

Bon Secour Refuge Pine Beach Trail Guide

by Chan West

This trail guide describes what one might see along one mile of Pine Beach Trail, from the parking lot to the bridge over the mouth of Gator Lake. Many of the flowering plants may be difficult to locate or identify when not in bloom. Raccoon, opossum, red fox, rabbit, armadillo, flying squirrel and other resident animals are nocturnal but may leave their tracks along the trail. In daylight, you are apt to see the Six-lined Racerunner (similar to a skink), gray squirrel and an assortment of birds.

1. Counterclockwise Around Island Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) 58" oak supports a flowering plant, non-parasitic **spanish moss** (*Tillandsia usneoides*) almost evergreen. More orchid than moss, it was used to stuff furniture years ago. A small **Magnolia** (*Magnolia grandiflora*) evergreen.

Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) evergreen.

Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*) in years past many hickory were cut for smoking mullet; this large tree survived.

Coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea-Legume*) perennial shrub; spiny stems, spire of red flowers in spring, toxic red beans in fall.

At Gate

Red Basil (*Satureja coccineum*) to right of gate, under small pine this perennial shrub with spike salvia-like red flowers in late summer/early fall attracts hummingbirds.

Climbing Butterfly Pea

(*Centrosema virginianum*) vine twining on plants near gate with bluish-lavendar blossoms in summer.

St. Andrew's Cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*) shrub with opposite leaves behind "closed to vehicles" sign. Yellow flower with four petals in cross pattern. Blooms in summer.

Goldenrod (*Solidago*) on left beyond gate. Several species along trail; fall.

Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) on both sides of road. Spring flowers supply nectar for bees; wildlife eat fall fruit: evergreen.

2. Starting on Right

Beautyberry/French Mulberry (*Callicarpa americana*) deciduous shrub with large clusters of bright maroon berries along stems in late summer/fall which are eaten by birds.

Wild Olive/Devilwood (*Osmanthus americana*) small tree with leathery leaves. Inconspicuous blossoms in spring smell similar to the cultivated osmanthus, tea olive or sweet olive. Small olive-like fruit in fall.

Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) numerous small shrubs with light bark, shiny small leaves, red berries in fall and winter; evergreen.

Flowering Spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*) plant with small white flowers in summer; common along trail.

3. To the Left

Deer Tongue/Vanilla Plant (*Carphephorus odoratissimus*) basal rosette of tongue-shaped

leaves; lavender blossoms on tall stem in early fall.

Bracken Fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) green fern turns brown in fall.

Behind; Saint Andrew's Cross (see "At Gate").

Dog Fennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) feathery plant.

Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) large shrub. In fall, has small wax-coated seeds along stems which were once used for candle wax; evergreen.

Coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) on down left side of road; see Station 1.

4. False Foxglove (*Aureolaria laevigati*) long, arching stems with tubular, yellow flowers in late summer; parasitic on roots of oak tree; turns black when picked.

Gopher Apple (*Licania michauxii*) approximately 8"-10" evergreen plant along both sides of road. Extensive underground branches with only stems above ground, creamy white flowers in spring, pinkish "apple" in late summer.

5. Seaside Rosemary (*Certiola ericoides*) shrub with needlelike foliage and tiny, brown flowers; not the herb used in cooking; evergreen.

Reindeer Moss/Reindeer Lichen/Arctic Moss (*Cladonia rangifera*) soft and spongy when damp; when dry, hard and fragile.

Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) is most common; from spreading giant in parking lot to dwarfed ones on beach dunes; **Scrub Oak** is shaped by salty sea breezes and drifting sand. Oblong leaves have rolled-under edges.

Myrtle Oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) common, small, scrubby, black oak with obovate leaves; with similarly appearing **White Oak** (*Quercus chapmanii*).

Dwarf Sand Oak (*Quercus geminata*) scrub live oak (several other scientific names), much like a very small **Live Oak**.

Choctawhatchee Sand Pine (*Pinus clausa*) short-leafed tree with closed cones. Range limited to coastal Baldwin County east into Florida panhandle.

Ocala Sand Pine is found in central Florida; evergreen.

6. Across Road

Fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*) with raised veins on edges of leather-like leaves, pink urn-like flowers in early spring, and persistent nutlets. The clump of small trees behind Fetterbush includes **Wild Oak/Devilwood** (*Osmanthus americana*) with large leaf, and **Huckleberry** with small leaf, white pinkish bell or urn-like dangling blossoms in spring, small edible fruit in late summer. There are numerous species of Huckleberry, **Sparkleberry, Blueberry** (*Gaylussacia, Vaccinium*), throughout area from 10" dwarf to small trees, difficult to identify specific species.

The pine trees in swamp were killed by Hurricane Frederic, not by fire. The dead trees have provided nest holes for nuthatches, woodpeckers, woodducks, kestrels, and other animals.

7. Beside Post

Sevmeria (*Cassioides*) fine foliage, small yellow flowers in late summer, early fall.

In swamp across road, **Pond Cypress** (*Taxodium ascendens*) small trees which have grown since Frederic.

Beggartick (*Bidens mitis*) yellow, cosmos-like flower in late summer/fall.

Water Plantain, Common Arrowhead, Duck Potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*) aquatic clump of long leaves with stem of white flowers. Other species with narrower leaves found in area, one much smaller.

Summer Titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*) shrub with dangling raceme of white flowers in spring. Fruit persists and looks similar to flower.

8. Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) deciduous shrub with round, white flower in summer; fruit is persistent, brown, round head.

Wax myrtle - See Station 3.

Across the road to right of dead pine **Redbay** (*Persea borbonia*) small tree; frequently has gall on leaves. To left of the dead tree is a **Sweet Bay** (*Magnolia virginiana*) common swamp tree noticeable in breeze because of lighter underside of leaves. The spring flower is like a small Southern Magnolia flower. In the ditch of the culvert, spring-summer, two small aquatic plants: **Floating Bladderwort** (*Utricularia inflata*) yellow flower on stem supported by whorl of floating branches; Purple Bladderwort (*Utricularia purpurea*) pale, purple flower with

submerged, whorled, feathery branches.

9. Blazin Star (*Liatris*) in September, a spire of lavender flowers.

Conradina (*Conradina canescens*) locally called **Rosemary**; narrow, tightly-rolled, linear leaves; common, lavender to white flowers bloom in early spring but blooms sparingly, almost year-round.

Polygonella - several species; clumps of small, white flowers, turning pinkish as fruit matures, and slender spires of white flowers on plant with succulent-like leaves; fall.

10. Shrub to right, **Bitter Gallberry/Inkberry** (*Ilex glabra*) small, white flower in spring; bees collect nectar; black berry in fall-winter.

Buttonweed (*Dioda virginiana*) ground cover; small white flower and shiny leaves.

Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemesiifolia*) plant with deeply lobed leaves, green flower spire; summer/fall.

Lance-leaved Violet (*Viola lanceolata*) white-violet along edge of road to left; spring.

In low area across road, **Rose Mallow** (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) clumps of 5' stems with showy pink flowers in late summer; dried seed pods persist.

Slash Pine (*Pinus elliottii*) common large pine tree with big cones and long needles; grows in wet as well as well-drained areas; evergreen.

11. Dahoon/Swamp Holly (*Ilex cassine*) small tree with dull green leaves varying length from 1 to 10 cm. Dull berries usually red, sometimes orange or yellow. Numerous in swamp on both sides of road; evergreen.

Shrub to left of post, **Groundsel/Silverling** (*Baccharis halimifolia*) white, hairy heads in fall. Monarch butterflies gather on these during fall migration in mid-October; evergreen.

Small tree 30' to left, large leaf, **Persimmon** (*Diospyros virginiana*) deciduous; leaves usually have black spots; edible fruit in fall. Don't eat until soft, ripe; bitter, nonpoisonous.

Across road from Persimmon is **Chinese Tallow Tree; Popcorn Tree** (*Sapium sebiferum*) alien, spade shaped leaves have brilliant fall color. White, toxic, popcorn-like seeds are eaten and spread by birds. Trees grow in wet areas and are a nuisance in agricultural drainage ditches. Spring flowers good for bees.

Rattlebox/Showy Croton (*Crotalaria spectabilis*) erect, yellow legume brought in with fill dirt. Formerly used as cover crop; toxic to livestock; Seeds rattle in dry pod.

12. Scurb Oaks-refer to Station 5. **Blueberries/Huckleberries**-refer to Station 6.

13. Debris line from Hurricane Frederic, September 12, 1979. Much has been scavenged from roadside, but if this line is followed, one can see decaying remains of houses and their contents that stood on the beach at Gulf Shores.

Please return unwanted brochures.

Beautyberry-deciduous shrub; see Station 2.

14. Follow side trail about 100' **Hairy Wicky** (*Kalmia hirsuta*) small shrub with small leaves; rare, pink, mountain laurel-like flower. White flower with 5 narrow petals is a **Sabatia** - summer bloom.

Elephant's foot (*Elephantopus tomentosus*) approximately 12" - 18" flower stalk with lavender flowers and basal rosette of hairy leaves; late summer-fall bloom. Fewer flowers than taller **Deer-tongue** (Station 3).

Orange Milkwort/Candyweed (*Colygala lutea*) low plant with yellow-orange flower; compact head; spring - fall.

15. Saw Grass (*Cladium jamaicense*) grows as high as 3 meters, in brackish marsh.

Winged Sumac (*Rhus copallina*) small tree; leaves turn red in fall; reddish clusters of fruit persist; nonpoisonous.

Note the cat-face scar on lower trunk of the pine tree. In years past, turpentine and timber were the only commercial activities beside fishing in the area. The large oak in the parking lot was the collection spot for this area.

Bridge
Stand on bridge and look up at trunks of nearby pine trees. Notice the scars made by floating debris in Hurricane Frederic.

Fur further information, contact:
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