

The Leaflet

Walk at the Hill School by Karen Hendershot and Emily Southgate
Photos by Karen Hendershot

SPRING 2023

On December 10, Emily Southgate led the Piedmont Chapter tour of the Hill School Campus on the outskirts of Middleburg. The property consists of bush-hogged fields bordered by woodlands, with some intentional plantings. While the December chill chases many people inside, for those interested in botany it is a wonderful time to be outside. Bare branches make tree architecture more visible, buds have been formed for future growth, and many plants are spreading their seeds in preparation for spring.

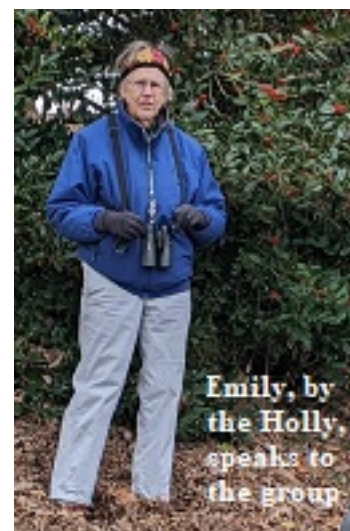
In the parking lot, Emily pointed to a White Oak (*Quercus alba*) with clustered buds, typical of oak trees, and round-lobed leaves still clinging to some branches. She pointed out that leaves don't just drop off trees in the fall; they seal off the petioles by an active process called abscission that leaves a smooth scar on the twig. Young trees have often not "learned" how to do this so their leaves hang on and die in place. Emily also showed us a cultivated English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) with shiny leaves, which could be differentiated from the American Holly species, whose leaves are dull.

Nearby, we encountered an Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), an early successional tree. The lower, younger leaves were sharp, probably helping against predation. Higher up on the tree, the older leaves flatten out and become less hazardous.

As we exited the parking lot, we saw the fuzzy buds of a Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) forming around the leaf scars. The big bud would become the flower and the smaller buds would become leaves. Visible on the bark were round white lenticels, letting air into the tree. Emily split a branch already broken from the tree to show us the green interior of the bark, capable of photosynthesis, and the pith divided into small chambers – a characteristic of the *Juglans* genus. We noticed a native Grape (*Vitis* sp.) entwined in the tree. Grape tendrils (modified twigs) allow them to hang on to a small tree and to grow with it, rather than strangling the tree as do Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*).

In the field, we had to guard against tripping on the low-growing, smooth red berry vine. Linda Murphy thought it looked like the invasive Japanese Blackberry (*Rubus parvifolius*) we had seen at the Blandy Experimental Farm two years ago.

A bounty of plants in seed was visible throughout the field, and we witnessed how even humans can become agents of Mother Nature's distribution network. The snowy fluff of Goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.) and the white sparkly seeds of the beautiful auburn grass called Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) became airborne as we brushed past. The hooked fruits of Agrimony (*Agrimonia* sp.) and (continued on page 2)



The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), founded as the Virginia Wildflower Society in 1982, is a non-profit organization of people who share an interest in Virginia's wild plants and habitats and a concern for their protection.

The Piedmont Chapter is a sub-group of VNPS in the northern point of Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It includes Loudoun, Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Warren, Clarke, and Frederick counties.

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The Leaflet can be seen online in color at
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Walk at the Hill School (continued)

the sticky triangular fruits of Tick-trefoil (*Desmodium sp.*) clung to our clothes, as they would to animal fur, to be moved to new locations.

Punctuating the field were yellow globes of Horse-nettle fruits (*Solanum carolinense*). Emily navigated the thorns and squished a fruit to show the seeds,



similar to those of tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*). Both are in the Nightshade (Solanaceae) Family. Don't lick your fingers if you squish a Horse-nettle fruit! It is one of the deadly Nightshades.

As we approached the woodland, Ed LeGrand used his *Winter Tree Finder* booklet to key out a tree species. When he came to "If the twigs and buds are smooth; side buds almost at right angles to the twig," we knew it was Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*). Why the common name? Look at the snout on the fruit!

Natalie Izlar, an intern with Virginia Working Landscapes at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, spotted a particularly interesting plant to see in winter, Seedbox (*Ludwigia sp.*), whose fruits look like ornately carved boxes. Natalie opened a fruit and inside were dozens of tiny golden seeds.

Seedboxes tend to like damp conditions and nearby was a Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*), another sign that the terrain was becoming wetter. Indeed, in this area we found a large colony of Cattails (*Typha sp.*). Their spongy leaves are filled with air pockets that allow air to circulate to the roots, which are growing in water where they cannot absorb the oxygen needed for respiration. (Think of the consequences of overwatering your houseplants.)

As we returned to the parking lot, we encountered a Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), which will have lovely racemes of fragrant white flowers in the spring but is sometimes disparaged for its thorns and weedy habit. Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) is also seen in our area. It, like Black Locust, is in the Legume Family (Fabaceae). Emily pointed out that the thorns of the Black Locust are modified stipules (outgrowth at the base of the leaf) and are formed around leaf scars. Thorns on the Honey Locust are modified twigs. They are much bigger and often are branched.



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Walk at the Hill School (continued)

This walk was a delightful way to spend an afternoon. Carol Dennis mentioned that Master Naturalists get educational credits for attending our events. Master Naturalist or not, a Piedmont Chapter walk is always fun and informative.



Walk at The Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve

Text and photos by Sally Anderson

The Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve is notable for its habitats and plant communities as well as its cultural history. The 2,350-acre preserve is owned by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and was dedicated as a Natural Area Preserve by Virginia Natural Heritage Program in 2002. Our leader was Preserve Manager Joe Villari (welcomed recently as a member of the VNPS State Board of Directors), a capable leader well versed in all of the aspects of this property. While the northern section that we visited is only accessible on tours, the southern section is open and is also worth a visit.

Bull Run Mountains has been extensively studied since at least the 1930s when Henry Allard regularly took the train from Washington, DC and made extensive plant collections. A few years ago, many of his notebooks were transcribed and digitized through the Smithsonian Institution. Geology, rattlesnakes, birds, insect diversity, history and Natural Heritage inventories have been published, and a study of ecology within dead wood is ongoing. The property is also used to host children and adults to teach about these topics. The website has information on these studies if you would like to know more.

Our first sighting before leaving the meeting spot at the Stone House was a very large Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), in my opinion, an under-appreciated tree with important wildlife associations. The woods were beautiful and relatively free of invasive plants, yet all along the way we saw evidence of past human use. We crossed a rock outcrop that had been a quarry. Later, near a creek, we saw several remnant foundations. Another clue were double trunked trees, that Joe explained were the result of 'coppice logging', where a tree is cut and re-sprouts to become a double trunked tree that can be cut again later.



Although it was winter, there were bits of green everywhere. Ferns, lycophytes, orchids, mosses, lichens, liverworts, Hepatica and evergreen trees were spotted along the trails, interspersed with dormant but still recognizable tree species and last year's flower and fruit remnants. We had an interesting discussion around a Tulip Tree stump, which was continuing to try and heal itself but was growing down into its stump. It must be receiving nutrients through mycorrhizal connections in the soil.

At the end of the walk we toured the Stone House, where work is being done to make it useable for programs. This is a fantastic preserve and I always feel lucky to visit there.



Group at the Stone House



Group surrounded by *Dendroscoparium obscurum*, Common Tree Clubmoss.



Andreae Family Wellness and Recreation Trail Text and photos by Sally Anderson

You never know what weather you'll get for our February walk, so chilly but reasonable temperatures, a little sunshine, and low winds were a pleasant surprise when we visited the new trails at Warren Memorial Hospital in Front Royal. The Andreae Family Wellness and Recreation Trail was completed within the last year by a professional trail building company, with both the land and the trails donated by the family to the Valley Health Foundations.

The hill behind the new hospital gives views of the Shenandoah Valley and the Mountains to the northwest. The woods in the lower section appear to be on rock that produces a somewhat acidic soil, reflected in the plant community with the presence of lots of Ericaceous plants, such as Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Blueberry/Huckleberry shrubs (*Vaccinium* and/or *Gaylussacia*), Wild or Pinxterbloom Azalea (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*), and Maleberry (*Lyonia ligustrina*) as we walked.

Two common pines grow in the woods. Old Field or Virginia Pine (*Pinus virginiana*) probably filled the hillside when it was logged at some time in the past. Now, except in one little clearing, the trees are tall and sparse, nearing the



Trailing Arbutus leaves



Short Leaf Pine resin pits



Looking at a big tree

end of their life span. The other is the Short Leaf Pine (*Pinus echinata*), with slightly longer needles and larger cones and a stately crown. A close examination of the tree will show its characteristic resin pits on the trunk where the outside layer of bark has flaked away.

The remainder of the lower forest has several species of oaks (*Quercus*), many of which can be identified in winter because of distinctive bark and by looking at leaves on the forest floor, since they last better than other leaves. It was even warm enough to stop to look at the mosses, lichens and a few mushrooms.

These trails are open to the public and the hospital lots have plenty of parking. A well-made trail with a good map and signs make this a place anyone can explore. Our group only made it to the first overlook, but there is plenty of room to roam. Check the hospital's website for maps and guidelines.



Chapter Events: Register at piedmontvnps@gmail.com. Attendance is limited, so register early.

Tuesday	Mar 7	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			
Saturday	Mar 11	1pm	Wildcat Mountain Walk
Fauquier County. Walk through the early spring woodlands near Warrenton. Learn about land use history and, hopefully, see Hepatica and Pennywort in bloom.			
Sunday	Apr 2	1pm	G. Richard Thompson WMA Invasive Removal
Fauquier County. We will look for early signs of spring while we pull Garlic Mustard, led by Sally Anderson. Bring gloves and drinking water.			
Tuesday	Apr 4	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			
Saturday	Apr 8	10am	Shenandoah River State Park Walk
Warren County. Master Naturalist Richard Stromberg will lead a walk to see Bluebells and other spring flowers along the Shenandoah River.			
Thursday	Apr 13	1pm	Balls Bluff Regional Park Walk
Loudoun County. Join Emily Southgate to discover some of our earliest ephemerals like Bluebells, Harbinger-of-spring, Bloodroot, Dutchman's Breeches and others on a trail overlooking the Potomac River near Leesburg.			
Saturday	Apr 15	10am-noon	Calmes Neck Bluebell Walk
Clarke County. VNPS members and Calmes Neck residents only. See early spring wildflowers along the Shenandoah River. Walk is moderate and a walking stick is recommended. Bring lunch, water, and insect repellent.			
Friday	Apr 28	5pm	G. Richard Thompson WMA Trillium Walk
Fauquier County. Master Naturalist Sally Anderson will lead this evening walk to see millions of Trilliums and other spring flowers.			
Tuesday	May 2	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			
Saturday & Sunday May 13 & 14			9am-4:30pm
State Arboretum Garden Fair			
Clarke County. Several native plant vendors and lots of information available. Another opportunity to help us by sitting at a Piedmont Chapter booth (includes free admission), contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com . The chapter is sponsoring a walk in the Arboretum. See https://blandy.virginia.edu/garden-fair-2022 for more information.			
Tuesday	Jun 6	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			

Other Events

Saturday	Apr 22	9am-3pm	Native Plant Sale
Loudoun County. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Native Plant Sale at Morven Park. Information at https://loudounwildlife.org/event/spring-native-plant-sale/			
Saturday & Sunday May 6 & 7			Wildflower Weekend at Shenandoah National Park
Appreciate the diversity of wildflowers growing in the Blue Ridge. More than 1,300 species of plants thrive in Shenandoah National Park, a haven for native woodland wildflowers. Information at https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/event-details.htm?id=FC612FD4-FCAE-57E1-6C424B9DF839D106 .			

See our Special Violets Edition at <https://vnps.org/piedmont/newsletter/>

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Curlyheads (*Clematis ochroleuca*)

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