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RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

BURLS AND BITTERSWEET

Self-guiding Trail



Illustrated by James Carson

Introducing

Burl Oak Holmes

*the Great Nature Detective
and his artful assistant*

What's-on

*in a gripping tale of
mystery!*

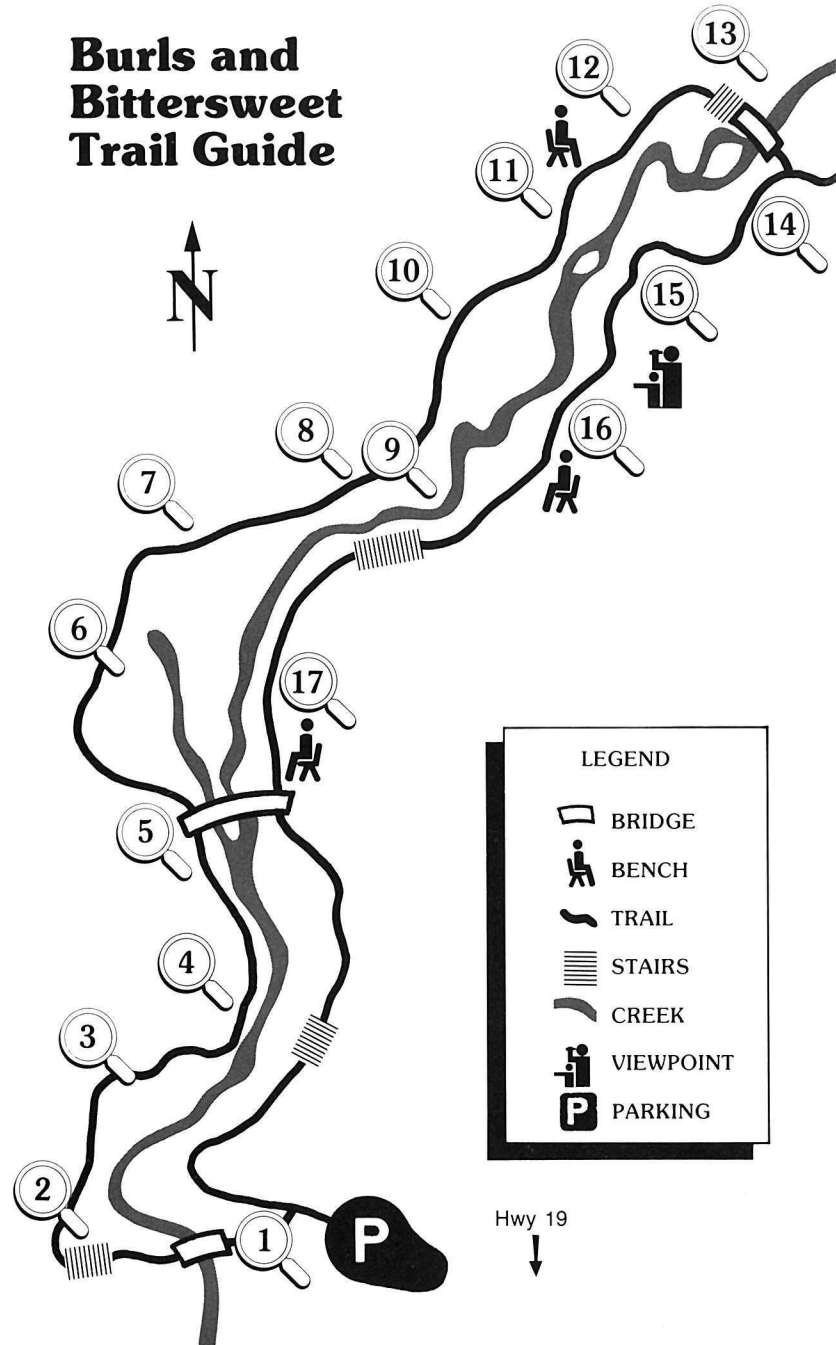




Discover along the trail...

- Poison Ivy
- Nodding Trillium
- Hog Peanut
- Elk
- Bittersweet
- Burr Oak
- Green Ash
- White Elm
- White Birch
- Saskatoon
- Pin Cherry
- Nannyberry
- Chokecherry
- Highbush Cranberry
- Wild Plum
- Hazel
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Northern Oriole

Burls and Bittersweet Trail Guide



LEGEND

- BRIDGE
- BENCH
- TRAIL
- STAIRS
- CREEK
- VIEWPOINT
- PARKING

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Burls and Bittersweet Nature Trail

Hidden in the great beauty and peace of this eastern hardwood forest is a tale of mystery. Why is this kind of forest found nowhere else in the park? Why is the peace of this landscape so often disrupted by nature's violence?

Join the great nature detective "Burl-oak Holmes" and his assistant "What's-on" to discover the plants and animals along the trail and solve the mystery of this changing land.

The clues in the trail guide match the numbered posts on the path. Use your pencil to check off the plants and animals listed on the flyleaf as you discover them along this everchanging forest trail.

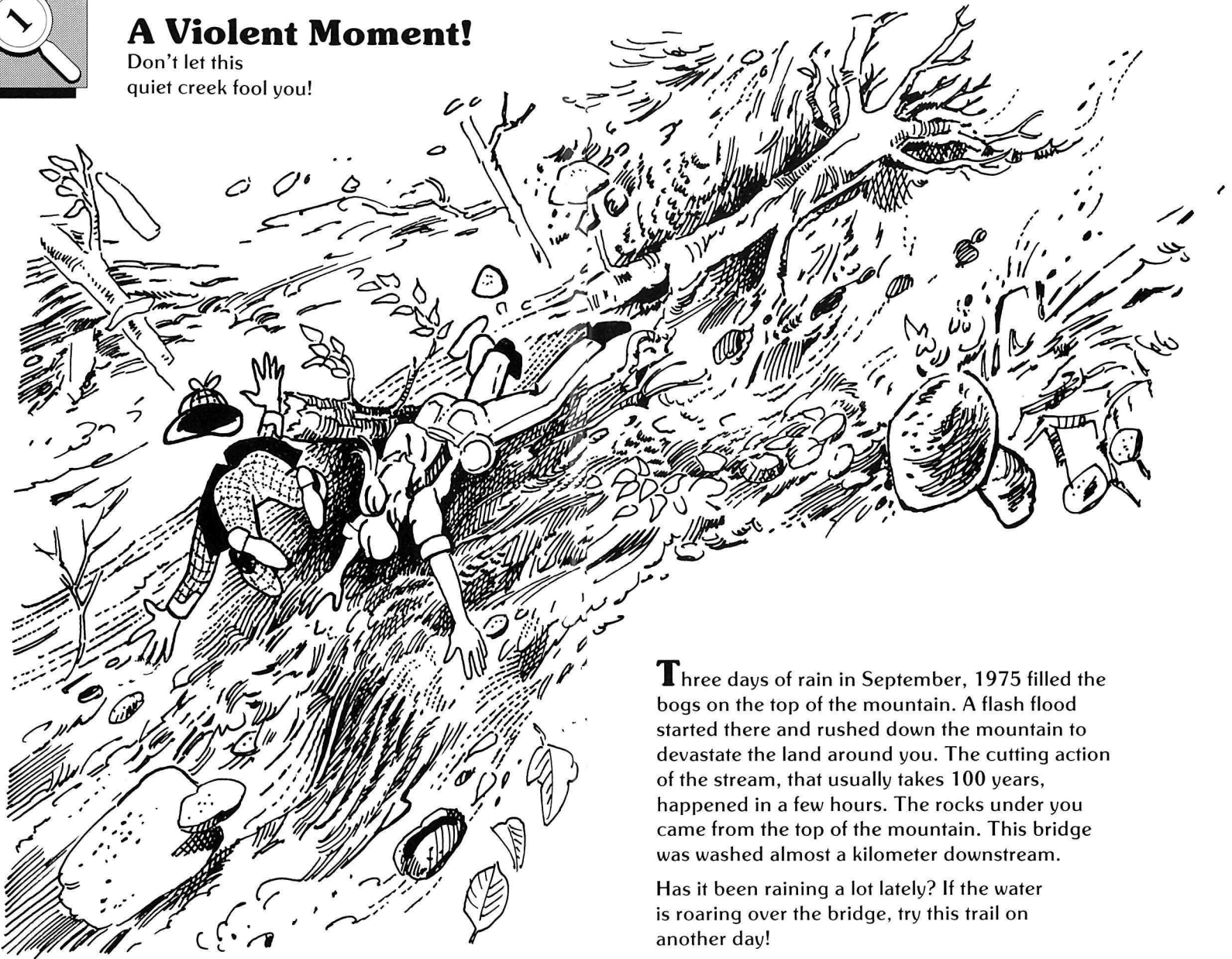
You can walk the 2.2 km loop trail in about 40 minutes or the 0.5 km loop in 10 minutes.





A Violent Moment!

Don't let this
quiet creek fool you!



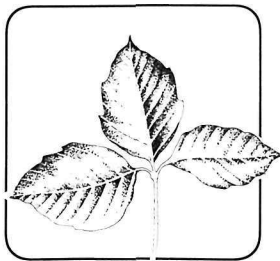
Three days of rain in September, 1975 filled the bogs on the top of the mountain. A flash flood started there and rushed down the mountain to devastate the land around you. The cutting action of the stream, that usually takes 100 years, happened in a few hours. The rocks under you came from the top of the mountain. This bridge was washed almost a kilometer downstream.

Has it been raining a lot lately? If the water is roaring over the bridge, try this trail on another day!



Beware!

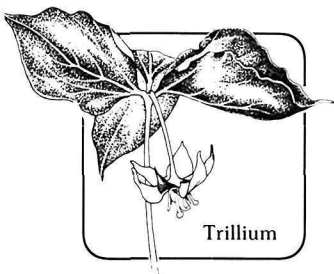
The warm moist climate and rich soils of this area promote the growth of many plants and animals that are uncommon elsewhere in the park. Unfortunately, you need to be wary of two — woodticks and poison ivy.



Poison Ivy

Woodticks are most often found here in June. To foil the ticks, tuck your pant legs into your socks. Then you can easily pick them off before they attach to your skin.

Low growing plants are best not touched — they may be poison ivy. If you do touch this plant, wash with soap and water. If you get an itchy rash, apply calomine lotion and check with your doctor.



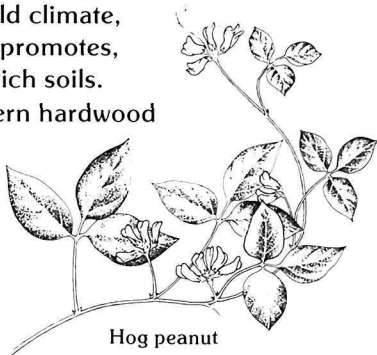
Trillium

Shady Evidence

Here, 300 metres below the mountain, more rain falls. The growing season is

about 30 days longer than at the top of the mountain. This relatively mild climate, and the lush plant growth it promotes, work together to create the rich soils.

These conditions favor eastern hardwood trees and plants that you would more commonly see in southeastern Canada and the eastern United States. They are rarely found in the rest of the park.

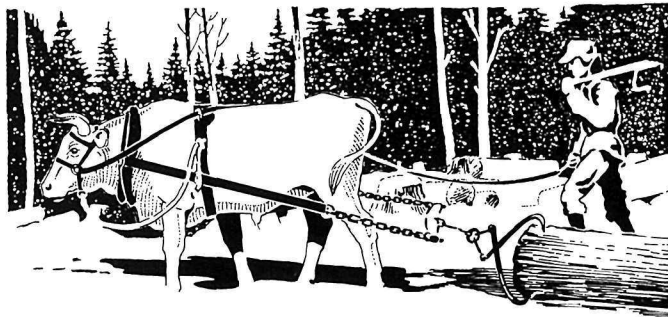


Hog peanut



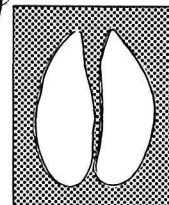
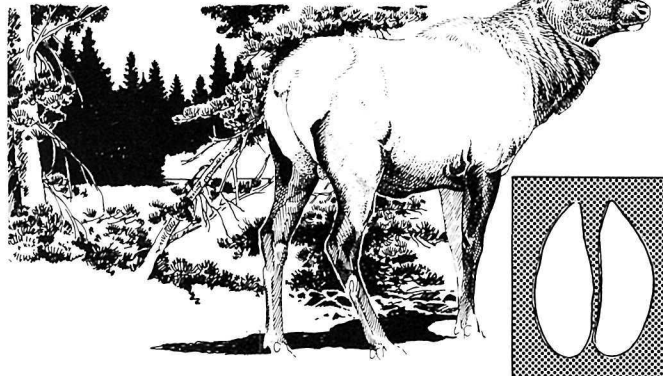
What's in a Name?

Why would anyone name a creek — Dead Ox?



Riding Mountain has always had big trees and lots of wildlife. Long before it became a national park, pioneers travelled here to cut the trees they needed to build their homes and to hunt the wild animals for food. During one of these trips, a settler's ox drowned in this creek. The loss of his only heavy work animal was so terrible that it became a part of the park's folklore and that's how Dead Ox Creek got its name.

Oxen weren't the only big animals in the park. Look for clues ahead.

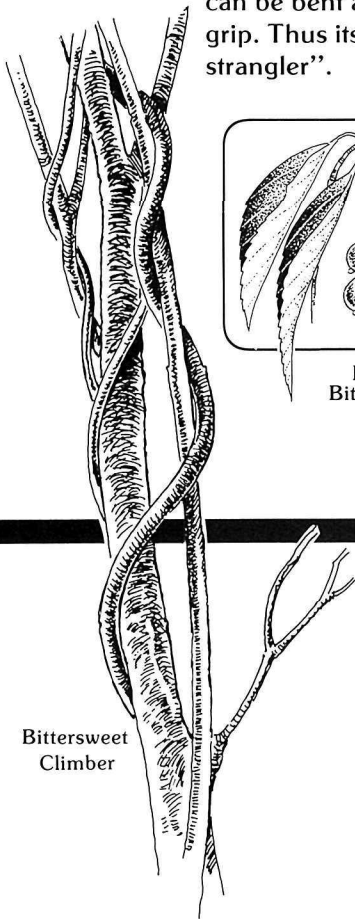


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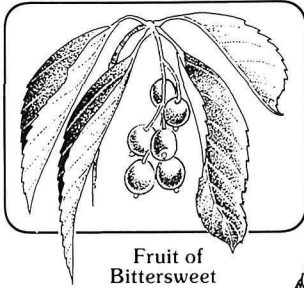
The Strangler

Nowhere else in the park do you have to worry about the “strangler”, because only here does Bittersweet grow.

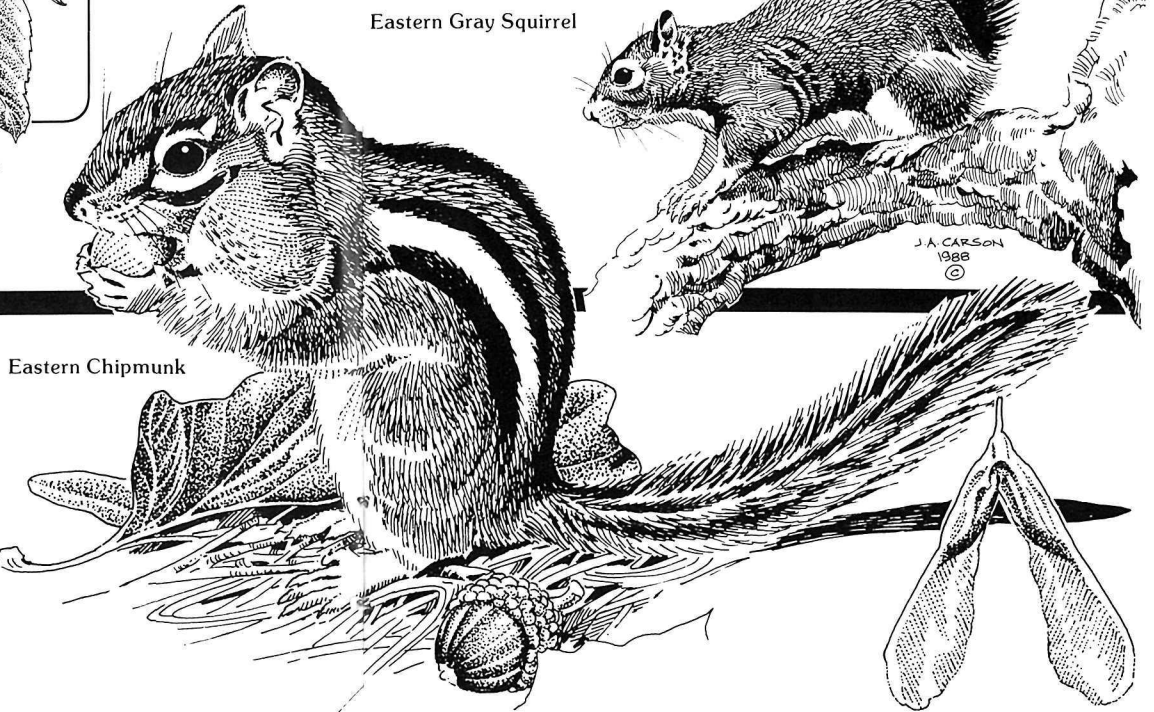
When one of the tender young stems of this Bittersweet vine touches a branch of another tree or shrub, it slowly wraps itself around the branch in a snake-like grip. These vines do not harm a fully-grown tree, but a springy sapling can be bent and twisted by their coiling grip. Thus its nickname, the “tree strangler”.



Bittersweet
Climber



Fruit of
Bittersweet



Eastern Chipmunk

Eastern Gray Squirrel

Seeds of Maple Tree

6

Pillars of the Community

This Bur Oak is one of the largest of its kind in the park. Along with the many shrubs, small plants, green ash and white elm tagged ahead on the trail, it tells you that you are in an eastern hardwood forest.

The plentiful nuts and seeds of these trees attract other animals more common south and east of here — the eastern gray squirrel and eastern chipmunk.



The Locals

The “cherta-cherta-cherta” call of an Ovenbird will alert you to its presence. If you get close to its nest, the Ovenbird might try to lead you away by pretending to have a broken wing. Watch for a glimpse of a Least Flycatcher as it darts out into a small opening to snag a small insect or hear it call “che-bec” from a hidden perch.

The creek sometimes damages these birds’ homes but they stay anyway. This deciduous forest gives them places to hide and nest as well as all the insects, snails and spiders they can eat.



Least Flycatcher



Ovenbird

J.A. CARSON
1988
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Tree Warts

Did you know that trees can get warts? Notice the rough swellings or **BURLS** on these trees.

They don't seem to hurt the tree and we don't

know what causes them. These cancer-like growths are spread to the tips of the tree's tiniest branches.

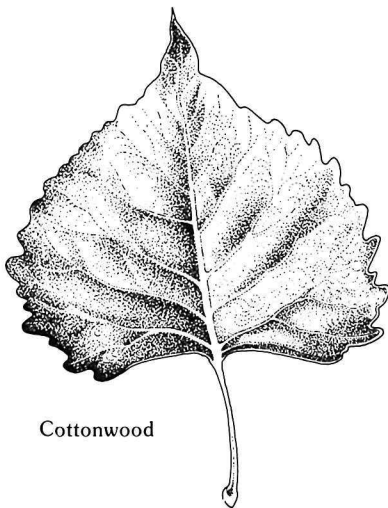
Can you tell which "type" of tree has the most burls?



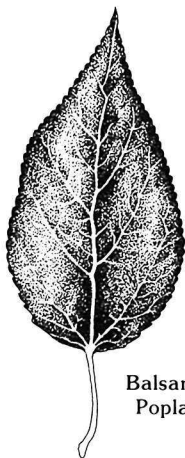
Outstanding Witness

Try to wrap your arms around this tree. It is huge! This is not just one tree but rather a mixture of two — the Balsam Poplar of the cool

highlands and the Eastern Cottonwood of the plains. This poplar hybrid even kept the two kinds of leaves rather than making a new type.



Cottonwood



Balsam
Poplar

Nowhere else in the park will you find this hybrid variety. It is an outstanding witness that confirms the fertility of this land. Its size testifies to its ability to withstand the occasional destructive action of the creek.

You found it! These hybrids have more burls than any other type of tree on the trail.



Mud

Take a tiny piece of the shale rock that the creek has uncovered at your feet. Taste it or get it wet and rub it between your fingers — it's

gritty, it's **MUD!** Shale, the bedrock that Riding Mountain rests on, is just tons and tons of packed mud! How can the creek wash it away so easily? Well, add water, wait a season or two, and it breaks down into the mud that it once was.

Three million years ago this area was at the bottom of the huge inland sea that covered a centre strip of North America. You are standing on the shale that was formed under that sea of long ago.



Food for Thought

The rich soil and mild climate of this area support a greater variety of fruit bushes than any other forest in the park.

Each has its own time of ripening: first, saskatoons and pin cherry in July; nannyberry and choke cherry in August; then, cranberry, wild plum and hazelnut in September. See how many you can discover (with the help of the name tags) along the trail.

Bears relish this summer-long feast. Broken bushes and seed-filled droppings are sure signs of the Black Bear. These animals are shy of people and our noise usually keeps them at a distance. Black bears rarely are a threat to hikers. However, be very careful if you see a mother with cubs. Never approach bears. In all meetings — withdraw slowly!



12

The Protector

Can you tell which shale protects this area of Riding Mountain from being washed away by Dead Ox Creek to become yet another flat farm field? Take some different looking pieces in your hand and try to break them.

The green shale breaks more easily than the grey speckled shale. The grey shale is normally found at the top of the mountain. This hard cap is the “protector” that shields the softer shale underneath and slows the speed at which it is washed away. After the softer shale is gone, the top layer of harder shale snaps off under its own weight and the mountain’s face stays steep.



13

High Adventure

This trail had one of the highest maintenance costs of any in Riding Mountain National Park!

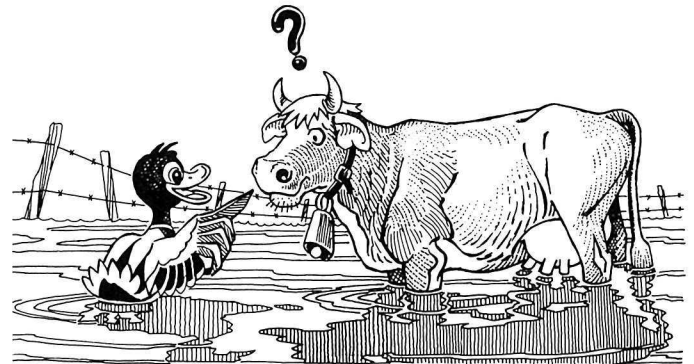
Not only did the creek change this land every time it flooded, but, at this spot, it also wrecked three bridges in 10 years. Finally, a suspension bridge was built. This bridge works with nature rather than trying to withstand it. Now, the flooding water and rocks flow under, not through, the bridge and the bridge survives.

14

Consequences

Wilderness and farmland meet just 20 paces to your left. This wilderness lowland protects the farmland by absorbing the force of the stream.

Here, much of the creek’s runoff water sinks into the ground and leaves behind the shale it is carrying. Without this buffer area, the creek would flood further onto the farmland and dump most of its shale load there instead of inside the park.



The Mystery Deepens

A thousand years ago this area was covered with about 300 m of shale bedrock. All that rock was slowly carried away, piece by piece, by the tiny trickle before you.

The white birch tree skeletons in front of you are the tops of 10 metre tall trees that the creek had buried with shale. The creek is still burying trees and uncovering more skeletons as the years go by.



A Flitting Clue

Only in these eastern hardwoods can some of Riding Mountain's most beautiful birds find the insects, seeds and tall trees for nesting that they need.

The male Northern Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeak are very strikingly colored while the females are almost plain. Watch for the pale yellow female Oriole with her brilliant orange and black mate. The female Rose-breasted Grosbeak's breast is streaked with brown. She looks like a big sparrow beside the black, white and rose-breasted male.



Northern Oriole

J.A. CARSON
1988
©



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

The Mystery

Why is the eastern hardwood forest found only here?
Why does the land change so much?

Turn the page...





RIGHT!

The forest is here because only at the foot of the mountain is the warmth, rainfall and rich soil available to support it.

Dead Ox Creek is the violent culprit, ripping and tearing, burying and uncovering, changing this land each year!

You can visit this eastern hardwood forest again and again. Even though it is changing, it will be here forever — preserved and protected for you in Riding Mountain National Park.

We hope you enjoyed unravelling the mystery behind the great beauty and peace of this unusual pocket of forest. To receive your official CASE CLOSED stamp, bring this guide to the Interpretive Centre in Wasagaming.

We also invite you to discover other nature trails, try a Discovery Box at the Interpretive Centre or join a naturalist on a walk.

Thank you for coming.

Certificate of Merit

I, _____
*solved the mystery of the Burls
and Bittersweet Trail.*

*I pledge to use my nature-
detecting skills to unravel other
mysteries in my environment.*

Detective

Date

Canadian Parks Service

Date



NOTES

OMINNIK

*A Marsh Adventure right
in the heart of town!*



Look for our colourful sign at the corner of Wasagaming Drive and the Boat Cove Road. A floating boardwalk will lead into the hidden world of the marsh, and a small viewing blind will let you see many of the inhabitants close-up.

If you like, pick up a Marsh Adventure Kit at the Interpretive Centre beside the park office and explore the fascinating, watery realm of the marsh first-hand.

FIRE! – Fire everywhere...



That was the radio call all along Highway #19 in late May, 1980. Now, when you visit the Rolling River Fire Self-guiding Trail, you can find out how the fire started, how it was fought, and discover for yourself how the forest is returning to life.

The trail begins at the junction of Highway #19 and the Rolling River Road, 15.6 km from Highway #10. It is about one kilometre long.

The trail was recently upgraded with new wildlife view-points, shady stops and benches. Birds and animals are returning to this once devastated, burned area.

We invite you to take a closer look at Nature's marvellous gifts of healing here on the Rolling River Trail.



RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK
INTERPRETIVE SERVICE

Published by authority of
the Minister of the Environment
© Minister of Supply and
Services Canada 1989
QS-R0009-000-EE-A1

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