

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE



# **WHISPERING PINES**

NATURE TRAIL

Tyler State Park

# Whispering Pines Nature Trail

- Easy to moderate hike
- ¾ mile round-trip
- Foot traffic only

The Whispering Pines Nature Trail passes through a portion of an East Texas mixed hardwood-pine woodland. Some of the plant life is identified and discussed in the following numbered paragraphs which correspond to numbered posts along the trail. However, additional plants and animals also occur along it. Keep a sharp eye out for some of the more elusive members of this forest community.

By walking quietly and alertly along this trail, a number of birds and other wildlife may be observed. Most commonly seen are the CARDINAL, TUFTED TITMOUSE, RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER and GRAY SQUIRRELS.



This historic trail winds through a portion of what was once the Beauchamp Springs Picnic Area, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1938. Nestled in nature, this peaceful family gathering place historically featured a Children's Wading Pool, a lily pond and several picnic tables. Memories were made in this relaxing environment as many area family reunions were held here.

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Plant illustrations from *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest* by Robert A. Vines with drawings by Sarah Kahlden Arendale, 1960, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.

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# 1. SASSAFRAS

*Sassafras albidum*



This small tree occurs in sandy soils from East Texas eastward to Florida and throughout the north-eastern and north-central United States. Three types of leaves can be found on a single plant—unlobed leaves as well as leaves with one or two lateral lobes. The bark of the roots can be used to make a fragrant tea. Sassafras grows best in open woods, along fence rows, and in fields. The fruit is a valuable food for various birds while the leaves may be browsed by deer and rabbits.

# 2. CHILDREN'S WADING POOL

The CCC built this Children's Wading Pool in the family picnic area to provide a safe place to splash around. The pool was designed with a concrete floor surrounded at the edge by native iron-ore rock. A constant flow of cool spring water flowed through a series of pipes to fill the natural, rustic looking pool. Silt and other debris eventually caused the water flow to stop.

# 3. LATRINES

These concrete ovals are what remain of the men's latrine, built by the CCC in 1938 to serve the picnic area. Pit toilets were located inside a well ventilated wooden house, shielded from the rest of the picnic area by a well placed tree. CCC architects planned this area carefully, placing the toilets in an area where the prevailing winds would blow away from the eating areas. Further down the trail, you may see two holes in a concrete platform, all that remains of the women's latrine.

## 4. EASTERN RED CEDAR

*Juniperus virginiana*



Male and female cones of this evergreen species normally, but not always, occur on separate trees. The wood is used for posts, millwork, paneling, and pencils. The wood is highly aromatic and is considered to be insect repellent. The berry-like fruit is eaten by numerous species of birds and other wildlife. Eastern red cedar grows well in open habitats such as old fields because it is sun-adapted and drought-resistant. It is able to continue PHOTOSYNTHESIS (the process by which sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide are transformed into carbohydrate and oxygen) at high and low temperatures and low water levels. Photosynthesis may occur even at 32°F; therefore, this tree has a very long growing season. This species is intolerant of shade and does not occur in mature forests. It thrives in very shallow and poor soils.

## 5. BLACKJACK OAK

*Quercus marilandica*

This oak is readily identified by its characteristic leaf shape- the tip of the leaf is broadly expanded. Blackjack grows most commonly on dry, sandy, low-nutrient soils from central Texas eastward throughout the United States. The acorns, which require two seasons to mature, are eaten by deer, turkey, and squirrels. The wood has been used for fuel, charcoal, and posts. It has little timber value because trees rarely exceed 30 feet in height and are of scraggly form.

## 6. SWEETGUM

*Liquidambar styraciflua*

Star-shaped leaves with five (rarely seven) points make identification of this tree easy. This tree grows best in rich bottomland soils where it may reach 120 feet in height and four feet in diameter. Young branches and twigs may have corky wings. Sweetgum displays brilliant red or yellow leaves in the fall.



## 7. LOBLOLLY PINE

*Pinus taeda*



One of the faster growing pines, loblolly grows in sand or gravel areas in Central Texas (Bastrop County), East Texas and eastward throughout the southeastern United States. Another name is **OLDFIELD PINE** in reference to its ability to invade open areas. Loblolly is the principal commercial pine species of East Texas because it is able to adapt to numerous habitats. Its wood is used for lumber, pulp, fuel and cross-ties.

At this point you have reached the camping area. The nature trail continues to the left, turning back along the wooded slope and returning to the starting point. Please notice that there are restrooms and drinking water located in this area for your convenience.

## 8. REDBUD

*Cercis canadensis* var. *canadensis*

This shrub or small tree is covered with rose-purple blossoms in early spring before the heart-shaped leaves appear. The showy appearance of these flowers has led to widespread use of eastern redbud as an ornamental. The acid-tasting flowers have been pickled for use in salads; in some parts of Mexico flowers are fried and eaten.



## 9. AMERICAN HOLLY

*Ilex opaca*

At one time, American holly commonly grew to 50 feet in height, and specimens have been known to attain a height of 100 feet. Almost all of these large trees were harvested for lumber. Only small trees such as this individual remain in most areas. The glossy, spiny leaves, along with red berries, commonly are used as Christmas decorations. The berries are eaten by numerous species of birds.

## 10. MOCKERNUT HICKORY

*Carya tomentosa*

One of several hickories occurring in eastern Texas, mockernut generally is found on drier soils of ridges and hillsides. The commercially important wood is used for tool handles and fuel. Although used in lesser quantities than other hickories, the fruit of this species is sweet and edible. The leaflets of this tree are hairy, or tomentose, the trait which gave this hickory its species name.

## 11. POISON IVY

*Rhus toxicodendron*

Many bird species eat the berries of this plant, but almost everyone is aware of the painful results when human skin comes in contact with any part of this plant.



## 12. SHORTLEAF PINE

*Pinus echinata*

At first glance, this species looks very similar to the loblolly seen earlier. Notice the shorter needles and smaller cone size of this pine. Shortleaf pine grows at a slower rate and to a lesser height than loblolly pine. Although not as highly valued as loblolly for commercial purposes, shortleaf is widely used for general construction, veneer, excelsior and boxes. Rodents and birds feed on the seeds.

## 13. TRAIL STEPS

These steps are part of a nature trail built by the CCC that followed very closely to this one. Natural building materials such as iron-ore stone were used throughout the park to harmonize with the existing beauty of the earth. The design concept known as the “National Park Service Rustic Style” was characteristic of this time period and the concept is shown in parks throughout the United States. However, European architects fleeing to the United States due to impending war brought a new appreciation for Modernism. Tyler State Park is distinctive among the 30 other CCC state parks in Texas. The buildings were not designed to blend with their surroundings, but were made of milled lumber with metal sash windows. The landscape architects at the park used the naturalistic style, while the building architects embraced a new motif.\*

\* Ralph Edward Newlan. “Tyler State Park Smith County, Texas Cultural Resources Survey Report.”  
Submitted to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (August 1995) 15-16.

## 14. POST OAK

### *Quercus stellata*

Post oak is common in dry upland woods, particularly in sandy areas, in central and eastern Texas. The leaf is variously lobed; however, the widest part of the leaf is in the middle, whereas blackjack (seen earlier) has leaves which are widest at the tip. Post oak and blackjack often are found growing together, with post oak being more abundant on richer soils and blackjack oak being more abundant on thin, infertile soils. Acorns of post oak mature in one growing season and are eaten by numerous wildlife species. Wood is used for crossties, fuel, furniture, and posts.



## 15. FLOWERING DOGWOOD

### *Cornus florida*



Many people are familiar with the apparent white flowers which appear profusely in springtime on these trees. What look like petals, however, actually are bracts (modified leaves). The true flowers are inconspicuous, yellowish or greenish-white structures in the center of these bracts. Bright red fruit ripen in October. These berries are eaten by deer, turkey, squirrels, and many species of birds.



## 16. STEPS, DAM, AND WATERFALL

The dam and steps were made by the CCC when they created the Beauchamp Springs picnic area. The concrete steps were meant to mimic natural tree stumps, in keeping with the park's natural feel. The clay and rock dam held the water produced by the springs to form a beautiful lily pond, located in the middle of the family picnic grounds. Excess water from the pond spills over the top of the dam and down the rocks, creating a waterfall that is pleasing to both the eyes and the ears.

## 17. BEAUCHAMP SPRINGS

Follow the creek with your eyes up the hill to see the water source, a natural spring caused by the intersection of the water table with the slope of the hill. The rocks and the small waterfall were all designed and built by the CCC.

As you return to the Children's Wading Pool, notice the biological processes at work. A thin layer of soil has developed from the accumulation of dust, fallen leaves, and other organic matter. When water was present, this pond may have supported aquatic plants, frogs, and aquatic insects. Now that it is dry, land plants have begun to grow here. The lichens growing on the rocks are primitive plants consisting of an algae and a fungus. The algae produce food from water, and minerals are obtained by the fungus. This relationship, called mutualism, benefits both species. Lichens are called pioneer plants because they are among the first plants to colonize bare rock.

Walking through this woodland, one may wonder why this area is a forest instead of grassland. The plentiful rainfall here favors the growth of trees. On a hot summer day, a large tree may require 1,000 gallons of water, the same amount it would take to fill the bed of a long-bed pickup truck. This means a greater number of trees growing here results in a lower water table, reducing the opportunity for water to flow to the wading pool. Soil type and incidence of fire are other important factors involved in the presence of trees and grasses. Grasses are scarce in this woodland due to insufficient sunlight and the deep layer of litter on top of the soil. Two grasses, SESSILE-FLOWERED SPIKEGRASS and the closely related INLAND SEA OATS, have adapted to shady woodland conditions. Moving westward from here across the state, trees gradually give way to grasses which are better adapted to arid conditions. As you visit other state parks in Texas, notice the transition from forest to grassland.

# TYLER STATE PARK ECOSYSTEM

This forest is a community. Some individuals produce food, some provide shelter, and still others (scavengers) remove dead individuals. These plants and animals depend upon one another for survival and, through careful conservation and sound management, they will remain here a long time.

While experiencing the beauty of the park, take time to appreciate the sights and sounds that have been lost in most urban settings. Allow yourself to be enriched by the nature that surrounds you. While doing so:

- Please help us keep the scenery beautiful and assure continued use of this natural and cultural resource by keeping it litter free.
- Help wild animals stay on a healthy, natural diet while minimizing animal contact with visitors. This discourages them from digging through campsites for food. Feeding wild animals is prohibited at all state parks.
- Help researchers link us to our past by not disturbing archeological sites.
- Wildlife and resource management will help preserve our heritage for future generations. Please be aware of fire bans in the park.



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