

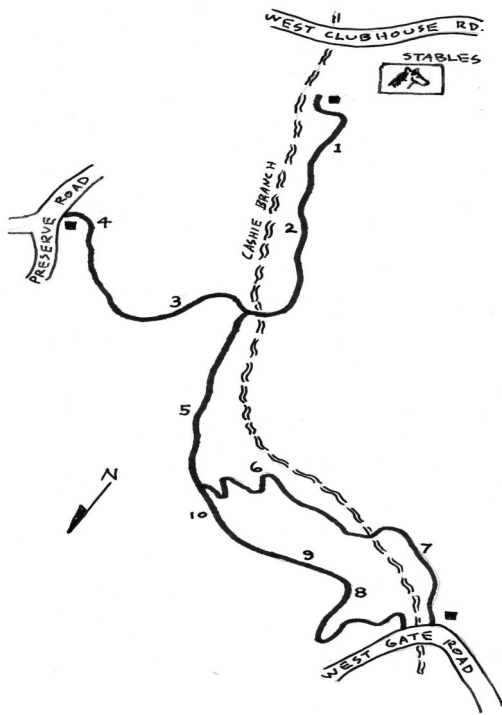
10) The rock outcropping above the trail reflects what natural weathering can accomplish with



exposed stone. This particular rock is mostly schist. An area of softer, flakier texture has weathered faster than the surrounding rock, leaving a cavity. Water infiltration combined with cycles of freezing and thawing help break up, and wash away, bits of rock over time. Rocks with harder composition or with a smooth surface may weather at slower rates. All rocks exposed to the elements are subject to this weathering cycle.

Cashie Branch Trail 4

Map not to scale



TRAIL		ROADS	
INTERPRETIVE BOXES		2 INTERPRETIVE POSTS	
STREAMS		P 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

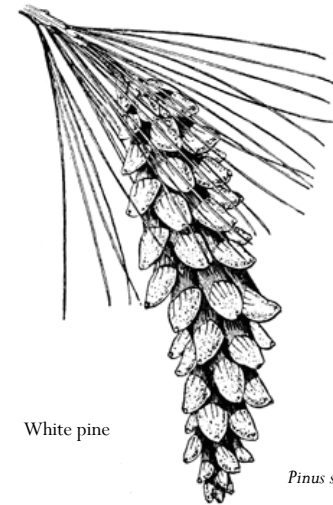
BMP Security
Phone: (828)631-1011

Interpretive Trail Guide

FOLLOWING NUMBERED POSTS PLACED ALONG TRAIL



Cashie Branch Trail 4



White pine

Pinus strobus

Terrain: Moderate terrain on old logging roads and trails along a rushing creek

Trail elevation: 600 ft elevation difference between each end

Trail length: A one way trip is 1.3 miles; the spur trail adds another 1.25 mile, one-way

Trail Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

Must see: Cascades and rock features

1) Old stumps of **American chestnut** (*Castanea dentata*) are visible on this slope, a testament to the prevalence of this former canopy tree



prior to the arrival of chestnut blight. The resistance of chestnut wood to decay, as evident here well over half a century since the tree's death, is one trait that made the chestnut valuable to early settlers.



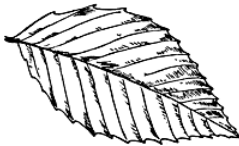
2) Downslope about 20 ft. is a tall, slender shrub with cinnamon-red peeling bark. This is an exceptionally large specimen of **mountain pepperbush** (*Clethra acuminata*). Showy white flowers appear in July, and elongate clusters of seed capsules hang throughout the winter. Shade and moisture are two

habitat preferences of this endemic Appalachian plant species. It is sometimes used in landscaping but needs moist, shaded sites to remain vigorous.

Note: To continue on the main trail, follow signs for No. 4; to reach Preserve Road and interpretive stations 3 & 4, follow signs for spur No. 4A

3) Overhead are several tall **white pines** (*Pinus strobus*), which are one of only a few species of pine in the world that can tolerate shaded competition among hardwood forests. In time, they often manage to overtop the hardwoods- something they must do to reach maturity. Compare the height of these pines with surrounding hardwoods; only the tulip-trees closely parallel them. Both these tree species are important in lumber manufacturing, due to the height, trunk straightness and rapid growth rates.

4) **Bitternut hickory** (*Carya cordiformis*) is aptly named since its nuts are high in bitter-tasting tannins. All other hickory species of the region typically have palatable and edible nuts. The bitternut is, however, our most closely related hickory to the pecan. Its thin nut shell, slightly winged fruit husk, and yellowish winter buds are traits to remember before you decide to nibble. This is a common tree in moist mountain soils, and extends to higher elevations than any other hickory.



5) On the slope above the trail stands an older resident of these woods, a large **American beech** (*Fagus grandifolia*). Its thin gray bark is smooth and distinctive. A close relative of oak and chestnut, the beech produces two small triangular nuts within a bristly husk. The nuts are often empty due to lack of pollination, but filled ones are a favorite food for grouse, turkey, rodents, deer and bear.

Note the junction of main trail No.4 and spur No. 4B; these meet again at West Gate Road to complete a loop. The next interpretive station lies along No.4.

6) The nearby tree that appears to be walking on legs is an example of a stilt-rooted **black birch** (*Betula lenta*). When a tiny birch seed germinates on a rotting log or stump, some of its roots become exposed after the hosting object fully decays. Such a "nurse log" gave this tree its beginning, but now there is no sign of it. This phenomenon is seen only in moist microclimates, and mainly involves tree species having small seeds that can germinate easily on surfaces having a minimum of soil. The large fallen hickory tree narrowly missed the birch.

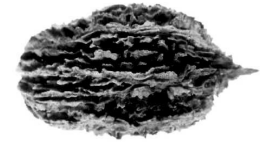


7) Look closely at the boulder above the trail to observe the **walking fern** (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*). Long leaf tips of this fern arch over and take root where they touch the ground, enabling a new plant to begin there. This

"walking" is a slow process, and is so limited by the need for constantly available moisture that these plant colonies are rarely very extensive. The walking fern's health is susceptible to careless transplanting and changes in humidity levels in their shady, often mossy habitats.

To continue on a loop using trail No. 4B, cross Cashie Branch on West Gate Road and look for the trail sign post nearby.

8) 12 ft. below the trail a **butternut** (*Juglans cinerea*) grows tall. It can be recognized by the light gray, flat-



topped bark ridges of its trunk. These walnuts are uncommon, declining due to fungal disease. This one is fairly vigorous. After dropping to the ground in autumn, its oblong, deeply grooved nuts become exposed when the overlying sticky husk decomposes.

9) Nearby stands an example of mimicry in nature. The scaly-barked hickory below the trail has bark features that suggest the shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) but is actually a **red hickory** (*Carya ovalis*). Bark appearance in the red hickory can vary from tightly ridged to loosely scaly or "shaggy," causing confusion in its identification. Close inspection of foliage, twigs and fruits confirm the true identity. This case of mimicry is coincidental, due merely to a genetic range of variation within one species. In cases of true mimicry in nature, a plant or animal species may have survival advantages by resembling another.