

Nature Trails Teach Nature's Lessons

Coordinating Nature Studies

The material on this page is furnished by the Coordinating Council on Nature Activities.

Realizing the need for a national program that would coordinate the nature activities of national groups working with young people, the American Museum of Natural History invited these volunteer organizations to form a council to be known as the Coordinating Council on Nature Activities for the purpose of teaching the growing generation, through nature activities, the value of all wild life and natural resources and their conservation. The organizations represented are: American Museum of Natural History, American Nature Study Society, Boy Scouts of America, Camp Directors' Association, Camp Fire Girls, Inc., Girl Scouts, Inc., Pioneer Youth of America, Playground and Recreation Association, and the Woodcraft League of America.

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Nature Trails

Nature has numerous stories to tell. Many of these stories, however, are lost to the public, out-of-doors, unless some method be devised to call attention to various interesting things that are to be found on every hand. Mere labels upon trees and other plants along the walks and paths are not enough in themselves, although they may succeed in attracting a public that has formerly been somewhat interested in Nature Study. In order to appeal to the growing army of people who seek the open air during the spring and summer months, Nature Trails have been developed in many sections of the country, particularly in the National Parks.

At Bear Mountain, on the Hudson, in the Harriman section of the Palisades Interstate Park, where tens of thousands of people spend their week-ends during the vacation seasons, an experimental Nature Trail is being built. An outdoor nature building is being provided by the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Foundation. At the beginning of this trail is the following label—"How many of us are able to read, unaided, the 'signs' of Nature? Let the guiding labels take the place of a Naturalist Friend who has an interesting story to tell you as you follow the trail." This introductory label really explains the purpose of the project and tells the idea and aim of the series

of "signs" following along the path. Attention is called to the various phases of nature, including the principal geological features of the region, the story of the birds, mammals and amphibia. The botanical trail is being developed under the direction of Dr. Clyde Fisher, of the American Museum of Natural History. Dr. Frank E. Lutz, of the same institution, who developed the Nature Trail idea at his station near Tuxedo, is the scientific adviser of the work. The naturalist in charge is William H. Carr also of the American Museum.

The educational work upon the Bear Mountain Trail includes the teaching of conservation. The following label upon a gray birch reads: "This is one of the trees from which the bark used to be peeled BEFORE people learned that it was the wrong thing to do." An attempt is made, throughout, to have the labels include not only the names, but some interesting facts as well. In order to prevent lengthy wording, a series of two or more labels are sometimes used to explain certain facts.

At the National Parks Conference, which was recently held at Bear Mountain, a resolution was accepted to adopt Nature Trails throughout the United States. There is indeed a great future for this new phase of Nature Education.

William H. Carr,

American Museum of Natural History

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An Easy Tree To Nick-Name

The boy with personal peculiarities is generally well known and generally nick-named. That is, he bears an "eke-name" in addition to the John or Samuel given to him by his parents. So it is with several of our common native trees—the Buckeye, the Redbud, the Shagbark, the Tulip Tree. The same is true of the Kentucky Coffee Tree, which was thus nick-named because some of the early settlers south of the Ohio River used its seeds as a substitute for coffee. The name they gave to it, although generally accepted, is not very apt. The hard seeds are indeed like roasted coffee in color, but the bitter drink made from them has little of the taste of our breakfast beverage. Others who named the tree did somewhat better. They noticed that its twigs never bore any fine spray and that each twig when the leaves had fallen looked like the

stump of a branch with the end cut off. So these observers named it the Stump Tree. They might have called it the Solitary Stump Tree, for it is a rare tree, fond of growing alone. In 1783 the French botanist, Lamarck, who also noticed that the branches had no spray gave it the Greek name, *Gymnocladus* (naked branch), which it still bears in all the tree books.

Now that we know it better we may want to call it by other names. One who hunts for its winter buds may want to call it the No Bud Tree, for until spring is well advanced its buds appear to be scarcely more than little brown spots set in "silky craters." They look strangely unlike any other buds. One who handles the beautiful seal-brown seeds and tries to cut their adamantine coat may want to name the tree that bore them the Brown Ivory Tree. Perhaps some experimenter waiting more than a whole year for these seeds to germinate may find a name to tell how lazy they are. While observing the tree's solitary habits and the peculiar whiteness of its young bark, which breaks into flakes and peels like the skin of a patient who has had fever, one may be tempted to call it the Leprous Tree. When one cuts a twig and observes the beautiful salmon color of its pith, one feels sure that somewhere the Indians must have had a flowing name which meant, "The tree with the salmon pith." Surely a tree so easily named deserves wider acquaintance.

L. M. Dougan,

American Nature Study Society.

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Hobbies That Count

To uncover the treasure chests of the notorious Captain Kidd is the ambition of every boy who possesses a pick and a shovel and a place to dig. If you tell your scouts who are qualifying for the mining merit badge that they may find genuine jewels and marketable stones, they may regard you with suspicion. Yet nearly every state in the Union has at least one mineral that has value as a gem or which is so rare in other parts of the country that it is earnestly sought by mineral collectors.

The mineral collection offers more than money values, however. It offers hours of pleasure and profit. Hikes become more interesting and

(Just turn the page)

Nature Trails

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worth while with minerals as an objective. Minerals give a chance to make a collection which would be a real asset to the camp museum, the school, or the community house. Here also is a splendid opportunity to carry out in principle an individual patrol or even troop project. One of the most popular of such projects, as has again and again been demonstrated, is the collection and preparation of a mineral display.

For instance, the display that won the first prize among the collections at the Mohawk Indian Village at the Eastern States Exposition in 1926 was a mineral collection displayed by Troop 19, East Orange, N. J. This was not merely the group of miscellaneous classified minerals and rocks so often seen, but was a display arranged by the scouts to show how common minerals are related to our everyday life. Beside a piece of crude lead ore was a short length of finished lead pipe. Beside a chunk of silver ore glistened a sterling teaspoon and a few silver coins. Contrasted to the specimen of copper ore lay a coil of copper wire. Mercury made possible the thermometer; mineral talc, a can of talcum powder, etc.

Among the features of a recent annual banquet of Troop 8 of Elizabeth, N. J., was an exhibition of projects made by the eight different patrols. The display adjudged the best was the work of the "mineral patrol." These scouts made a model of a mining camp, complete in every detail showing various mining methods and equipment. Accompanying the model were labeled mineral speci-

mens such as would be produced in the layout they had displayed.

Mineral collectors have a broad field in which to exercise their ingenuity. Practical and educational exhibits may be prepared to show the interesting and mystifying properties of minerals. One type that always attracts attention and tells a story is a collection classified as "Minerals of Interest." Such a collection shows, for example, how Iceland spar reveals two long lines on a sheet of paper when held over a single line, due to its double refracting powers (on the same principle that a stick appears bent when dipped in water). It would show how lodestone violently attracts a compass needle and picks up iron fragments. Of course, the "Virginia Lucky Stone," the mineral which crystallizes in the form of crosses, often perfect St. George's and St. Andrew's, would be included. Mercury, the only liquid metal, which has such a high specific gravity that an iron bar will float in it, is always of interest.

Still other types of collections are those which show the variation in color or weight, or form, or hardness of minerals. Then too, the scout will find he can prepare collections that are based even more closely on the merit badge requirements for mining. These include samples of different ores, types of rock formations, groups of the rock-making minerals and many others.

Malcolm Douglas,
Boy Scouts of America.

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One-fourth of all the bird population of South America is in Ecuador.

English air traffic rules require airplanes to give the right of way to airships and balloons.

The Crow Indians are among the tallest of people, the men averaging almost six feet in height.

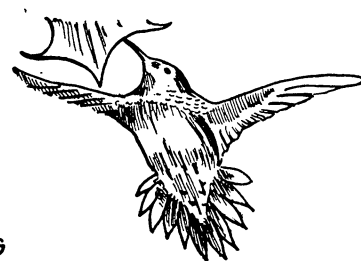
A new device to suck rock dust out of mines makes the air more healthy for miners to breathe.

The 110 story skyscraper planned for New York City will have 60 elevators, none of which will make the entire 110 floor trip.

Automobiles have helped to kill off wild game animals, not by running the animals down, but by carrying hunters more quickly and easily to inaccessible places.

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



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Humming-Birds

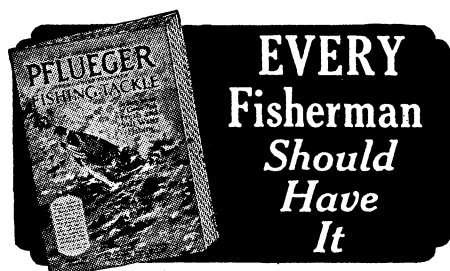
Humming-birds have been called flying jewels, living bits of flame, and similar fanciful and poetic names by such a variety of naturalists and literary folk that it is vain to seek a new descriptive term for them. Everybody knows them, and exclaims joyously when these little birds condescend to pay them a visit.

The best way to secure regular visits from humming-birds is to plant a trumpet-creeper vine somewhere about the premises. The deep-throated, flame-colored flowers of this tropical plant are the favorite food-counters of these hovering, humming, darting small bits of feathery energy. But they can be lured by other deep or long-spurred flowers that common bees have trouble getting into, for example, the common annual larkspur.

The common feeling that there is something exotic about humming-birds, that they do not exactly fit in with the rest of our birds, is quite correct. The whole family is essentially tropic, and those that visit us during the summer come late and leave early on their flight to warmer lands at the summer's end. In the tropics there are thousands of them to one in the temperate zones, and our few non-tropic species are quite eclipsed by dozens and scores of humming-birds that never leave their warm home-lands.

Some of the tropical humming-birds replace insects in the familiar role of carrying pollen from flower to flower, thus insuring fertilization and a crop of seed. The yellow dust catches on the feathers of their heads, and the next flower they visit receives a bit of it on its stigma. Many of these flowers have given up all dependence on insects as pollenation agents, and rely entirely on their special humming-birds guests.

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