

WALKS in the Pine Creek WATERSHED

To promote the importance of the local watershed to area residents and to encourage everyone to enjoy its natural beauty and diversity, the Outreach Committee of the Pine Creek Watershed Assessment has developed five self-guided walking tours of the watershed.

These hikes average an hour of walking. For safety, always hike with a partner and for the protection of plant and animal life, stay on the trails. Taking along a small plastic bag to carry away some litter from along the trail is a simple way to further enhance these natural resources. Take a camera and share with us **your** walk in the watershed!

1) IRMA KOST NATURAL AREA

This beautiful area is at the eastern end of the Hampton Municipal Park. To get there go 1.4 miles north of the intersection of Route 8 and Duncan Avenue (Green Belt) past Harts Run Road on the right, to McCully Rd. (just before Craighead office complex). This is a dangerous right hand turn so go slowly off Route 8.

Continue another 1.3 miles passing the Hampton High School, Hampton Park, the Red Barn Theatre, & Hampton Municipal Building, to the third downhill slope. A good-size gravel parking area on the left is at the entrance to the Irma Kost Area. An attractive sign marks the spot. This valley includes the headwaters of Gourdhead Run, a tributary to Pine Creek. A lovely grove of mature and growing beech trees are a highlight of the area, with large cherry, oaks, maple, ash and other hardwoods dominating the area. A few hemlocks in the valley and some white pines on the higher areas are the only conifers to be found.

The main trail (blue blazes) follows the stream with spring ephemerals (Virginia bluebells, trout lily, and Dutchman's breeches) and skunk cabbage along the way. Later a kaleidoscope of violets take over for a while. The Rachel Carson Trail (yellow blazes) crosses through the valley up to Middle Road, then eventually to Hartwood Acres. The slopes on either side of the valley are fairly steep and straight uphill shots, short stretches, but shouldn't be tackled lightly. They are also prone to erosion, so please step carefully. A bench near the top of the Rachel Carson trail toward Middle Road (eastern side of the valley) is appreciated. A short muddy crossing may discourage you before reaching it, but an Eagle Scout project created a fine wooden walkway in a soggy section at the far end of the valley. Changing wildlife views are seen throughout the seasons.

Specific highlights you can encounter in this area are a great variety of birds in all levels of the forest, from rufous-sided towhees on the ground or in the shrubs, to several species of woodpeckers plus flickers along the tree trunks, not to mention cardinals, song sparrows, titmice, and many other songbirds. Botanical highlights include some *Lycopodium spp.* (ground pine) on the upper reaches of the eastern slope and witch hazel along the stream.

This isn't the largest natural area you can encounter, but the Irma Kost Natural Area is a hidden jewel in northeast corner of the Pine Creek Watershed. People remember Mrs. Kost for her 30 years of determined independent work and skill in developing and maintaining this area. She enlisted Scouts and other community groups to participate. Volunteers still keep it up.

2) CROUSE RUN RAVINE off Wildwood Road in Hampton Township

This 17 acre public nature reserve is south of Wildwood Road, with access from the lower parking area of the Tuscan Inn, just a half mile west of Route 8. The narrow ravine was a site of Rachel Carson's early studies. She could reach it in the 1920s via the trolley that gave mass transit between Pittsburgh and Butler. The land has been preserved through efforts of Patricia Hare, Hampton resident, EAC member, and a founding member of the North Area Environmental Council (NAEC). The Pine Creek Land Conservation Trust, (PCLCT), now assures its preservation.

Take the grassy path down from a PCLCT granite marker and cross the stream on the shale rocks below. It is typically just ankle deep to wade. Be careful after heavy rains. Vertical limestone cliffs line the stream on the east. Another crossing, with stepping stones, leads up to an open grassy area once the site of an old hotel. The trail continues to another PCLCT marker, beyond the bench placed by friends in memory of Joe Grom, a respected teacher-naturalist who led many to the area. Access without any wading is available from the Trillium Ridge plan of homes, a left turn off Wildwood Road just up from the Tuscan Inn. This access is a rock-edged trail on the left at the utility posts between the third and fourth homes after entering the plan. (Park along the road.) The trail follows down a long-used route into deep old woods. Plants and birds can differ from those in the valley floor. Another bench there is a good resting place when you climb back up. At one point a rigid cable has been fixed as a hand hold at a steep side connection.

Whichever access you choose, you will be enchanted by the terrain which transports you immediately into Rachel Carson's world of exposed limestone, hemlocks & ferns. Bring your wildflower guide, as on the Spring Day we ventured out the floor of this ravine was covered with the spring ephemerals: Bloodroot, Spring Beauty, Trout Lily, emerging May Apple, Violets of many kinds, Skunk Cabbage and the nodding heads of Trillium blossoms.

Please note: Though the valley trail has been in use for countless generations all the way to Sample Road, the current landowner south of the second PCLCT marker does not wish any visitors there.

PCLCT placed signs to restrict plaguing motorized users, who cause noise & real problems, erosion and damage to plants. Phone Hampton police at 412-486-3201 to report any misuse you observe.

3) ROCKY DELL, near North Park in the area east of the Swimming Pool

Rocky Dell is a lovely wild valley that runs between Hemlock Drive II and the railroad crossing on Sample Road. It is part of the Rachel Carson trail which is marked with yellow blazes. They appear newly painted in April 2003. There are several ways to plan a hike in Rocky Dell: From Sample Road in the valley, park next to the bridge over the stream coming down from Rocky Dell. This small pull-off area east of the road is used by fisherman. A white trash bin bears the name Allison Park Sportsmans Club. There is a yellow blaze on the telephone pole on the opposite side of the road. Walk to the railroad tracks and cross the road where there is a double blaze on the telephone pole. Follow the railroad tracks and blazes to another double blaze on a phone pole. (These always mean to watch for a turning on a trail.)

Be careful; trains DO run on that track! Turn left up the valley following the trail and blazes. At a point where a gas line crosses, marked by a white pole, the trail becomes narrow with little room between the stream and the cliff, and a bit further on it ascends along the hillside on a path that is eroding in places, making it rather difficult. The terrain on the other side of the stream is largely flat and looks much more inviting. , our trail researchers walked along the stream and found traces of what looked like an older trail. The stream valley is indeed passable, but it is necessary to cross the stream several times. The marked trail descends to the stream level after awhile, and just around a bend in the stream there is a picnic table. A few feet further is an old abandoned shelter. From there one can climb, largely on an old set of stone steps, to the trail crossing at Hemlock Drive II. At a leisurely pace this hike took us 45 minutes each way. For all or part of this hike in the other direction, drive in onto Hemlock Drive II, past the trail crossing at the stone bridge, and park by the road at Allegheny Grove, across from the Hemlocks II residential complex. Walk back down the road to the trail crossing, follow the stone steps to the old shelter, turn left and hike downstream.

One can make a longer hike by starting at Lone Pine Field. This is at the end of the road that cuts across the 1.5-mile South Ridge Road, the one-way loop that begins at Pie Traynor Field. See the large yellow blaze on a concrete block marking this section of the Rachel Carson trail. Cross a red-blazed trail and follow the yellow blazes downhill on an old road to a level spot where

the road turns left (about 10 minutes). Continue straight on yellow-blazed trail to Hemlock Drive II, jog left at the double blaze, then right at the next double blaze and down stone steps to the old shelter, etc. One could spot a car at Sample Road for a one-way hike. If you are retracing your steps, you could turn right at the level spot where the old road turned left and you went straight on the trail coming down. You would leave the Rachel Carson Trail and follow the old road back up to South Ridge Road at the Round Top Shelter, then walk across the grass to the Lone Pine Field. Or leave the car at Round Top & walk across to Lone Pine first.

4) SANDY CLIFFS of North Park

Total Walking Time: 45 minutes Easy to moderate. Half of the walk is along a paved road in the park, the rest is wooded trail, sometimes rocky & uneven.

Hidden among the trees of North Park is a delightful and often-missed surprise. The destination is incongruous, yet striking - sandy orange cliffs, reminding one of a scene from the southwestern U. S.

The beginning of the trail is approached from Hemlock Drive, a left turn 0.5 mile south of the traffic light intersection at Ingomar/Wildwood Rd. & Babcock Blvd. in the eastern side of North Park. At the top of Hemlock Drive turn left, pass the swimming pool area, continue up the hill to South Ridge Dr. Turn right at the top T-junction and go about 0.1 mile, to parking area on the right, adjacent to Pie Traynor Baseball Field. Having parked the car, and with the ball field behind you, turn right and walk along the one-way road. The road curves to the left. You'll pass the "Black Rock," "Perry," and "Woods" picnic shelters on the right, & "Ellwood" picnic shelter on the left in this half mile. At the road T-junction, bear right and see the walking trail marked by a 2 ft. high concrete block. Take the trail forking left, immediately bear left onto a trail marked with red blazes on the trees. As you walk down the hill, the trail will fork again. Take the trail on your right and continue down the hill. This trail features mixed hardwoods and a rocky path (watch your step!), with yellow blazes marking the stones along the path now and then. Follow the trail down until you reach a large clearing. The sandy cliffs will be on your left as you emerge from the woods and enter this clearing.

The cliffs are a beautiful backdrop for photographs, with their striking orange color and striated rock pattern. From here, you may return via the route you came, or continue to follow the trail to the right of the cliffs, passing the sandy cliffs on your left, and under utility lines. This arrives at a T-junction where it joins a gravel road. Follow it to the left. Occasional breaks in the trees on the right side afford lovely views of the hills and fields of Hampton Township below. Soon you will reach the paved road again. Follow it to the right for the entire loop winding back to your parking area. You'll pass 5 more shelters. At the last one there is a green wooden trail head sign that provides a map of other excellent hiking trails in North Park.

5) FALL RUN PARK, Shaler Twp. contains a stream tributary that joins Pine Creek

The entrance to Fall Run Park, Shaler Township's largest park at 93.65 acres, is just east of William Penn Hwy (Rte 8) on the left side of Fall Run Rd. Turn in at the light on Route 8, across from Spirit Harley Davidson store (bright orange and black).

The Park is marked by an entrance sign and contains a picnic shelter, children's play area, soccer field, portajohn, and a basketball half-court. A large sign marks the entrance, "Judge D. M. Miller Nature Reserve." Another indicates "Community Conservation Partnership Initiative" with funding provided by the Keystone Recreation, Park & Conservation Fund.

The nature trail is at least 1 mile. It is a well-maintained trail featuring 7 wooden bridges which allow a visitor to zigzag over the babbling stream without getting wet unless you really want to. The path and bridges eventually lead you to the highlight of the trail, a waterfall. You can view the falls from below, or on a recently built staircase. Total of 34 steps takes you atop the falls. This is definitely one area not to miss in the Pine Creek Watershed!!!