

## MONOCACY NATURE CENTER: TRAIL GUIDE

Welcome to the Monocacy Nature Center. This area has been set aside as a Sanctuary by the city of Bethlehem. This is a place to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of nature. Please do not litter, or run your dogs here. Motorized vehicles are not permitted. The main trail is approximately one mile long.

This is a special place. It is an ancestral corridor for migrating birds, in both spring and fall. With shrinking habitat everywhere, there are fewer places where suitable habitat is continuous, or connected. Visit our web site to learn more about the number and variety of birds which can be found here. The creek is home to naturally-reproducing native Brown Trout. Cool, shaded water is essential to their survival. Please do not walk on the edge of the banks, where erosion can cause siltation of the water. Stay on the trails. This area is maintained by many volunteer groups, via the sponsorship of the Monocacy Creek Watershed Assn, and with the cooperation of the City Parks dept. Some of the projects which help to keep this sanctuary pristine are: (1) planting of trees (2) trail maintenance (3) rock deflectors on the stream banks (4) other types of stream banks stabilization. If you would like to help us, please call City Hall. They will put you in touch with one of the volunteer groups.

### SELF-GUIDING TOUR:

**1 Parking lot:** Look across the railroad, up the hill. This is known as the orchard woods. A long time ago, there was once a farmhouse near the top of the hill, with an apple orchard behind it. The hillside includes older trees, such as Red Oaks, Black Walnut, White Ash and Aspen. Where the land was disturbed, near the RR, opportunistic species, such as Ailanthus and Box Elders, have temporarily taken over. There is a foot trail, parallel to the RR, approx halfway up the hill. This is a good place to look for birds in the spring. After long flights from southern places, they look for food and cover. As soon as new leaves emerge, caterpillars begin feeding on them, and the birds soon follow, to feed on the caterpillars.

**2 Floodplain trail:** Pick up the creek-side trail, and follow it to the first break to the right (approx ¼ mile). Here you will see evidence of too much foot traffic right at the water's edge. The banks have collapsed in some places, and the stream is wider than it should be. This causes silt in the water, fallen trees, and is generally not good for the native trout that live here. You will also see a few rock deflectors on the near bank. These are designed to push the main flow of water back out into the center of the stream. This helps to keep the water deep and cold, it provides trout habitat, and grows new bank, by deposition of silt. You may also see the anchored skeletons of Xmas trees lining the banks. These also help to trap silt, and to stabilize the banks. A floodplain is where plants like Cattails and Sedges grow. See if you can find any. Many of the trees are Black Willows, which like to grow near water. They are fast-growing, but they are rather fragile, and frequently fall down. Shrubs include Pussy Willows and Honeysuckle.

**3 Barlieb trail:** Cross the RR, and follow the trail at the bottom of the swimming pool field. Look for field birds, such as Grackles, Starlings and Robins. At the edge, perhaps you may see a Mockingbird on top of one of the shrubs. Groundhogs live here too, but are seen only in the warm months. (Why?). Near the RR, note the many Black Walnut trees, which occur here naturally and elsewhere in the sanctuary. This part of the Monocacy Trail is named after Catherine Barlieb, who was an avid birder that studied this area from 1936 to 1954, and left extensive notes on sightings.

**4 North Quarry:** Both quarries are said to have been the source of the rock that was used to build the bridge that crosses the Lehigh River at Rt 378. Later, this quarry was used as a dumping grounds for rubbish, for many years. Environmental groups cleaned it up, and now it's an interesting place to watch for birds, and to look for snakes. Snakes like to sun themselves on warm rocks. Just observe them. Don't try to pick them up. Garter snakes, Brown (or "DeKay's") and other snakes have been seen here. There is a small stand of Quaking Aspen (trees) on your left, as you face the quarry.

**5 Pond path:** The pond is known as the "Paint Mill Pond". It was once part of the industrial complex seen across the creek. Red and yellow paint pigments were once made there, and there used to be evidence of it in the pond itself. Extensive cleanups, and years of re-growth, have all but concealed the former history of this site. The pond is apparently spring fed, and is incredibly rich in aquatic life. It contains native Rock Bass, Sunfish, Musk ("Stinkpot") Turtles, Painted Turtles, and, in early Spring, it is where at least two kinds of salamanders come to reproduce. They are: "Two-lined" and "Red-backed." Also, look for aquatic birds, in any season.

**6 Duckweed colony:** Close to the RR, and on the north (upstream) side of the pond, is a tiny pool, somewhat separated from the main body of water, containing a colony of Duckweed. This is an extremely tiny, floating aquatic plant, which thrives in cool, clear still water. Watercress also can be found here, and it too likes cold spring water.

**7 South Quarry:** The steep "cliff" bordering the wooded side of the pond, is one of two old quarries in the sanctuary. This one happens to have a very interesting geology exhibit. On your left, where the cliff face is not covered with vegetation, see how the rocks are "folded" into wavy lines. This is called an "anticline", and occurred many millions of years ago, when this location was covered with perhaps miles of additional rocks. The rocks "folded" from heat and pressure, as the earth rearranged itself, and left us a permanent picture of the outcome.

**8 RR Trestle:** Just upstream of the RR trestle, along the creek, you will walk by a small grove of Black Locust trees. The Monocacy waters are rather placid here. Although this is a natural occurrence, it would be better to have more trees, to provide shade over the water. If you continue upstream, near the water, you will come to a tiny hill, between the RR and the creek. Look across the creek, and slightly downstream. See if you can find two giant Red Oak trees. They have been determined to be over 200 years old. On the near stream bank, there is a beaver hut, and a family of beavers. They frequently build a dam near the RR trestle, to create a backwater that suits them.

**9 Stream banks and return (via Floodplain Trail):** Be careful not to trip in the muskrat holes at streamside. Further upstream, and also across the creek, look for a Beech woods. Beech trees are relatively uncommon here, but somehow, they found a suitable micro-habitat, possibly because of the northwest exposure of the hillside. Finally, especially in the warmer months, look for rising trout, almost everywhere. They create tiny dimples in the water's surface, as they feed on the hordes of mayflies that live in the water.

**DO NOT LITTER - PASS THIS TRAIL GUIDE ON TO SOMEONE ELSE.**

Web site (Monocacy Creek Watershed Assn): <http://www.pipeline.com/~rlfreed/linda.htm>

Telephone: (Bethlehem, City Hall, general info): 1-610-865-7000

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