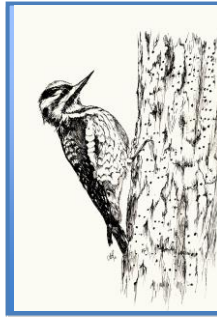


Welcome to Indian Creek Nature Center, leased and protected since 1974 by private citizens as part of the Upper and Lower Lakes Wildlife Management Area.

The Lowland Trail begins just past the ponds and boardwalk east of the parking area. Stay left after the boardwalk and watch for the **Lowland Trail** sign. The sites marked in this guide go counterclockwise around the trail, so start at the right fork.

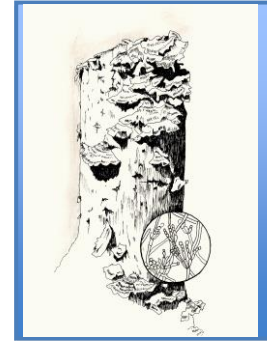
In contrast to the variety of water birds, plants and animals visible along the ponds, marshes and boardwalk (see the interpretive signs there), the Lowland Trail is quieter. Except for chattering red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), whirring ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), tapping woodpeckers, and calling songbirds and frogs in season, the creatures of the Lowland Trail are mostly hidden. With quiet patience you may see larger mammals like fishers (*Martes pennanti*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), or weasels (*Mustela*).



This young forest has grown up during the lifetime of the Nature Center. About 40 years ago this was pastureland. Look for old fences and stone walls along the trail, which defined the fields.

Site 1. Today, red maples (*Acer rubrum*) dominate here. Larger trees on the trail are isolated remnants of an earlier forest. About 12,500 years ago at the end of the Pleistocene ice age, they changed from spruce (*Picea*) and fir (*Abies*) to oaks (*Quercus*) and maples (*Acer*). Wind, fire, floods and the work of beavers (*Castor canadensis*) left clearings in those earlier forests for sun-loving species.

Site 2. Here, look for white ash trees (*Fraxinus americana*) with distinctive compound leaves, opposite branching and linear bark furrows and American elm (*Ulmus americana*) with its asymmetrical serrated leaves and coarser furrowed bark. Today, elm usually grows only 40 or 50 years before it succumbs to Dutch elm disease, caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis ulmi* and carried by beetles. Both ash and elm have had various human uses from ash tool handles to elm bark containers.



Site 3. Young yellow birches (*Betula alleghaniensis*) here have the distinctive resinous golden bark and catkins with their fleur-de-lis-shaped bracts scattered by wind in mid to late April.

Site 4. This site shows the variety of our deciduous forest. Large old sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*) mixed with basswood (*Tilia americana*) with large heart-shaped leaves, ironwood or hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) with its bark in narrow vertical stripes and strong heavy wood, and black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) with its black potato-chip-like bark and summer fruit. All these trees have both economical and ecological value.

Site 5. This appears to be a site used for boiling sugar maple sap. Barrels cut in half made a low-cost fire “arch” for boiling pans. Picture this isolated knoll with big maples surrounded by fields half a century ago. Or, further back in time, imagine native people who travelled the Indian Creek between the Grasse River and Oswegatchie River stopping here to collect maple sap and boil it in elm bark containers with heated rocks.

Site 6. These quaking aspen or poplar trees (*Populus tremuloides*) may be connected to a common root system and grow well in open sunlight. This pioneer species moved early into the open pastureland. Notice the flat leaf stem, which causes the leaf to flutter or quake in the wind.

Site 7. This wet crossing reveals black organic rich soil and some green ash trees (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), which prefers this moist fertile soil.

Site 8. The remains of a split rail fence here show a field boundary and the wood of early cedar trees, perhaps split from nearby.

Site 9. The white oak (*Quercus alba*) in this area stands out. Native Americans used the acorns for flour. In the past and today it is an important food source for wildlife.

Site 10. This decomposing maple tree offers a glimpse of wood becoming soil. Fungus mycelia are breaking down the wood, converting dead wood to new life. Check out what grows from it.



Site 11. Here on this sandy point, wildflowers, blackberries (*Rubus*) and horsetail (*Equisetum*) take advantage of the opening. Beavers are still active here, chewing some of the trees and keeping the view of the wetland open.

Site 12. Looking across the marsh from the forthcoming observation platform, you may see a soaring bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nesting on the island. Nearby beaver have made slides they use to enter the marsh.

Site 13. This open, sandy area was an ancient shoreline after glacial melting 12,500 years ago. Gray Birch (*Betula populifolia*), moss, lichens, and young oaks like this sandy area, as do female turtles that dig holes for their eggs.

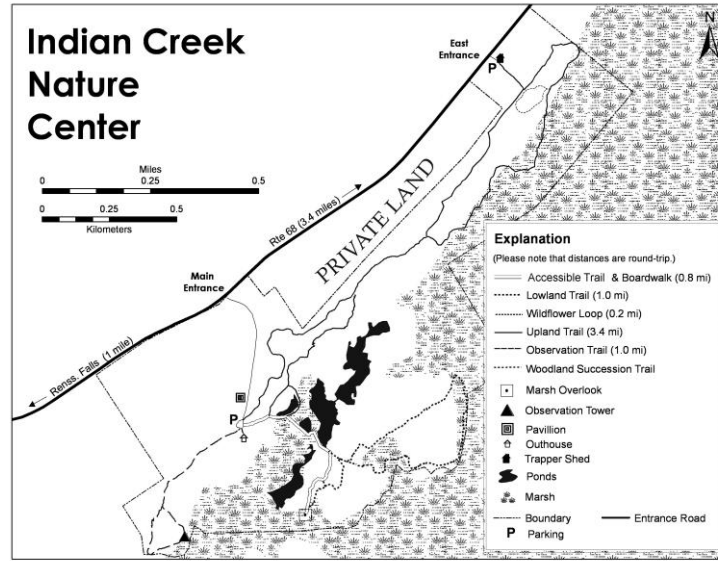
Site 14. Look for a big yellow birch off the trail where a porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*) has made a den. Nearby are young white pines (*Pinus strobus*). Contrast these with the older windblown pines on the islands in the creek.



Site 15. Hemlock trees (*Tsuga canadensis*) here have been heavily browsed by porcupines. White cedar trees (*Thuja occidentalis*) have also been browsed, since they are a favorite food of white-tailed deer.

Site 16. Here as we begin to complete our journey you will see large segments of the old split-rail fences and stone walls that marked the fields in old pastureland. Notice the variety of rocks transported by glacial ice over 12,500 years ago and piled up by the farmers only 150 years ago. Some of it is quartzite, once part of a quartz sand beach from over 500 million years ago.

Like many areas here at Indian Creek Nature Center, the sites and sounds of the Lowland Trail change with the seasons, so please stop back again!



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Illustrations provided by Caroline Pearson

INDIAN CREEK NATURE CENTER

GUIDE TO THE LOWLAND TRAIL



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