



# Alder Creek Gorge

## Trail Guide for Shortcut Trail

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### Shortcut Trail to Moss Trail and Overlook

#### Points of Interest

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#### Instructor's Guide To Shortcut Trail

1. **Map and Warming Hut** – -Point out where we are and where we will be going. Discuss Black River Environmental Improvement Association, camera and website. Families are welcome on all trails. Show them the warming hut and all of the trails in the area and which trail we will be following for the day.
2. **Flora** – -Discuss plant life that we see. Flora is the naturally occurring indigenous plants of a particular region with no human intervention. Invasive is plant life that is brought into a particular region. The gorge is a rich plant habitat. Approximately 110 species live here including 19 trees and shrubs, 15 ferns, 12 grasses and sedges, and 58 wildflowers. Some plants that can be found are blackberries, wild ginger, dwarf buttercup, turtle-heads, and violets. New York state flower is the rose.
3. **Forest Environment** – An environment is identified by the climate and the plants that grow there. Deciduous trees shed their leaves during a particular season each year. Deciduous trees are the dominant flora in the forest. Conifer trees that produce seed bearing cones and have leaves shaped like needles are also forest flora. Most conifers remain green throughout the year. A forest environment may have a canopy formed by the leafy tops of tall trees that limit the amount of

sunlight that reaches the ground. Define understory. Fungi, moss lichens and ferns cover the forest floor. **Fungi** Yeasts, mushrooms, molds and morels are fungi. All fungi, except yeasts, are multicellular. Fungi are made of tiny filaments called hyphae. Tangled hyphae or mycelium grow below the ground. The above or visible portion of fungi is the fruiting body or reproductive structure. Fungi reproduce by spores or break off and begin to grow on their own. The oldest known fossils of fungi are 460 million years old. Fungi are important as decomposers. Fungi recycle nutrients by breaking down the bodies of other organisms. Parasitic fungi can cause diseases in plants and animals. **Mosses** Low growing plants that can be found everywhere. They are an ecosystem within themselves. Mosses do not have true stems or leaves (nonvascular). They vary in appearance. Water and nutrients move from cell to cell through rhizoids (roots). Reproduction is by spores. Mosses have been used to absorb fluids, for fuel (peat), and added to soil to retain water for plants. **Lichens** are formed by a symbiotic association between fungi and algae (or cyanobacteria). Lichens are resistant to drought and cold. They are the first organisms to grow in barren places. They break down rocks to begin soil formation. Lichens help recycle dead plants. They are important decomposers in the forest environment. **Ferns** Ferns evolved about 350 million years ago. Ferns have true vascular tissues that carry water, sap and nutrients throughout the plant. Ferns have leaves called fronds which grow from a rhizome or underground stem. Ferns are abundant worldwide. Ferns reproduce by spores, usually found on the underside of the frond.

4. **Glaciers** – Alder Creek Gorge is a wooded ravine at the foot of a glacial terrace near the headwaters of Alder Creek. The glacier blocked the Alder Creek Valley and formed a lake. Streams brought sand and gravel into the lake. When the ice melted, the lake drained and sediments were exposed. Top of the valley was farmed up until 70 years ago. Glaciers covered the area during the Ice Age about 10,000 years ago (Pleistocene Ice Age). Glaciers were formed by the snow, which didn't melt away but kept building up. There are two kinds of glaciers- valley (look like rivers of ice) and continental (ice sheet that cover vast areas of land such as Greenland/Antarctica). Glaciers move by the force of gravity and the pressure of its own weight. The ice ages disappeared in North America about 6,000 years ago. At one time on North America the ice was thought to have reached all the way to New York City. Kettles-holes in the ground that were formed where knobs of ice under the glacier melted. Eskers-long, snakelike ridges formed by material left by the melting of the glacier with the water flowing underneath. Drumlins- material left behind by the glacier forming smooth, egg shaped mounds. Kames- material left behind by the glacier formed cone shaped hills.
5. **Fauna** – the animals that inhabit the gorge. Generally we may see tracks/ scat for deer, rabbits, foxes, squirrels, chipmunks, and turkeys. Predator/prey. Predators have eyes close together on the front of its head which allows it to seek prey and decide whether it is within his reach or not. Prey have eyes that are set far back on its head so it can be more aware of its surroundings and may use camouflage for more protection.
6. **Deciduous Trees** – Deciduous trees lose their leaves in the winter to conserve energy and water. There is not enough sunlight and water in winter for photosynthesis to occur. Some native deciduous trees are black cherry, maple, ash, beech, and birch. Remember that the Sugar maple is the New York State tree. Discuss maple syrup. Deciduous trees are the dominant flora in the forest. Discuss the Emerald Ash Borer beetle and its potential danger. 1 hand approximately 12 tree years

7. **Lycopodium** – is a genus of clubmosses also known as ground pines or creeping cedar. They are flowerless, vascular, terrestrial plants, with widely branched, erect, prostrate or creeping stem, with small, simple, needlelike or scale-like leaves that thickly cover the stem and branches. Staghorn clubmoss is the most wide spread species of the genus.
8. **Cherry Trees/Birch Trees** – Birches are native to northern regions. The bark is marked with cross streaks and/or dark chevron-shaped trunk markings. The curling older bark is flammable even when damp. The paraffin wax component helps it ignite. The bark of some species (white birch) was once used in the making of canoes. The sap of some birches is used in drinks and syrups. The flowers of birches are caterpillar-like catkins. Male catkins are present in the winter. Birch lumber is used for cabinets, tools, spools, clothespins, and fuel. The seeds and buds are eaten by ruffed grouse, wild turkey, red squirrels, and songbirds. The twigs are browsed by moose, deer, and rabbits. The Black Cherry is the largest member of the cherry trees. The wood is sought after by cabinet makers and for use in violins and guitars. The thick trunk is covered with bark that resembles dark potato chips or cornflakes. The tart fruit is eaten by wildlife. Black knot a fungus, is a common disease of black cherry trees. Black knot does not kill the tree but causes a die-back along twigs and branches affected by the fungus.
9. **Lichens** – are formed by a symbiotic association between fungi and algae (or cyanobacteria). Lichens are resistant to drought and cold. They are the first organisms to grow in barren places. The break down rocks to begin soil formation. Lichens help recycle dead plants. They are important decomposers in the forest environment. See them on trees and on grave markers. Freddy Fungi+ Alice Algae= Larry/Lisa Lichen
10. **Watershed** – A watershed is an area, often a ridge of land, that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas. Alder Creek watershed has water flowing to the Black River, Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River and then on to the Atlantic Ocean.
11. **Conifer Trees** – An easy way to identify conifers is by their needles. Fir trees have flat needles. Spruces have square needles. Pines have needles that come in pairs or more. For example, a white pine would have five needles in their pair and a red pine would have three needles in their pair. Conifers are gymnosperms, plants that bear seeds or cones.
12. **Adirondack Overlook** – The rocks making up the Adirondack region are the oldest on planet (1 billion years old). Of the 46 high peaks Mt Marcy is the highest (5,344 ft). Adirondack is a derivative from the Iroquois for the word “bark eater.” Made from the glaciers and still have many glacial lakes within the area-Saranac, George, Indian, and Placid to name a few. Makes up the Adirondack preserve which is “forever wild” from NY State Constitution. Its area is larger than 7 of the smallest states from US or larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Great Smokey, and Everglades National Parks put together. Drumlins are the

egg shaped mounds left as the glacier melted where the Niagara Mohawk poles are.

13. **Survival Skills** – stay put when lost, make sure that you are with a buddy, tell someone where you are going. Rule of threes- 3 minutes-air, 3 hours-heat, 3 days-water, 3 weeks-food.