

## The "Back 40" Self-Guided Tour



The trails through the "Back 40" are based on old farm roads, cow paths, and foot trails, and as such are not universally accessible. The trail from the Wood Lane entrance proceeding north through the highlands area has relatively gentle gradients, but the surface is natural, with roots and stones, and is quite muddy in spring and in wet weather. The section leading down the esker to the bog is rather steep and should only be attempted by those who can navigate a steep rocky slope.

The access for these trails from the Taylor Road parking lot begins at the northern end of the boardwalk by the Wildflower Garden. One may also access this trail from the Wood Lane entrance or from Minot Ave. near the bog.

While walking through the "Back 40", visitors can see various forest succession stages, interesting geological features, and a variety of animal habitats.

### 14 Invasive Species Control Area

This area of the arboretum is being actively managed to remove Norway maples, winged euonymous, multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and other **invasive non-native species** that crowd out more desirable but less well-adapted native species. This undertaking will help maintain species diversity in the area. In time, native species such as American beech or sugar maple may be reintroduced into this area.

### 15 Pine Grove

This nearly pure stand of towering **white pines** seems almost cathedral-like on a sunny afternoon with an errant glacial boulder at hilltop that could serve as a pulpit. These tall trees

*Pine Grove (continued)*

provide dense shade and an acidic understory that limits shrub growth. Few birds find this area a safe place to nest although owls, hawks, or crows might be seen high up among the tree tops. Look for the "Forest Stones" nearby.

### 16 Esker

You are standing atop an **esker**, a raised gravel stream bed left by a melting and receding glacier. The presence of pitch pines and dominance of oaks plus a wide variety of other trees that are adapted to dry conditions provide evidence of the esker's dry glacial gravel base. The esker is a mini-continental divide for this lower part of the arboretum. The great swamp on the trail's west side drains south into Coles Brook and the Fort Pond Brook watershed while the east-side wetlands and bog drain east into the Nashoba Brook watershed.

### 17 Bog

This 2.5 acre **bog** is a classic glacially-created wetland that has been colonized with bog plants. Its sphagnum moss bed is about 16' deep in some places. As with most peat lands, no stream flows into this bog, significantly limiting the nutrients entering the bog. There is no constant supply of oxygen which is necessary to fuel the bacterial decomposition process. Both of these factors slow the rate of biologic decomposition of the organic matter and keep the environment very acidic, often with a pH less than 4.0. As a result, plants grow here that are unable to gain a foothold in other environments, plants such as northern pitcher plants and members of the heath family such as leatherleaf.

### 18 Wildlife Corridor

The dense shade and thick acidic decomposing needle litter on the forest floor limit shrub growth. An exception can be found along this

*Wildlife Corridor (continued)*

telephone easement running through the property where sapling black birch, red maple, and buckthorn grow in profusion. For large animals such as white-tailed deer, red fox, and coyotes, this old telephone easement provides an important east/west **travel corridor** through the arboretum, along with necessary cover for these mammals.

### 19 Farm Quarry

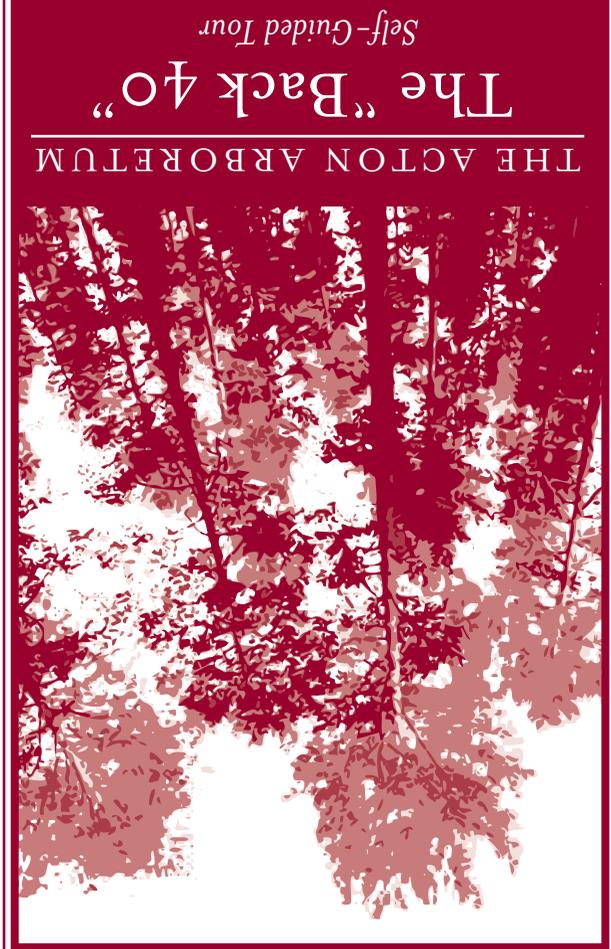
**Quarrying** was done in Acton throughout the 1800s, but did not become a major industry until the 1880s. Earlier times saw small-scale quarrying being done by farmers to cut fence posts and foundation stones. Many quarries such as this can be found scattered throughout the woods in Acton.

### 20 Ledge Outcrop

Here is a very steep **exposed ledge** topped with junipers. At the base of the ledge is a small cluster of tupelo trees. Tupelo is fairly rare in Acton and is generally considered to be a wetland species, tolerant of flooding. There is a small seep or spring at the base of the ledge, which provides a constant water supply for both the tupelos and the American cranberry bush growing next to the tupelos.

### 21 Old Orchard

This **old apple orchard** with fairly high ground water has a number of very large old apple trees that are hollow and in advanced stages of decline. The trees provide den areas for raccoons, red and gray squirrels, deer mice, and white-footed mice. This area is densely overgrown with honeysuckle and multiflora rose, providing nesting habitat for many of the same species found in an edge habitat. Blue jays and yellow-billed cuckoos nest in this protected environment.



#### WHO ARE THE FRIENDS?

*We are a group of citizens who care about the natural world and share a vision of preserving and enhancing our natural resources for educational purposes.*

*Friends contribute time, money, plants and other gifts and talents in support of the Acton Arboretum in order to achieve these goals.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO:  
THE TOWN OF ACTON, PROCESS / SUSAN CONNOR  
AND INTERNATIONAL PAPER

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