

The



Leaflet

Cedar Mountain Battlefield Walk by Linda Murphy

AUTUMN 2026

If a tree could talk, I wonder what it's story would be. The June 6 walk was at the Cedar Mountain Battlefield, one of the Culpeper Battlefields State Park sites. It is home to what is known as a 'witness tree': a Southern Red Oak (*Quercus falcata*) that was a mature tree at the time of the 1862 battle involving the 3rd Wisconsin Infantry.

The park is dedicated to the civil war battles fought in Culpeper County. It also offers the

opportunity to explore the outdoors as one learns American Civil War History from strategically placed exhibits. The Cedar Mountain site sits in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is largely an oak-hickory forest remnant with indicators of continuous agricultural activity. An indentation in the forest floor may have been a ground silo. The presence of daffodils and daylilies in a clearing speak of a homesite. The walk explored the one-mile optional interpretive trail that is primarily wooded.

Spring had completed awakening. From the parking area, the trail heads through the woods that reveals a mix of hardwoods of varying sizes and ages. Oak and Hickory are primary tree species accompanied by other species usually found in their company. The forest floor is covered with tree seedlings. The variety of tree sizes indicates a healthy woods free of heavy deer browse.

Digging through forest litter revealed Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*) nuts. Blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*), Strawberry Bush (*Euonymus americanus*), Southern Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), and Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), among others, make up the understory. The presence of invasive species (Japanese Honeysuckle, Multiflora Rose, Stilt Grass) appears largely at the edges.

In the open area that once served as a homesite, a patch of flowering Indian Hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*) attracted a Great Spangled Fritillary butterfly, bees, and flies. Other native wildflowers favoring full sun were also present.

As we headed back into the woods, a change occurred as the land dropped into an area that serves as a drainage for storm runoff and, possibly, a small spring. American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) spread across the downward slope. Sadly, they are showing signs of Beech Leaf Disease. (continued on page 2)





Cedar Mountain Battlefield Walk (continued)

Understory species include Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Spice Bush (*Lindera benzoin*), American Holly (*Ilex opaca*), and Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) past their peak bloom. The floor is home to extensive outcrops of New York Fern (*Parathelypteris noveboracensis*), Running-cedar (*Diphasiastrum digitatum*), and Partridge Berry (*Mitchella repens*), among others. Tall pines stand sentry over all.

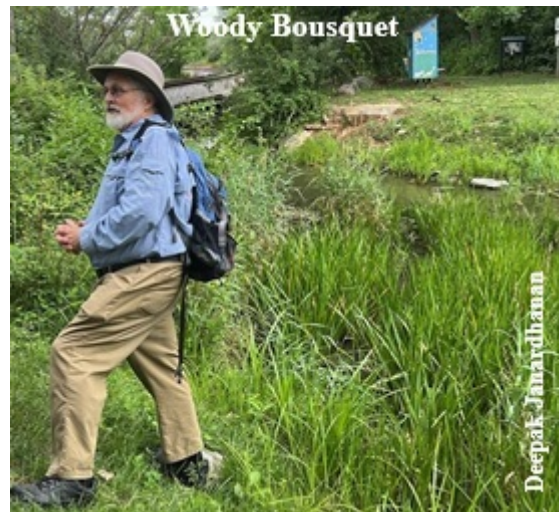
Cedar Mountain Battlefield is one of four sites of Virginia's 43rd State Park. The variety of ecosystems offer the opportunity to merge interest in nature with the knowledge of one of our nation's historic events.



Abrams Creek Wetlands by Deepak Janardhanan

At the western edge of the City of Winchester lies Abrams Creek Wetlands, that traces its origins back to the end of the last ice age, when retreating glaciers left behind a unique environment and microclimate.

The scientific designation for the Abrams Creek Wetlands is a Calcareous Muck Fen. The wetland is fed not only by rainwater but also by cold groundwater sources rich in calcium and magnesium. This creates a cool microclimate that is unique to this part of the Shenandoah Valley, supporting a range of northern sedges, rushes, and grasses that are native to prairies but rare in Virginia. This is the geological history that Professor Woody Bousquet expertly shared with a group of native plant enthusiasts on Saturday, July 11.



Along the paved path that cuts across the wetland, participants learned to distinguish between sedges, rushes, and grasses. These include Torrey's Rush (*Juncus torreyi*) and the Knotted Rush (*Juncus nodosus*), which can be distinguished by the size and clustering of their flowers. *Juncus torreyi* features larger, closely packed clusters, while *Juncus nodosus* has smaller flower heads placed further apart.

Walking down the path, we saw an abundance of Willowleaf Aster (*Symphyotrichum praealtum*), not blooming yet. These prairie natives have established a niche at Abrams Creek due to the open spaces free of encroaching trees. They are known in only one other place in Virginia.



(continued on page 3)



Abrams Creek Wetlands (continued)

Further down, the group surveyed a large clump of Wheat Sedge (*Carex atherodes*) from the trail's raised boardwalk. Seeing this sedge was a rare treat because it is typically found only in prairie wetlands.



The group also stepped off the path to walk along the railway tracks running alongside the wetland to observe some unique plants, in particular the Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*). Other notable, though not necessarily rare, observations at this site included Water Hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*), Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), and several Willows (*Salix* spp.). The Willows have cone-like galls caused by the larvae of a tiny insect, the Willow Pinecone Gall Midge (*Rabdophaga strobiloides*). The midge lays its eggs on the plant's buds, causing the developing leaves to form these distinctive galls.

The Abrams Creek Wetlands preserve is a remarkable conservation success story. Much thanks is owed to the partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to keeping this preserve healthy and vibrant, including the City of Winchester (specifically the Parks and Recreation Department), Shenandoah University, Winchester-Clarke Garden Club, Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, Opequon Watershed, Inc. (TOW), and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

While the focus of this walk was primarily on rare plants, this wetland also hosts a large many mammals and birds during their annual migrations. Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society organizes walks throughout the year focusing on the nearly 180 species of birds that transit or nest at Abrams Creek, which promises to be a treat of its own.





Third Battle of Winchester Park article and photos by Richard Stromberg

After the explosion of blossoms in spring, the number of flowers seem to me to dwindle as summer progresses. But I was surprised at how many flowers I saw last year when I toured the Third Battle of Winchester Park in August. So, I led the Piedmont Chapter's August walk there this year.

We saw three different Mulleins (*Verbascum* spp.) The first was a Moth Mullein (*V. blattaria*) in the grass near the parking lot, with its spike of white flowers with reddish centers. Many Great Mulleins (*V. Thapsus*) stood in the fields in the distance. They had finished flowering and stood in the fields like scarecrows. Further along the gravel path was another Mullein, full of yellow flowers. Clasp leaves said this was Clasp or Orange Mullein (*V. phlomoides*). None of them are native.



Moth Mullein



Great Mullein



Orange Mullein

We saw two Bindweed vines trailing through the grass. Both had trumpet-shaped white flowers like Morning Glories and long, triangular leaves with basal lobes. Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) flowers were less than an inch wide. The basal leaf lobes were pointed. Hedge Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) flowers were up to three inches wide. The basal leaf lobes were square.

Sally Anderson saw another vine with rounded leaf lobes, but it wasn't another Bindweed. It was Honeyvine (*Cynanchum laeve*). It had clusters of tiny, white flowers in the leaf axils. This species is related to Milkweeds and often has Monarch caterpillars, but this one had none. (continued on page 5)



Field Bindweed



Hedge Bindweed



Honeyvine



Third Battle of Winchester Park (continued)

Sally also saw several clumps of white flowers beyond the split rail fence a few feet from the path. They were Flowering Spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*). The flat-topped inflorescence was made up of tiny flowers, each flower surrounded by five roundish petal-like bracts.

A large cylinder of scat in the grass had an Hackberry Emperor butterfly (*Asterocampa celtis*) at one end and a Tawny Emperor butterfly (*A. clyton*) at the other, with a Common House Fly (*Musca domestica*) between them.



Flowering
Spurge



Hackberry Emperor

Tawny
Emperor

Emily Southgate noticed a branch reaching down from a tree with a dense cluster of leaves at its tip. It seemed to be a formation caused by some kind of infection, often called a “Witches Broom.” The leaves had no lobes, but other leaves up in the tree did, so we figured it was a Mulberry. Then we saw some fruits, confirming that. The shiny leaves indicated that it was the non-native White Mulberry (*Morus alba*) rather than the native Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*).

(continued on page 7)



White Mulberry
witches broom



Registration notices for Chapter events will be sent out three weeks before the event. Business meetings will conclude with a discussion of a current topic. Members are encouraged to join us.

Tuesday	Sep 1	3-5pm	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 12	10am	Walk at Gilbert's Corner Regional Park
Culpeper County. Emily Southgate will lead this walk in a habitat that we usually do not see - early successional woodland, i.e., what would happen if you stopped bush-hogging your field.			
Saturday	Sep 19	1pm	Nature Journaling at Clifton Institute
Fauquier County. Eleanor Harris, Co-Director of the Clifton Institute, will give a brief introduction to nature journaling with suggestions for ways to journal about native plants. Then we will practice outside before coming together to share what we've learned.			
Saturday	Oct 10	noon-2pm	Piedmont Chapter Annual Meeting
County. Meeting and Election of Officers and Board of Directors at Northern Fauquier Community Park followed by a walk on the property. Details will be sent to you in the meeting notice.			
Tuesday	Nov 3	3-5pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	Nov 14	10am	Doves Landing Park Walk
Prince William County. Joint walk at Doves Landing Park with Prince William Wildflower Society			
Tuesday	Dec 1	3-5pm	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	10am	Little Stony Creek Walk
Shenandoah County. Forest Road 92 (Little Stony Creek) led by Natalie Itzar			

SAVE THE DATE!

VNPS Annual Meeting October 2 - 4, 2026



This fall's annual meeting will be held October 2-4 at the [Airfield Conference Center](#) near Wakefield, VA on Airfield Lake. A number of Natural Area Preserves are in the area so there will be plenty of great places for field trips. Watch for details in the coming months and mark your calendar now.



Third Battle of Winchester Park (continued)

Another find was a clump of leaves less than a foot high with yellow flowers hanging down under the leaves—Longleaf Ground-cherry (*Physalis longifolia*).

Carla Overbeck asked if we would see any Butter-and-eggs (*Linaria vulgaris*). The Park had sprayed herbicide along the fence line beside the trail, but eventually Butter-and-eggs showed up in abundance away from the fence.

As the path curved around the Ohio Civil War monument we enjoyed the bright orange splotches of Butterfly-weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and one Ironweed. We knew it was Upland Ironweed (*Vernonia glauca*) because it was not growing around water, but also because the pappus was pale. Towering above the one-to-two-foot-tall grasses were occasional six-to-seven-foot stalks of Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*) with unopened flower buds.



Longleaf Ground-cherry



Butter-and-eggs



Butterfly-weed



Upland Ironweed

An Allegheny Monkeyflower (*Mimulus ringens*) flower greeted us at eye-level as we reached Redbud Run. Just beyond, spectacular Swamp Rose-mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) blossoms were amazing. This side of the Run was lined with masses of Rose-mallows as far as the eye could see upstream and down. We bent down to determine what the low plants growing in the muck beside the Run were: American Water Plantain (*Alisma subcordatum*) with wide leaves and small, three-petaled flowers; Mild Water-pepper (*Persicaria hydropiperoides*) with narrow leaves and spikes of even smaller flowers; and Water Speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*) with typical Speedwell flowers—lower of the four petals not as wide as the other three. An Ironweed was probably New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) because it was growing in the water, but its buds had not opened, so we could not check the pappus.

Allegheny
Monkeyflower

Swamp Rose-mallow



As we had spent over an hour moving less than a mile and the sky was darkening, we turned around and beat the rain back to the cars. Carla Overbeck summed it up, “It was a great walk with great company, and I had no idea there were so many interesting plants to look at.” (continued on page 8)



Third Battle of Winchester Park (continued)



Queen-of-the-Prairie Progress

In the summer of 2021, Clifton Institute Director Bert Harris was alerted to the existence of a stand of Queen of the Prairie (*Filipendula rubra*) on the edge boundary of Rady Park, a Town of Warrenton facility. A rare plant, listed in only seven Virginia counties, all but Fauquier located in southwestern Virginia, it is, ironically, a showy plant in flower and can be purchased in many nurseries. In the wild, however, it needs and deserves protection to avoid extinction as a wild plant.

July 14 this year, Gary Rzepecki, Director of Fauquier County Parks & Recreation wrote to Bert, "I took a stroll through Rady park around 7am and was surprised to see about 20 blooms of the Queen of the Prairie!" July 22, Bert wrote, "I stopped by a few days ago myself and couldn't believe the response from the plants. It looks like there are more QOP on the Rady Park side of the fence than on the private property now! Nevertheless, our Grassland Steward Heather Poyner will try again to get in touch with the landowner there (Joe Saffer). Heather is also available to help manage invasives that are causing trouble for the QOP. And we'll be collecting some seeds with the goal of reintroducing this species at a few other sites in the county where it has disappeared."



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**PIEDMONT CHAPTER
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 336
THE PLAINS, VA 20198**



Curlyheads (Clematis ochroleuca)

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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Editor: **Richard Stromberg** richsybi@gmail.com

The Leaflet can be seen on-line in color at www.vnps.org/piedmont

The Chapter's email address is piedmontvnps@gmail.com

Social Media Coordinator: Nan McCary nanmccarry@gmail.com

OFFICERS

Emily Southgate *President* ewbsouthgate@gmail.com

Vice President vacant

Sally Anderson *Treasurer* rccsca@comcast.net

Paige Ober *Secretary* p.mcober@gmail.com

DIRECTORS

Ed Clark edwardalbertclark@gmail.com

Natalie Izlar natalie.izlar@gmail.com

Ed LeGrand edmundlegrand@gmail.com

Jack Monsted jm9ks@virginia.edu

Julie Olechnicki rvr9xe@virginia.edu

Richard Stromberg richsybi@gmail.com

Kristin Zimet kristinzimet@yahoo.com