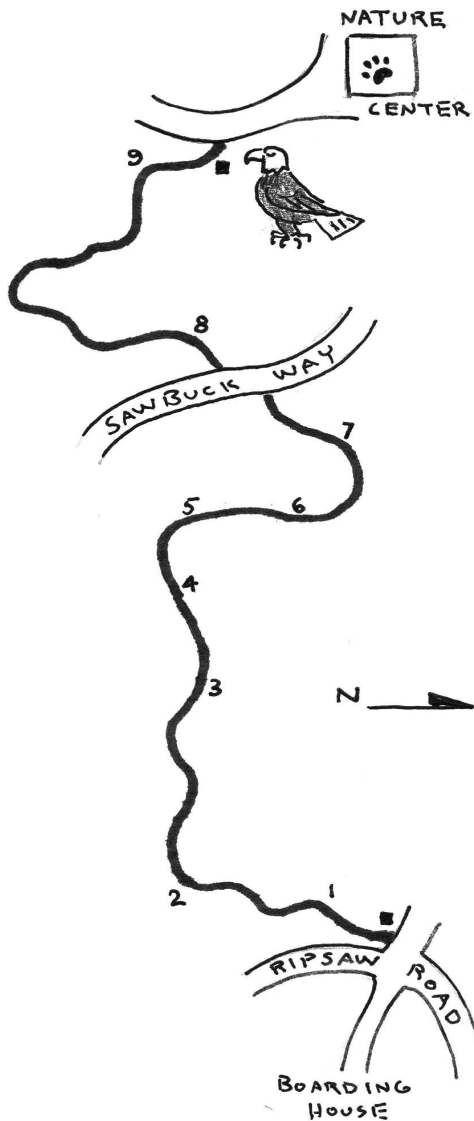


Nature's Way Trail 6

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



Nature's Way Trail 6



Chestnut oak

Quercus montana

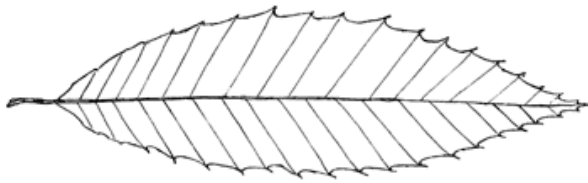
Terrain: Steep terrain with log steps; gravel road bisects trail

Trail elevation: Short drop in elevation from the Boarding House (3600'-3400')

Trail length: A one way trip is 0.3 miles

Trail Difficulty: Top to bottom is moderate to steep; bottom to top is strenuous

Must see: Nature Center & exhibits, Outside Eagle Aviary



1) On the north side of the trail an old stump of **American chestnut** (*Castanea dentata*) hints of a forest that once was. When the chestnut blight arrived in southern Appalachia around 1930, the resulting death of these dominant forest giants caused drastic ecological changes. Today there are several young chestnut sprouts nearby. However, they will likely succumb to the very same fungal disease. Looking up you will notice that this particular woodland is now dominated by a cousin of the chestnut, the **chestnut oak** (*Quercus montana*) which has a leaf shape suggesting the connection.



2) The mature **pignut hickory** (*Carya glabra*) on the south edge of the trail is characterized by slender twigs, narrowly ridged bark, and small, thin-husked fruits. Settlers applied the colloquial name since their swine would consume its small nuts. Other small-fruited hickory species in other regions may be locally known by the same name for the same reason. Hickories are an important food source for turkeys and various woodland mammals.

3) At this point a **flame azalea** (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) spreads its branches over the trail. Popular for its colorful orange spring flowers, it may seem inconspicuous in other times of the year, however its elongated capsular fruits are usually present. The flame azalea is one of the tallest of our native azalea species.

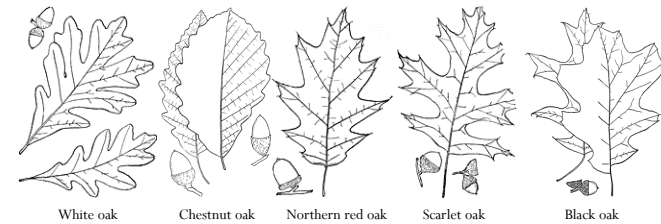
4) Here the trail crosses the spine of a secondary ridge as it traverses this generally south-facing slope. Notice the reddish color of the exposed soil here – well drained clay loam covered by a thin layer of leafy humus with its underlying mat of roots. Most fine feeder roots of plants, as well as many soil organisms, occur in this upper layer. Although the deeper soil layers provide minerals and moisture, it is the upper organic layer that harbors the majority of nutrients and greater biological diversity.

5) The mature oak tree on the south side of the trail is in deteriorating health but contributing, in its sickness, to a host of other consumers in this ecosystem. Injuries to trees, including lightning strikes, broken branches and scraped trunks, permit wood-digesting fungi to gain hold. Insects move in to devour tissues of stressed trees. Woodpeckers and other birds search out the insects, and hollowed trunks provide cavities for nesting. With time the entire tree will be decomposed and its nutrient remains used by other living plants.

6) An extremely hard and durable timber comes from the **black locust** (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), also known as yellow locust due to the color of the heartwood. Below the trail one of these trees leans onto a neighboring oak. The crooked trunk and sparse crown of the locust may not give an impression of beauty, yet this species does yield showy white flowers. This specimen reveals weathered wood projecting from a section of trunk which split apart decades ago. All parts of this tree are poisonous if eaten EXCEPT the flowers, which can be eaten fresh or batter-fried.



7) On both sides of the trail in this vicinity the **Fraser magnolia** (*Magnolia fraseri*) can be seen. The large leaves with their earlobe-like bases are a trademark trait. The thin gray bark, pointy purplish buds and showy flowers and fruit are also characteristic. This magnolia is endemic and truly symbolic of the southern Appalachian landscape - rarely seen away from shady mountain slopes and loamy forest soils.



8) Oaks are obviously of prime importance in this forest, and all 5 oak species common in the Preserve occur along this trail. Divided into two groups (subgenera), the white oaks and red oaks differ from each other in several ways. **White oak** and **chestnut oak** are our two white oak members; all others are red oak. Look among the fallen leaves for clues to the identities. Large, pale-barked white oaks grow nearby, and are also directly overhead.

9) Growing at trail's edge is a mature **black birch** (*Betula lenta*), its cherry-like bark is dark and smooth when young but becomes slightly scaly with age. Because of this bark another common name for the tree is cherry birch. And because of the wintergreen-scented sap it also received the name sweet birch.



Regardless of which name you use, this tree is a very common resident in moist mountain woodlands. It provides tasty twigs to chew and rich yellow autumn leaf colors.