

The Leaflet

Serendipity on the Royal Shenandoah Greenway by Karen Hendershot

AUTUMN 2025

A botanical gem resides in the southwest corner of Front Royal, along the edges of the Royal Shenandoah Greenway. The Greenway, finished about a decade ago through the efforts of the Front Royal/Warren County Tree Stewards, is a 5.2-mile walking path encircling much of town. On June 14, Richard Stromberg led us on an exploration of the remarkable plant community lying between Eastham Park and Skyline High School. Our group included participants from as far away as Orange, Virginia.

Much of the path is shaded by trees and tall shrubs. Oaks (*Quercus spp.*), Hickories (*Carya spp.*), Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and Common Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) are underlain by Common Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), Eastern Boxelder (*Acer negundo*), Eastern Redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*), and Black Haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*), the last heavy with fruit. Richard also pointed out a prominent nonnative, a Tricolor European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* "Tricolor"), planted to honor deceased Tree Steward, James Huttar, who was instrumental in developing the Greenway.

The real appeal for us, however, was the rich collection of native plants that have a home here. In particular, we were looking for the lovely Northern Leatherflower or Vase-vine (*Clematis viorna*), cousin to our Chapter flower, Curlyheads (*Clematis ochroleuca*).

Among our first finds were the dainty flowers of White Avens (*Geum canadense*), their green pointed sepals visible between five white petals making it look like a fancy button.

Another white-flowered beauty stood by our path: Thimbleweed or Tall Anemone (*Anemone virginiana*), a name derived from the shape of its fruit.

We saw two examples of the genus Fleabane (*Erigeron*), their branching stems full of white flowers. Daisy Fleabane (*E. strigosus*) has narrow, sparse leaves and flower heads slightly bowed. Annual Fleabane (*E. annuus*) has wider, denser leaves and erect flowers.

Our path was punctuated by Common Wild-petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), a low plant with lavender flowers against dark green leaves. Nearby a large spike of bright blue flowers caught our eye. It was Nettle-leaf Sage (*Salvia urticifolia*). Square stems indicated the plant was in the

Mint (Lamiaceae) Family.



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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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Serendipity on the Royal Shenandoah Greenway (continued)

The exotic-looking but native Climbing Milkvine (*Matelea obliqua*), with its fat round leaves and whirly burgundy flowers, bedazzled me when I saw it here a few years ago. This time flowers were sparse but we also found a milkweed-like seed pod (technically called a follicle). While Milkvines (*Matelea*) are in a separate genus from Milkweeds (*Asclepias*), both are members of the Dogbane (Apocynaceae) family, characterized by a milky sap and frequently bearing seeds in follicles. A second unique vine, Wild Potato-vine (*Ipomoea pandurata*), with some leaves heart-shaped and others slightly lobed, was visible nearby. A member of the Morning Glory (Convolvulaceae) Family, it will have showy white blossoms with a magenta center in summer.

Richard showed us a Missouri Gooseberry (*Ribes missouriense*) in fruit. Introduced from the Midwest, it is not native in Virginia, although Virginia does have the native Appalachian Gooseberry (*Ribes rotundifolium*). At this stage they look similar. The now-gone flowers of Missouri Gooseberry are white while Appalachian Gooseberry's are purple.

Richard also pointed out the native berries Common Dewberry (*Rubus flagellaris*), a creeping form of the blackberry with thin stems, and Black Raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*), recognizable by its glaucous (waxy, whitish coated), purple canes. Sadly, Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*), an invasive nonnative, with numerous red prickles, was abundant as well.

We found a large colony of Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) and peeked beneath the leaves, but we were too late to see any maroon flowers. Richard noted that this area also contains the spring ephemeral, Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) and pointed to another fading ephemeral, Toadshade (*Trillium sessile*).

Other common native plants were also present. Among them were Pale Jewelweed (*Impatiens pallida*), Shining Bedstraw (*Galium concinnum*), American Germander (*Teucrium canadense*), and Fringed Loosestrife (*Steironema ciliatum*) with its slightly toothed yellow flowers and hairy (fringed) petioles (leaf stalks). We also saw Yellow Crownbeard (*Verbesina occidentalis*), not yet flowering but we noticed the winged stems. We were reminded that the "o" in Crownbeard matches the "o" in its opposite leaf structure, differentiating it from similar-looking alternative-leaved Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*). Horse-nettle (*Solanum carolinense*), often disparaged for its prickly stems and leaves, was in full bloom, attracting pollinators.



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Serendipity on the Royal Shenandoah Greenway (continued)

Among the native grasses were Deer-Tongue Grass (*Dichanthelium clandestinum*), which has stout culms (stalks) with clasping, rough blades. What is clandestine about it? In addition to floral panicles that open in the spring, it has a second set of cleistogamous (closed, self-pollinating) flowers hidden in the sheaths of the leaves that will be produced later in the year. A large stand of Bottlebrush Grass (*Elymus hystrix*), with spikes matching its common name, formed a statuesque foreground against the forest.

It is not unusual for any area that has been disturbed by construction to host an influx of nonnative plants. Among those we saw were Yellow Sweet-clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), tiny Deptford Pinks (*Dianthus armeria*), the bright blue flowers of coffee-substitute Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*), White Campion (*Silene latifolia*) and three species of Dock: Bitter, Curly, and Clustered (*Rumex obtusifolius*, *R. crispus*, and *R. conglomeratus*). Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and the shrub, Chinese Privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), were also here. The weedy shrub, Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), whose nativity is uncertain, dominated many areas.

The day had been interesting. Still, as professional botanical artist and Piedmont Chapter member, Elena Borkland, and I walked back toward the parking lot, we shared disappointment that we had not seen the advertised star of the show, Northern Leatherflower (*Clematis viorna*). We stopped to catch our breath and, as she gazed at the hillside, Elena exclaimed, “Wait, I think this is it!” There, hiding in the greenery was a sweet, pink bud. Marjorie Prochaska arrived and said “There’s got to be more” and within seconds, Penny from Orange, Virginia, said “I think I see some!” Our day had gone from good to great through the serendipity of a pause in our walk and the sharp eyes of our members.





VNPS Piedmont Chapter Hike to Pua Falls text and photos by Elena Borkland

On July 12, a beautiful, warm summer day, fifteen people met at the Appalachian Trail Morgan's Mill Road access for a hike. Fortunately, deep forest shaded the trail down to Pua Falls, keeping us fairly cool. At the start of our hike, we came across White Avens (*Geum canadense*), White Vervain (*Verbena urticifolia*), Virginia Knotweed aka Jumpseed (*Persicaria virginiana*), Lopseed (*Phryma leptostachya*), and Naked-Flowered Tick-trefoil (*Hylodesmum nudiflorum*) sporting their small blooms, along with an awful lot of Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*). A nice clump of one of my favorites, Ghost Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), sprouted by the side of the trail. Common Black Cohosh aka Fairy Candles (*Actaea racemosa*) and seedling Maple-leaf Viburnums (*Viburnum acerifolium*) were also spotted.

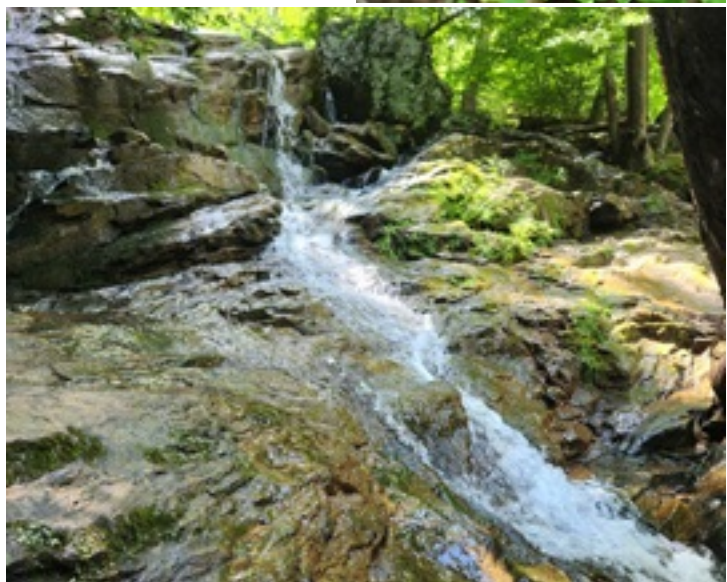


One tiny plant caught my attention—it was not on our list, but Natalie identified it as Nailwort. Upon looking it up, it was Smooth Forked Nailwort (*Paronychia canadensis*). Its tiny green flowers were visible only through a magnifying glass, the overall look of the plant very delicate and lacy.



Deeper in the forest a huge Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) was vining up a Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*). As the trail descended, several spring-blooming plants, somewhat bedraggled, were visible: a Showy Orchid (*Galearis spectabilis*), Wild Licorice (*Galium circaeazans*), Round-lobed Hepatica (*Hepatica americana*) Early Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*), and Solomon's Plume setting seed.

Nearing the falls we found Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) and a patch of ferns, including Silvery Spleenwort (*Deparia acrostichoides*), Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) and Southern Lady Fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*). Walking this trail section in spring would be worthwhile.



Pua Falls was visible at an offset just above the trail, it's refreshing coolness welcome. Several of us climbed up the rocky hill for a closer look at the falls, where the view was obstructed by a fallen log. We lingered here resting and enjoying the cool air. Several plants were growing near the rocks: a large American Basswood (*Tilia americana*), one Bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*), Yellow Jewelweed (*Impatiens pallida*) on the banks of the creek, and a plant new to me, Horse Balm (*Collinsonia canadensis*).

The climb back up the hill was quite an effort as the temperature rose. As hikers straggled back to the parking lot, there was nary a dry back or brow, but the hike was well worth the effort.



Registration notices for Chapter events will be sent out three weeks before the event. Business meetings will conclude (about 3:30-4) with a discussion of a current topic. Members are encouraged to join us.

Tuesday	Sep. 2	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	Sep 14	10am	Piedmont Prairie Walk
Culpeper County. The twenty foot grassland along Raccoon Ford Road has not been overtaken by woody plants because it is periodically mowed offering a unique habitat in northern Virginia. This is a level roadside walk.			
Friday-Sunday	Sep. 19-21		VNPS Annual Meeting
Skelton 4-H Center on Smith Mountain Lake see https://vnps.org/events/2025-annual-meeting-and-program/			
Saturday	Oct 18	10am-noon	Piedmont Chapter Annual Meeting
Fauquier County. Meeting and Election of Officers and Board of Directors at Three Fox Winery followed by a walk on the property. Details will be sent to you in the meeting notice.			
Saturday	Nov 8	1pm	TBD
Tuesday	Dec 2	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	Dec 12	1pm	TBD

If you are not receiving regular emails from the VNPS Piedmont Chapter, please contact our Vice President Mitzi Fox at fox57va@gmail.com. We send emails for every walk and for other events. To search for your emails from us, search "PiedmontVNPS@gmail.com" in your email folders including the spam folder.

Ice Mountain Walk by Lori Kesner photos by Richard Stromberg

On a perfect day in August, the VNPS Piedmont Chapter hosted an exploration of the botanical wonders of Ice Mountain led by Chapter Board Member and Nature Conservancy docent Kristin Zimet. Ice Mountain is part of a 149-acre preserve in the community of North River Mills in Hampshire County, West Virginia. It belongs to the Nature Conservancy, and the National Park Service has designated it as a National Natural Landmark. You can read about it at

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/ice-mountain-preserve/>

We were fortunate to have a wealth of knowledgeable people to guide us on our journey, sharing both history and botany. Flora on the preserve is amazingly diverse. We saw special Appalachian endemic plants, such as Minniebush (*Menziesia pilosa*) and the ancient Appalachian Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium appalachianum*). Appalachian Oak Fern is a basal species going back before many modern ferns evolved.



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Ice Mountain Walk (continued)

Minniebush can be identified by the white mucro at the tip of the leaves. A mucro is a short, sharp point at the end of an organ. We found plants typical of Canada, New England, and very high elevations at this latitude, such as Northern Bedstraw (*Galium boreale*); Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), a tiny dogwood; and Canada Mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*). Most surprising, we saw plants that belong in Siberia, the Arctic, and high latitudes around the world, such as Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) and Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*). Twinflower was Linnaeus' favorite plant.



Minniebush



Twinflower



Northern Bedstraw

On a day that got up to 84 degrees, we felt cold air blowing from vents along the North River. We measured the temperature at the entrance to a vent. It was 46 degrees! We learned how a special combination of geological features makes the cold vents work, making it possible for boreal plants to survive there. They have persisted at Ice Mountain since the last Ice Age.

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Ice Mountain Walk (continued)

If you would like to experience Ice Mountain, you need to go with a docent. You can schedule a guided hike by filling out a form at <http://www.stevebailes.org/icemountain/request.php>.





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Curlyheads (*Clematis ochroleuca*)

Bunchberry & Canada Mayflower in June



Black Haw Viburnum on Royal Shenandoah Greenway



Richard Stromberg