

Welcome to the Ironwood Nature Trail

To follow the numbered signs, please walk the trail clockwise.

1. Ironwood

These trees are mature eastern hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*). This species is also known as



Ironwood because of the strength and durability of the wood which is so tough that chainsaws will spark when cutting it.

Ironwood was used historically for tool handles, machine shafts, and wagon axles instead of iron. In Vermont it is traditionally used to boil maple sap because it burns hot and for a long time.

Ironwood leaves have serrated edges and nearly straight parallel veins. In summer, Ironwood produces flowers, then clusters of fruits that resemble hops. The seeds within these hop-like structures provide food for deer, hare, grouse and other birds. They also give this tree its name of hophornbeam.

2. Farmland to Forest



Here you can see a fence dividing a private pasture from the Park's young forest. The large sugar maples probably germinated and grew when there was pasture on this side of the fence too. They are older than the rest of the forest which is about 50 years old.

Abandoned farmland usually starts being colonized by small shrubs and fast-growing trees after a few years. The slower growing, larger trees then begin to out-compete the trees that grew first. One of the missions of Vermont State Parks is to keep parcels of land undeveloped for everyone to commune with nature and feel the forest.

3. Virginia Creeper

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) is a climbing vine, which can grow up to 50 feet long. It is often confused with poison ivy.



Virginia creeper can be identified by its leaves, which have five leaflets with toothed edges. The leaves are green, tinted with red when young. In the Fall all the leaves turn deep red.

Virginia creeper can stand alone and send out runners along the ground, quickly covering a large area. It blooms from June through August with clusters of tiny, yellowish-green flowers. The fruits are purplish-black berries, about 1/4 inch across and are not edible.

4. Ash Trees

Green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) and white ash (*Fraxinus americana*) both have compound leaves with 5 to 9 leaflets, and brown bark with small vertical fissures often likened to cantaloupe skin. Green ash turns yellow in autumn and white ash turns purple. These trees may grow 80 feet in height and two feet in diameter.

Ash trees are threatened by the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive insect from Asia that lays

its eggs in the cambium, the inner living layer of the bark. The larvae eat tunnels in that layer, eventually killing the trees. It was first found in Vermont in March 2018.



Please slow its spread by not moving firewood from place to place.

5. Small Pond



This tiny pond was probably dug as a farm pond to water cattle or crops. There is always water in this pond, which suggests that it is naturally spring fed as well as collecting rainwater.

Springs are common in Vermont and in Grand Isle County.

With the surrounding land reverting back to forest, the pond is now naturalizing. It is home to leopard and green frogs and has been filling in with aquatic plants. It is surrounded by dogwood bushes and attracts wildlife such as deer, birds, and fox. Look for tadpoles, frogs, dragonflies, and animal tracks in the mud!

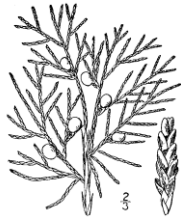
6. Red and White Cedar



In this part of the forest, you can see both northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). Northern white cedar has tiny, flat scale-like leaves, yellow-green above

and blue-green below. The bark is thin, brown, fibrous and shredding. Northern white cedar produces seeds in tiny cones at the ends of the branches. It is often planted around grave sites and called Arborvitae, or the “tree of life.”

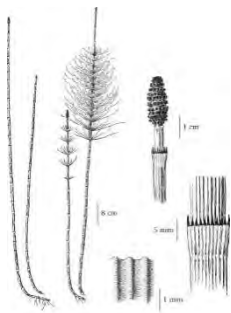
Red cedar has blue-green, scale-like and awl-like leaves that are prickly to the touch. White cedar leaves are smoother in comparison. Red cedar produces tiny round blue berry-like cones that have a pungent gin odor when crushed. Both species prefer nutrient rich soils and are often found in areas underlain by limestones and other rocks with high calcium content. Red cedar is often a pioneer of abandoned pastures.



7. Water Horsetail

The wetland vegetation you are now looking at is mainly composed of water horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), sometimes called “scouring rush” because deposits of silica in its cells make it an excellent material for scouring pots.

Water horsetail reproduces from spores rather than seeds and does not produce flowers. A spore is a tiny reproductive cell that divides and develops to form a new adult plant.



Horsetails have obvious jointed stems, with whorls of tiny scale-like leaves and branches, each topped with brown spore cone. The water horsetail is erect, slender and green, unbranched or with many

narrow branches in whorls around mid-stem.

At some places in this trail you may also see the field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), which has an upright stem, rough and green, with many rosettes of long ascending branches.

8. Sensitive Fern

Here, in the semi-forested wetland, sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) grows abundantly, preferring the moist rich soil and semi-shaded forest floor. Sensitive fern gets its name because it is one of the first plants to wither in early frosts.



The frond is light green and variable in size (up to two feet long). New pinnae often have a reddish tint.

Ferns reproduce from spores, not seeds. The spores of the sensitive fern are borne on a separate frond in bead-like capsules, hence its other common name “bead fern”.

Space for your notes and memories:

Did you visit the Overlook?

We hope you enjoyed your walk!

Grand Isle State Park, VT, 2021

Grand Isle State Park
Vermont

Ironwood Nature Trail

- A one-mile, moderate, circular trail.
- The trailhead is at the junction of East Shore Road and State Park Road, just outside the Park’s main entrance.
- Year-round public access.
- Please stay on the trail, respect wildlife and plants, and watch out for poison ivy.
- Dogs on leashes welcome.
- Pedestrians only – no bicycles.

