The first spring wildflower to bloom in North American, skunk cabbage has served as a wound and toothache remedy, bear food, spring greens, and an ingredient in making healing tattoos. To be safe to eat, early spring leaves must be boiled in multiple changes of water, to lessen the effect of the plant's mouth blistering calcium oxidate.

- **Old Stone Wall**

Rugged famers built these stone walls in the early-to mid-1800's when forests were logged to make way for livestock, fields, and orchards. Notice the composition and structure of the vegetation on the north side of the wall as compared to the south side. The north side was plowed and is now rampant with invasive species. The south side was not likely cultivated, is older, and freer of invasive species.

- **Red Oak Room**

This is a special, interior woodland hosting native wildflowers and offering suitable habitat for endangered and threatened species, like the barred owl, red shouldered hawk, and wood turtle. This forest was also ancestral hunting grounds for the Late Woodland Indians who lived alongside Cherry Run Stream. Old forests are our best defense against climate change and species extinction. Let us treat these woodlands with respect and reverence and help to save the forests we can!

