



SUMMIT VIEW

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mt. Agamenticus

Spring 2020

Mount Agamenticus COVID-19 Update

The Town of York has initiated a partial re-opening of Mount A with some restrictions still in place. Parking is limited to approximately 12 vehicles at the base and 24 at the summit (10 of which are designated to vehicles with Town of York parking stickers only).

There are NO amenities. There is no water for drinking or hand washing. Picnic tables, trail boxes, overlooks, and Learning Lodge remain CLOSED at this time. Trail maps can be downloaded from Agamenticus.org in advance, scanned or photographed at the trailhead. The popular loop trails, Ring and Big A, are now one directional. Please respect the one-way signs.



If you plan to visit, please be mindful of the following:

- **PARK IN DESIGNATED PARKING AREAS ONLY**
- **DO NOT BLOCK ROADWAYS!**
- **IF LOT IS FULL, CONTINUE TO A DIFFERENT LOCATION**
- **SHORTEN YOUR VISIT**
- **GIVE OTHERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT**
- **REDUCE NEED FOR RESTROOM FACILITIES**
- **FOLLOW CDC & LOCAL GUIDELINES**
- **NO GROUPS, PHYSICAL DISTANCE, LEASH DOGS, ACTIVE USE ONLY**
- **AVOID TOUCHING HARD SURFACES, BRING HAND SANITIZER**

If we all do our part, we will get through this time, stay safe and keep Mount A open!

Mount Agamenticus – Without You

I am the ancient one. I am the mountain by the sea, witness to ageless and unimaginable phenomena.

Hundreds of millions of your years ago, I rose twenty thousand feet into the sky, integral to a mighty range of fiery volcanoes tall as the planet's highest peaks, even as the Earth's crust was shifting to create oceans.

I have been covered five thousand feet deep under glacial ice sheets in a yesterday of twenty thousand years. From Arctic tundra when humans first appeared, through the Pleistocene mass extinction, I have been here. I am one with fire, ice and snow, prodigious winds and hammering rains feeding forests, rivers, lakes, land and all who move in, upon, or above them.

Your time here is a blink from a star compared to the ages before you. From where I sit, I have seen your tenderness and reverence, and embraced you. I have seen your cruelty and desecration, and still I embraced you. I rest peacefully, nurturing all life, including yours. I am in your breath and in your veins.

Today you must know that nothing has changed for me except that you cannot be here.

Today the worshipful chorus of birds still dawned. Without human activity, there is more song, less warning.

The meadows are greening, dotted with blue flag iris, and in morning mist the woodchuck is at its leisure feeding upon clover and dandelions. Nocturnal porcupine nibbles twigs and herbs in peace. Fiddleheads have poked up along brooks and streams, where the magical flute of the thrush is heard. In pinewood soil trailing arbutus shows its pink blossoms and offers subtle perfume. As the ground softens and the tree buds swell, winter-gray deer, round with new life, tread tentatively into the open to browse.

April rains have filled vernal pools, ringed by bright soggy mosses while Canada mayflower begins to carpet the forest floor. From the uplands the trek of yellow and blue-spotted salamanders impels them to cross roads and human obstacles in order to return to the pool of their birth. They have converged upon the water teeming with faerie shrimp and larvae, to mate and lay eggs. Throngs of bacteria ceaselessly decompose the winter detritus, their toil evidenced by a sweet pungency wafting from ponds and pools dispersed across tens of thousands of acres.

Turtles emerge from their winter burrows, feed at vernal pools, and bask on logs and rocks. A gentle, timid Blanding's turtle plunges into the water, but doesn't stay submerged, as she can for hours when threatened. Instead, she quickly emerges and swims ashore to soak up the sun. Soon those having survived two decades will trek to breeding grounds, crossing deadly highways, through lands no longer their own.



Above my summit I marked the migration of mighty raptors using the coastline for guidance and mountain updrafts to gain lift. Hawks, eagles, ospreys and harriers, agile falcons, and sky-sailing turkey vultures, return again. Most by now, tenderly feeding nestlings.

At dusk, the Woodcock performs his sky dance, spiraling ever upward, sounding his musical twitter until he reaches the moonlit clouds, dazzling for a mate. He then falls towards earth, levels off and lands in the exact spot from whence he began, only to resume his nasally, one-note serenade to his intended.

Nightfall signals the impromptu choir of wood frogs, peepers and the spadefoot toad's baritone cadenza. Deep into the night the Barred, the Great horned, the Saw-whet owls call to one another across the darkened forest.

And while you are sleeping, miles above in great clouds of feather and bone, migratory birds near the end of an epic two thousand-mile journey. In this era of planetary change, they are arriving long before there is an abundance of insects to feed their young. Still the primordial voyage continues in the night.

And in that darkness, in the wildness that is our salvation, I see the predator and the prey – the panicked scuffles and the swift attack, the fang and talon, the fleet and unfortunate, the sick and dying. The adversities of this world are miserably immeasurable and yet they are eternal. I am the ancient one. I am the mountain by the sea, witness to ageless and unimaginable phenomena. And I see you.



- Denise Johnson

Species Spotlight Red Maple, *Acer Rubrum*



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It's not hard to guess how the most common tree in the Northeast got its name. The red maple is known for its red bark, buds, and twigs, and is among one of the first and brightest trees to turn red in fall. Keep an eye out for its bright red flower buds and blooms in spring to easily identify this widespread and adaptable tree. These trees are hardy and can tolerate wet or swampy soil better than other maples, which may explain the relative abundance of red maples on Mt. Agamenticus' watershed. Red maples have flaky bark that is often arranged in a bulls-eye pattern, the result of a trunk canker caused by a fungus.

It can often be hard to distinguish the red maple from its close relative, the sugar maple, but the distinction is an important one! Though beautiful, the red maple's leaves and twigs contain too many tannins, the bitter molecules often discussed when tasting wine, to be a useful source of food

to many herbivores, though moose, deer, butterflies, and moths are among the few species that can tolerate the bitter leaves. Red maples can also be tapped for maple syrup production, though they tend to produce less sap than the coveted sugar maple. The leaves of the red maple are more rounded in shape than the sugar maples iconic 5-pointed leaf. They occur twice as frequently as sugar maples in our northern forests, so chances are if you have an unidentified maple, it's a red maple! - Katie Brodeur, *Education & Outreach Specialist, Center for Wildlife*

Basics of Natural and Humane Landscaping

Here are some ideas for keeping all your neighbors (humans, wildlife and companion animals) in mind while planning, implementing and maintaining your landscape!

Conserve Soil Health - organic compost and mulches mimic natural decay cycles and help increase the available nutrients and microorganism diversity in the soil.

Avoid Chemicals - chemical fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides reduce local biodiversity and toxify the soil; also, overuse creates runoff that pollutes our waterways.

Limit Lawns - if you do have a lawn, try mowing for a minimum height of 2.5 to 3 inches; you'll increase its health and use less water. Making mown paths while leaving other areas to grow "wild" will

Be sure to check local zoning requirements and these resources for inspiration: *Wild Seed Project*: <https://wildseedproject.net/primer-for-ecological-gardening/>; *Humane Gardener*: <https://www.humanegardener.com/>; *National Wildlife Federation*: <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create/At-Home/Natural-Landscape-Considerations>

provide food and habitat for insects and the birds and animals that feed on them.

Consider a "Catio" - outdoor cats can devastate wildlife and tend to have shorter lifespans. To keep kitty contained, you can create or buy a variety of enclosures ("catios"). Please be aware of siting these properly for your cat's safety and avoid leaving any pets unattended outdoors.

Encourage Diversity - you can provide aesthetically pleasing and ecologically sensitive style for your landscape with diverse groupings of plants based on their growth requirements (sunlight or shade, soil type and moisture level). This helps to create "natural communities" and encourages the return of creatures that match these habitats.

A Reminder to Stay on Trails

Mount A is a wonderful place to recreate and enjoy the outdoors, but it is also important habitat for many plants and wildlife.

Ground nesters will lay and hide eggs in thick leaf litter on the open forest floor.

This Ovenbird nest was discovered right next to a popular trail.

Help protect the plants and wildlife that live here by keeping yourselves and your pets on trail.

Thank you!





Self-guided StoryWalk™

Spring has officially sprung, and the Spring StoryWalk has been posted! This season's book is *The Secret Pool* by Kimberly Ridley with illustrations by Rebekah Raye. Grade levels 2-4.

We do ask that visitors enjoying the StoryWalk continue to maintain a recommended 6-foot physical distance from other trail users, and announce their presence as they approach others. Avoid touching the story panels; if you do, make use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, as water is not available for hand washing up at the summit at this time.

For those of you unable to visit us and enjoy this story, our Outreach and Education Coordinator has received permission from the author to share a video walk and read aloud here online. We hope to have this posted on our website soon! *The Secret Pool* will be up on the trail through July, at which point we will switch over to a new book for the remainder of the summer.

Our walk starts at the lowest parking lot on the trail, continues on the west side of Ring, and up the Witch Hazel trail to finish on the summit. The trail is somewhat steep in places but comfortable at easy stroll pace with stops at the reading stations. Terrain varies from gentle slope on dirt trail to rocky sections with short climbs or descents. Distance is 1.3 miles. Allow 1 ½ hours for younger children. For good hikers just stopping to read, time can be reduced to about half an hour.

Spring's Chorus

As nature awakens around us, the signature sounds of Spring begin – peepers and Red-winged Blackbirds by wetlands, robins and woodpeckers near forests, hawks and turkeys by fields – and we savor the change of seasons that welcomes them.

It's incredible any of these creatures can survive Winter to thrive in Spring, but no worries because evolution has given an advantage to these early arrivals – they are generally able to complete their breeding cycles with less predators and less competition for resources.

The chorus begins tentatively at first, but becomes bolder and more insistent as insects and mammals join in. Early risers braving dawn's chill might witness a songbird's breath making a tiny cloud at first light; or maybe you're drawn by the lingering dusk to the water's edge for the peepers' crescendo?

Wherever we are, Spring seems to be articulating and coloring everything around us as the landscape bursts into life again.

The same elements that energize us, increasing daylight, mists above thawing ponds, freshly growing food and unrestricted movement, also commence nature's chorus. Our wildlife neighbors follow their instincts in carrying out their seasonal activities, but we all need the same resources to survive and flourish.



Learning Lodge/Visitor Center COVID-19 Update

The Mount Agamenticus Learning Lodge and Visitor Center remains closed for the start of the 2020 season and will open if and when we can do so safely. All scheduled on-site educational programs have been cancelled through at least July. Keep an eye on Agamenticus.org for the most up to date information about programs, Community Volunteer Work Days, and other events.

You can also follow Mount A on Facebook for access to free online outreach and educational materials, including weekly posts from the Kids' Corner! Tune into #MtAKidsCorner2020 to follow along and learn with us!

A Kids' Corner hub and additional interpretive materials for getting out on the trail will be coming soon to our website.

No Litter is Safe Litter

Each year, the Wildlife Center admits hundreds of animals that are hit by vehicles while searching for food along the roadside.

Roadside litter -- even a biodegradable item like an apple core -- has a devastating impact on wildlife.

Food items thrown from cars attract wild animals to the sides of roads -- dangerous places to be. Wild animals do not understand the concept of cars, and they often will not or cannot get out of the way of a moving vehicle.

What can you do?
 - Don't litter; dispose of your trash properly.
 - Help your community by participating in a local roadside cleanup.
 - Share the message of the apple core.

THE APPLE CORE EFFECT
 THE WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA

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