

LEDGES NATURE TRAIL



PARK RANGER'S ADDRESS

Ledges State Park

RR 1

Boone, Iowa 50036

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Welcome to the Ledges Nature Trail. We hope that you enjoy your walk and, at the same time, learn about some of the important trees and plants found in the park. Ledges is a great place to experience the diversity of nature. We hope that you return to the park often, in all seasons, so that you may see nature in all its moods and variety.

The trail is one-half mile long and takes about 40 minutes to walk. If you like, take the opportunity to see Lost Lake, located south of the interpretive trail between points of interest seven and nine.

1. POISON IVY

This plant, upon contact with the skin, can cause itching, burning and blistering. Notice the three "leaflets" which make up a single leaf. A rule of thumb is, "IF IT HAS LEAFLETS OF THREE, THEN LET IT BE."

Poison ivy can be found in bush form, near the ground in groundcover form, or as a twining plant around trees as a vine. In the fall, poison ivy is the first to change color from a bright gold to red. Its white berries are eaten by songbirds such as catbirds, flickers, thrushes and chickadees.

2. EASTERN COTTONWOOD

The presence of this large, straight-growing tree usually indicates a nearby stream or watercourse. Although not long lived, it grows 4 to 5 feet per year to a height of 80 to 100 feet. In May and June, the wind catches the cottony strands and carries the seeds great distances. The flattened leaf-stems cause the leaves to rustle or "talk" with the slightest breeze. The cottonwood was sacred to the Indians who used parts of the tree for the treatment of sunburns, colds and headaches.

3. VIRGINIA CREEPER

Virginia creeper is a woody, climbing vine with five leaflets. Its greenish flowers appear in July. The fruit is a bluish-black berry that appears in October. Its vine has curled adhesive discs called "tendrils" which aid in climbing. The fruit provides food for many

songbirds. Indians considered the berries bad to eat and some tribes called them "ghost grapes." The Indians used the stems for tea, roots for the treatment of diarrhea and the leaves to treat bladder trouble.

4. WILD GRAPE

The wild grape is a climbing woody vine with coiling tendrils. Its tiny, light green flowers are pleasantly fragrant. Clusters of fruit ripen to a frosty bluish-black color about the time of the first frost, hence its other name — "frost grape." The Indians gathered and dried the fruit for winter use, made tea from the twigs and brewed a tonic to treat stomach and intestinal disorders. At one time the plant was thought to be a cure for insanity. The fruit is a popular food of most wildlife species.

5. PRAIRIE

Early settlers found prairie similar to this over much of Iowa. Most of the rich, fertile farmland of today was once prairie. The prairie provides food and nesting cover for many kinds of birds and small mammals. Prairie plants, due to their very fibrous root systems, are excellent for soil erosion control.

Frequent fires once prevented woody plants from invading the prairies. In the absence of fires, trees such as cottonwood, willow, ash and sumac establish themselves and eventually replace the prairie species. Prairies are very rare now in Iowa, primarily found as small, scattered tracts. Ledges State Park has a large re-established prairie located near the main park entrance. Take the time to stop and visit that prairie, also.

6. SMOOTH SUMAC

The sumac has a short, crooked trunk and gnarled, leggy branches. It grows in open fields and roadsides, spreading rapidly to form colonies. Some leaves have 11 to 31 long, narrow leaflets which turn fiery red and orange as autumn approaches. Sumac leaves were once an important ingredient of Indian "tobacco." The leaves and twigs are rich in tannin and were once used to cure the finest grades of leather. In the late summer its fruits

of dry, red, hairy berries are clustered in dense erect spikes at the end of the branches. These berries are an important food source for wildlife in the winter.

7. BLACK WILLOW

Black willow is the largest of the native willows. It is usually found in low, wet woods and along the borders of streams and ponds. Early settlers used black willow to make baskets and a fine charcoal used in black gunpowder. Today black willow is used for crate material, veneer and pulp. The black willow is also an important winter wildlife food for grouse, rabbits, beaver and deer. Many insects gather pollen from the flowers or feed on the leaves of the willow. Black willow bark contains a chemical which was once used to make a form of aspirin.

8. KENTUCKY COFFEETREE

This tree is usually found in moist settings, along with other hardwood species. Early settlers in Kentucky roasted and ground the seeds of this tree to make a coffee substitute; hence the name Kentucky coffeetree. They also used powdered seeds as potent smelling salts. The wood of this tree is used for railroad ties and posts because of its strength and durability.

9. WILD ROSE

The wild rose is the state flower of Iowa. Its stems are armed with prickles and the leaves are about two inches long. Pink flowers appear in June and July. The flowers are followed by fruit called "hips" which possess a high concentration of vitamin C. Three "hips" contain as much vitamin C as one orange. Indians used the fruit for stomach troubles. The wild rose is an important wildlife food for small mammals, birds and deer. The rose also makes an excellent nesting site for certain species of birds.

10. HONEY LOCUST

Honey locust gets its name from the sweet, honey-like substance found inside the seed pod. Wildlife feed on the fruit and sometimes on the bark of this tree. Man has used the

strong durable wood for fence posts, wagon hubs and bows. Honey locust is often called a living fence because of the many sharp thorns along its trunk and branches.

11. ELM "SNAGS"

These dead elms are victims of Dutch elm disease, caused by a fungus spread by bark beetles that infects elm trees and prevents the sap from circulating throughout the trees. These snags provide excellent habitat for raccoon, skunk, opossum, owls, woodpeckers and squirrels. They have a natural place in the cycle of the forest. Unfortunately, in many instances, too many dead and dying trees are cut, eliminating potential habitat for many wildlife species.

12. RED OAK

The oak is the state tree of Iowa. Red oak is easily distinguished from white oak by the spines at the tip of each lobe of the leaves. The wood is quite durable and is used for flooring, structural timber and railroad ties. This species is of major importance to many forms of wildlife, including squirrels, songbirds of many species and the wild turkey.

13. SHAGBARK HICKORY

The distinctive shagbark hickory is usually found growing in moist soils. The green wood of the shagbark has long been an important fuel for smoking hams. Pioneers saved the leftover ashes to make lye for homemade soap. Hickory wood is hard, strong and tough, yet fairly flexible, making it an excellent choice for tool handles. Hickory is also used in the manufacture of sporting goods, ladders, furniture and charcoal briquettes. A yellow dye can be made from the inner bark.

14. SERVICEBERRY/JUNEBERRY

The serviceberry is a small tree, seldom over 30 feet high. It is one of the first trees to blossom in the spring. The brilliant white petals contrast with the otherwise barren landscape. The name juneberry comes from the fruit which matures in June. Juneberry provides pollen for insects and a sweet fruit for

humans and wildlife. Indians mixed the dried berries with pounded, dried meat and grease, to form a long-lasting cake of food called "pemmican" which was carried on trips.

15. BLACK MAPLE

The black maple is usually found in moist, cool locations. Although listed as a separate species, it is regarded by some botanists as a variety of sugar maple. Like sugar maple, black maple can be tapped in early spring for its sugary sap. The sugaring season lasts three to six weeks, with each tree yielding five to sixty gallons of sap per year. The black maple makes a fine shade tree for residential areas.

16. HOPHORNBEAM

This is one of the hardest woods in North America, hence its popular name of "ironwood." The name hophornbeam comes from the distinctive fruit clusters which resemble hops. The leaves, which stay attached into winter, despite their withered condition, are smooth and resemble elm leaves. The nuts are an important source of food for quail, pheasants and rabbits.

17. WHITE OAK

The white oak is the most important hardwood species in the U.S. Its uses range from flooring, to barrels, to structural timber. One now sees few of these trees over 100 years old because the railroads used the trees so extensively for ties. The acorns are a choice food for many forms of wildlife.

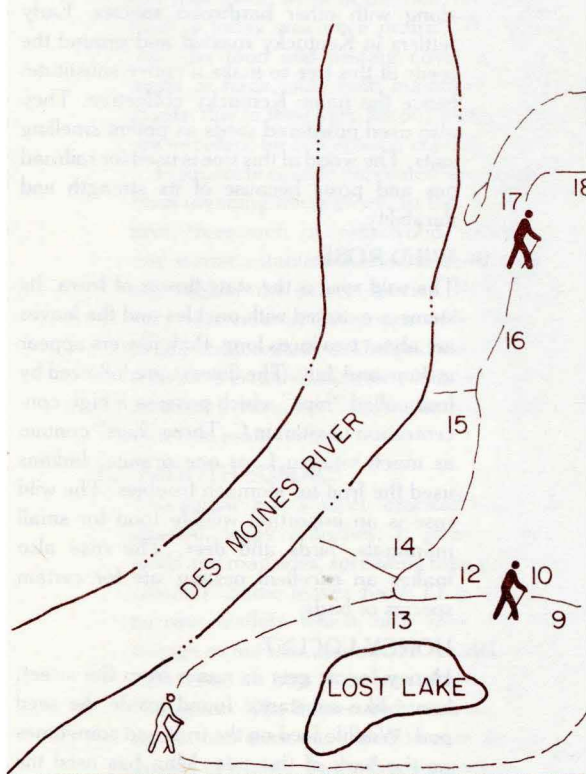
18. AMERICAN BASSWOOD/LINDEN

American basswood, or linden, is easily identified by the unevenly based, heart-shaped leaves, large reddish buds and clusters of stems rising from a single base. The fruit is a hard, berry-like nut with a unique wing-like attachment called a bract. The blossoms are a major source of pollen for honey. When dried, they are said to make an excellent tea for the treatment of nervousness, insomnia and cramps. The inner bark was used by Indians for rope, baskets and the treatment of burns. The wood is soft and easily worked, making it

popular for carving. The fast-growing basswood is also used as a shade tree.

19. BLACK WALNUT

Black walnut, a highly valued American hardwood, is prized for its chocolate to dark, purplish-brown heartwood. This beautiful wood is easily worked, making it one of the world's finest cabinet woods. Other important uses include furniture, gunstocks and veneer. Individual walnut trees, suitable for high grade veneer, have sold for more than \$20,000. American colonists first used black walnut as a cheap imitation for the more expensive,



imported mahogany. The nuts are prized by both humans and wildlife.

20. EASTERN RED CEDAR

The red cedar is common throughout Iowa. It is one of the most visible invaders of old fields and fence rows. It is one of the few conifers native to Iowa. Many parts of the red cedar were used by Indians for medicinal purposes. The bark makes excellent tinder and the wood was once used for pencils. The rich, red wood is easily worked and is used for cedar chests and closets because of its pleasant fragrance and protection against moths. The berries have been used to make gin and perfume.

