



Newsletter



Volume 11, Issue 5

Carvers Creek State Park

May 1, 2023

Year of the Trail: Longleaf Pine Trail

Part 1 of 2

The Longleaf Pine trail is located in the Sandhill's Access part of Carvers Creek State Park. It is the main trail in the Sandhills and has several branches that we'll talk about in other newsletters. Let's start with the most important feature of the Longleaf Pine trail - it's an "out and back" trail. That means it's 4 miles ONE WAY.

4 Miles ONE WAY!!

To get back to the parking lot, you have to turn around and walk back, another 4 miles. The trail ends at the powerline where you see the sign for the Turkey Oak Loop trail.

Every year the Rangers get calls from lost hikers who misread the map and thought the trail was a 4 mile loop back to the parking lot. But it's not! If you walk the entire length, to get back to the parking lot, you will have at least an 8 mile round trip!

Beginning the walk

Now that's out of the way, let's talk about the trail itself. The Longleaf Pine trail is mostly flat with some short hills scattered throughout. As you walk it you'll pass through several different types of landscape. You'll see the dry, sandy slopes of wiregrass and Longleaf pine, the dense, marshy bottom lands thick with cypress and sweetgum trees, and mixes of hickory and oak peppered with damp Sandhills seeps. Spring is a great time to walk the trail. Humidity is low, the flowers are blooming and you'll have the opportunity to hear and see many of the beautiful birds that live around the trail.



The trailhead is the same as the Wiregrass Loop trail, just outside the overflow parking lot at the Sandhills Access. Turn right and follow the trail from a couple hundred feet and you'll see the Wiregrass Loop turn off to your left. Continue straight, paralleling McCloskey Road for about a mile. You'll cross a powerline access road to your left, and then the trail follows the powerline for about another half mile. On your left as you walk you can see some beautiful Longleaf glades on a slight hilltop, filled with wiregrass and bluestem grass.

As you reach the top of a small rise, the trail turns a hard left down a hill. As you continue down the trail about a quarter mile, on your left you'll see a small spur trail that leads to the Small Pond. Take a moment and wander down. It's kind of an unusual pond. Do you think it is naturally occurring or was it built by the people who used to own the property? What sort of clues do you see that might help you

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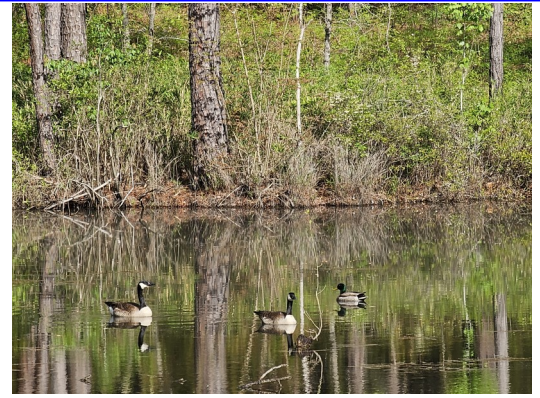
Birdwatching in the Park

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decide? What can you see around the pond or on it? On a recent visit, there were two Canadian Geese and a male Mallard duck swimming together on the water.

Walk back out to the main trail and turn to your left to continue on Longleaf Pine trail. Soon you'll see an old service road that breaks off to your left, but continue to follow the trail signs into some dense scrub oak forest. The trees are thick and birds flit back and forth, calling to each other as they build nests and hunt for food. Not long and you'll come upon another service road - right in front of you - and the trail continues to the left.



As you walk down this section of the trail, you will walk through one of the first low areas that can stay damp with water year-round. These areas are called "seeps", where the water is just high enough to keep the ground wet with just a visible trace of water most of the year. Seeps are important features for wildlife, and if you look carefully you might find tracks and signs of animals in the area. Seeps are also a great spot to look for butterflies fluttering around near the ground. What is it about the area that might attract butterflies?

As you walk further along the trail, you will pass a low, marshy area that has stream running through it. Notice how the trees and plants you see are different than the ones back in the scrub oak forest. Do you hear different birds? What do you think causes the changes you see? The trail begins to rise slightly and soon you will reach a sign marking the 2 mile point. Here the trail splits off into the Fox Squirrel Loop trail to your right. Take a break on the bench in the shade and we'll pick up the second half of the trail next month.

How to win a Nobel Prize!

Throughout this newsletter, I scattered a few questions about the area you were walking in today. A famous scientist who won the Nobel Prize for his achievements in Physics said that it wasn't winning the Nobel Prize that motivated him, but "the prize is in the pleasure of finding the thing out, the kick in the discovery..." Sometimes it's fun to look around and realize how much we really don't know about the world around us! So how do you find out? Well, one way to start is to look around and ask yourself questions about the world you see, like we did in this newsletter. For instance, where do you see more butterflies on the walk? Then, take note of the area and any facts you can record about your observation. Are you in a field? A forest? Near water? What about the weather? Is it sunny or cloudy? Humid and hot or cool and dry?

Then you can use that information to help you come up with a possible solution. For instance, you notice you see more butterflies on a sunny day, near an open field filled with pink flowering plants than you do anywhere else on your walk. So you guess that the butterflies are attracted to the pink flowers. The next time you go out for a walk, you look to see if the butterflies are still there but it's a rainy, cloudy day, a little cool, and you don't see as many butterflies. So now you combine your observations and come up with the butterflies are attracted to the pink flowers and are more active on sunny, warm days. Now you have something you can test. The next time you walk, go out on a warm sunny day and look for the pink flowers. Do you see more butterflies?

Observe. Ask questions. Come up with a possible answer based on your observations. Test your answer. Repeat. Keep at it and you too can be like the world-famous Nobel Prize winning scientist, Dr. Richard Feynman.

(If you are interested in learning more about finding things out, Dr. Feynman wrote several popular books, including "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out" and "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!")

If you would like to attend one of our upcoming programs please call 910-436-4681 to reserve your spots.

FIRST DAY HIKE

Monday, May 1st @ 9:00 am

First Day (of the Month!) Hike: In honor of North Carolina celebrating the Year of the Trail, we will host a First Day of the Month hike every month this year. In May, we will hike part of the Longleaf Pine Trail, which is also our newsletter topic for May. Bring your copy of the newsletter or stop by the office and get one and follow along with a Ranger to learn about the nature and history of the Wiregrass Loop trail. We'll meet at 9:00 am on Monday, May 1st in the Small Parking lot at the Sandhills Access. Please call (910) 436-4681 to sign up.

MAY FLOWERS HIKE

Friday, May 5th @ 6:00 pm

Join a ranger on an easy 2-mile hike at our Long Valley access! Enjoy the beautiful May flowers native to our area and participate in some flower fun and identification. We will meet in the grassy area beside the pollinator garden near the Rockefeller Loop trail head at 6 pm.

CANOE HIKE

Saturday, May 6th @ 5:00 pm

Saturday, May 20th @ 5:00 pm

We will be learning the basics of canoeing and then trying out our new skills by maneuvering through the Cypress swamp. This is a slow and calm canoeing experience and great for beginners or if you want to get a closer look at the Cypress trees. **YOU MUST SIGN-UP.** You can call the park office to sign-up. **Limit is 10 visitors. Please allow approximately 15 minutes to walk from the parking lot to the Rain Shelter. Age limit is 8 years old and older.**

BIRDWATCHING IN THE PARK

Thursday, May 11th @ 10:00 am (Long Valley Farm Access)

Thursday, May 25th @ 10:00 am (Sandhills Access)

Join a park naturalist at our Sandhills access for a bird watching walk around the Wiregrass loop trail. An easy 1.4-mile loop that starts and ends at the parking lot, the Wiregrass loop trail is a great place to find some of the birds that live year-round in our longleaf pine habitat, and maybe even see some of the less frequent visitors that are just passing through. We'll start early to help keep things cool but bring weather appropriate clothes and some water! We will be using the Merlin Bird ID app (free and available in both Android and IOS app stores). If you have binoculars, be sure to bring them! The hike will start at 10:00 am For Sandhills access- meet at the trail head near the small parking lot. The hike will start at 10:00 am For Long Valley Farm- meet in front of the Welcome Center. The event and access to the park are both free of charge. Please call our office at 910-436-4681 to sign-up!

MOMMY & ME: WILDFLOWER HIKE & CRAFT

Sunday, May 14th @ 4:00 pm

Moms', bring your little one out for some one-on-one bonding time on Mothers' Day! There will be a 1-mile Story Walk and a fun craft to remember the evening. We will meet at the Park office.

VOLUNTEER DAY

Saturday, May 27th from 9:00 am- 12:00 pm

Carvers Creek State Park offers a wide variety of opportunities when you come to our Volunteer Days. Our prized volunteers help us with everything from our old farm fences, to culverts, to invasive species of plants, to leaf clean-up, trail creation, and many others.. Please be prepared for the weather and bring bottled water and gloves with you. **We will be meeting at our Long Valley Farm Access, Welcome Center.**