

Manchester — 11/18/2008

Small Hilliard Trail is home to wide variety of native trees

BY BARBARA ARMENTANO ReminderNews

The Hilliard Trail is located at the corner of New State Road and Hilliard Street in Manchester and is maintained by the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee. The Hilliard Trail is unique in that an amazing variety of tree species can be found on the shortest of the nine Hockanum hiking trails.



Tree expert Ed Richardson (left) examines the trees along the Hilliard Trail with Doug Smith of the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee. Photo by Barbara Armentano.

The quarter-mile hike is just long enough to enjoy a walk along the river during lunch hour or to jog with a dog.

Nearby resident Brianna Tassinari found this “hidden jewel in Manchester” shortly after moving to the area last year. “I never expected to find such a perfect place to walk my adopted rescue dog, Brooklyn, when we moved here,” she said.

The silence of the woods gives way to the continuous ripple of the water as it glides downstream. For many years, a white goose and his mate took up residence here during the summer months, leaving before winter and returning the next summer. About five years ago, he returned without his mate and spent the summers alone, but this year he has not been seen.

The Hilliard Trail is named for E.E. Hilliard, who took over the first woolen mill in Manchester. The mill was originally started by Aaron Buckland in 1794 and later owned by Sidney Pitkin. Hilliard operated the mill until his death in 1881, after which his son, and later his grandson, ran the mill. The E.E. Hilliard Company was listed as a producer of woolen goods

in the Manchester Town Directories until 1941. The mill buildings still stand on Hilliard Street across from the trail, and the new owners of the buildings are undertaking a major renovation for office and storage space. Plans are underway for a new trail along Bigelow Brook in the rear of the buildings.

On Wednesday, Oct. 15, tree expert Ed Richardson (" Notable Trees in Connecticut") met with Doug Smith and Brian Pillion of the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee to help identify some of the trees along the trail. Richardson said he has visited many areas in Connecticut to classify trees in various locations and determine whether they are native to the area.

Richardson's identifications started with some red maples. He said, "Red maples turn color early," and then, noticing a few sycamores, he stated, "It's one of our favorites." As he approached a black birch tree, he saw evidence that a beaver chewed on the tree. Smith said, "It's been a continuous problem, and many trees are wrapped on the bottom to prevent beavers chewing on them."

Here and there, he picked a leaf from a tree to be examined carefully and classified . Richardson was impressed by the many types as they walked from tree to tree. There were three varieties of white mulberry trees that produce purple, red or white flowers. Coming upon a silver maple, he explained, "They get to be among the largest and like to be near water." Quickly moving on, he said, "I think you have a sugar maple here. I just checked a leaf, and it's a very nice specimen."

Richardson was surprised to come upon a box elder, another type of maple tree. He said, "It has compound leaves, which no other tree has, and some call it a 'junk tree.'"

He then pointed out a cottonwood tree near the end of the trail, and when he located a winterberry tree, he said, "This is a native tree, not a nursery one," adding, "That's a good plant, and people have them in their yards."

There was also a white oak and an American beech tree standing side by side. Richardson said, "There is quite an assortment of trees here for such a short trail."

For more information about Manchester trails, visit the Web site www.hockanumriverwa.net.