

A “Traditional” First Day Hike

Happy New Year! Welcome to Sky Meadows and thank you for choosing us to help you start 2020 with a refreshing hike! Before we get started today, I just wanted to give a little background on the New Year holiday. Did you know it was not always celebrated on January? In Roman times it was celebrated in March during the equinox. It was not until Julius Caesar and the creation on the 12 month year (adding January and February) that the beginning of the year was moved to January 1st. New Year’s is celebrated differently all over the world and has varied throughout time. Queen Victorian highly favored new years and even gave it a new name “Hogmanay”. Her love for the holiday great affected how the rest of the new world celebrated.

During the Victorian era young bachelors would visit numerous homes on New Year’s Day. Typically they would leave behind a calling card for the young ladies of the home, Amanda Edmonds speaks much of this in her diary. Another common custom of the time was to decorate your table with 12 different fruits. These fruits were usually, but always round, and represented good luck and plenty of food for the coming year. At each fruit/ tree we will have a previously placed Victorian calling card. Each stop will have a little bit about the nature, how it ties in with New Year’s or “keeping the old with the new”, and how it affects the wild life in the coming year. These fruits appear on both trails and will be used: cherry, paw-paw, persimmon, plum, berries (wine berries, black raspberry, blackberry), grape vine, barberry, rose fruits, pokeberry, bittersweet, poison ivy, Hawthorne, hackberry.

Beginning at the Park Office, this hike will take Boston Mill Road trail, continue onto James Ball Trail, then onto Corporal Morgan Trail to finish at the Park Office. As you hike along the highlighted route on the map included, use the numbered stops on the trail and information below to learn more about the history and nature Of Sky Meadows State Park.

1. Cherry

The black cherry tree is a species that is widespread across North America, and was most commonly spread by settlers in this area. In the second half of the 17th century, cherries are reported to have been grown in abundance in Virginia. The fruit produced by the black cherry tree has been used historically to flavor brandy or rum, and is consumed raw by humans as well as a wide variety of wildlife. The leaves, twigs, bark, and seeds of the black cherry tree are poisonous to livestock, however, are eaten by white-tail deer without harm. The black cherry tree has a very distinctive bark, and this bark has been used historically in the Appalachian region as a cough, remedy, tonic, and as a sedative. Cherries trees are often connected to the fruitfulness of life and can correlate to a fruitful and prosperous year.

2. Pawpaw

Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch a small deciduous tree and the largest edible fruit native to eastern North America. During winter, the tree can be identified by its smaller size, distinctive bark, and felted bud tips present on the branches. It is a fruit and tree that is widespread throughout the Appalachian region and is well established in American history and folklore. The earliest documented mention of the pawpaw is in the 1541 report of the Spanish de Soto expedition, who found Native Americans cultivating it east of the Mississippi River. The Lewis and Clark Expedition consumed pawpaw

fruits during their travels. Thomas Jefferson planted trees at Monticello, his home in Virginia. Legend has it that chilled pawpaw fruit was a favorite dessert of George Washington.

One of the most tasty late-season rewards for hikers and wildlife alike is the pawpaw fruit, which begins to ripen in late summer and peaks in September and October. The flavor of pawpaw fruit is often compared to bananas, but with hints of mango, vanilla, and citrus. The fruit has the ungainly appearance of a small green potato and may occur in clusters on the tree. The pawpaw is known by many regional names based on both its appearance and taste, some including: wild banana, prairie banana, Hoosier banana, Appalachian banana, Ozark banana, Indian banana, American custard apple, banango, and the poor man's banana. During the Great Depression, the readily available pawpaw fruit was a frequent substitute for other fruits. Pawpaw trees can be found in thickets just off many of the trails throughout the park.

3. Persimmon

The Persimmon tree has its roots in American history. It served as an integral part of the Native American's diet. The name persimmon derives from the Algonquin words for "choke-fruit," referring to the astringent nature of an unripe fruit. In 1609, Capt. John Smith wrote "If it is not ripe, it will draw a man's mouth awry with much torment. When it is ripe, it is delicious as an apricot". Many early colonial orchards included the Persimmon. The persimmon fruit matures in the late fall, can remain on the tree until winter, and are typically harvested after the first frost. This is why you may still see some fruit on the trees in Sky Meadows even in January.

In American folklore, the severity of the upcoming winter is said to be predictable by cutting open the seed of a persimmon and look at the shape inside. A fork shape is said to indicate a mild winter, a knife is for a biting cold winter, and a shovel shape indicates a lot of snow. During the Civil War, when supplies became scarce for soldiers, the persimmon seeds were used as buttons or roasted and ground to be used as a coffee substitute. The hard and heavy wood was often used to make gunstocks for the soldiers. Also used for medicinal purposes, both sides of the conflict offered 20-25 cents per pound of persimmon root.

4. Plum

Plums and plum trees have a history of extensive use by Native American people and tribes. Their uses can range from culinary, ornamental, and medicinal purposes traditionally. Some medicinal uses include the use of plum bark, seeds, and leaves to treat diabetes, the use of bark to soothe throat problems, and the use of leaves for strengthening teeth. The fruit of the plum tree can be eaten raw or processed into preserves, jellies, jams, or even wines. Many birds and animals will also eat the fruit and white-tail deer will feed on twigs and leaves from plum trees.

5. Berries

The three most common berry varieties found in Sky Meadows include the black raspberry, wineberry, and blackberry. These fruits are some of the favorite treats of the American black bear and other birds and mammals that call the Appalachian region, and Sky Meadows, home.

- a. Black raspberry

The black raspberry is a type of wild berry that is native to North America. They can be easily identified, especially in the winter, by the powdery blue color of the vines. Like most berries, the black raspberry is covered in small thorns as a defense mechanism for predators and grows in canes that can reach heights of about three to five feet. Often confused for the blackberry, black raspberries may look similar, but share more characteristics with the red raspberry. Peak season for the black raspberry in Appalachia is July.

b. Wineberry

The wineberry is a subspecies of raspberry. Able to be easily identified by the deep burgundy color of the thorny canes and vines. Not native to the United States, the wineberry was introduced in 1890 to assist in cultivating other species of blackberries. Like many other blackberries, wineberry is generally considered a pioneer or early-successional species that flourishes after disturbance, often forming dense thickets and dominating sites.

c. Blackberry

Native to North America, primarily the United States and Canada. The nectar and pollen of the flowers attract many kinds of insects, especially long-tongued and short-tongued bees. This includes honeybees, bumblebees, Little Carpenter bees, Nomadine Cuckoo bees, Mason bees, and other pollinators. Identifiable from the thorny brown canes and vines that grow in thickets just off most hiking trails in Sky Meadows.

6. Grape Vine

When the Vikings first stepped foot in North America around 1000A.D, they called it Vinland, because of the number of grape vines they saw growing.

Six hundred years later, the early colonists fervently tried to produce wines of worth from native grapes. They hoped that it would be the New World's first great export. Thank goodness for tobacco, because all wines produced from these native grapes were bitter or otherwise unsatisfactory. European winemakers were even commissioned to come to the New World to make good of the plentiful native grapes available, Thomas Jefferson gave it a similarly valiant effort, to no avail. French vines were imported to the New World to try and grow, but were killed by the harsh winters

For troops during the Civil War, native grapes sufficed just fine, and were used regularly in the making of wine.

Success came in the nineteenth century from the grafting of plump, sweet, French grape vines to the winter hardy roots of American grape vines. Today, Virginia is ranked 9th in the country in wine production, and it contributes immensely to the state's economy. The Crooked Run valley is certainly not excluded in this, as is evidenced by the sheer number of vineyards neighboring the park.

In disturbed habitats, grape vines have the potential to grow uncontrollably/aggressively, a trait that has often earned them a negative reputation. Thus, though they can be burdensome in these situations, often taking over and choking out orchards, these vines are native to the ecosystem and serve a valuable role in healthy and well balanced landscapes, benefiting birds and other wildlife. Birds will not only eat the grapes, but will use the peeling bark of the vines to construct their nests. Grape vines also help to 'pull-down' standing dead trees that are prohibiting the rise of new forest growth, and provide

avenues of travel for squirrels and other canopy dwelling animals. Additionally, as they thrive primarily along forest edgelands, thick strands of grapevines provide shelter and hiding places for animals that thrive in this ecosystem of converging pasture/woodland.

7. Barberry

Invasive, Japanese barberry located within Sky Meadows. Introduced in the 1800s and is a popular ornamental and landscape plant. Promoted as a substitute for the common barberry (native to Europe). The wood of the barberry is a yellow color, which is good for making dyes. The barberry has been used traditionally to treat wounds and for soothing minor mouth and throat irritations.

8. Rose Hips

The fruit of a rose, which is only visible after the petals drop in the late summer. Rose hips contain very high amounts of Vitamin C and are a common ingredient in teas. Has been used for thousands of years in traditional medicine to treat a wide variety of ailments. Were historically a great source of Vitamins A, B, and C for Native Americans during the winter months when other sources of those vitamins were scarcer.

9. Pokeberry

The pokeberry is a plant native to the eastern United States and is the first spring growth. It is a choice edible and a traditional Appalachian food source. Young leaves and stems when properly cooked are edible and provide a good source of protein, fat and carbohydrate. Pokeberry has strong ties to traditional medicine and has been used to treat both rheumatism and skin diseases. If the poison is not removed properly from the pokeberry, it can cause a variety of symptoms. Many cases of pokeberry poisoning occurred in the 19th century from its uses in tinctures and herbal remedies where the poison had not been removed correctly.

10. Bittersweet

Two varieties of the bittersweet plant can be found in Sky Meadows, the native American bittersweet and the invasive Oriental bittersweet. This plant was named bittersweet by European settlers due to the resemblance of the fruits to the common nightshade, which was also called bittersweet. Roots of the bittersweet were used by Native Americans and pioneers to induce vomiting, treat venereal disease, and treat the symptoms of tuberculosis. Wood of the bittersweet plant have been used for making walking sticks. American bittersweet has It has colorful, orange fruits about the size of a pea. These fruits are poisonous to humans when ingested, but are favorites of birds. Invasive Oriental bittersweet were introduced to the United States in 1979.

11. Hawthorn

The Hawthorn are shrubs or small trees native to the Northern Hemisphere, mostly growing to 5–15 meters tall, with small pome fruit and thorny branches. The long thorns have a defense mechanism of the shrub to protect buds and edible fruits, but have been used by Native Americans and early settlers as fishing hooks. Hawthorn extract is noted to be useful as a medicine for heart diseases and to strengthen cardiovascular function and has been used traditionally as an herbal medicine. In the Victorian era, the hawthorn represented hope in the language of the flowers and the imagery of the flowering plant and fruit was used commonly on calling cards.

12. Hackberry

Hackberry trees are medium sized deciduous trees common to North America, and in Sky Meadows they are found lining the stone walls along Boston Mill Road trail. The sweet purple berry that grows on this tree is primarily eaten by small birds and mammals. Hackberry wood is similar in many ways to hickory, but much cheaper, and has been used to make furniture. The bark of the hackberry has very distinctive ridges and is quite fibrous, which has made it useful in making ropes and matting after it has been soaked to allow the fibers to separate.

Conclusion

As we embark upon the New Year, it is important that we strive to preserve and celebrate the past whilst also looking forward to what lies ahead, and work to sustain a positive future.

Sky Meadows State Park Trails

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Blue Ridge Trails	Blaze	Mileage	Usage	Difficulty
Ambassador Whitehouse	Lt. Blue	1.1	H	■
Appalachian Trail	White	2.43	H	■
James Ball	Pink	0.83	H, HB, B	●
Gap Run	Orange	0.49	H	■
North Ridge	Blue	1.54	H	■
Old Trail	Purple	1.8	H	■
Piedmont Overlook	Red	0.61	H	■
Snowden	Silver	1.14	H	■
South Ridge	Yellow	1.54	H	■
Boston Mill Road	Green	0.43	H, HB, B	●
Corporal Morgan	Dk. Brown	1.61	H, HB, B	●

H = Hiking B = Biking HB = Horseback Riding

● = Easy ■ = Moderate ▲ = Difficult

Blue Ridge Trailheads Latitude Longitude

A. Backcountry Trailhead 38°59.528 -77°57.988

B. Valley Trailhead 38°59.352 -77°57.425

Blue Ridge Points of Interest Latitude Longitude

C. Upper Piedmont Overlook 38°59.82 -77°58.368

D. Lower Piedmont Overlook 38°59.688 -77°58.182

E. South Ridge Overlook 38°59.064 -77°58.544

F. Snowden Ruins 38°59.22 -77°58.332

G. Woodpecker Viewing Area 38°59.388 -77°57.666

H. Whitehouse Overlook 39°00.160 -77°58.200

I. SK Start/Finish 38°59.454 -77°57.731

James Ball 0.83 mi.

Corporal Morgan 1.61 mi.

Piedmont Overlook 0.61 mi.

Gap Run 0.49 mi.

Whitehouse 1.1 mi.

North Ridge 1.54 mi.

South Ridge 1.54 mi.

Snowden 1.14 mi.

Shearman's Mill 1.05 mi.

Hayfield Trail 0.81 mi.

Rolling Meadows Trail 2.5 mi.

Old Pasture Trail 0.55 mi.

Lost Mountain Trail 2.2 mi.

Washington's Ridge 0.73 mi.

Wayfield 0.81 mi.

Old Pasture 0.55 mi.

Corporal Morgan 1.61 mi.

Lost Mtn. Trailheads Latitude Longitude

J. Lost Mountain Trailhead 38°59.43 -77°56.784

Lost Mtn. Points of Interest Latitude Longitude

K. Bridle Overlook 38°59.522 -77°56.052

L. Old Dumphries Road 38°59.364 -77°56.862

M. Migratory Duck Ponds 38°59.344 -77°56.172

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H = Hiking B = Biking HB = Horseback Riding

● = Easy ■ = Moderate ▲ = Difficult

VC = Visitor Center

PO = Park Office

IS = Information Station

IN = Information

P = Parking

PI = Point of Interest

PS = Picnic Shelter

GP = General Picnicking

GC = Group Camping

CA = Camping Area

Restrooms

Gifts/Shopping

Turner Pond

Horse Access

Overnight Parking