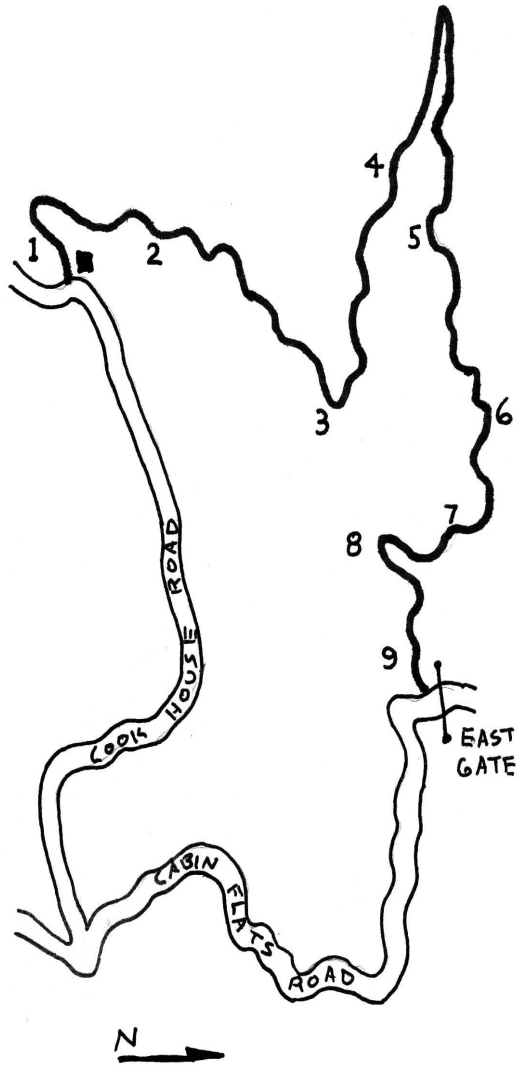


# Dark Ridge/Bee Tree Gap Trail 40

Map not to scale



TRAIL		ROADS	
INTERPRETIVE BOXES		INTERPRETIVE POSTS	
STREAMS		PARKING AREAS	

## 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

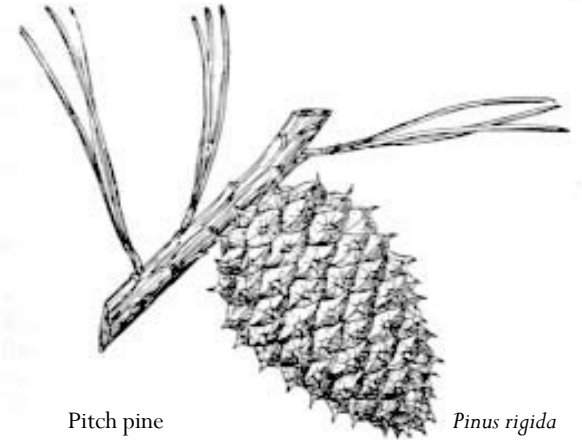
BMP Security  
Phone: (828)631-1011

## Interpretive Trail Guide

FOLLOWING NUMBERED POSTS PLACED  
ALONG TRAIL



## Dark Ridge/Bee Tree Gap Trail 40



Pitch pine

*Pinus rigida*

Terrain: Moderate terrain along old logging road. Connects Dark Ridge Camp with the east gate.

Trail elevation: 650 ft elevation difference between each end

Trail length: 2 miles one way

Trail Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

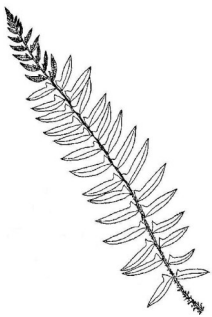
Must see: Views off pine ridges

1) The young **sassafras** (*Sassafras albidum*) has furrowed bark and a mix of leaf shapes - 3 lobed, 2 lobed and unlobed. A member of the laurel family (Lauraceae), its



spicy-scented sap was once widely known and several parts of the plant were popularly used for medicinal and culinary purposes. Its bark may have been the first American forest product exported to England in the 1600's, used for sassafras oil extraction.

2) A small overhanging canopy of living plant roots and organic material can be seen at the top of the bank along this old road. With closer observation, it is apparent that beneath this drapery a "rodent road" parallels the trail for a considerable extent. Sheltered from rain and easy detection, chipmunks and mice have established a well-worn runway that allows them to travel and carry food with decreased danger of predation by raptors, foxes and bobcat. Smaller predators such as snakes and weasels may occasionally share the rodent's trail.



3) Abundant **Christmas fern** (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) can be seen on the slope growing in spaced clumps amid a shady environment. Because it is evergreen, this fern was once popular as a cut floral green and wreath material used in Christmas decorations. In nature, its greenery provides a winter food source for grouse. This is one of our most common and easily recognized ferns. It is hardy and tolerant of transplanting if kept out of direct sun. The spore-producing sori are borne on the tips of some leaves.

4) The **mockernut hickory** (*Carya tomentosa*) gets its name through its supposed mockery of having a large nut/fruit but very little edible nutmeat available inside. Ignoring such human designations, rodents gnaw through the thick, hard shells to access the nutritious, oily kernel. Hickory nuts are high in unsaturated fats, protein and many minerals and vitamins, so they are one of the most nutritious forest foods. In all hickories, each fruit is composed of one nut enclosed in a husk, which usually splits away to release the nut. Husk thickness and extent of its splitting differs among the species. Of the 5 types of hickory that grow in the preserve, mockernut is unique in its combination of ridged bark, thick nut husks and hairy leaves.

5) Looking south-southwest, one of the main ridges of Doubletop Mountain can be seen descending toward Dark Ridge Creek, 400 feet below. Preserve, East Reach and Cook House Roads cross the distant ridge at 4400, 3800 and 3600 ft. elevations, respectively. Stem-winder Road extends along a portion of its crest. Consider the appearance of the hardwood forests visible on the distant slopes, most of which are north-facing. No presence of pines are obvious there, compared to the south-facing slopes and ridges here.



6) Conspicuous patches of **trailing arbutus** (*Epigaea repens*), an evergreen ground-cover shrub with a liking for sunny places and acid soils, grow near the top of the road bank. Its aromatic white or pink flowers appear in early spring. These plants depend on a fungal mycorrhizal association for proper root nutrition, without which the roots, and plant, will weaken or die. Trailing arbutus leaves are hairy and elongate, while a common companion plant, galax, has smooth, circular leaves.

7) **Sourwood** (*Oxydendrum arboreum*) rarely grows tall enough to be a forest canopy tree, but its frequently crooked trunk can reach diameters of 12-18 inches. The deeply furrowed gray bark is most recognizable. In summer the dangling white clusters of small flowers are conspicuous. The nectar from these flowers provides the source of regionally famous sourwood honey. In winter, clusters of small capsules persist on the twig tips and release multitudes of tiny seed. Chewing the very tart green leaves explains the name.



8) Past disturbances to this oak-dominated forest have opened a sunny window of opportunity for establishment of pines in this vicinity. These pines will inevitably disappear without continued disturbance, as their seedlings cannot grow in hardwood shade. The type seen here is **pitch pine** (*Pinus rigida*), which has needles 3-5 inches long and prickly cones about the size and shape of a hen's egg. Nowhere else on the Preserve are pitch pines as numerous as here on these south-facing ridges and slopes.

9) Above the trail stands a **Virginia pine** (*Pinus virginiana*), identifiable by its short needles, small prickly cones, and thin, cinnamon-colored bark on the upper trunk. This is one of several types of yellow pine in the region, but this species is uncommon on the Preserve. It is the smallest of the regional yellow pines and is sometimes called scrub pine. Trees as young as 5 years old and 6 ft. tall may bear cones, but more typically this pine is mature between 20-50 feet. It can grow to 80 ft. on optimum sites.