



Pixley Falls

Trail Guide for Black River Canal Trail

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Instructor's Guide to Black River Canal Trail

1. **Black River Canal** – The Black River Canal was a canal built in northern New York to connect the Erie Canal to the Black River. This canal was only 35 miles long, but it had 109 locks. While driving into Boonville on Route 12, you can see the locks that were once part of the Black River Canal. This canal was the longest surviving of the Erie Canal's feeder canal system. It was in use until 1925 in some segments.
2. **Limestone** – The bedrock of this area which represents fragments of marine animal skeletons and shells. About 10% of all sedimentary rocks are types of limestone. Limestone is a very popular building block since it is hard, durable, and commonly occurs in easily accessible surface exposures.
3. **Five Combines** – The Five Combines are a series of locks that were placed end-to-end to raise and lower boats over a steep change in elevation. The number of combines in the Black River Canal is a world record.
4. **Tug Hill Plateau** – The Tug Hill Plateau is not really a plateau at all. It was formed by a large area that rose on one side and dropped on the other side. It is more accurately called a cuesta (kwes-ta). It rises from 350 feet on the west side to over 2,000 feet in the east.

5. **Violets** – is a common spring plant of this area. It grows well even in the acidic soils of the North Country. It is used in cooking, medicines, and perfumes. In this narrow gorge, you may see the typical purple or white variety. Some variegated blossoms can also be found.
6. **Locks** – Locks are the means by which the canal workers raised or lowered the boats from one level to another. The wooden gates that opened and closed allowed each boat to rise or fall with the water level in the lock.
7. **Bedstraw** – This plant is actually called field Madder, but is often used as a form of bed straw. Its roots found favor with the first settlers as a source of red dye.
8. **Trillium** – Trillium looks very much like a small lily. Here along the Lansing Kill it occurs in its white or dull red form. What looks like three leaves surrounding the flower are actually part of the flower itself. The seeds are spread by ants. The white trillium is the flower representing Ontario to our north and can be seen on a number of signs. It is somewhat at risk. Tribes in this area used it for all sorts of skin irritations and child-birth.
9. **Maple Trees** – Maples are a large group of trees that have a few things in common. Their leaves are labeled acerbic which indicates the points on each leaf. Most maples in this area have 5 pointed or palmate leaves. The central lobe is longer than the others. Sugar maples are prevalent in these areas. Trees are tapped in the spring when days are warm and nights are cold. Gerrit Boon, the founder of Boonville, attempted to start a sugar plantation in this area.
10. **White Pine** – The strong, straight white pines were one of the reasons for logging to become a major industry for this area. They became the mast on many sailing ships as the Adirondacks opened to the world. Its branches are ended by a clump of needle bundles which cluster in a brush-like formation. Each of the needle bundles contains 5 individual needles. They are flexible. An easy way to remember the white pine has 5 needles is to associate the 5 letters of the word white. The cones are slender and about 6 inches long. Cone production peaks every 3 to 5 years. Mature trees can easily be 200 to 250 years old. Some white pines live over 400 years. A tree growing near Syracuse, New York was dated to 458 years in the late 1980s.
11. **Yarrow** – Yarrow grows up to 3 feet tall and has no branches except near the top. The leaves have a delicate, fernlike, lacy appearance. Flower heads are white and arranged in clusters at the top of the stem. Yarrow flower was often used as a poultice for skin problems. Wild animals such as bear have been found using a mud and yarrow poultice for wounds.
12. **Maidenhair Ferns** – Maidenhair Ferns have dark, shiny stems. This graceful, fan-like pattern is unique. Burgundy red fiddleheads appear in early spring. The roots are wiry and black.

13. **Ostrich Fern** – Ostrich Ferns live throughout the Northern Hemisphere. They are named for their resemblance to the tail plumes of an ostrich. The fronds grow in a tight circle called a crown. The ostrich fern is popular in gardens. The tightly wound immature fronds, called fiddleheads, are also used as a cooked vegetable and are considered a delicacy mainly in rural areas of northeastern North America. The young shoots can also be eaten raw in salads or as a snack in the field. The ostrich fern are 2-4 feet tall, and fronds are tapered on both ends with brown stems. Fertile fronds form a beaded plume through winter.
14. **Christmas Fern** – Christmas Ferns are popular because they are one of the few ferns that stay green all winter long. The fronds of the plant are often used at Christmas time for wreaths. The sori (spore-bearing structures) are on the upper leaflets of the fertile leaves; they are round and reddish brown. The fronds of this evergreen fern may be eaten by White-Tailed Deer when food is especially scarce. The silvery fiddleheads emerge in early spring.
15. **Queen Anne's Lace** – Queen Anne's Lace is a biennial plant that is found in most areas of the North Country. During its first year it is commonly called a wild carrot which is the taproot for the flowering stage in the second year. There is a deep purple bloom in the center of the flower head.