

Seth Myers Nature Trail

Seth Myers (1899-1978) is nationally remembered for his many years of dedicated work in conserving and enhancing our natural resources. Seth resided for many years in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and was employed as an outdoor writer for the Sharon Herald. He received numerous conservation awards, including the Department of the Army Citation of Appreciation for Patriotic Civilian Service. Because of his outstanding conservation efforts, this trail was named for him and dedicated in his honor on June 2, 1976.

Welcome to the Seth Myers Nature Trail. During the next 45 minutes you will be walking through one little corner of nature's vast world. This trail guide will help to point out some of the many interesting facets of nature you can observe along the trail. Simply match the numbers on the posts with the numbered paragraphs in this guide. Here, as on all Federal lands, plants must be left undisturbed. Thank you and have a pleasant walk.

1.) Touch At Your Own Risk

The vine growing on this oak tree is poison ivy. Poison ivy has three waxy, green leaves, and in late summer, clusters of whitish berries. Poison ivy may take the form of either a climbing vine or a low sprawling shrub. Skin contact with the leaves or other parts of this plant often results in a blister-like skin irritation. Should contact occur, wash the affected area as soon as possible with soap and water. Learn to identify poison ivy at a distance and be certain to avoid any contact. Don't forget the common saying, "Leaves of three, let them be!"

2.) Valuable Tree

The tree marked with a yellow dot is a black cherry. Black cherries are deciduous trees that grows up to 50-100 feet tall with a trunk diameter of up to 25-50 inches, occasionally more, with flowers. The leaves are simple, 2.5-5.5 inches long, with a serrated margin. The flowers are small and fragrant with five white petals. The fruit is often eaten by birds. A mature black cherry can easily be identified in a forest by its very broken, dark grey to black bark. It can also be identified by an almond-like odor when a young twig is scratched and held close to the nose. The fruit is suitable for many uses including jam, cherry pies, flavoring in sodas, and in many ice creams.

3.) Nature's Fertilizer Factory

At one time the fallen log lying before you was a thriving, healthy tree. However, even though it is now dead and decaying, it is not without value. This log provides food for many types of bacteria, fungi, and other living organisms which are hard at work producing nature's fertilizer. As these organisms slowly decompose the log, nutrients are returned to the soil and the atmosphere. This is nature's way of recycling necessary materials which provide nourishment for new generations of plants and animals.

4.) A Parade of Plants

The area where you are now standing was once a farmer's field. Many years ago this field was abandoned and, as time passed, a slow parade of different plant species spread throughout the area. This process is known as succession. The first species to inhabit the area were various grasses which were closely followed by the heavy-stemmed weeds such as goldenrod and multi-flora rose. These were followed by the thorn apple and other woody plants. In time, only those plants whose seedlings can survive in the shade of their parents will persist.

5.) Tree Battlefield

The small trees around you with the yellow dots are all shagbark hickories. For many years they have been in a constant struggle for survival with each other and all of the other trees in the area. They are fighting for the essentials of life; sunlight, moisture, nutrients, and growing space. Furthermore, if these saplings are ever to reach maturity, they must defend themselves against many types of harmful insects and disease-carrying organisms. Many of the young hickories before you will not win this battle and will die before they reach maturity. In order to prevent overcrowding, only the fittest individuals shall live to reproduce their own kind.

6.) Nature's Tree Planters

The long, flat plates of gray bark, loose at one or both ends, identifies this tree as a mature shagbark hickory. Again, this tree is marked with a yellow dot. It is the parent of all the small hickories you saw at the last station. Nuts from this tree were probably carried off and buried by squirrels and chipmunks. Some of the nuts later germinated to form many of the young hickory saplings now populating the area. In this manner, small rodents play an extremely important role in both establishing and maintaining our forests.

7.) A Knight in Armor

The trees to the left and right of the post are wearing a suit of "armor." A tree's bark serves to defend the tree against many enemies. Bark is effective in repelling attacks by insects and disease-carrying organisms, acts as a protective barrier against surface fires, insulates the living tissue beneath it from the sun, and prevents dehydration. Bark can be useful in identifying species of trees.

8.) Caution

Does this vine climbing up the trunk of this white oak look familiar to you? You were just introduced to it a little ways back the trail. It's poison ivy. Poison ivy grows abundantly in this woodlot so be careful not to wander off the trail. Despite the poisonous effects of poison ivy on humans, its berries are relished by over sixty species of bird.

9.) Umbrella Plant

A patch of may-apples can be distinguished from afar. The smooth, dark green foliage during the spring makes it a conspicuous feature of the woodland landscape. The stems are attached to the center of the leaf giving the plant an umbrella-like appearance. Large, white flowers appear in May and the lemon-shaped fruit, which follows, is edible but very laxative and should not be considered as food. All green parts, and the root of the plant, are poisonous if eaten.

10.) White Oak

Not a tall tree by normal standards, the white oak, marked by a yellow dot, typically reaches 65-85 feet at maturity. The lower branches are apt to reach out laterally, parallel to the ground. White oaks can live up to six hundred years. The bark is light ash/gray and peels from the top, bottom, and/or sides. Because the white oak is waterproof, this wood is used for wine and whiskey barrels because it is resistant to leaks. It has also been used in construction, shipbuilding, agriculture, and interior finishing in houses. The acorns are valuable as food for turkeys, wood ducks, rabbits, squirrels and deer.

11.) A Borrow Pit

The depression in front of you is the site of a borrow pit. Earthen fill from this site was probably used in the construction of the canal built on this river during the early 1800's. One of the locks from this canal system is still visible from the bridge below the dam. Later in the 1800's, this pit was probably used again for fill in the building of railroads following the river valley. Using your imagination, you can visualize a steam powered shovel, men busy with picks and shovels, and horse drawn wagons hauling fill to a busy railroad or canal construction crew.

12.) A Thirsty Tree

When you see this tree growing, you can be sure that water is nearby. The seeds of this species require exceedingly moist conditions in which to grow. For this reason the sycamore, marked with a yellow dot, is seldom found far from stream banks or moist bottomlands. The most striking feature of the sycamore is its mottled, creamy white, green, and brown bark. As the older brownish colored bark peels off, the newer, lighter colored bark is exposed. This is especially evident if you are looking at the upper limbs. As you walk along, see if you can find a sycamore that is not relatively close to a water source.

13.) Shenango Lake

Shenango River Lake has provided many benefits since its completion in 1965. During periods of high water and potential flooding, the dam stores the runoff from a 589 square mile drainage area. This water is held back until the threat of downstream flooding is past, and then it is safely released. Some of the excess water is stored for low water periods in the summer when its release can help to increase stream flow and improve water quality downstream by diluting polluted waters entering the river via towns and industries. The benefit which may most interest you, however, is recreation. In addition, project lands provide habitat for a variety of wildlife including deer, turkey, squirrel, rabbit, pheasant, grouse, and many species of waterfowl. The waters of the lake are inhabited by many fish species including trout, bass, walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, and many pan and forage fishes.

14.) Home Sweet Home

The cavity in the trunk of the fallen oak tree behind you had its origin many years ago. It undoubtedly is the result of a wound which permitted wood destroying fungi to enter the tree. These fungi began destroying the center or heart wood of the tree which resulted in the formation of an inner cavity or den. Hollow trees such as this one are important to many species of wildlife including squirrels, raccoons, opossums, mice, owls, and wood ducks. Den trees provide wildlife with shelter during periods of bad weather, protection from predators, and an ideal place to raise young.

15.) Weary Traveler

Why is this particular boulder resting at this location where no other boulders are apparent? Its rounded surface contours give us a clue to its past history. As the great glaciers advanced southward, they pushed tremendous quantities of the earth's crust along with them. This material was often transported many miles from its place of origin. During this journey, rocks and boulders were continually rolled and rubbed against one another which tended to grind and otherwise wear away the sharp corners and jagged edges they once possessed. This left them with the rounded contours displayed by the boulder in front of you. As the climate warmed and the glaciers began to recede, the melting ice released the giant boulders it carried with it. This boulder was dropped in this very spot. Its long, rugged journey had come to an end.

16.) Lost Soil

The soil which originally filled this gully has been torn away by a powerful force which has radically altered the face of the earth throughout history. For most of the year, this gully is merely a dry streambed. However, during periods of heavy rainfall and melting snow, a torrent of water rushes down this channel and tears away fragments of soil. These soil particles may be carried for long distances by the force of the running water before finally being deposited as sediment upon the bottoms of lakes and rivers. Quite possibly, some of the soil particles originally washed from this small gully now helps to comprise the Mississippi River Delta over a thousand miles away. This process by which the surface of the earth is worn away is known as erosion. Every year millions of tons of valuable topsoil are lost from productive use because of erosion.

17.) Remnant of a Disaster

For many years this black cherry tree stood proudly upright, with its branches reaching for the sky. Then, quite suddenly, it was thrown to the ground. What unforeseen force could have done this? Was the tree toppled by the strong winds of a violent storm? Was it crushed to the ground when a large limb or a nearby tree fell on it? We may never be able to fully answer these questions. But the vertical sprout now growing from the base of this cherry tree does give us an idea of how long ago the disaster occurred. The sprout started to grow shortly after the tree fell.

The Seth Myers Trail has received an honorable mention in the landscape architecture category of the U.S. Army Chief of Engineers Distinguished Design Award. We thank you for visiting Shenango River Lake, and we hope you enjoyed your walk while exploring the trail. We hope the trail was educational and fun for all ages. Remember to always do your part in keeping Shenango safe, clean, and enjoyable for all of our visitors. If you have any questions, please call (724) 962-7746 or stop by our Resource Manager's office. Again, thank you for visiting Shenango and have a great day!

References:

Rogers, Robert. "White Oak: *Quercus alba* L." <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/quercus/alba.htm>.

Marquis, David A. "Black Cherry: *Prunus serotina* Ehrh." <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/prunus/serotina.htm>.