

TUDOR TRAIL WALK

- by Bernie McKenna

Date: Tuesday, August 5th

Place: Cole Harbour Heritage Park, 784 Bissett Road

Weather: Sunny = 23 C

Participants: 11

The group of us were extremely fortunate to get this walk in because this very afternoon all hiking trails in the province were declared closed until fire conditions improve or on October 15th. With the extreme dryness of the woods this makes perfect sense; most of the areas we walked were tinder dry and any spark could well have set it off.

The walk was carried out in 3 segments. The 1st went from the parking lot to the Tudor Trailhead, and its walking surface was wide, well-packed crusher dust. The 2nd went from there to the Costley Farm site and it was a mix of wood chips, crushed gravel and some vegetated spots. The 3rd, and final segment went from the farm site back to the parking lot, and although the surface was dry and firm, portions of it had numerous exposed rocks that had the potential to trip one.

When all 11 participants were present, we did introductions all around, as a couple of faces may have not been familiar to everyone. We took the time for anyone who wanted to apply insect repellent to do so, we have ticks you know! We also reviewed copies of the park map that Cole Harbour Parks and Trails had generously allowed us to copy and its use ensured we all knew the route before we got under way. When I had first arrived, I checked the parking lot and easily found: Knapweed, a small Balsam Fir, White Spruce, Wild Raisin, Mountain Holly, Grey Alders, Serviceberry and Cinnamon Ferns. Everyone one of these would be seen again, later on during the walk. The entire walk showed us plants all the way from very, tall White Pines to the prostate Creeping Snowberry, wonderful diversity! Luckily amongst us, we had two good birders and it seemed the rest of us were reasonably good at plant ID, a few were more than reasonably good! Both the Merlin and SEEK identification apps were used for either initial identification or confirmation of the ID. Each app is excellent and well worth having on your phone.

The 1st leg, had the best walking with it's hard packed crusher dust surface, the walking was so good we got strung out a bit, but between us we found and identified the following; Wild Blueberries, several Larch in full summer dress, Pearly Everlastings, Queen Anne's Lace (wild carrot), Meadowsweet, a seemingly out of place clump of Prairie Willow, (a SEEK ID), Paper Birch, Grey Birch, tall Perennial Sow Thistle, Primrose, with a colourful Primrose Moth attending it, Marsh Thistle, Marsh forget-me-nots, Flat Topped White Aster, Coltsfoot, Raspberry, Rugosa Rose and Sensitive Ferns. This seemed the most diverse and bountiful section of the walk.

Starting the 2nd leg at the Tudor Trailhead we entered a slightly different setting with more ferns and mosses. David Patriquin or Sean Haughian would have been invaluable here. We

found: New York Ferns, Sensitive Ferns, Common Bracken, Cinnamon Ferns, Rock Polypody, along with very large patches of both Blue Bead Lilies and Bunchberries, Large Leaf Poplars, Red Oak, Creeping Snowberry, as well as a wild mint and a sedge that SEEK could not identify. Through here the ruggedness of the terrain really showed, there were boulders and solid rock faces protruding from the ground for 15 feet or more. It was hard to imagine it had been the trail from the Costley farm to Bissett Road and further. There was a bit of a climb at the end of the Tudor Trail through former farm fields, that took us to the site where the farm house and buildings would have been.

The 3rd leg of the walk took us from the Costley farm back to the parking lot and the completion of the loop. The previous climb was through a small field entirely covered in Knapweed, where hundreds or thousands of bees were busy collecting the pollen and nectar to make honey and feed their larvae. There were also several old apple trees, bearing fruit and appearing very healthy, no doubt direct descendants of the original farm trees. Along with the Knapweed and apple trees were a smattering of small poplar trees pushing up about 18 inches in height. This field is normally mowed to keep the weeds and brush from taking over and returning it to woods again. The plant species on this 3rd leg was not a lot different than the first two legs, but the land was a bit higher and drier and the White Pine and White Spruce seemed to like that. This is the only area where we saw Japanese Beetles during the whole walk and then, only a couple of them. As we left the field, we saw two rock fences heading east and west along the field's edge. Here a large, limbless White Birch snag had two large holes in the top section and a pile of what was likely Pileated Woodpecker chips at its base, whether there was a nest or not we don't know. During the entire walk we had ripe Huckleberries to snack on, the bushes were seemingly everywhere and laden with their delicious berries.

We saw and heard birds of the following species. American Robins, American Gold Finches, Red-breasted Nuthatches, American Crows, Black-capped Chickadees, a Northern Flicker, Blue Jays, a Downy Woodpecker, a Yellow Warbler, a White-throated Sparrow, a Black and White Warbler, and of course Starlings. I suspect we weren't the only ones eating those Huckleberries. Not a bad list of birds for a middle of the day walk.

We were all more than pleased with the outing, particularly with the number of different plants we found. It took us just shy of 2 hours at a fairly leisurely pace. As I mentioned at the beginning, another day later and the trail would have been closed, very nice to have squeezed this walk in.