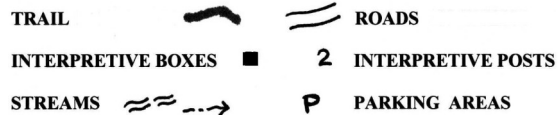
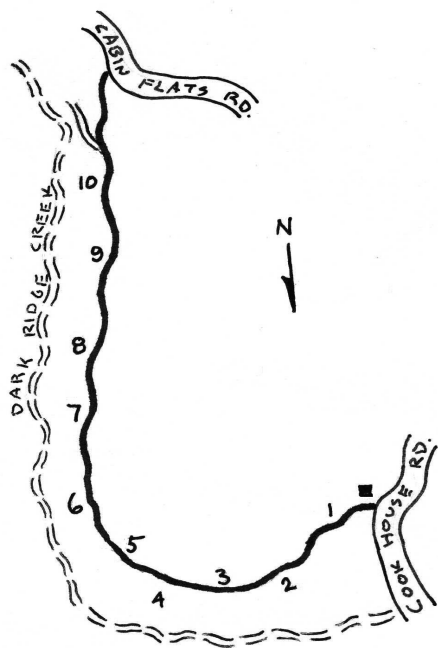


10) The 4-stemmed tree with grayish upper stem bark is a **butternut walnut** (*Juglans cinerea*). Its oily, rather buttery-flavored nuts account for the name. Based on the pale bark colors, white walnut is another common name. A yellowish-brown dye rendered from the nut husks and bark was once used to color clothing. Faded uniform colors of Confederate soldiers earned them the name of "butternuts" in some areas, relating to the similar color of butternut dye.

## Upper Dark Ridge Creek Trail 38

Map not to scale



## HIKING SAFETY GUIDELINES

- Carry water with you
- Stay on designated trail
- Inform a friend of your hiking plans
- Hike with another person
- Leash your pet
- Carry a cell phone with fully charged and extra battery
- Carry important medication/first aid
- Call Security or the Trust Nature Center if you need help



Balsam Mountain Trust  
Phone: (828)631-1060

BMP Security  
Phone: (828)631-1011

## Interpretive Trail Guide

FOLLOWING NUMBERED POSTS PLACED ALONG TRAIL



## Upper Dark Ridge Creek Trail 38



Black cherry *Prunus serotina*

Terrain: Gradual grades along an old logging road. Connects with Dark Ridge Camp Loop, west end.

Trail elevation: 400 ft elevation difference between each end

Trail length: A trip from end-to-end and back is 1.75 miles

Trail Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

Must see: Dark Ridge Creek from vantage points.

1) Look carefully above the trail to find a young **red oak** (*Quercus rubra*) that exhibits natural grafting of two formerly separate stems. Sometimes in nature, two compatible stems touch and after rubbing together extensively or becoming wounded, they may meld together. With time and continued survival this tree will absorb all signs of this graft into a single trunk.



2) The **silverbell** (*Halesia tetraptera*) is a tree that prefers moist soils. It grows to its largest size in the southern Appalachians, attaining heights of 60-100 feet, but is much smaller in other parts of its range. The light, brittle

wood is not commercially valuable, but showy white flowers promote high popularity of this tree as an ornamental.

3) The heart-shaped, evergreen leaves of **galax** (*Galax urceolata*) adorn the rocks as their creeping rhizomes spread unseen beneath the leaf litter. The leaves are often harvested for the floral industry. If left alone and in concentration, a odorous event may occur when the plant's transpired gasses, replete with smelly oils, drift on air currents and bring a "woody odor" (skunk-like, some say) to a person on a woodland walk.



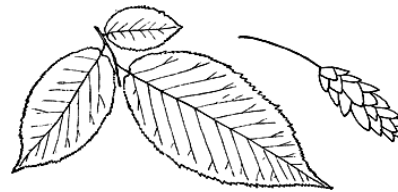
4) The view of **Dark Ridge Creek** allows a glimpse of a rushing mountain stream cloaked in lush vegetation. This creek has its highest beginnings at about 5400 ft. elevation, on the slopes

of Old Bald Ridge and Grassy Ridge in the Great Balsam Mountains. It then flows west and northwest 6 miles to its junction with Scotts Creek, near 3000 ft. elevation. Along the way, tributaries draining steep slopes join in, providing the abundance and quality of water that characterizes a healthy forest watershed.

5) Bouldery slopes on northern exposures provide a special habitat within these mountains. The numerous rocky crevices and moss-laden cover is a moist, cool, verdant shelter and foraging area for many small creatures. Here, a thick growth of evergreen **dog-hobble** (*Leucothoe fontanesiana*) also occurs. This shrub's name is presumably linked to bear hunters, whose dogs were slowed or "hobbled" when the bear under pursuit chose to leave his trail through tangled colonies of doghobble.



6) Uncommon within Balsam Mountain Preserve is the **hophornbeam** (*Ostrya virginiana*), a small understory tree of the birch family. The pale brown, scaly bark is normally conspicuous, though covered by moss here. The hop-like fruits are borne at the tips of the slender twigs. The hard, tough wood also contributes to another name, ironwood. The leaves may be softly hairy, but picking the bristly fruits with bare fingers may render some itchy discomfort as those hairs easily dislodge and impale tender skin. Ultimately, the fruits naturally lose their defenses and each bladder-like sac may offer a tasty nutlet for birds and rodents.



7) The **black cherry** (*Prunus serotina*) is high on the list of important wildlife foods. A tall tree with dark gray, scaly bark, we often overlook its main attribute, its small and lofty fruits. They are only 3/8 inch diameter, but are plentiful and eaten by multitudes of birds and mammals. For people, the reddish heartwood is famous cabinetry and furniture material. At one time a popular fermented drink was made locally from the fruits known as "cherry bounce."

8) The two trees here, each with a companion grape vine, are both considered "hardwoods", as opposed to the "softwood" label which we attach to conifers. In reality, the wood from these two trees are nearly opposite in actual hardness. The **white oak** (*Quercus alba*), having scaly bark on the upper trunk, produces a coarse-grained, dense, hard and heavy wood. The **basswood** (*Tilia heterophylla*), with furrowed bark, produces a fine-grained, soft, lightweight wood, at least 20 lbs per cubic foot lighter than oak. Flooring is obviously one common use for oak; carving is one for basswood. The everyday use of various woods from all our native trees was, accordingly, much more utilitarian in the days of early settlement compared to today.

9) The evergreen mass sprawling over the ground is **periwinkle** (*Vinca minor*), a European plant originally introduced in the 1700s. It has been planted as a groundcover due to a tolerance for shade and ability to choke out weeds. Any small plant can be choked by the continuous advance and thus periwinkle is considered an invasive exotic in some states. This patch probably started from an old home or roadside planting.

