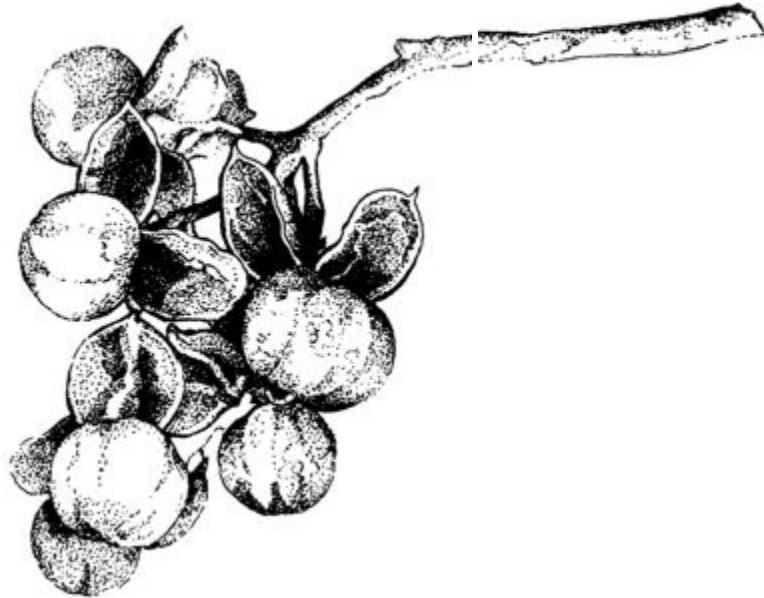


Central Parks

Birds Hill Provincial Park

Nimowin Self-guiding - Spring / Summer / Fall



Introduction

Nimowin (pronounced Nim-oh-Win) is a Cree word meaning peaceful or quiet. The purpose of the Nimowin Trail is to help you reflect upon this natural environment, consider the impact of people upon it and witness firsthand how nature repairs itself. Take a few moments to consider the activities that had once taken place along what is now the Nimowin trail.

"There is always music amongst the trees in the garden, but our hearts must be very quiet to hear it." *Minn*

1. Connections

We are all aware of how interconnected life on earth can be. All around you are examples of one living thing depending on another. We, for example, depend on the oxygen produced by the green plants around us. While they, in turn, are dependant on the carbon dioxide we exhale for their survival. This is just one example, but there are hundreds. Take a moment to look around and see the connections between all these living things.

"In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous." *Aristotle*



2. Protecting the Tall Grass

Much of this area was once a sea of 1-3 metre tall grasses, a section of which is to your right, the big bluestem. Big bluestem is so named because of its blue to purple colour during the growing season.

With the settlement of the area, much of the Tall Grass Prairie was converted into agricultural land. The extremely fertile soils, owing in large part to the bluestem and other prairie plants, are now a major producer of food.

Only small pockets of our original Tall Grass Prairie remain; most are protected by conservation efforts.

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." *John Muir*



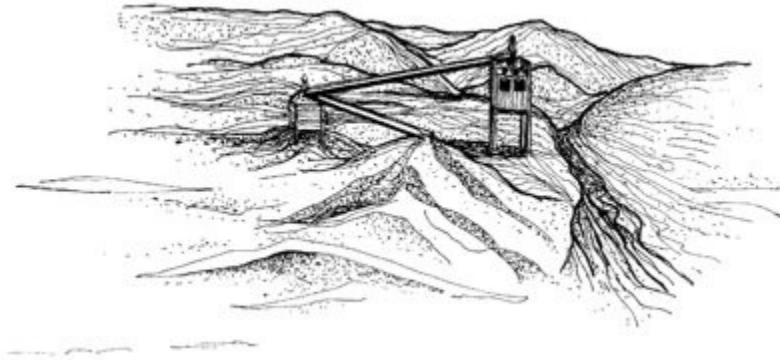
Farmer ploughing field

3. People Use a Natural Resource

Take a look around you—this clearing was once a gravel pit. The forest was bulldozed so the gravel beneath could be used for road building. Note how the forest is beginning to reclaim the

gravel pit. Given enough time, much of the damage done to this clearing can be erased. Much, but not all. We must fully consider the impact of our actions when using a natural resource, making sure the use is sustainable and inflicts minimal impact.

"Nature favors those organisms which leave the environment in better shape for their progeny to survive." *James Lovelock*



Gravel pit

4. Pioneers

The sparse growth of grasses and herbs all around you are pioneer plants. In the recovery of the land they are often the first on the scene. They stabilize the soil, retain moisture and shade the seedlings of the plants that will eventually take their place. This process is known as ecological succession.

"The sky is held up by the trees. If the forest disappears, the sky-roof of the world collapses. Nature and man then perish together." *Anonymous*



Goatsbeard

5. Mosquitoe the Hero

You may have noticed the buzzing of one on Manitoba's most misunderstood heroes on your journey. As unpleasant as the mosquito's bite may be, the insect is a vital part of our ecosystem. Did you know that only the female mosquito bites? And that she only bites at a certain part of her life cycle, during a crucial part of the development of her eggs? The rest of the time both she and her male counterparts feed on flower nectar. They, just like bees, are major pollinators. Not to mention that they are a primary source of food for animals we typically appreciate a lot more, including dragonflies, birds, fish and bats.

"Even a mosquito doesn't get a slap on the back until it starts to work." *Unknown*

6. Humans Make Their Mark

What you are seeing now is not a natural clearing. This land was divided into one mile squares to help define property lines. This clearing is an abandoned road, built on a road allowance before Birds Hill became a park. Given enough time, this clearing will be erased, leaving little evidence that people were ever here.



"I have a lot of concerns that you're taking away from nature what nature gave to us."

Barbara James

7. Competitions or Cooperation

Look carefully at the right and you will see spruce trees growing among the aspen. In 50 years, what will we find here, perhaps a thriving grove of spruce trees or a stand of ancient aspens? Environmental factors such as sun, soil and water will give a competitive edge to one of them. At this point, we cannot be sure which will emerge dominant.

Competition is commonplace in nature. Other plants lived here before the aspen. First there were the pioneer plants, like those we saw in the gravel pit at the beginning of the trail. Then the prairie grasses moved in only to be replaced by spruce and aspen. Now spruce may be overtaking the aspen. The introduction of a natural or human-made event, such as fire, could wipe the slate clean again and the cycle would repeat.

"Adopt the pace of nature, her secret is patience." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

8. A Bittersweet Vine

This vine, tightly wrapped around this Balsam poplar is known as the American Bittersweet. The vine is actually embedded in the bark and may eventually kill the supporting tree. The bittersweet is using the tree to gain access to sunlight it can't get on the forest floor. Their orange berries—illustrated on the cover of this brochure and the trailhead sign—are poisonous.

Another common parasitic plant in the forest is black knot fungus or dead man's finger. Characterized by the thick black clumps on the stems of trees and bushes, it may also cause the death of the plant that supports it.

Both bittersweet and black knot show little interest in protecting the plants that support them.



Bittersweet vine

"Nature can satisfy all of our needs but none of our greed." *Mahatma Gandhi*

9. Not All Soils are Created Equally

A family once tried their hand at farming here, only to discover the hard way that the soil is too sandy and infertile for farming what they had planted.

Looking around, you can clearly see that plants do indeed grow here. Had the family chosen different plants for growing in this particular environment, the outcome may well have been very different. Developing a strong understanding of an ecosystem before making major changes can save time and money.

"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you." *Frank Lloyd Wright*



Bouquet of lilacs

10. Overwhelming View

Here we have a few signs of previous human habitation. Can you see them? There is a group of Iris flowers that probably once graced the front garden. On your right is a lone lilac bush. Slowly but surely, these plants, that are not native to this area, are being forced out by the better adapted native grasses and aspen.

Soon only an archaeologist would ever know this homestead was ever here.

"How strange that nature does not knock, and yet does not intrude!" *Emily Dickinson*



Baneberry. Both white and red varieties are poisonous

11. A Community of Peace

The plants here live in a cooperative relationship. The tops of the aspen trees form a canopy regulating the amount of light reaching the plants below, and the aspen leaves which drop each fall condition the soil for them to grow in. Beneath the aspen grow the tall woody shrubs—hazel, red

osier dogwood, arrowwood, chokecherry, pincherry, nannyberry and high bush-cranberry; and beneath them, grows a thin cover of grasses, herbs, and small shrubs such as baneberry, bedstraw, bunchberry and poison ivy. These plants, unlike the mixed aspen and spruce that you saw earlier, are coexisting as a stable community. Barring some catastrophe, this community will remain as it is for a long period of time.

"All my life through, the new sights of nature made me rejoice like a child." *Marie Curie*



Poison Ivy

Conclusion

While exploring the Nimowin trail, you have been experiencing how the land repairs and rejuvenates itself. Scars, from damage inflicted long ago, are being replaced with the return of native species, and educate us about the impact of our actions. This trail is an example of recovery aided by a better understanding of our natural spaces and our willingness to let them be wild.

As we have seen on this trail, nature can heal wounds resulting from human use if people are careful and assist in the healing process. Careless use of resources and unchecked pollution may leave wounds that cannot be healed. The links between organisms on earth are far reaching and complex. They are rarely as clear as the link between mosquitoes and flower pollination or beavers and overland flooding. We can, and are, taking steps to better understand our wild spaces before we make any changes to them.

Thank you for your help in keeping our provincial parks beautiful and for hiking the Nimowin Self-guiding Trail.

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action."*Peter F Drucker*