

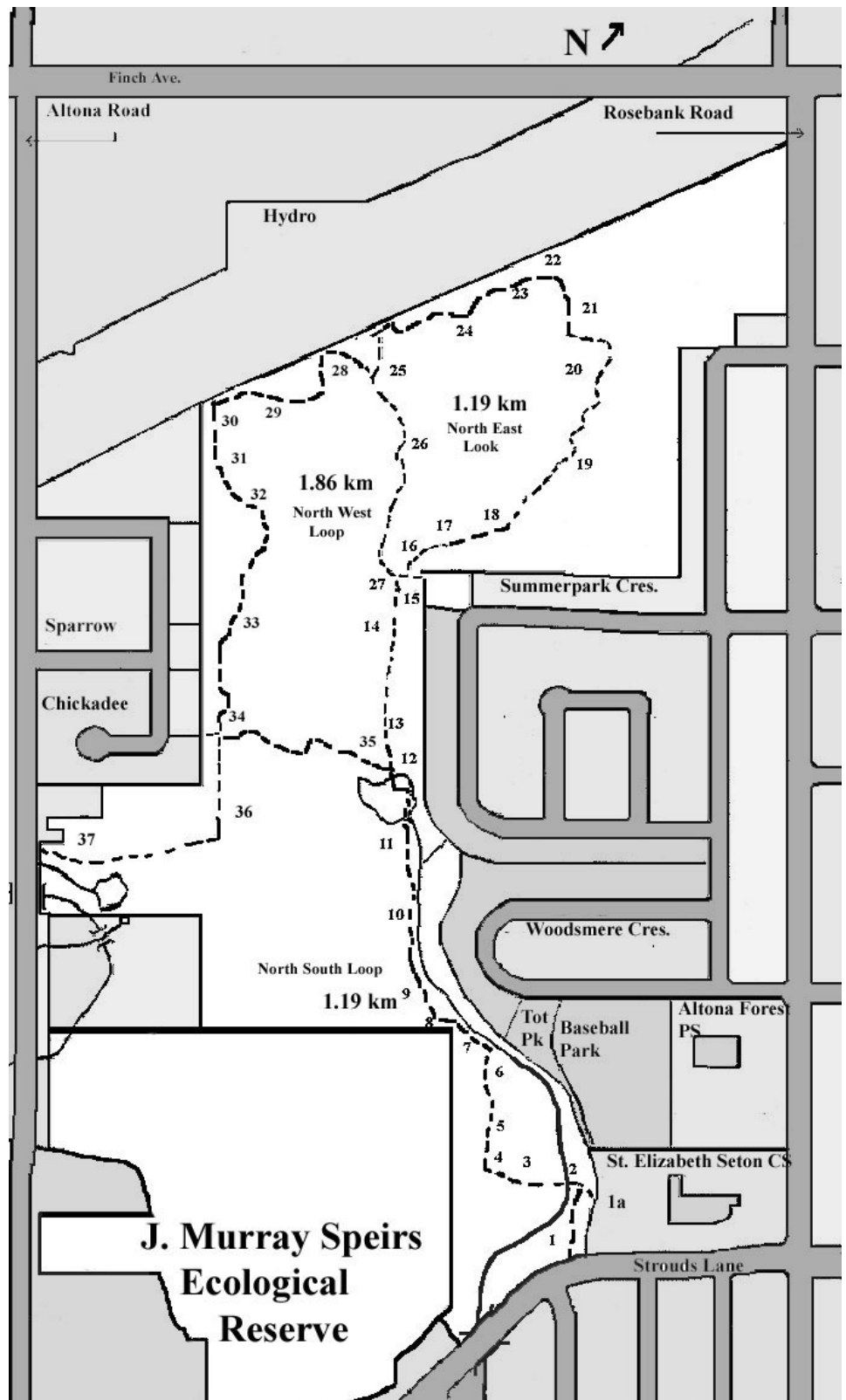
# ALTONA FOREST HIKING TRAILS

## GUIDE

Short Version

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The hiking trails of Altona Forest start at any one of the seven (7) access points. These are:

- Stroud's Lane Entrance - on Stroud's Lane just west of St. Elizabeth Seton School
- St. Elizabeth Seton Entrance - from soccer field at St. Elizabeth Seton School
- Summerpark Entrance - through the small park on Summerpark Road
- Chickadee Entrance - through walkway from Chickadee Road off Altona Road
- Altona Road Entrance - this entrance off Altona Road across from Pine Grove Ave.
- Hydro Central Entrance - for now, you may park on Rosebank and walk along the hydro property to the entrance.

This booklet is a short version of the Trail Hiking Guide. The longer, more detailed one is available at [altonaforest.org](http://altonaforest.org).

**INTERPRETIVE POST 1** — Welcome to Altona Forest. You are entering the Altona Forest at the southeast side. For a short distance you will be travelling beside the Rosebank Tributary. From here the Rosebank Tributary travels under Stroud's Lane and joins up with Petticoat Creek a short distance south of Stroud's Lane. The vegetation in this area is relatively young compared to much of Altona Forest. Rosebank Tributary has its source in the wetland which is located approximately in the middle of the east side of the forest. The wetland drains much of the interior of the forest. The trees you will find in this area include: **buckthorn, staghorn sumac, hemlock**. The wildflowers include: **poison ivy, ferns, trilliums** and **violets**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 1a** — Welcome to Altona Forest. This trail proceeds west and then north to the Summerpark Entrance. The distance from here to the Summerpark Entrance is approximately 1.19 km. Look at the small clearing just to the south of this INTERPRETIVE POST. Wildflowers found in this area, include: **sweet white clover, red clover, plantain, vetch, ragweed, plantain, yarrow, Queen Anne's lace, chicory, goldenrod, birdsfoot trefoil, least hop clover, burdock, thistle, cinquefoil, aster** and **small staghorn sumac**. Along the path in this area is **sugar maple, choke cherry, white pine, white ash, wild grape, poison ivy** and **buckthorn**. Butterflies such as the **monarch, cabbage white, cabbage yellow**, and **red admiral** frequent this clearing.

North of your position is a **white pine**, has a distinctive shape. The **white pine** is the tallest tree in eastern Canada. **Eastern white pine** is the provincial tree of Ontario. During colonial times, it was reserved for the Royal Navy who used it for ship masts.

**CAUTION:** There is some **poison ivy** on all the paths of Altona Forest; indeed, from here to INTERPRETIVE POST Post 3. **Poison ivy** is abundant on both sides of the path. **Please read the Poison Ivy information section at the end of this booklet**. Be careful to stay in the middle of the path until INTERPRETIVE POST 3. Thereafter be watchful for **poison ivy** in reduced quantity unless cautioned again.

Along this narrow path look for **chokecherry, white elm, white cedar, white birch** and **sugar maple**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 2** — In front of you is the Rosebank Tributary. This tributary was deepened by a developer to drain the wetland which you will see later on the hike. Watch for the removed soil which is mounded beside the tributary in many places. Plants in this area are **staghorn sumac, wild bergamot, sweet white clover, daisy** and **vetch**. **Pileated woodpeckers** can sometimes be heard or seen in the trees along this part of the trail.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 3** — You are now entering a hardwood forest. Notice the change in plant life and upperstorey cover above your head. The upperstorey shades the ground and results in the growth of shade-loving flowering plants and shade-tolerant trees. Hardwood trees in this section are **sugar maple, white ash, white elm, white birch** and **ironwood**. **Trout lily, white and red trilliums** are common in this and the rest of the hardwood forested parts of Altona Forest in spring.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 4** — Dr. J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve is located immediately to the west of this INTERPRETIVE POST. Please do not enter the Reserve but stay on the official path. The Reserve is an ecologically sensitive area and there are no public paths through it.

The trees in this area include a very large **sugar maple**. As you walk along the path which now goes in a north/south direction, look for more **sugar maples** of various sizes, **white ashes** and some **hemlock**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 5** — This INTERPRETIVE POST is located beside a unique tree in this area, the **blue beech**. Look for a tree with a trunk which looks like a muscular arm. Beyond this tree is more of the Reserve swamp area. You may notice some fresh water vernal pools nearby. These pools are aquatic habitats for a great variety of species such as **fairy shrimp, wood frogs, toads, salamanders** and **turtles**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 6** — In this area, off to the east and west, you will see a number of tree stumps. These are vandalized trees - **sugar maple, white birch, ironwood, white cedar, white elm** and **white ash**. More than a hundred trees were cut down in this area by vandals in the summer of 2000. If you see someone vandalizing the forest, call Durham Region Police at (905) 668-0552. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO STOP THEM BUT CALL THE POLICE WHO WILL COME OUT IMMEDIATELY IF THE VANDALS ARE STILL IN THE FOREST.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 7** — This small clearing is unique. If you look carefully, you will see a number of small water channels arising in the forest to the west and running to the tributary. There are a great variety of plants growing in the clearing including an abundance of **wild grape, wild raspberry, goldenrod**, two types of **fern (marginal wood fern and northern beech fern)**, some **poison ivy, thistle, milkweed, spotted Joe Pye weed, asters, flowering dogwood** and **boneset**. (Refer to SECTION II for explanations of each of these plants.)

Many of the **goldenrod** have **galls** on their stems. There is further information on galls on our web site. There are also some **willows** near the tributary. These too have galls. The willow galls resemble

cones from a coniferous tree..

As you leave the clearing, be careful of your footing as the trail gets close to the edge of the Rosebank Tributary bank in a few places.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 8** — The forest here is predominantly **white cedar**. It is called a softwood forest with some hardwoods like **white birch** and **red oak**. You may also see some **black-eyed susans** along the trail as well as **balsam fir**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 9** — You have climbed up a mound which is just one of many along the Rosebank Tributary. Around 1970, the developers who owned this property planned to build houses but were not satisfied with the water drainage in the area of the present day Altona Forest. They brought heavy equipment into the forest and dug up Rosebank Tributary to make it deeper and drain the wetland and the surrounding area. They were successful in lowering the water table and in draining much of the wetland which resulted in the destruction of breeding areas for many birds, small reptiles and amphibians.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 10** — The farmer's cedar rail fence seen here is a continuation of the one in the area of INTERPRETIVE POST 9. These examples of white cedar split rail fences are around 60 years old and in still good condition.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 11** — You have arrived at the source of the Rosebank Tributary. This wetland once covered the entire flat area. Migratory birds used to stop here on their way north or south on their yearly trips. **Ducks** used to swim on the open water and nest in the cattails by the water's edge. **Frogs** used to add their voices to the **crickets**' nightly concerts, and **deer, fox** and **coyote** used to come here to drink and hunt. Other wetlands were located east of here where there are now houses.

**Deer, fox** and **coyote** still roam the forest and they do come here during the spring and early summer when there is more water. This is an excellent place to stop for some quiet observation.. **Cardinals, blue jays, downy, hairy and pileated woodpeckers, black-capped chickadees, American goldfinches, red-breasted nut hatches** and **song sparrows** are often heard and sometimes seen flying around the wetland. This is a prime place to hear the mating call of the **cicada** or to see **dragonflies** and **damselies** hunting. Many varieties of butterflies, including **monarch, cabbage white, cabbage yellow** and **red admiral**, are often seen flitting around the many flowers, especially on the south side just to the west of the trail where large **flowering dogwoods** grow in abundance.

The large variety of plant life here include: **cattails, dogwood, purple loosestrife, various grasses, honeysuckle, Joe-Pye-weed, goldenrod, swamp thistle, wild lettuce** and **trembling aspens**. There are also some **black cherries** on the north side.

To the south of this post you might be able to see some **wild roses** growing on the bank of the tributary. Tradition has it that these roses gave the tributary its name of Rosebank.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 12** — You are in a softwood forest dominated by **white cedar** with some **hemlock** and **balsam fir**. Ground cover includes **trout lily, fern, white trillium, red trillium, showy orchids** and **elecampane**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 13** — This is a continuation of the cedar forest. Notice the lack of plant life on the floor. What is on the forest floor? How might this material prevent other plants from growing?

**INTERPRETIVE POST 14** — Here you can see some very old **apple** trees. In the fall the area has a decided cider odour.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 15** — You are standing at the Summerpark Entrance. The trail to the west is the start of the Northwest Loop hiking trail. It is a 1.86 km loop returning to this spot.

To the north is the start of the Northeast Loop hiking trail. This trail is a 1.19 km loop returning to this spot. It proceeds to the Hydro Entrance and then west to join up with the Northwest Loop hiking trail. If you proceed south on the North/South Trail, it is approximately 1.19 km to the St. Elizabeth Seton Entrance. **Dog-strangling vine** is common here. Beside you is a tree with large thorns, a **hawthorn**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 16** — You have entered a mature **white cedar** stand with scattered **white ash** and **sugar maple**. Cedar leaves (look like scales) on the ground produces an acidic type of soil which is tolerated by few plants. Notice the lack of ground cover in this area because of a combination of factors, including the soil, the shade and smothering.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 17** — Emerging from the **white cedar** stand, you have entered a **hemlock** and **white pine** area which leads into a large area of medium sized **sugar maple** trees which make up the upper and under storey. Shrubs and flowers here include (seasonally): **baneberry, jack-in-the-pulpit, trilliums, meadow rue, blue cohosh** and **toothworts**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 18** — This area has large **hemlocks** and a number of **beech** trees, two of which are located near where you are standing. Notice the elephant-like colour and texture of the trunk of the **beech**. Look around and you will see some large wind falls. As you walk on from here, you will see some **wood fern, arrowleaf asters, baneberry** and **blue cohosh** growing beside the trail.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 19** — There are a number of trees on the ground in this area. Some have **bracket fungus** growing on them.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 20** — Look around here to see two trees with unique bark. One, sometimes called the corn flake tree, has bark with large scales which resemble corn flakes pasted onto the trunk. This is the **black cherry**. Another unique tree here has bark which looks like the

white birch as it peels back in papery sections. The colour of the bark is a dark yellow. This tree is **yellow birch**. (There is a painting of this yellow birch on the web site “altonaforest.org”. Around this area and along the trail, look out for the following: **fern, rattlesnake root, jack-in-the-pulpit** and very large **hemlocks**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 21** — You are standing near an unnamed intermittent tributary. The soil and clay have been washed away to expose the rocks. You can clearly see here why this area was not successful as farm land. In this area and along the trail you might see **ostrich fern, jack-in-the-pulpit, barren strawberry**, and **moss** on the ground and rocks. Trees in this area are **ironwood, large hemlock, sugar maples** and **basswood**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 22** — You are at the edge of a white pine forest. Notice the ground. The **pine** needles in this area are so thick that in many places nothing else will grow. This is one way trees can eliminate competition.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 23** — CAUTION: From this INTERPRETATIVE POST #23 through INTERPRETATIVE POST #24, 25, 26 and 27, there is an abundance of **poison ivy**. STAY ON THE TRAIL and do not venture off even a little.

Here is a moist area with **white cedar** and **aspen** and some dead trees which may have been killed by the moisture. **Aspen** and **cedars** like the moist conditions here but many other trees do not. Watch for the intricate **spider** webs strung across or beside the paths. Notice that they are large enough to be seen by birds and small mammals as the spider does not want its work destroyed needlessly.

On the trail in this area look out for **barren strawberry, buttercups, horsetail, mullein, elecampane, barberry, milkweed, enchanters night shade** and **poison ivy**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 24** — North of your position is the hydro corridor. This area receives more sun light than many areas inside the forest and as a result has some different plants growing here. Look for **sedges, dogwood, goldenrod, highbush cranberry, grape, buttercup**, and **willows** with galls which resemble cones. The galls are the reaction of the willows to the incursion of an insect egg inside its twig. It does the tree no harm.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 25** — CAUTION: **poison ivy** in this area.

You are at the junction of the Northeast and the Northwest loops in the Altona Forest Hiking Trails. To the west from here is a regeneration area. It is a sensitive area with many different trees, shrubs and wildflowers which you can not see in such abundance anywhere in the forest. It is part of the Northwest loop and we urge you to consider walking there. To the north is the Northeast trail which goes through a number of forest types before arriving at the Summerpark Entrance.

The plants here include: **rush, milkweed, dogwood, poison ivy** and **bush clover**. The trees include the **black cherry, chokecherry, white cedar, white pine** and **aspen**. Wildlife which frequents this

area in: **cardinals, red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls, blue jays, downy, hairy and pileated woodpeckers, black-capped chickadees, American goldfinches, red-breasted nut hatches, song sparrows, two owl families, butterflies, and white tailed deer.**

**INTERPRETIVE POST 26** — CAUTION: INTERPRETATIVE POST #26 through 27 is an abundance of **poison ivy.**

If you look into the cedar trees to the west of where you are standing, you will notice a large pile of rocks. These are left over from the days when this area was partially cleared of trees and the farmer removed the surface rocks. Plants in this area include the **white cedar, ostrich fern and coltsfoot.**

**INTERPRETIVE POST 27** — You are standing at the junction of the South Trail and the Northwest Trail. To the east is the exit to Summerpark and the start of the Northeast Trail. To the south is the South Trail and to the west is the Northwest Trail.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 28** — North of this location is the hydro corridor. Southwest is a meadow woodlot dominated by **white ash and white cedar.** The ground cover in this area is **grass, sedge, goldenrod and poison ivy.** Please be cautious and stay on the path to avoid the **poison ivy.**

In the meadow you may also see some **highbush cranberry and English hawthorn** (smaller thorns than the native hawthorn and oak-like leaves), **dogwood and grape.** This is a very good area to observe birds. It is also an area which is frequented by **deer and rabbits** as well as **owls and hawks.**

**INTERPRETIVE POST 29** — You are in the reforestation area of northern Altona Forest. It is a meadow woodlot dominated by **white ash and white cedar.** The ground cover in this area is **grass, sedge, goldenrod and poison ivy.** Please be cautious and stay on the path to avoid the poison ivy. In the meadow you may also see some **highbush cranberry and English hawthorn** (smaller thorns than the native **hawthorn**), **dogwood, tall buttercup, Virginia creeper and grape.** This is a very good area to observe birds. It is also an area which is frequented by **deer and rabbits** as well as **great-horned owls and red-tailed hawks.** North of here is the hydro corridor.

During the spring of 2002, more than 300 white cedars, 5 to 6 ft tall, were stolen from this area. You may still be able to see the holes left when the root balls were removed. Please be careful not to walk into any of these holes as some of them are located near to the path. **If you see anyone digging up trees in this, or any part of Altona Forest, please call the Durham Police by calling 911.**

**INTERPRETIVE POST 30** — There is an entirely different type of vegetation here than at INTERPRETIVE POSTS 29 and 31. The soil is damp and rich and supports **tall buttercup, grass, sedge, fleabane, white avens, horsetail, small Bebb's / beaked willow, chokecherry, basswood, white ash, dogwood, common mullein, elecampane, trembling aspen, white elm,** small and medium **white cedars** and an abundance of **elecampane** with its velvety leaves. In this area **slugs** and **snails** with beige shells with dark brown stripes are common.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 31** — This meadow has an abundance of wildflowers and small trees. The plants include **hawkweed, buttercup, white avens, white ash, white pine, black cherry** and **chokecherry**. This is another area frequented by a variety of birds as well as **deer, rabbits** and **coyote**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 32** — You are in a mature **white cedar** stand with some **dogwood, moss** and **wood fern** but mostly very little understorey. Look at the ground and look above. The ground is covered with a mat of dried cedar leaves while there is very little light coming through the upperstorey of **cedars**. These factors combine to discourage an abundance of understorey growth.

You might notice the occasional large apple tree along the path. The reason for this is not clear but this area was a farmers field in the 1940s and there is an old apple orchard on the east side of Altona Forest not too far from here.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 33** — **White pine** and **white cedar** are dominant in this area. Notice the ground cover of pine needles and the lack of an understorey. Watch out for large **apple trees** with scaly bark (very different from the other trees in this area). The apple trees may have been here before the cedar trees as they are very old. You will see some **baneberry** and **dog-strangling vine** where the sun light reaches the ground.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 34** — Welcome to Altona Forest. Please read the introduction which is found at the beginning of this booklet. To the west of this post is the exit from Chickadee. From here you can proceed north along the Northwest Loop toward INTERPRETIVE POST # 33, east toward the NorthSouth trail toward INTERPRETIVE POST #35 or south towards the Altona Road entrance and INTERPRETIVE POST # 36.

The North West Trail is approximately 1.86 km long if you return to this spot.

As you enter you will have passed a variety of wild flowers including **touch-me-nots**. In this area there are a number of fallen and decaying trees. Some of the logs which have been on the ground for a number of years no longer have the bark protecting the inner wood. On some of these trees you can see evidence of the **bark beetle**. These blackish brown, small and fat insects have enlarged tips on their short club-shaped antennae. They attack both live and dead trees. When the eggs hatch under the bark, the larvae make extensive tunnels which resemble complicated road systems. Some of these tunnels are visible on some of the old trees which have had the bark rot off.

Look out for large **apple trees, white cedar, white pine, hemlock, dog strangling vine** and **white ash** towards the edge of the forest.

Along the east trail you will also see (in season) some **Canada mayflower, true Solomon's seal, wild lily of the valley, trilliums, baneberry, dog strangling vine, wood fern** and **spikenard**.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 35** — You are at the junction of the NorthSouth trail. To the south



is the wetland. To the north is the trail to the Summerpark Entrance. To the west is the Chickadee Entrance.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 36** — You are entering a mixed forest with a variety of tree types. In the immediate area, there used to be a private residence. The drive way came in from Altona Road and looped around in front of the house. This area experience a major disturbance when the house was removed and the road was left to grow over. A large variety of trees, shrubs and weeds are regenerating this area.

**INTERPRETIVE POST 37** — Welcome to Altona Forest. Before going on, please read the introduction at the beginning of this booklet.

This is INTERPRETIVE POST 37. Although it is the beginning of the hiking trail starting from Altona Road, this post was the last one placed on the hiking trails inside the forest, thus the number. From here you will hike north to the Chickadee Entrance where you can continue north or proceed east.

The area around you was once the drive way and yards of a home situated beside Petticoat Creek. Petticoat Creek is situated in the valley to the immediate south of here, just beyond the parking lot. From here Petticoat Creek flows into private property and then to the other side of Altona Road before flowing in a southeastern direction under Sheppard Ave, CN Rail tracks, the 401 highway and into Petticoat Creek Conservation Area before emptying into Lake Ontario.

## NOTES ON POISON IVY

### Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)

**Poison Ivy** is common in Altona Forest especially in disturbed areas and near the edges of the forest and along some paths. **Poison Ivy** is very common along the school fence, along the backyard fences where undergrowth has been removed and in the open areas. Please be cautious and stay on the trail.



**Poison Ivy** is a perennial that spreads by seeds and woody rhizomes. Its leaves are arranged alternately on the stem and consist of three leaflets. Look carefully at the middle leaflet which has one stalk much longer than those of the two lateral leaflets. The edges of the leaflets may be smooth, toothed or even lobed like an oak leaf, which causes some people to call this plant **poison oak**. The leaves vary greatly in size, from 8 mm to 10 cm long.

- / **spring** The leaves are reddish or purplish when they first emerge. Male and female flowers are normally found on separate plants. They are clustered, small, and cream to yellow green in colour.
- ! **summer** Leaves are green and the green to yellow-beige fruits are clustered, round, and waxy. They are 3-7 mm in diameter and contain 1-seeded.
- // **autumn** leaves turn shades of purple, yellow, orange, red, or bronze
- † **winter** leaves fall but the stems and fruit persists and can still transmit the harmful chemicals which can cause severe rash

The chemical which causes the allergic reaction in some people, can get on your skin, clothes, foot wear and on the fur of animals. It can then be transferred to your, or someone else's skin at a later time. If you feel that you have been exposed to poison ivy, wash the exposed area with mild soap and water as soon as possible. Wash boots or shoes and any clothes you suspect may have been exposed. If symptoms of itching or rash appear, see a doctor immediately.

