

# Stony Kill Farm Woodland Trail Guide



## **WELCOME TO THE WOODLAND TRAIL**

Part of Stony Kill Farm's 8.5-mile trail system on more than 750 acres, this  $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile trail is compliant with the American Disabilities Act and is ADA accessible. With its even surface and gentle incline, the trail can be enjoyed by all.

## ABOUT THE WOODLAND TRAIL

Forests are constantly changing. Last year's leaves on the forest floor become this year's fertilizer for plants and shrubs thanks to organisms known as decomposers. Shade-loving trees and shrubs grow in the shadows of plants that need full sunlight. A fallen tree becomes home to a variety of wildlife. New habitats evolve and different wildlife species move into the area.

On this ¼-mile trek, you will experience some of the changes that have occurred to this trail area since the 1960s, when it was no longer farmed. Each time you visit, through the seasons and through the years, you will notice continuous natural changes taking place.

Follow the trail clockwise and match the 12 numbered posts along the trail to the 12 sections in this guide. For your safety and to protect the woodland habitat, please stay on the trail. Avoid touching plants you are not sure about, don't remove any plants or animals, and use insect repellent if desired. Be careful of poison ivy: "Leaves of three, leave it be!"

## POST 1: A Fence in the Woods?

*“Before I built a wall, I’d ask to know what I was walling in or walling out” –Robert Frost*



If you stood here 100 years ago, you would be looking at a cow pasture. The rusty gate in front of you, along with a few strands of barbed wire here and there, is all that is left of the fence that once kept the farmer’s cattle from straying. The fence posts were cut from black locust trees, known for their rot resistance. These posts are still remarkably sound after so many years. When the pasture was abandoned, the forest simply regrew...and that is the forest you will be walking through for the next  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile.

## Post 2: Look Up!

The magnificent trees towering overhead are tulip poplar trees. In the magnolia family, tulip trees are the tallest deciduous trees in the eastern United States. More common in the south, they are near the northern edge of their range here at Stony Kill. Both the leaves and flowers are tulip shaped, and their long trunks were used by Native Americans to make dugout canoes. In addition, tulip trees are host plants for the eastern tiger swallowtail caterpillar.



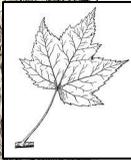
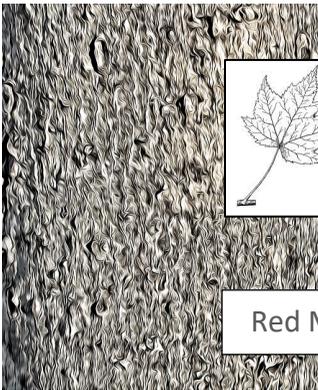
## Post 3: The Circle of Life

Most of the time, it is the green plants that attract our attention as the living things in a forest, but there is much more going on than that. Plants and animals die, fall to the forest floor, and decay. During the process of decaying, the fallen trees and animals are broken down by decomposers such as fungi, worms, and beetles. The process of decomposition recycles nutrients for new living things to grow. The forest never really dies; it continues the circle of life.

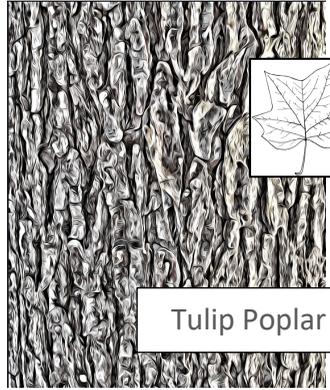


## Post 4: Name that Tree

Look at the trees around you. Compare these bark photos to the bark on nearby trees—how many different species can you name? Then, check your answers by using the leaf photos below. Identifying trees from their bark is the best way to learn their names because you can always tell what species they are no matter what the season.



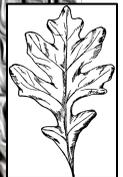
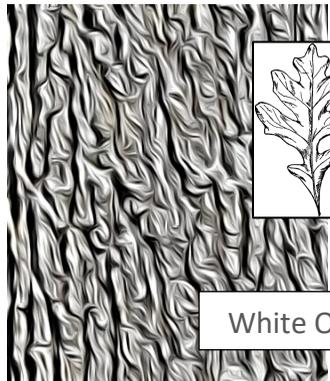
Red Maple



Tulip Poplar



Shagbark Hickory



White Oak

## Post 5: Frog Heaven

Seasonal woodland pools are important habitats within the forest ecosystem. These shallow depressions fill with snow melt and rainwater, especially in the spring. Many amphibians, including wood frogs, spring peepers, and salamanders, need these pools to breed. Because the water dries up in the summer, fish cannot survive in them, and therefore they cannot eat the salamander eggs and larvae. When these pools are drained and filled for human development, many amphibians lose their breeding habitat and then decline in number.



## Post 6: Wildlife Habitat

It is hard to see anything in this mess of plants. Although appearances can be deceiving, every habitat has value. Bushes, vines, and other small plants grow under the trees in the understory and can create an almost impenetrable tangled web of leaves and stems.

However, the understory is one of the best places for small animals such as rabbits and birds to hide from foxes and other predators looking for food. Berries from some of these bushes and vines are also valuable food sources for animals.



## **Post 7: There's a Fungus Among Us...**

Mushrooms and other fungi are found all over the forest floor and on the trunks of trees.

Over time, these fungi help break down fallen trees and dead leaves into nutrients that are absorbed by plants for their growth.



Mushroom foraging is a popular activity but foragers must use extreme caution. Some wild mushrooms can be eaten by humans but others are very poisonous, even deadly. Never eat a mushroom unless an expert has determined it is safe to eat!

## Post 8: Itchy Nature!

See that hairy vine climbing on the tree in front of you? Don't touch it!! That is a poison ivy vine. All parts of the plant can cause an allergic reaction at any time of the year. We have been warned about the leaves (see the beginning of this guide), but poison



ivy is the master of disguise. It is often found on the edges of trails because it grows well in sunlight. It can also be found in the fields, so, once again: “Leaves of three, leave it be”!



## **Post 9: Forest Forensics...How Do We Know What Was There?**

A tree can be uprooted by a storm, leaving its roots exposed and a hole in the ground. Over a long period of time, the trunk of the tree rots and turns into soil and all that is left is a mound of dirt and a hole, called a pillow and a cradle, respectively. You will see a lot of fallen trees like this on the trail, and, one day, a future visitor will know it was the place where a tree once stood only because of the pillow and cradle it will leave behind...like what is seen here.



## Post 10: Invasive...Plants from Other Places

Wow! There is a lot of plant growth going on behind this post. Most of the plants in this spot are invasive species. Invasives are plants (or animals) that are intentionally or accidentally introduced from other continents, and then dispersed by animals, birds, wind, and even the soles of our shoes. Without their native predators, invasives can grow out of control and displace many of our native plants, which cannot compete. They can ruin the habitat for native plants that evolved over time to coexist with everything



else in the forest. Invasive vines like bittersweet can smother native trees and plants; the tangle of vines can become so heavy that trees can be toppled by wind.

## Post 11: Changing Landscape

Turn around. Can you guess what this post is, and why it is there? Take a closer look and then look in the woods to the left and the right. Notice anything?



What you see was once a fence line for the farm. These black locust tree posts were strung with wire to keep livestock in the pasture and to keep predators out.

All of the forest land on this trail was once fields and meadows. Once the farming stopped, the land again became forest...what it was before the farmers came.

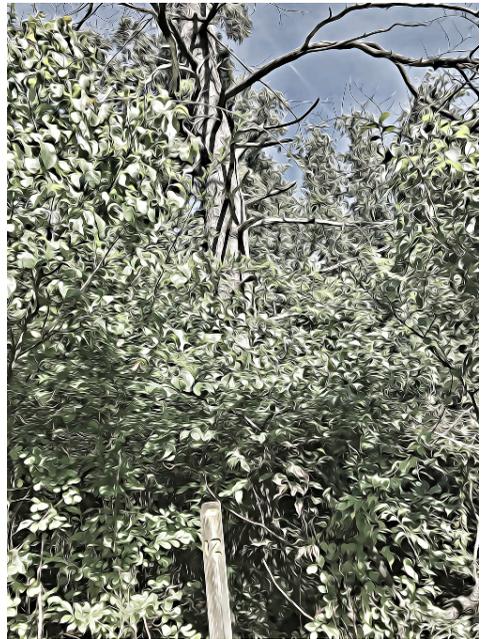
How do you think this forest will look in 20 years? How about 50 years? Look beyond the trees and bushes...see the road? If this land is not preserved, what do you think will be here?

## Post 12: Where is the Forest Heading?

This is the last post on our trail. The dead tree trunk in front of you was once a feature of this trail: a towering white pine. It is gone now and there are no other white pines on the trail. Is that bad?

No...that is what happens in a forest.

Different tree species will live there for a while, and then die, but are replaced by other kinds of trees that are better suited to the habitat the first tree left behind.



This is part of the ecological process known as succession. But what if we chop down the trees before they complete their life cycle? At Stony Kill, we let the forest follow its natural course.

*Forests play an important role in our world. They improve air and water quality and decrease noise pollution. They act as huge sponges to absorb, store, and slowly release water for plants and animals alike. They are valued for their recreational opportunities and the many wood and paper products we use every day. They are home to so many living things—plants, animals, and microbes—all living in connection to each other.*

*We hope you enjoy your visit to the Woodland Trail and encourage you to return every season to experience the ever-changing ecosystem.*

## About Stony Kill Farm

Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center is home to 750+ acres of farm and forest land and offers a wide range of opportunities to slow down, explore, and connect through hands-on experiences in nature and sustainable agriculture.

Originally home to the Wappinger Nation, the land that comprises Stony Kill Farm was purchased from the Wappinger in 1683 by Francis Rombout, Gulian Verplanck, and Stephanus Van Cortlandt. The Verplanck family operated Stony Kill as a tenant farm, and later settled on site, passing the farm down through generations until donating the 754 acres to the NY State Department of Education in 1942. The land was used as a teaching farm by SUNY Farmingdale. In 1973, the farm was transferred to the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for use as an environmental education center.

Stony Kill Foundation, chartered in 1977, is a nonprofit organization originally formed as a Friends group to support DEC at Stony Kill Farm. In 2010, the Foundation was granted permission by DEC to take the lead in operating the farm and its programs. The Foundation's work is focused on connecting people with rich experiences in the outdoors and agriculture and preserving and improving Stony Kill farm for all to enjoy.



### Connect with Stony Kill Foundation

845.831.3800 | [foundation@stonykill.org](mailto:foundation@stonykill.org)  
[stonykill.org](http://stonykill.org)  
79 Farmstead Lane  
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590