

Smithsonian Associates

Springtime on the Potomac Heritage Trail: A Wildflower Hike at Turkey Run Park

Mid-April, 2023, 10:00 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.

Study Leader: Melanie Choukas-Bradley

We will hike through the heart of the Potomac Gorge on an April morning, stopping to appreciate and study the many spring wildflowers and mature trees along our route through the upland woods and floodplain forest. We will also be on the lookout for birds in the canopy and along the river. Here is some information about Potomac Gorge parkland, with some recommended resources. A list of trees and wildflowers, a poem about spring wildflowers in the gorge, and a map of the Potomac Gorge follow. The Potomac Gorge is the 15-mile valley that carries the river from the Piedmont Plateau at Great Falls through the Fall Zone to the beginning of the Coastal Plain at Theodore Roosevelt Island. It is one of the most biodiverse areas in North America.

Potomac Gorge Parkland

Virginia

Riverbend Park, Great Falls Park; Difficult Run Stream Park; Scott’s Run Nature Preserve, **Turkey Run Park**; Gulf Branch Nature Center and Park; Potomac Overlook Regional Park;
Potomac Heritage Trail

Maryland

C&O Canal National Historical Park (including Great Falls, MD and the Billy Goat Trails); Cabin John Stream Valley Park; Glen Echo Park

District of Columbia

C&O Canal; Battery Kemble Park; Foundry Branch, Glover Archbold Park; Theodore Roosevelt Island

Potomac Gorge Maps

Potomac Gorge Area: Great Falls Park, VA & C&O Canal National Historical Park, MD, Published by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (doesn’t include Turkey Run Park)

For Turkey Run Park trail maps, search “Turkey Run Park Trail Maps” for National Park Service and AllTrails maps

Potomac Gorge: MD, VA & DC, Sponsored by National Park Service, the Nature Conservancy & Potomac Conservancy, Map by Mary Belcher for TNC (SEE LAST PAGE)

Guide Books

The C&O Canal Companion: A Journey Through Potomac History by Mike High, Johns Hopkins University Press

Towpath Guide to the C&O Canal by Thomas F. Swiftwater Hahn, American Canal & Transportation Center

Potomac Pathway: A Nature Guide to the C&O Canal by Napier Shelton, Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Geology & History Books

Nature & History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson by James D. Rice, Johns Hopkins University Press

The Potomac by Frederick Gutheim, Grosset & Dunlap

The Grand Idea: George Washington's Potomac & the Race to the West by Joel Achenbach, Simon & Schuster

A Washington Sketchbook by Gail Dickersin Spilsbury, with drawings by Robert L. Dickinson, 1917-1918, Chesapeake Book Company

The River & the Rocks: The Geologic Story of Great Falls & the Potomac River Gorge, US Government Printing Office

Nature Books

Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area by Cristol Fleming, Marion Blois Lobstein & Barbara Tufty, Johns Hopkins University Press

Flora of Virginia by Alan S. Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig & John F. Townsend; Bland Crowder, Editor, Botanical Research Institute of Texas Press (Note: a big book!)

Newcomb's Wildflower Guide by Lawrence Newcomb, Little, Brown & Company

City of Trees: The Complete Field Guide to the Trees of Washington, DC by Melanie Choukas-Bradley, University of Virginia Press

The Joy of Forest Bathing: Reconnect with Wild Places & Rejuvenate Your Life by Melanie Choukas-Bradley, Rock Point, Quarto Publishing Group

Finding Solace at Theodore Roosevelt Island by Melanie Choukas-Bradley, Changemakers Books

The Sibley Guide to Trees by David Allen Sibley, Alfred A. Knopf

The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America by David Allen Sibley, Alfred A. Knopf

Websites

Search Turkey Run Park for National Park Service Website

Search Potomac Heritage Trail for National Park Service Website

National Park Service, George Washington Memorial Parkway www.nps.gov-gwmp

Potomac Conservancy www.potomac.org

The Nature Conservancy www.nature.org

Potomac Appalachian Trail Club www.patc.net

Georgetown Heritage www.georgetownheritage.org

C&O Canal National Historical Park: www.nps.gov-choh

C&O Canal Trust www.canaltrust.org

Note: All parks in the Potomac Gorge mentioned above have their own websites

Selected trees of Potomac Gorge

Trees unless identified as shrubs. Wildflowers & ferns follow.

Plant Species

Plant Family

Ash, Green (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*)

Olive (Oleaceae)

Ash, White (*Fraxinus americana*)

Basswood, American (American Linden) *Tilia americana*

Mallow (Malvaceae)

Beech, American (*Fagus grandifolia*)

Beech (Fagaceae)

Birch, River (*Betula nigra*)

Birch (Betulaceae)

Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)

Pea or Legume (Fabaceae)

Bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*) large shrub/ small tree Bladdernut (Staphyleaceae)

Boxelder (*Acer negundo*)

Maple (Aceraceae) or Soapberry (Sapindaceae)

Cottonwood, Eastern (*Populus deltoides*)

Willow (Salicaceae)

Dogwood, Flowering (*Cornus florida*)

Dogwood (Cornaceae)

Elm, American (*Ulmus americana*)

Elm (Ulmaceae)

Elm, Slippery (*Ulmus rubra*)

Hackberry, Northern (*Celtis occidentalis*)

Hops (Cannabaceae)

Hickory, Bitternut (*Carya cordiformis*)

Walnut (Juglandaceae)

Hickory, Mockernut (*Carya tomentosa*)

Hickory, Pignut (*Carya glabra*)

Plant Species**Plant Family**

Holly, American (<i>Ilex opaca</i>)	Holly (<u>Aquifoliaceae</u>)
Hop-Hornbeam, Eastern (<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>)	Birch (<u>Betulaceae</u>)
Hornbeam, American (Ironwood or Musclewood) (<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>)	
Hydrangea, Wild (<i>Hydrangea arborescens</i>) shrub	Hydrangea (<u>Hydrangeaceae</u>)
Maple, Red (<i>Acer rubrum</i>)	Soapberry (<u>Sapindaceae</u>)
Maple, Silver (<i>Acer saccharinum</i>)	
Maple, Sugar (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	
Maple, Ash-Leaved (See Boxelder)	
Mountain Laurel (<i>Kalmia latifolia</i>) shrub	Heath (<u>Ericaceae</u>)
Oak, Black (<i>Quercus velutina</i>)	Beech (<u>Fagaceae</u>)
Oak, Chestnut (<i>Quercus montana</i> or <i>Q. prinus</i>)	
Oak, Northern Red or Red (<i>Quercus rubra</i>)	
Oak, Pin (<i>Quercus palustris</i>)	
Oak, Post (<i>Quercus stellata</i>)	
Oak, Scarlet (<i>Quercus coccinea</i>)	
Oak, Shingle (<i>Quercus imbricaria</i>)	
Oak, Southern Red or Spanish (<i>Quercus falcata</i>)	
Oak, Swamp White (<i>Quercus bicolor</i>)	
Oak, White (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	
Pawpaw (<i>Asimina triloba</i>) small tree or shrub	Custard-Apple (<u>Annonaceae</u>)
Pine, Scrub or Virginia (<i>Pinus virginiana</i>)	Pine (<u>Pinaceae</u>)
Pinxter (Pink Azalea) (<i>Rhododendron periclymenoides</i>) shrub	Heath (<u>Ericaceae</u>)
Redbud (<i>Cercis canadensis</i>)	Pea or Legume (<u>Fabaceae</u>)
Sassafras (<i>Sassafras albidum</i>)	Laurel (<u>Lauraceae</u>)
Shadbush or Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	Rose (<u>Rosaceae</u>)
Spicebush (<i>Lindera benzoin</i>) shrub	Laurel (<u>Lauraceae</u>)
Sycamore, American (<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>)	Plane Tree (<u>Platanaceae</u>)

Plant Species**Plant Family**

Tulip-Tree (Tulip Poplar) (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>)	Magnolia (<u>Magnoliaceae</u>)
Tupelo (Black Gum) (<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>)	Tupelo (<u>Nyssaceae</u>)
Viburnum, Arrowwood (<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>) shrub	Honeysuckle (<u>Caprifoliaceae</u>) or Moschatel (<u>Adoxaceae</u>)
Viburnum, Blackhaw (<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>) shrub or small tree	
Viburnum, Maple-Leaved (<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>) shrub	
Walnut, Black (<i>Juglans nigra</i>)	Walnut (<u>Juglandaceae</u>)
Witch-Hazel, Common (<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>) large shrub/ small tree	Witch-Hazel (<u>Hamamelidaceae</u>)

Early-Mid April Wildflowers (*Indicates non-native species)

Bloodroot (<i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i>)	Poppy (<u>Papaveraceae</u>)
Bluets, Common (<i>Houstonia caerulea</i>)	Madder (<u>Rubiaceae</u>)
Cut-Leaved Toothwort (<i>Cardamine concatenata</i> ; <i>Dentaria laciniata</i>)	Mustard (<u>Brassicaceae</u>)
Garlic Mustard (<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>)* Very invasive	
Garlic Pennycress (<i>Thlaspi alliaceum</i>) *	
Dutchman's Breeches (<i>Dicentra cucullaria</i>)	Bleeding Heart or Fumitory (<u>Fumariaceae</u>)
Squirrel Corn (<i>Dicentra canadensis</i>)	(<u>Fumariaceae</u> recently included in <u>Papaveraceae</u>)
Geranium, Wild (<i>Geranium maculatum</i>)	Geranium (<u>Geraniaceae</u>)
Ginger, Wild (<i>Asarum canadense</i>)	Birthwort (<u>Aristolochiaceae</u>)
Ginseng, Dwarf (<i>Panax trifolius</i>)	Ginseng (<u>Araliaceae</u>)
Jack-in-the-Pulpit (<i>Arisaema triphyllum</i>)	Arum (<u>Araceae</u>)
Lesser Celandine (Fig Buttercup) (<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i> ; <i>Ficaria verna</i>)* Very invasive	Buttercup (<u>Ranunculaceae</u>)
Mayapple (<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>)	Barberry (<u>Berberidaceae</u>)
Phlox, Moss (<i>Phlox subulata</i>)	Phlox (<u>Polemoniaceae</u>)
Phlox, Wild Blue (<i>Phlox divaricata</i>)	

Plant Species

Plant Family

Ragwort, Golden (<i>Packera aurea</i>)	Aster or Daisy (<u>Asteraceae</u>)
Ramps (<i>Allium tricoccum</i>) oniony leaves; flowers later	Amaryllis (<u>Amaryllidaceae</u>)
Rue-Anemone (Wind Flower) (<i>Anemonella thalictroides</i> ; <i>Thalictrum thalictroides</i>)	Buttercup (<u>Ranunculaceae</u>)
Saxifrage, Early (<i>Saxifraga virginensis</i> ; <i>Micranthes virginensis</i>)	Saxifrage (<u>Saxifragaceae</u>)
Spring Beauty (<i>Claytonia virginica</i>)	Montia (<u>Montiaceae</u>)
Star Chickweed (<i>Stellaria pubera</i>)	Pink (<u>Caryophyllaceae</u>)
Trout Lily, Yellow (<i>Erythronium americanum</i>)	Lily (<u>Liliaceae</u>)
Trout Lily, White (<i>Erythronium albidum</i>)	
(Other members formerly included in the lily family with leaves emerging: Solomon's Seal (<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i>), Plumed or False Solomon's Seal (<i>Smilacina racemosa</i> or <i>Maianthemum racemosum</i>) and Bellworts, Sessile and Perfoliate (<i>Uvularia_spp.</i>)	
Violet, Common Blue (<i>Viola sororia</i>)	Violet (<u>Violaceae</u>)
Violet, Smooth Yellow (<i>Viola pensylvanica</i> ; <i>V. pubescens</i>)	
Virginia Bluebells (<i>Mertensia virginica</i>)	Borage (<u>Boraginaceae</u>)
Toadshade (or Sessile) Trillium (<i>Trillium sessile</i>)	Trillium (<u>Trilliaceae</u>)

Ferns

Christmas (<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>)	Wood Fern (<u>Dryopteridaceae</u>)
Marginal Wood Fern (<i>Dryopteris marginalis</i>)	
Common or Rock Polypody (<i>Polypodium virginianum</i>)	Polypody (<u>Polypodiaceae</u>)
Lowland Bladder (Brittle or Fragile) Fern (<i>Cystopteris protrusa</i>)	(<u>Cystopteridaceae</u>)

Potomac Gorge Poem

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Potomac Gorge in Tender Flower

by Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Wild rocky gorge
Improbable urban neighbor
You own the winter world

With your towering cliffs
Singing rapids
And frozen waterfalls

Home to
The calling raven, soaring eagle
The diving cormorant and migrant merganser

And now it is spring
And your wind-whipped bluffs and scoured floodplains
Cradle the delicate wildflowers

Like a great bear holding a fragile bird's egg
In outstretched claws
Your rock basin coddles the tender

Lyre-leaved rock cress
Small white flowers
On trembling stalks above tiny leaf rosettes

Under the pines of Bear Island
Nantucket shadbush clings to a crevice
Far from home like so many

Unwitting botanical travelers
Ramps, spring tonic of Appalachia
Have found their way downriver

The rare white trout lily
Of the Ohio Valley, here
Now, blooming beside her yellow-flowered cousin

Here with the bloodroot, the Dutchman's breeches
The globally rare Coville's phacelia
The wild blue phlox and golden ragwort, the uncommon twinleaf

Tiny ruby crowned kinglets probe
The yellow spicebush flowers above forbidding bluffs

Living ephemera in your land of rock and water

You are a raging vertical world flowering
 Virginia bluebells your floodplain carpet
 As your Great Falls obliterate and bring new life

Map of the Potomac Gorge by Mary Belcher for The Nature Conservancy

