

## Self-guided Hike Along the Nature Center Trail at French Creek

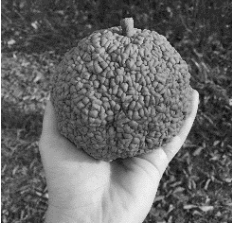
Welcome to French Creek Reservation!

This self-guided hike will allow you to explore our Nature Center Trail on your own. The trail is approximately .5 miles out and .5 miles back to the nature center. The trail is covered in crushed limestone so it doesn't get as muddy as an all-natural, dirt trail. There are 9 spots along the trail that are marked by numbers. This guide shows you where those numbers are and this guide has a description of what you see at that number. Once you are finished, you can either follow the steps up to the nature center, or follow the trail back to the parking lot. Please take this guide with you or return to the nature center to be used again. Thank you, and have fun exploring!



# Nature Center Trail

## #1



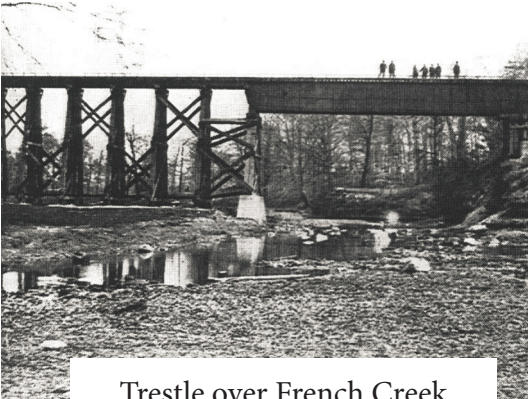
The large tree you see in front of you is an Osage orange tree. This tree was probably planted by the cattle farmer who used to own the land. Osage orange, along with Hawthorn trees, were used as natural fencing to keep cattle in. The wood is also very strong and durable. In autumn, you may notice grape-fruit-sized fruit on the tree. These are nicknamed “monkey balls” and are said to keep spiders away.

## #2

If you look at the area in front of you, you will notice that there are very few large trees. When the land was a farm, trees were cleared to plant crops. Once it became a park, succession began. Succession is when an area of disturbed land returns to its natural state. Grasses grow first, shrubs follow, and are then overgrown by maple, beech, and oak trees. This can take many years to occur depending on the area. Forests also grow back this way after a fire.

## #3

This block of cement was once part of a railroad trestle, or bridge, for the Lake Erie & Pittsburgh Line. This steam railroad went to the Cromwell Steel Mill on Root Road. This base and the one on the other side of French Creek are all that are left since the rest was made of wood. The trestle spanned the creek from the top of the bank on the far side, to the top of the bank behind the nature center.



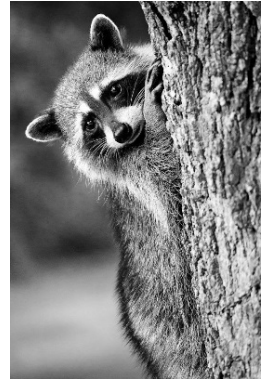
Trestle over French Creek

#### #4

This bridge crosses French Creek which flows into the Black River and then to Lake Erie. Depending on the amount of rain, the water level may be high and fast flowing, or shallow and slow. You can see how high it is by our water level gauge across the creek. In calm water, look for small fish called minnows. As you stand on the bridge, look at the rocky bank below the nature center. This is made of many layers of shale which is a rock that is brittle and easily broken. You can see where erosion from the water and wind has been wearing away the soil around the tree roots. If you look up further, you will see large white rocks. These were placed at the bottom of the hill to slow the erosion of the hill.

#### #5

This tree is called a Sycamore. It is easily identified by its outer layer of bark which peels off and leaves the younger white bark showing. Sometimes this tree is called the camouflage tree. Can you see why? Sycamores begin to hollow out while they are still living. This can make a great home for a squirrel, owl, raccoon, or even a black rat snake. This tree loves lots of water and is mostly found living near rivers and lakes. Can you see the white tops of other Sycamore trees?



#### #6

The box on this pole is utilized a certain flying mammal. Do you know what animal that is? This is a bat box which is used by bats as a roosting spot during the day. Many times, bats live under tree bark, in trees, or under bridges and in old buildings to give birth and rear their young. Bat boxes mimic the space between the tree and its bark. As forests are clearing, bats have a hard time finding a warm, cozy spot to make a nursery so bat boxes make a great addition to our park as well as your own backyard.

## #7



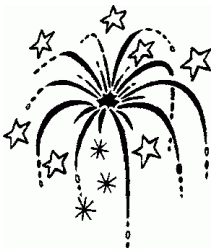
This next box is much bigger than the previous box. Since trees are used by many animals in a forest size and shape are important for a good home. This box is for a Barred Owl. Barred Owls typically nest in large, mature trees that have plenty of space inside, unlike bats. Barred Owls are very adaptable and tend to live close to accessible water sources. One way to know if an owl has been somewhere is if you find an owl pellet, which is a ball of digested animal hair and bones from their last meal.

## #8

This large rock is called a glacial erratic and is proof that the last glacier reached into Ohio. Rocks made of granite are not normally found here. This rock was picked up by the glacier and carried in the ice until the ice began to melt. As the glacier melted, it could not carry the rock and dropped it here. Rocks carried by the glacier are usually rounded since they have been shaped by the ice and other rocks.

## #9

Fish Creek flows underneath this bridge and into French Creek. Usually the water level is low and flowing slowly. In winter, look for animal tracks going down the slope to the water. The French Creek watershed has always been a popular site for human settlements. The Adena, Hopewell, Woodland and other Native American people frequented the area to hunt and fish along the streams.



**You have completed the self-guided tour of the Nature Center Trail. This trail ends at the top of the hills where it meets the Big Woods Loop Trail. This loop is about 1.5 miles long. Feel free to continue on your adventure, or turn around and head back to visit the Nature Center!**