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Exploring the Peninsula: Penobscot's Weinland Nature Study Area

by Bonnie Copper, Board of Directors, and Eileen Mielenhausen, Membership Coordinator

As a result of a merger with another local land trust earlier this year, Blue Hill Heritage Trust now owns and manages two public access properties in Penobscot--Sherm Perkins Memorial Park, located in Penobscot village on Rt. 175/Rt. 199, and the Richard and Virginia Weinland Nature Study Area on the south side of Gray Ridge Road.

The Weinland Nature Study Area has proven to be aptly named. Charlotte Clews, a local naturalist, led a small group of young explorers on a walk of discovery there on July 7.

The first surprise was at the very beginning of the trail. The box that was built to hold brochures is currently the home of a black capped chickadee and its three eggs. The bird and the children were equally startled when the top of the box was opened! Both bird parents were very protective of their nest and were happy when the box was closed and the group moved on down the trail.

Charlotte, assisted by her children Lucy and Georgia, pointed out many of the types of flora that line the path and fill the woods. Stories of how the plants have been used, learning how to examine the plants without harming them, standing quietly and listening to the calls of the red breasted nuthatch, going slowly enough to see the spider with the egg case crossing the path are just some of the shared experiences. And several trees along the way just begged to be climbed.

What was here before us? Coyote scat at the edge of the path is one clue. Marine mud (a magnet to the children on the hike) indicates that the Bagaduce River was once much higher. An old hunting stand in the woods makes one believe that deer have been hunted here in the past.

Hair cap moss (the tallest moss), cinnamon ferns, gold thread, sphagnum moss, hay scented ferns, horsetails (used as a pot scrubber by our ancestors because of the silica in it), liverwort, bracken ferns and bunchberry dogwood are just a sampling of the flora lining the path. How do you tell a balsam from a spruce? Shake hands with it. A balsam is soft and friendly, and a spruce is prickly and smells like cat pee!

What is a lichen? Freddy Fungus and Alice Algae took a lichen to each other and their marriage is on the rocks. Lichen is not a plant and has no stems or roots. All three types of lichen can be found here--tree, map, and leafy. Reindeer lichen not only looks a little like

reindeer antlers, but reindeer like to eat them. Charlotte used many fun things like this to bring nature alive and make it easy to remember what was being observed.

A garter snake (one of only 6 types of snakes in Maine) slithered across the path, giving a glimpse of its red tongue. It then coiled up allowing all to see the beautiful patterns on its back and see how well camouflaged it could be. After being properly admired, it made its way into the undergrowth.

A golden crowned kinglet, the smallest bird to overwinter in Maine, was heard calling. It is still not clearly understood how a bird so very small can survive the Maine winters.

Many trees along the trail are marked with signs with their common and Latin names, including white pine, big toothed aspen, red maple, yellow birch, and stripped (or moose) maple.

So much to see, hear, smell, and explore on just a one-mile path through the woods. Sometimes you just have to have someone to help you learn how to see, hear, and smell it all!

The Weinland Nature Study Area encompasses more than forty acres of what used to be known at the Condon Forest. Last cut over in the 1970's, the land now includes a variety of woodland spaces with both hard and soft wood stands, a brook, wetlands, and granite outcroppings. The trail is marked with blue blazes. There are several bridges over the stream and boggy areas, and some parts of the trail may be wet, especially after a rain.

The Trust is hosting several more walks this summer, including some programs designed especially for children and their families. We invite you to join us – and bring your friends and family along. BHHT volunteer Charlotte Clews will lead an evening of stargazing on August 25 at 7:30 pm on Caterpillar Hill in Sedgwick. Check out our website at bluehillheritagetrust.org for the full listing of our events this summer and fall.

For more information about the Trust, conserving land, becoming a member, or participating in our programs, please contact us at info@bluehillheritagetrust.org or 374-5118.

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