

Mansfield Middle School Roadrunner Trail

When you are on the Roadrunner Trail, please note the numeric trail markers. Below is a numeric listing of interpretive points developed by students at Mansfield Middle School. [Click here to download this guide.](#)

Happy Trails!

#1

Ferns (spring/summer)

A fern is also called a pteridophyte. There are as many as 20,000 species of ferns. Ferns can not only be seen in their original form, but also can be curled into fiddle-heads. They are in that form before they fully bloom. Ferns belong to an ancient group of plants that have developed before flowering plants, and they do not produce flowers and that means that they do not produce seeds. Ferns like damp areas and shade so they are found near streams, swamps, and in wooded areas.

#2

Stonewalls

If you're not from New England you are probably wondering what's up with these stonewalls. Well here is your answer, when we were just settling the land all of the farmers needed fields, all of the land was covered with stones so the farmers had to get rid of them and they piled them up to make a wall. Most are at property boundaries, the boundary of a field, or animal fence. Most are still here today and are covered with lichen or filled with hints of the animals who use the walls for habitat.

#3

Poison Ivy

The three almond-shaped leaves of a poison ivy plant have different ranges of colors, such as: light green when they're young, dark green when they're mature and bright red in the fall. Poison ivy can grow rapidly on ground, as well as trees. Poison Ivy can cause a bad reaction when the oils get on your skin!



#4

Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are hollows in the ground that get filled up with runoff or precipitation in the spring months. They may stay damp or wet all year but often dry up in the summer. These are important breeding grounds for salamanders and frogs because they do not contain fish that prey upon the eggs. For more information, click on www.vernalpool.org.

#5
LICHEN

The green colored substance on the rock next to you is lichen. Lichen is a symbiotic combination of algae and fungus. The fungus provides a place for the algae to grow and the algae produces food through photosynthesis.



#6

Waterfall/Dam

Mansfield has many remnants of historic mills, including the first silk mill in the US. This waterfall and remnants of stone walls are the remains of a dam that was constructed for powering a saw mill. The running water has carved into the large stone ledge in the stream.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mansfield,_Connecticut

#7

Japanese Barberry

All of the green bushes you see in front of you are Japanese Barberry. The barberry is an invasive species from Japan. The shrub produces red berries that the birds love to eat. Unfortunately, when the birds eat the berries then the shrub gets spread around into new places. The Barberry usually grows three feet high, sometimes reaching six feet. Its yellow flowers bloom in May and its berries start to form in winter. The Shrub is considered ornamental because of its red and orange shades that it turns in the fall. It is often found in old fields and open woods. It can grow in shade and sun and in different types of soil.



#8

Beech Trees

The cluster of trees in front of you are American beech trees. They are best known for their smooth, silvery-gray bark. Beechnuts ripen in the fall and have an oily-sweet taste. Many mammals feed on the Beech tree's nuts. Sometimes Beech trees get Beech bark disease, which results from the interaction of fungus and an insect. American Beech trees can live hundreds of years. Beech leaves are bright green and about 3 inches in length. Beech trees like to grow in deep, fertile, well drained but moist soil. Beech trees have a large root system that grows all over the surface of the ground and collects moisture for the tree.



#9

Eastern Hemlocks

The large evergreen you see back in the woods is an Eastern hemlocks. They can grow from 40-70 feet tall, but some can grow over 100 feet tall. A certain bug called the wooly adelgid is eating these trees, making the beautiful green pine needles turn white. This bug has been in the United States since 1924, which is not good. Parents lay between 50-300 eggs per season from January-June. That means that there are a lot of wooly adelgids to eat the needles. We are lucky to have our hemlock as healthy as it is.



The Wooly Adelgid eats Hemlock trees making theNeedles turn white.

#10

Shagbark Hickory

The shaggy looking tree on the pond side of the trail is easily recognized as the Shagbark Hickory. The Shagbark hickory grows best in a warm climate and is one of the hardiest hickory species. The shagbark hickory flowers in the spring. The flowers open when the leaves are nearly fully grown which is in early June in the northeast. The Shagbark also produces fruit, a nut that grows in groups of one to three and is enclosed in a thin husk. The fruit ripens in September and October and the kernel inside the nutshell is sweet and edible. While Native Americans enjoyed the nuts of the Hickory, now Squirrels and Chipmunks eat it as well as black bears, white and grey foxes, rabbits, and birds. Shagbark Hickory is found in most parts of the Eastern United States. When the tree is ten years old it is usually 3 or 4 ft. tall and when it is 90 years old it is 60- 65 ft. tall.

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/Volume_2/carya/ovata.htm



#11

Skunk Cabbage (spring/summer)

The large-leafed skunk cabbages grow in very wet areas, and are one of the first plants to bloom in the spring. It is very smelly when its leaves get bruised, and the smell attracts insects to pollinate the cabbage. The skunk cabbage can also produce its own heat, which allows it to be one of the first plants to appear in the spring.

www.fcps.k12.va.us/StratfordLandingES/Ecology/mpages/skunk_cabbage.htm



If you look around, you will notice many large and small boulders strewn throughout the area. These are debris left behind by a glacier that passed through Connecticut 15,000 years ago. Glaciers have had a major hand in shaping New England.

This trail guide was created by the Roots & Shoots group at Mansfield Middle School. Members include; Elizabeth Hong, Ellen Yang, Maye Henning, Kyle Schoeplein, Chloe Levin, Caitlin Briody, Jillian Mather, Moriah Ross, Chris Kegler & Hannah Reilly. Ms. Mehalakes supervises the group.