

## A Quick Identification Guide for Some of the Forest Species Encountered Along the Trail

**Sugar Maple:** Has a flaky bark. Twigs are opposite. Buds are sharp and pointy, looking like a fleur-de-lis.

**Yellow Birch:** Bark is generally golden/yellow, but will turn flaky in older trees. Peels in very narrow strips when golden/yellow. Twigs are alternate. Buds will have brown at base, green at tip.

**Paper Birch:** Bark varies from off-white to slightly pinkish, especially at higher elevations. Bark peels in large blocks. Twigs are alternate. Buds are similar to those of Yellow Birch.

**American Beech:** Bark is smooth and grey, often compared to elephant skin. May have scars from bears or disease. Twigs are alternate. Buds are long and brown. May still have old leaves on branches.

**Red Spruce:** Bark is platy and flaky. Needles are very sharp and pointy, and grow in a circular fashion around the twig.

**Balsam Fir:** Bark is more solid than spruce, and may contain many resin “blisters.” Needles are flat and dull, and grow on opposite sides of the twig, creating a “flat” surface. Three wax-covered reddish buds at the end of each twig.

**Hemlock:** Grows on steep streambanks at lower elevations. Bark is platy. Needles have two white lines on the underside.

**White Ash:** Bark has a diamondback characteristic to it. Twigs are thick and opposite. Buds are dark brown to black.

**Striped Maple:** A shrub that can grow to the size of a small tree. Bark will be green with white stripes, or grey with green stripes if older and larger. Twigs are opposite.

**Hobblebush:** A common shrub in the transition zone. Unique buds, with “praying hands” around a central bud. Twigs are alternate.

Further Suggested Reading:

The North Woods—Peter Marchand

Life in the Cold: An Introduction to Winter Ecology—Peter Marchand

The Nature of Vermont—Charles Johnson

Reading the Forested Landscape—Tom Wessels



The Catamount Trail Association (CTA) was incorporated in 1984 and is a member-supported, non-profit organization with the purpose of building, maintaining and protecting the Catamount Trail as a public resource, and furthering cross-country skiing in the state.

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### CATAMOUNT TRAIL ASSOCIATION

## A Brief Overview of the Winter Ecology of the Bolton-Trapp Section of the Catamount Trail



Johannes Griesshammer

# Things to Keep an Eye Open for Along the Trail

## Forests

- Trail begins in mixed hardwoods with yellow and paper birch, beech, and sugar maple
- The transition zone above this is characterized by the yellow birch canopy and red spruce in the understory
- Above the Bryant Cabin, you enter the boreal forest, consisting primarily of red spruce and balsam fir



Red Spruce      Balsam Fir

- Trees at these higher elevations must adapt to harsh winter conditions, including high winds, low temperature, and violent storms bringing about heavy icing and snowfall
- After passing the height of land along Windy Ridge, note how the forests revert back through the transition zone and into the northern hardwoods
- By Nebraska Notch Road, the forests resemble what is found throughout the valleys of the area

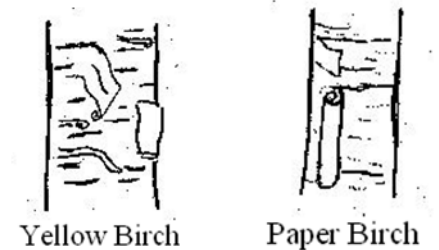
## Animals

- Watch for bear claw marks on beech trees along the trail
- Bears gorge themselves on beech nuts in the fall to gain energy reserves for the winter.
- Look for woodpecker holes in dead and dying spruce and fir trees along the traverse across Bolton Mountain
- Woodpeckers dig through the bark of the trees to find insects feeding on the decaying tree
- Listen for the metallic “gawk” of the majestic raven
- From the distinct lookout, take a moment to look for these large, black birds soaring on thermals when there’s sun.



- As you descend through the transition zone, pause every once in a while to see if you can spot moose browse
- The tasty buds of hobblebush and yellow birch offer a winter buffet for the moose of the area

## Humans



- The solid yellow birch canopy with a red spruce understory is a distinct remnant of historic logging practices in the area
- Logging continues to take place throughout the area, as most of the trail crosses the Mount Mansfield State Forest
- The Cotton Brook valley was once home to a settlement containing over 50 homesteads
- Most of the town was flooded by the Waterbury Dam, built in response to the great floods of 1927
- There is an old shack towards Nebraska Notch Road, along with an old clearing and stone walls
- Remnant apple trees in clearings and in the forest are often a sign of prior settlement in the area
- Lake Mansfield was once home to the Pleasant View House, a cabin retreat for visitors to the grand hotel in Moscow, VT