

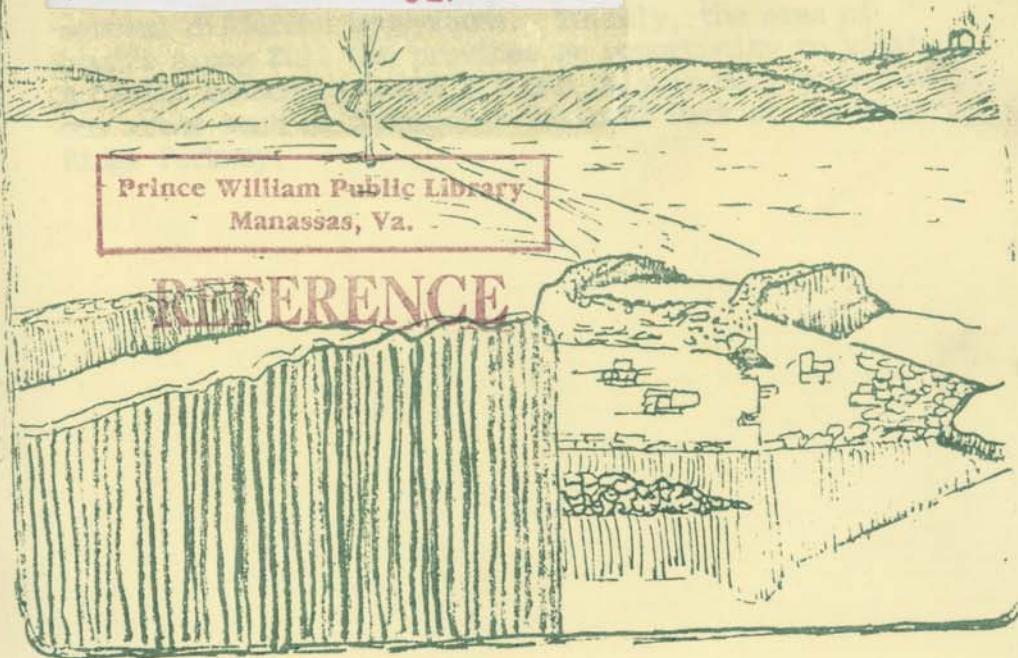
Stone Bridge - Van Pelt

Walking Trail

VIRGINIANA FILE SEP 21 1982

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

REFERENCE



THE TRAIL

This is the beginning of the Bull Run-Van Pelt trail. The trail is approximately one and four-tenths miles in length requiring one and one-half hours to complete at a leisurely pace.

The numbered trail markers correspond to the descriptive paragraphs in this booklet. For your safety, please stay on the trail. Be very careful along the stream as banks are slippery and steep. All plants and animals in the park are protected. Please do not disturb or remove any of the plants or animals - leave them for others to enjoy.

The Bull Run-Van Pelt trail is rather unique for several reasons.

First, it was the scene of important strategic maneuvers which took place during the First Battle of Manassas. Secondly, the area provides an excellent opportunity to study natural habitats, since the trail passes through several different ecosystems. Thirdly, the area of bluffs along Bull Run provides an opportunity to visit a biotic community usually found only in more mountainous areas such as Shenandoah National Park or the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In 1861 during the First Battle of Manassas most of the young men who came to fight were country boys who would have been familiar with many of the plants and animals they passed as they marched along the old roads on their way to the battle. The 1860's was a period of few doctors and no shopping areas as we know them today. Many of the foods and medicines used were to be found in the forests, fields and creeks such as those you are about to see.

As the young soldiers from Pennsylvania, South Carolina, or Virginia passed through the area they looked for something familiar to remind them of home. Perhaps they could find it here in these friendly "natural" surroundings.

As you walk along the trail you shall pass through several different ecosystems. Please observe your surroundings carefully so that the differences will be evident.

The first ecosystem you see will be a lowland creek area.

1. Poison Ivy - *Rhus radicans*)

DO NOT TOUCH THIS PLANT

All portions of this plant contain a skin irritant. Many people are allergic to it and may break out in an itchy rash. This may well have been as uncomfortable for the soldiers of 1861 as it is for the hikers of today.



Poison ivy has 3 parted leaves with long leaf stalks. The leaves may be dull or shiny, hairy or smooth. The plant may be an erect shrub, a low vine, or a climber, such as the plant here. Vines may grow several inches in diameter and develop aerial roots which give the vine a "wooly" appearance. The appearance and effect of poison ivy and poison oak are similar enough as to be often grouped under one name. All parts of the plant contain an oil which may cause a rash either by direct contact or contact with smoke from burning. If you accidentally come in contact with the plant (which grows in many places along the trail) washing with yellow laundry soap may be of some help in preventing the rash.

If a minor rash develops, calamine lotion is often used to relieve the itching but in serious cases, a doctor may be needed for consultation. The best thing to remember is: "Leaves of three; let it be."

2. Stone Bridge

The old Stone Bridge next to you was a major crossing of Bull Run in the 19th century. Located along the Warrenton Turnpike (known today as Route 29-211) the bridge served as an important part of the route between Washington and Warrenton. The Warrenton Turnpike, a major highway in its heyday, was regarded to be of strategic importance in July 1861, by Confederates stationed in the area charged with protecting Manassas Junction. Though Bull Run is a narrow shallow creek, its typical high red stone banks on one side and low marshy ground on the other make it difficult to cross.

Confederates sought to protect Manassas Junction from an assault by Union troops by preventing a crossing of Bull Run at any of its major fords or bridges. The job of protecting Stone Bridge went to Colonel Nathan Evans.

About 6:00 a.m. on the morning of July 21, 1861, Colonel Evans' troops faced an attack by Union troops under Sherman, Keyes, and Schenk. After a short period of time, Colonel Evans began to suspect that he was not facing the main thrust of the Union offensive.

His suspicions were confirmed by a message received at his signal tower on nearby Van Pelt Hill saying, "Look out for your left, you are turned." Evans then left a small force in the area of Stone Bridge taking his main body of troops to Matthews Hill.

(Turn left walking along the Run)

3. Gill Over the Ground - Ground Ivy
(*Glechoma hederacea*)

A lover of damp shady places is this low-lying member of the mint family. Growing from four to eight inches in height, its kidney-shaped leaves with scalloped edges are distinctive. Leaves from the plant are often used to make a tea when steeped for five to ten minutes. The plant has been used for medicine frequently in home remedies. It was thought to be a cure for hives, and if boiled in mutton broth, would cure backaches and aching muscles. It was also used formerly by the French to aid in the fermentation of beer.



4. The Undergrowth

As you walk, you may notice that on both sides of the trail the undergrowth is thick with poison ivy, honeysuckle, and numerous wild flowers. The dense foliage receives plenty of moisture due to its close proximity to Bull Run.

5. Paw Paw - (*Asimina triloba*)

Frequently appearing along streambanks is a fruit-bearing shrub known as paw paw. This shrub or small tree generally does not grow to a height of over twenty feet. Purplish flowers appear in April or May. Appearing in summer is the fruit of the paw.paw. The fruit bears a resemblance to a stubby banana. The sweet fruit may be either cooked or eaten raw. However, finding ripened fruit is difficult as possums, squirrels, and foxes provide competition for it.



6. Hackberry - Honeyberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)

A look at this tree will reveal very unusual bark. Bark is smooth ranging in color from gray to dark brown. With the passage of time the bark becomes thickly covered with warty knobs. The fruit of this tree, a dark purple berry which ripens in September or October is quite sweet and edible. Berries often remain on the trees throughout the winter providing food for turkeys, squirrels, raccoons, and deer. Indians found the berry pits useful in flavoring venison and other meats. Lumber is sometimes used for furniture.



7. Sycamore - (*Platanus occidentalis*)

Do not venture off of the trail to examine this tree as it is close to the stream's edge. Another tree which favors the moist lowland environment of the creeks is the sycamore. Considered to be one of the most massive trees of the eastern United States it may grow up to 150 feet in height with a trunk diameter of up to ten feet. The distinctive bark of the sycamore



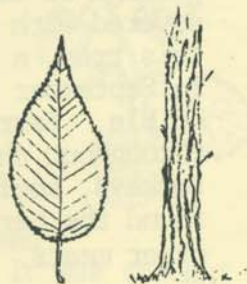
is its most easily recognizable feature. Its mottled brown bark flakes off exposing yellowish or whitish underbark producing a very colorful effect. Indians used trunks of these huge trees for dugout canoes. One was reportedly 65 feet long, weighing 9000 pounds.

8. Bull Run

The quiet stream beside the trail was not easily traversed by artillery, horses, or foot soldiers due to its steep banks. On July 21, 1861, three Union brigades were ordered to "demonstrate" in front of Stone Bridge while the main Union force made a flanking march to cross Bull Run at Sudley Springs Ford, one and one-half miles north of here. Though the Union troops were to cross the Ford at 6:00 a.m., it was nearly 9:00 a.m. before troops began the crossing.

9. Ironwood - (*Carpinus caroliniana*)

One of the trees which thrives in the moist lowlands along the creeks is the ironwood. The gray bark and rippled sinewy appearance have given rise to its nickname "muscle tree." In the past, charcoal made from ironwood was used in the manufacture of gunpowder. Fruits from this heavy tough tree provide food for many birds and squirrels.



10. Turtle Logs and so on -

As you walk along the trail look closely for signs of wildlife. Go quietly as the trail passes through their home environment and they must not be disturbed. Search the waters of Bull Run for a fallen tree partially submerged. Often turtles crawl onto such logs to sun themselves during spring and summer afternoons. Glance along the trail-perhaps you will see some small trees which have recently been 'cut' by beavers that frequent the area, or even a dam built by the beavers.

11. Farm Ford

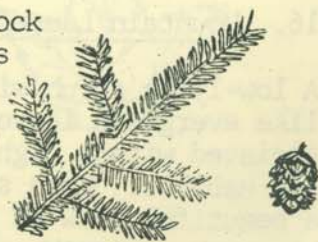
Crossing the countryside were many small dirt lanes going from farm to farm. One of these small roads known as Farm Ford road crossed Bull Run here. About 9:00 the day of the battle, Confederate Major Roberdeau Chatham Wheat rode into the Run taunting the Union troops of Sherman. Thus he pointed out a crossing of the Run, allowing the enemy troops to cut an hour of marching time by allowing them to shortcut. Wheat's Tigers, as the command was called, were recruited from the most rugged element of the New Orleans riverfront. The Tigers had a reputation for being fierce fighters against the Union enemy and in one instance even returned fire against other Confederates who mistakenly fired at them.

12. A trip to the mountains

As you begin to climb the hill just ahead carefully examine your surroundings. Some changes should become noticeable. The undergrowth begins to thin out. Different types of trees and flowers become evident. The ecosystem you are about to enter is quite different from the region you are leaving. This region has flora similar to that which could be found in the nearby mountains. The exposure of the bluffs to a northeastern breeze along with the coolness of the waters of Bull Run seems to account for this ecosystem. This area represents a very fragile ecosystem. You are reminded not to pick, injure, or destroy any plants or animals in the area.

13. Hemlock - (*Tsuga canadensis*)

The habitat most enjoyed by the hemlock tree is that of mountain slopes. Its linear leaves (or needles) measure one-third or two-thirds inches and its small perfectly formed cones have long been used in Christmas decorations. For years one of the principal sources of tannin, entire stands of timber were stripped of their bark, leaving ghostly forests of dead trees slowly decaying.



14. Chestnut Oak - (*Quercus prinus*)

Chestnut oak is an upland tree with oval roughly-serated leaves. The leaves strongly resemble those of the American chestnut, but the two are not members of the same family. The acorns of chestnut oak can be eaten in several ways. They usually need to be leached (or boiled) to remove the bitter taste. Then the acorns can be ground into acorn meal for use in bread or used to make a coffee. Such coffee was often used by Confederate soldiers during the War. Another use of the tree was to obtain tannin (used for leather dyeing). For this reason the chestnut oak was often referred to as tanbark oak.



15. Eastern White Pine - (*Pinus strobus*)

The needles of this pine grow three inches to five inches in length in bundles of five needles. This tree commonly grows to heights of 100 feet. Though it may adapt to many types of habitat the white pine commonly occurs both on slopes of the Appalachian mountains and scattered throughout the Piedmont region growing in close association with the eastern hemlock. Many portions of the tree are edible. The needles, particularly young spring shoots, brew up into a tea rich in vitamins A and C. White pine, though a soft wood, is one of the most valuable lumber trees in the eastern United States.



16. Mountain Laurel - (*Kalmia latifolia*)

A low-lying shrub with shiny leather-like evergreen leaves commonly associated with a highland or mountain habitat. This shrub presents a beautiful show of pink or white blossoms during May and June. It is a shrub of many nicknames being called ivy by the mountain folk and



spoonwood by the Indians. The latter name arose from its common use in making spoons and other eating utensils.

17. Dust to Dust



Along the left side of the trail lies a dead tree slowly decaying and returning to the earth. This log comprises a miniature community. First to arrive in the newly-fallen tree are fungi which begin the process of breaking down the log. Soon mosses, mushrooms, and young seedlings arrive to continue the work. Soon after these arrive a host of beetles, millipedes, and spiders which consume the tree, thus aiding in its eminent breakdown and eventual return to nature. During the period of time until the log rots away, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, or raccoons may find a home here. Even ants and butterfly cocoons may appear.

Generally, a log will rot most quickly from the bottom up due to contact with moisture on the ground's surface. Years are needed to return trees and their nutrients to the soil but imagine how the forests would look if this decay did not take place - if all the leaves and trees piled up deeper and deeper on the forest floor, FOREVER.

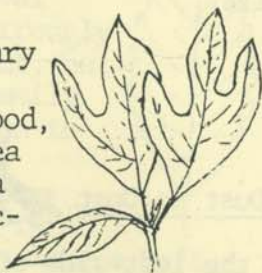
18. Maple Leaf Viburnum - Arrow wood (*Viburnum acerifolium*)

At a glance this shrub can be easily confused with a young red maple tree. However, it differs in that it has a white cluster of spring flowers developing into black fruits during the late summer. The name arrow wood refers to its slender straight branches which were used by Indians as shafts for arrows.



19. Sassafras - Root beer tree
(*Sassafras albidum*)

This small tree has leaves which vary in shape being oval, mitten-shaped, or three-lobed. Long known as a food, sassafras has been used as a panacea for all ills, frequently taken as a spring tonic to thin the blood. According to the old saying "Drink sassafras during the month of March, and you won't need a doctor all year." Roots or bark were boiled to make a dark tea then sweetened with sugar or honey.



20. Partridge Berry - (*Mitchella repens*)

If you look closely, you will most probably be able to find some small red berries among the twin evergreen leaves of this low-lying plant. Leaves are often variegated with white lines. In June you may find two small white or pink flowers at the end of a creeping stem. Used by settlers as a medicine, a tea from its leaves was thought to cure coughs and sore throats. The berries of the plant are often eaten by birds providing an important food source.



21. Towhees - a sound in the brush

As this trail enters the field you will be able to witness an emergence of two zones - woodland and field. Several animals enjoy this interim zone. Among them is the towhee, (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) a bird about seven and one-half to eight inches long. The towhee faintly resembles a robin, though it is smaller and does not have as much red on its breast. One of the favorite haunts of the towhee is a brushy



place among many dead leaves. Here you may often hear him scratching among the leaves. If you are very quiet perhaps you can even hear his song "drink-your-teeeee."

22. The interim

In this interim zone at the field's edge you will see a struggle taking place. The woods you have left are trying to reclaim this field. When white settlers first entered this area, many virgin forests were cleared so that field crops could be raised. If left to its own ways, nature will reclaim this field and return it to forests. Each time the field is not mowed up to the wood line an opportunity arises for a few more pioneer species to take over. A pioneer species is one of the first trees or shrubs to enter a field when the takeover from field to forest begins. Such plants as Virginia pine, Japanese honeysuckle, blackberry, and staghorn sumac are examples of plants which first begin the takeover of an old field.

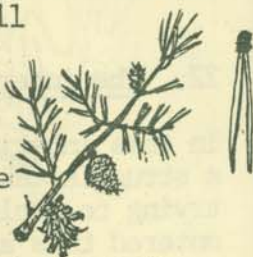
23. Japanese Honeysuckle - (*Lonicera japonica*)

Introduced many years ago from Japan as an ornamental, the vine along the ground and climbing the trees is often known to strangle native vegetation. Honeysuckle grows rapidly - at times a vine can grow as much as 30 feet in one season. Frequently seen as an early invader of old fields this evergreen vine produces fragrant pink or white blossoms in April or May. Young children sometimes pick the fresh blossoms to suck out the sweet nectar from the flower. Though nectar comes in scanty supply - its taste is delightful.



24. Virginia Pine - (Scrub pine) (*Pinus virginiana*)

An early invader of old fields and a lover of acid soils, the Virginia pine is a small tree rarely reaching heights above forty feet. The leaves of the pine tree are whitened needles approximately one and one-half to three inches long, twisted, growing in bundles of two needles. These pines have a shallow root system and are prone to blow over easily in ice storms or high winds. Early settlers found the inner bark of this and other pines could be either eaten raw or dried, ground and added to flour. Needles could be used for teas. The small trees are popularly being harvested for pulp wood.



25. Walk quietly

While proceeding across the open field to the clump of trees you may perhaps see a white-tailed deer slip out of the woods cautiously to browse on the young leaves at the edge or on the tender grass shoots. Perhaps a cottontail rabbit can be seen hopping along the trail. But....look closer and listen quietly. There may also be grasshoppers or black crickets at your feet or possibly red-breasted robins hopping ahead searching for worms. At your feet is a habitat teeming with life.

26. A trek across this field affords an opportunity to enjoy the tranquility of open countryside. During the 1860's more land was cleared and numerous small tracts were farmed. The two-story house southwest of here (across 29-211) is the Robinson House, former home of a freed black man. The original structure was destroyed during Second Manassas. The present larger structure was constructed on the same site shortly after the War, and in the background is the Visitor Center. The open terrain presents a chance to fully appreciate the gentle rolling hills of that geologic feature known as the Piedmont within which the park lies.

27. The Signal

A signal tower near this spot on Van Pelt Hill enabled Confederates of Colonel Evans' command to communicate with other Confederate troops. At approximately 8:45 a.m. Lt. E. P. Alexander who was in command of the signal station network based at Signal Hill, approximately six miles south of here, observed through his telescope the morning sun glistening off highly polished artillery and rifle bayonets several miles north of Van Pelt Hill. Closer scrutiny revealed the flanking march of the Union army moving toward Sudley Ford.

Quickly Colonel Evans was signaled by "talking flags" and notified of the movement. This message enabled Evans to move his troops from Stone Bridge to Matthews Hill, one-half mile northwest of here, to meet the Union advance and buy time for the Confederates to regroup and reinforce their position.

28. Van Pelt House

One of the small farms which formerly existed in the vicinity was the Van Pelt farm with a log house built about 1851. Serving as a field hospital during the Second Battle of Manassas, it was later burned after the War. Vivid traces still remain of the farm house which once occupied this spot. Numerous stones from the house foundation and outbuildings may still be seen.

Several trees surrounding the area are ornamentals commonly associated with home sites. These ornamentals were generally trees which did not commonly occur naturally in this vicinity. An example of this is the locust

tree next to you. The locust is a member of the legume (pea) family. This tree not only provided shade but was of practical value as well. A heavy durable wood, it was a favorite among area farmers for fenceposts. The fruits provided food for bobwhites, cottontail rabbits, and deer. While crossing old fields you may often see a clump of trees seemingly out of place.



This may indicate a former house or gravesite. A bit of exploration may reveal a home of bygone days.

29. Catalpa - (*Catalpa bignonioides*)

Another tree frequently planted as an ornamental is the catalpa tree also called the "cigar tree" after the long brown slender cigar-shaped fruits which appear September through the winter. The heart-shaped leaves and lovely white blossoms with yellow or purple spots made it a pleasant addition to any yard. Catalpa was frequently planted for fence posts due to its rapid growth but is easily damaged by insects or storms.



30. Staghorn Sumac - (*Rhus typhina*)

One of the pioneer species adding a splash of color to green fields is staghorn sumac, a small shrub or tree with 11-31 leaflets. Large clusters of green berries turn to wooly red berries as the summer progresses. Leaves of the plant were smoked by the Indians of the area and the bright red berries were used to make a "lemonade" used to relieve fatigue and reduce fevers. Staghorn sumac should not be confused with poison sumac (*Rhus vernix*). Poison sumac has drooping clusters of white berries (not red). It also frequents swampy areas whereas staghorn sumac inhabits open dry rocky areas.



31. Persimmon - (*Diospyros virginiana*)

A southern tree with dark rectangular grooved bark, the persimmon was a welcome find for the Civil War soldier. While supplies were short in the Confederacy during the Civil War the soldiers had to "make do" with available foods. Coffee was unobtainable so resourcefulness discovered toasted persimmon seeds could be substituted. Of course the small ripe orange fruit (somewhat larger than a cherry) was a delicious addition to the soldier's diet. Care had to be used only to collect the soft gooey ripened fruits as green 'simmons will make your mouth pucker up. Fruits could also be used in pies, bread, and even beer.

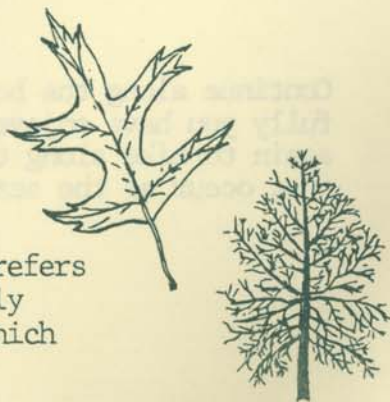


32. Flood Plain

As the trail descends you will re-enter the flood plain of Bull Run. Notice again that the plant life around you changes. A boardwalk was built across this low area because during many months of the year this is a swamp with four to six inches of water lying stagnant - an ideal environment for the breeding of mosquitos and frogs, whose croaking is heard resounding across the bottomland in early spring. During heavy rains as Bull Run swells angrily from its bank the bottomland floods. Frequently, the entire walkway is submerged. Receding waters may leave behind debris which has been carried here from upstream - sticks, logs, trash and occasionally entire trees are deposited here.

33. Pin Oak - (*Quercus palustris*)

The numerous types of oaks are divided into families. Pin oak is a member of the red oak group. Its leaves have bristle tips and the acorns a bitter taste. This oak prefers moist bottomland soils and is easily recognized by its lower branches which grow downward appearing dead.



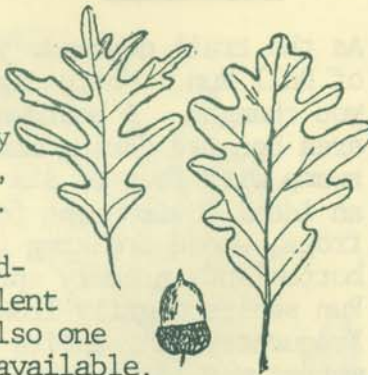
34. Gray Squirrel - (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Almost any place where you find plenty of oaks and hickories the gray squirrel will be close by. Perhaps you'll see them chattering as they run along the high branches frolicking or gathering in the winter supply of nuts and acorns. Maybe you'll catch a glimpse of a squirrel's leaf nest perched within the tree's branches. This is the squirrel's summer home. During cold winter months another nest will be built in the hollow of a tree protected from harsh weather. Squirrel meat would have made a welcome addition to the soldier's diet.



35. White Oak - (*Quercus alba*)

The second family of oaks is the white oak group of which *Quercus alba* is a member. It has leaves with rounded lobes and relatively sweet acorns. White oak is hard, strong and impervious to liquids. For these reasons it is the wood primarily used for cooperage. Additionally, white oak makes excellent furniture and flooring. It is also one of the most efficient firewoods available.



Continue along the boardwalk to the parking area. Hopefully you have enjoyed your walk. Perhaps you can return again to hike along the stream and observe the changes that occur as the seasons and time progress.