

# Guide To The *Wildwood Nature Trail*

Wildwood Nature Trail is located at Ashton Wildwood Park, seven miles west of Baxter, Iowa. Ashton Wildwood Park and Wildwood Nature Trail are administered by the Jasper County Conservation Board.

The Jasper County Conservation Board welcomes any recommendations or comments you might have. Please address them to:

Jasper County Conservation Board  
County Annex  
115 N. 2nd Ave. E.  
Newton, Iowa 50208  
(515) 792-9780



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## Ashton Wildwood Park

Jasper County Conservation Board



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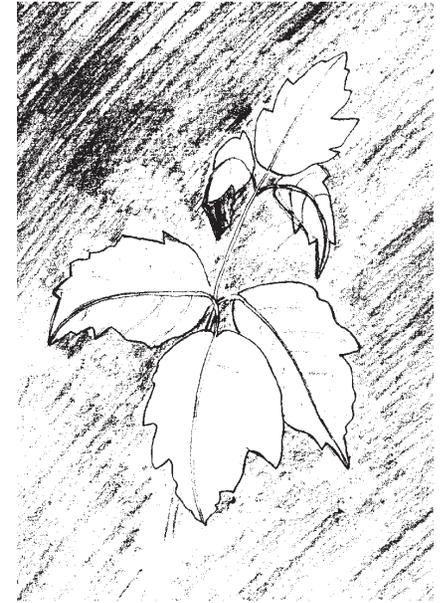
Newton, Iowa 50208

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**25**

**Poison Ivy**

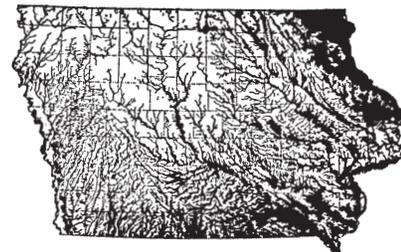
Around this post, on both sides of the trail, is one of the thickest poison ivy patches along the trail at Ashton Park. Poison ivy is the only plant in Jasper County that is poisonous to the touch. You can recognize poison ivy by its **three** dark green leaflets that have uneven saw teeth on the leaf edges.



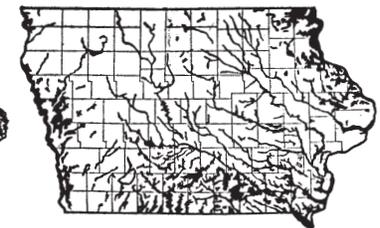
**Woodland Ecology**

The oak-hickory woodlands, located mainly along streams and rivers of Iowa, were once protected from prairie fires. Today, with more demands being put on land in Iowa, more and more woodlands will be converted to home sites, development, and farmland. The steepness of these cleared river and stream bluffs will create more erosion problems.

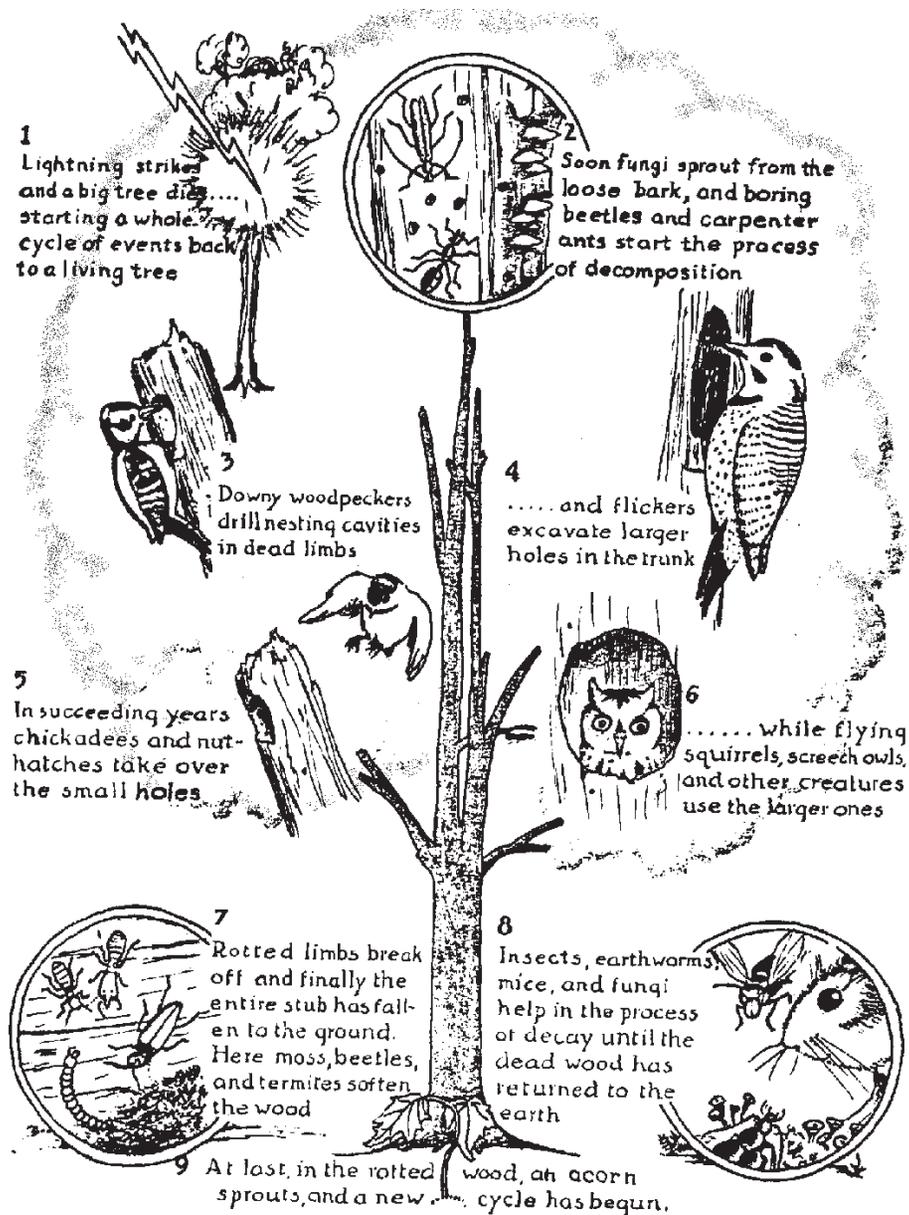
**IT IS OUR DUTY TO PRESERVE AS MUCH OF THIS VALUABLE WOODLAND AS POSSIBLE.**



Iowa Forests 1800's

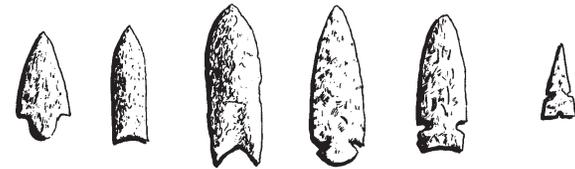


Iowa Forests 1900's



## 1 History

Ashton Wildwood Park is located in a stand of native hardwood timber. This woodland has probably been here for over one thousand years or longer. Stone tools of Indians have been found in and around Ashton Park, showing that these cultures have lived here for thousands of years.



## 2 Dead Leaves

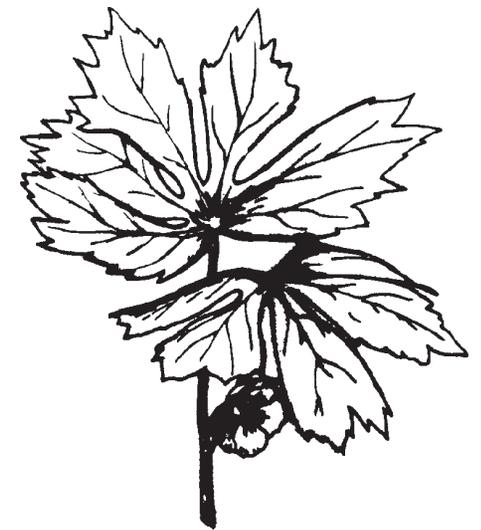
If nature did not provide nutrients to the soil, the trees would soon deplete the soil and the forest would die. However, "decomposers" such as bacteria and fungi decompose the dead leaves, plants, and animal materials that fall to the ground of the forest floor.



You can see the process of decomposition taking place in the box at post 2.

## 3 May Apples

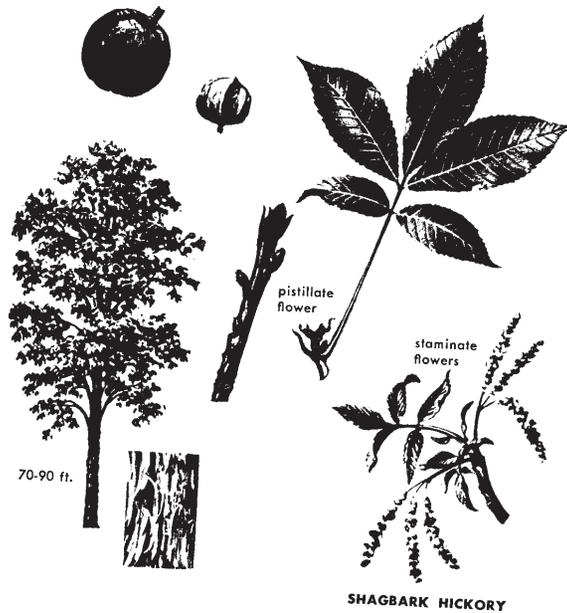
In spring behind post number 3 you can see a large colony of May Apples, that grow in the moist woodland soil. The large white flowers produce a lemon sized fruit that turns yellow when ripe. The May Apple plant is poisonous to eat, but the fruit is edible after it ripens, and has a strawberry flavor.



## 4 Shagbark Hickory

The trees described at post numbers 4, 5, and 6 represent the dominant trees of the Iowa upland woods.

The tree you see here is Shagbark Hickory, named for the light-gray bark that separates into thick plates a foot or more long, and curl outward at both ends. The hickory nut is good to eat. Hickory wood is used for making tool handles and athletic equipment. Fresh hickory wood is used to smoke meat like ham and bacon.



## 5 White Oak

The white oak is the dominant tree in Ashton Park. The white oak leaf has rounded lobes. Acorns from the white oak are eaten by wildlife and were also cooked and eaten by the Native Americans. White oak wood is used for making whiskey barrels, flooring, railroad ties, and was also used for building boats and ships.



## 21 Berry Plants

Not far from post number 21 can be seen plants that produce berries. These berries are eaten by wildlife and humans. The three most common berries growing in Ashton Park are black raspberries, gooseberries, and blackberries. Most berry seeds will pass through a bird's digestive system unharmed and begin to grow in other places.



## 22 Wet Hillsides

Rainwater and water held in the ground often seeps out of this hillside. The water runs into the ravine downhill from where you are standing, where it joins water from other hillsides and ravines. Eventually this water runs to Indian Creek, the Skunk River, the Mississippi River, and finally to the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Mexico.

## 23 Oldest Tree

This old dead white oak tree died in 1977, and was probably one of the oldest trees in Ashton at that time. The rings in the trunk were counted when the tree died, and the tree was over 300 years old. It began growing when Native Americans were the only human inhabitants in Iowa.

## 24 Life Cycles

As this old tree decays, many animals will use the habitat and food it provides. Living things will feed off of the decaying wood. New trees are growing into the space of the forest canopy that this tree made when it fell over. Study the life cycle of a tree on the next page.

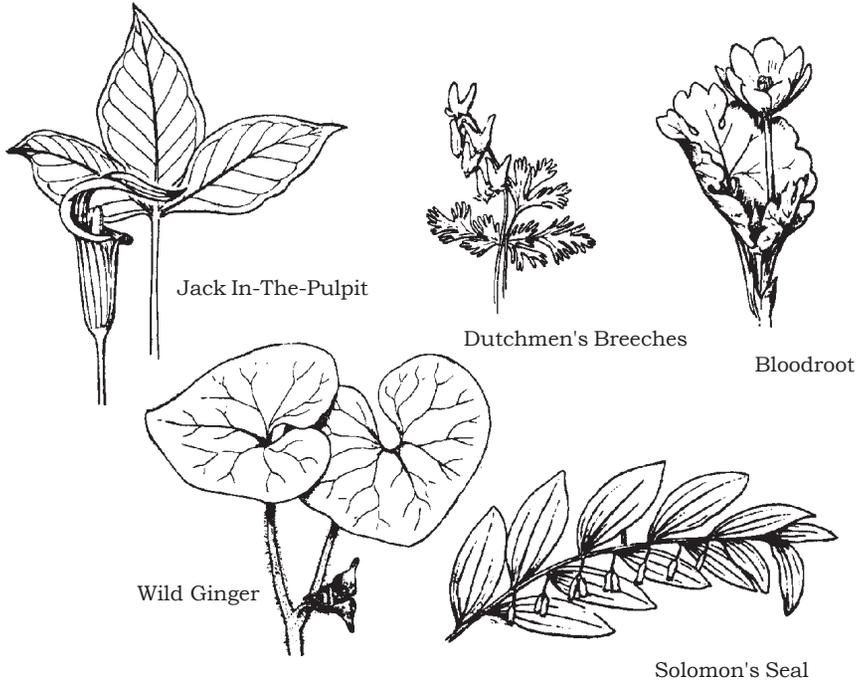
## 8

## Spring Wildflowers

Spring is the best time of the year to visit the woodlands to see the colorful wildflowers. They must bloom and grow early, while the sunlight can still reach the forest floor.

**DON'T PICK ANY WILDFLOWERS AT ASHTON!** Save their beauty for others to see.

See if you can find some of the spring flowers pictured in this brochure, on this page and the next page.



## 18

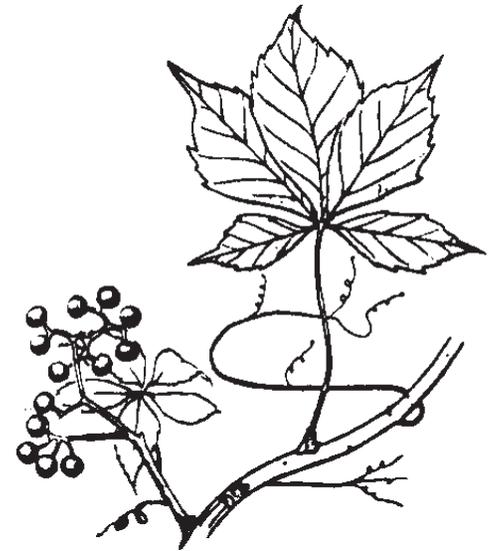
## Multiple Trunk Hickories

Notice that many of the hickory trees growing in the woods around this area have more than one main trunk. Many years ago squirrels probably buried many hickory nuts in a single hole underground, and the trees grew up together to appear as one single tree.

## 19

## Virginia Creeper

Some people confuse Virginia creeper with poison ivy. Virginia creeper can be recognized by its five leaflets arranged like the spokes of a wheel. Poison ivy only has three leaflets. The blue berries of Virginia creeper are eaten by birds, mice, and skunks. Virginia creeper leaves grow from the ground all over the woods, but its vines climb many trees in Ashton Park so that some of its leaves can absorb the energy from the sunlight.



## 20 Listening Post

Have a seat on the bench and enjoy the sounds of the woods. In spring and summer many woodland birds are proclaiming their nesting and feeding territories. In particular listen for the "Pee-O-Wee" of the eastern wood pewee, the "Peter-Peter" of the tufted titmouse, the "Chicka-dee-dee" of the black-capped chickadee, and the "Machine-gun" pecking of wood by the red-headed woodpecker. You can also hear many other sounds from birds, animals, insects, and humans.



Wood Pewee



White-breasted Nuthatch



Black-capped Chickadee



Tufted Titmouse

## 6 Black Oak

The bark of the black oak is much darker than white oak bark. The leaves have pointed lobes on them. Leaves in the red oak family, such as the black oaks, turn red before they fall from the tree.



## 7 Secondary Growth

This dense stand of oak and hickory saplings tell us much about the forest ecology. At one time the large trees in this area were removed by people or were killed by grazing cattle or sheep. When grazing was stopped in Ashton Park, the acorns and hickory nuts on the ground began growing into new trees. All of these trees are trying to get sunlight and water, but many will be crowded out and die. Only the healthiest and strongest trees will survive to become large trees.



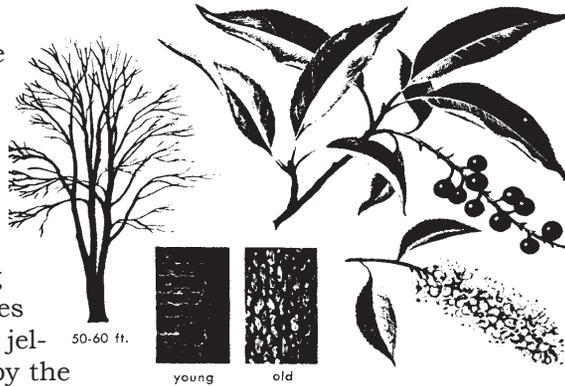
## 9 Hills and Valleys of Ashton

Ashton Wildwood Park is located in an area of many hills and deep valleys. These valleys were cut by water over thousands of years. The melting glaciers of ice provided fast running water that began cutting and eroding soil at Ashton to form deep valleys. Rain water has continued the forming of deeper valleys.

In the stream bottoms and near the parking lot you can see some of the rounded granite boulders carried to Iowa by the glacier.

## 10 Black Cherry

The large black cherry tree with its scaly, dark, "potato chip" bark can be seen about 15 feet behind the trail marker post. The satiny, reddish-brown wood of black cherry is prized for making fine furniture. The cherries can be made into jams and jellies, and were also eaten by the Native Americans. Wildlife also eat the cherries.



## 11 Oaks, Acorns, and Squirrels

Did you know that oak trees and squirrels form an inseparable team? Squirrels depend on oaks for food; and by burying acorns for future use, many acorns are "forgotten" and eventually begin to grow into young oak trees.



## 12 Grazed-out Timber



The effects of cattle grazing can be seen just beyond the fence. There are only a few areas of trees left in the pasture on the other side of the fence. This pasture once looked like Ashton Park. When cattle eat the grass they also eat the wildflowers and young trees that would normally grow in the woods. Some day there will be no trees at all left growing in this pasture.

## 13 Elm Trees

There used to be many large American Elm trees growing in this valley in Ashton Park. These trees have all died from Dutch Elm Disease. A beetle that lays its eggs under the elm bark, carries the disease from tree to tree. The disease is a fungus that clogs the tubes in a tree that carries food and water to the rest of the tree.

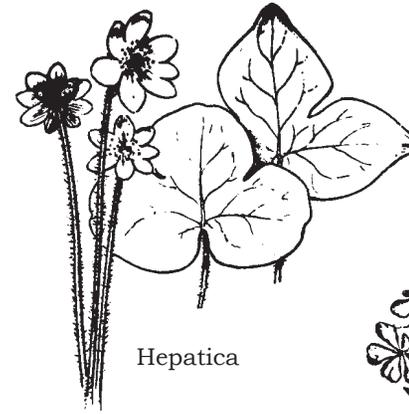
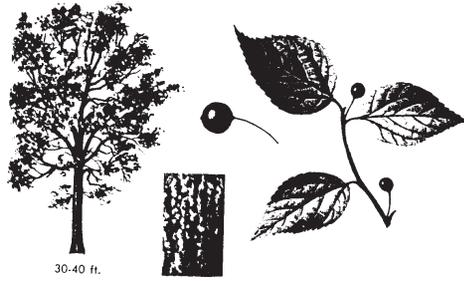
## 14 American Basswood

The large double tree toward the top of the hill is a common tree of the oak-hickory forest. It is called Basswood or Linden, and has a very soft wood which is used by wood carvers. Indians also used the inner bark for making rope and cord.



## 15 Hackberry

The hackberry tree is a bottomland tree found in oak-hickory forests. Feel the rough warty bark. The lumber from hackberry trees is used for many things. The fruit is a large purple berry that is edible. The berry is also eaten by wildlife.



Hepatica



Wild Geranium

## 16 Ironwood

Another bottomland tree, ironwood gets its name from the hard, heavy wood. Ironwood is an understory tree and can live in more shade than larger trees. Ironwood never grows to be a large canopy tree.



Blue Phlox



Jacob's Ladder

## 17 Woodland Layers

There are many layers in a forest; a forest floor layer of many plants and wildflowers, a shrub layer above the forest floor, an understory layer of trees and vines, and a canopy layer of full grown trees. Different animals live in and make use of the food in these various layers.



Virginia Waterleaf



Columbine



Bluebells



Common Violet  
(blue, white, yellow,  
or violet color)



Rue Anemone