

Exploring the Whiteshell

by Doris Ames, President

Native Orchid Conservation Inc.

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On June 14th, three of us drove to the start of the Falcon Creek Trail near the Riding Stables. This 2.2km trail is interesting because along it we can see some of the many geological features that make the Whiteshell so special, as well as many pretty native plant species.



Photo 1: Falcon Creek Trail sign - June 2004

The trail itself is built on top of the dark-green bedrock called basalt. This rock was formed from the lava of underwater volcanoes 2.5 billion years ago. This means the rocks in the Whiteshell are some of the oldest on earth. Near the start of the trail we came to a huge boulder made up of granite instead of basalt. Geologists call this sort of rock an erratic. The glacier moved it here during the last ice age some 10,000 years ago and when the ice finally melted it was left here. Climbing up on the rocks past the erratic, we could see the telltale scratches on the bedrock called striations that were made as the gravel and rocks in the glacier scraped across it. Slow-growing lichens are growing on these old rocks and gradually wearing them down with the acids they produce. There are several kinds of lichens here and some of them are as much as 1000 years old.



Photo 2: Erratic - Falcon Creek Trail - June 2004

A few, stately red pines were growing near where the trail crosses Falcon Creek. This reminded us that loggers had selectively cut most of the trees in this area in the 1930's, before it was declared a Provincial Park. Along the trail we saw violets, club mosses, starflower, nodding trillium and tall lungwort with its blue, pendant blossoms.



Photo 3: Nodding Trillium 2004jun11



Photo 4: Tall Lungwort - Falcon Creek Trail - June 2004

We stopped at the top of the rocks for a rest and a drink of water and enjoyed the sight of moccasin-flowers, pink corydalis and two kinds of pretty little ferns, polypody and woodsia. It seemed there was a fern or flower growing from every little crack and fissure in the bedrock. Blueberry bushes filled the mossy hollows with their promise of luscious pies to come.



Photo 5: Moccasin-flower - Falcon Creek Trail June 2004



Photo 6: Pink Corydalis - Falcon Creek Trail - June 2004



Photo 7: Polypody fern Falcon Creek Trail June 2004



Photo 8: Rusty Woodsia fern - Falcon Creek Trail - June 2004

On the return journey, we saw white spruce and a clump of the rare, green-flowered Hooker's rein-orchid as well as columbine and bluets. Two medicinal plants used by the aboriginal people are common up here; goldthread and Labrador tea. Goldthread, named for its bright yellow roots is used by aboriginal people to this day to purify the blood and treat liver problems. Labrador tea is high in Vitamin C and a refreshing tea can be made from the leaves.



Photo 9: Hooker's rein-orchid - Falcon Creek Trail - June 2004

The enjoyable hike along this trail took us two hours and was moderately strenuous. There were many fallen trees across the trail as a result of the snowstorm and high winds in May. The trail is steep and wet in places and good walking shoes or hiking boots are recommended. Bring along a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent and water as well.

This trail will be even more fun to hike if you visit the geological displays at the West Hawk Museum beforehand. Pick up the interesting brochure available at the Conservation Office in Falcon Lake. It lists many additional facts and suggests interesting activities for children. Have a great summer!