1. The Glacier

The last glacier disappeared from Ohio 12,000 years ago while the Mastodons still roamed the land. The warming climate caused the glacier to melt and huge chunks would break off from its edge. These would often be covered with gravel, boulders and other deposits by the melt water, to melt later and cause depressions on the surface of the land. Geologists call these depressions "kettles". Spring fed Punderson Lake (90 acres) is the largest kettle lake in Ohio.

2. Wild Cherry

One of the most common trees of Ohio's forest and roadsides is the wild black cherry. Easily identified year round by its bark, some describe the trunk of the older trees as covered by burned corn flakes. Although the fruit can be eaten, in fact is an important wildlife food in the fall, the leaves and twigs are poisonous. As a branch dies, deadly cyanide is formed in its leaves. Cattle have been, known to die after eating the wilted leaves of recently pruned cherry limbs.

3. Leaves of Three; Let It Be!

Can you identify the poison ivy plants? During the summer when poison ivy is most virulent, woodsmen learn to recognize the plant by its set of three, green, waxy leaflets. To make matters somewhat difficult, the plants may appear in three different forms bushes, vines or as a creeper. As a vine the plant can be easily recognized year round. The vine clings to tree bark with reddish hair like rootlets. Always remove clinging vines from firewood because many serious reactions may be caused by the smoke born poison from the burning poison ivy. Ironically, poison ivy is only noxious to humans. Many song birds, robins and waxwings eat its berries through the winter. Rabbits and deer feed on the leaves in the summer. Since man and poison ivy originated on different continents, its toxicity seems an accident of nature rather than a defense mechanism

4. Wild Violets

The pleasing fragrance of a violet can only be smelled briefly. The pungent essence of violets is accompanied by a mild aromatic anesthetic that quickly numbs the nose to the fragrance.

The violet begins to bloom in the spring and ends in early summer, leaving only the heart shaped leaves to blanket the forest floor. The leaves have been called "nature's vitamin pill" because of its healthful potency of vitamin C. There is more vitamin C in a half cup of violet leaves than in four oranges

Many species of violets are native to Ohio. Not all of these have purple flowers; some have white or even yellow. Along the hillsides at Punderson you can find the common blue violet as well as the less common three-lobed violet Wildflowers should never be picked in a State Park; and this means here at Punderson. Rather, they should be enjoyed as they are and left for others to appreciate as well.

5. Den Tree

The hardy woody core of a tree acts as a skeleton or support although it is really dead. The living portion of the tree, known as "sap wood" exists a fraction of an inch beneath the bark. A tree can live for many years with its trunk hollow. Such trees, however, are more susceptible to disease and damage from high winds.

Standing hollow trees should be left in the forest because they are important as "den" trees. Raccoons, opossums, squirrels woodpeckers, chickadees and owls are among the many wild animals that rely on hollow trees for homes for raising their young. Many, as the barred owl (an important pest control predator) will not be found near a forest where there are no den trees.

6. Punderson Lake

Beneath the sparkling surface of this spring-fed lake is water cold and deep enough to support lake trout. There have been several attempts to survey the lake bottom and measure its depth and the last one indicated the maximum depth to be about 85 feet.

The water feeding the lake from the bottom springs is deficient in oxygen and fish cannot live in the deeper waters Most of the fish (bass, perch, sunfish, crappie and trout) are found in the top layer where the oxygen is sufficient to support them. The Division of Wildlife stocks Punderson Lake regularly.

7. The Gift of the Great Spirit

Long before the white man came here, the early Americans (Indian) had learned the usefulness of the sugar maple tree. They considered it a special gift of the Nature Spirit. Early settlers were quick to learn about this unique American tree and the syrup (or sugar) making methods of the Indians. Today, Ohio is the fourth largest producer of maple syrup in the nation.

The large tree before you is an old sugar maple. Notice the round, penny size scar on its trunk. Before this forest became State Park land, these maple trees were tapped with hollow tubes of wood or metal called “spiles”: Syrup producers drilled a new hole each year as the old holes healed over. Spile scars can be found on many of Punderson's old maples evidence of the syrup making that once went on here.

8. Glacial Hitchhiker

Have you ever noticed large, seemingly misplaced boulders in a field or forest and wondered how they got there or where they came from? These boulders are usually rounded and contain pink feldspar, a clear to gray quartz and shiny mica. Stones such as these are found in Canada from where the glaciers brought them to Ohio.

When the glaciers formed in Canada, the rock studded ice scoured the bedrock of the Canadian shield and pulled out chunks of granite. As the ice moved south, the chunks were rounded and polished by constant abrasion. After traveling hundreds of miles, the boulders were eventually dropped where the ice melted.

9. The Marsh

The marshes along the edges of Punderson Lake are vital to the natural community. Muskrats, mallards and sparrows build their nests within the thick vegetation of the marsh. Fish and aquatic insects find food and shelter among the cattails and sedges of the marshes.

Shrubs with small ball shaped seed heads at the branch tips are known as “button brushes”. These peculiar cattails have been called the "supermarket of the swamp" because they provide such an abundance and variety of wild foods all year to the marsh inhabitants. Muskrats are particularly fond of the cattail’s starchy roots. The small, moisture loving arrowood trees (named because the Indians found the plant shaft-like branches useful for making arrows) border the marsh. Deeply toothed roundish leaves (in pairs opposite each other on the twigs) identify the arrowood.

10. A Fallen Hero

What good is a "dead" tree? Actually, dead trees are far from useless when left in the forest. Bacteria, fungi and mosses are some of the organisms that use the nutrients from the wood. Ants establish colonies inside, scurrying along miniature corridors and tunnels, communicating with a touch or antennae. As an ichneumon wasp searches for another egg or grub to parasitize, a snuffling skunk stops to search for some tasty tidbit in the form of a juicy beetle, salamander or worm. It may also investigate the possibility of taking up residence in the fallen tree.

THE NATURE TRAIL

A Self Conducted Tour
of the **Nature Trail**
at

Punderson State Park