



Cedar Overlook Trail

May 2021 v1.0

Created by ICNC Teacher Naturalist Phil White

This is a .5 mile round trip walk up and back; a slow rise under 60 feet. Start at the base of the woods at the northwest corner of Amazing Space. This self-guided tour points out features of the land, identifies some plants, and prompts thinking about this natural area.

As we start this walk, **think about the woods as one big living thing**. Trees communicate with each other via signals in their roots. The habitat is 'dressed' with its own version of shoes, pants, and even a hat.

You are leaving a wetland/prairie area that has a nice set of shoes and pants. The woods have tall trees, short trees, shrubs, and low plants - hats, pants, and shoes. While hiking higher, the density of the low and mid layers thin out due to lack of sunlight from the tree canopy. Much of the upper canopy is gone due to the August 2020 derecho. **What is this going to do for the plants in this area?**

Many wildflowers bloom early in the spring before the trees leaf out. Look for little patches of color, like the **Jack-in-the-Pulpit**. When you are on the trail and behind the Bird Room in the Amazing Space building, look for a Jack-in-the-Pulpit behind you. The three leaf pattern is on a single stalk with the bloom under the leaves. Later in the summer this will turn into a cluster of very bright red berries.

Now that you are up on the trail a bit, **stop, look and listen** for the birds. Is a **woodpecker** drumming? Do you hear the call of a **Cardinal** or a sing-songy melodic song from one of many **finches**? You might get scolded by a **Wren** or **Black Capped Chickadee**. Take a look at the ground; **what signs of wildlife do you see?**

As you reach the end of the gravel trail, **take a look at the soil**. How would sand get up on this hill side? **The answer is Glaciers**. During the last few *hundred thousand years* glaciers brought sand, silt and large rocks down from Canada. As hundreds of feet of thick ice melted, it cut the **Cedar River basin** that you are looking down upon. As the water recedes, wind blows the sand and silt back up the banks.

Look around; there are still some big trees standing. The large **gnarly, greyish trees are oaks**. This type tree has populated this area since the last glaciers in Iowa melted some 12,000 year ago. They are hardwood, grow slowly, and soak up the sunlight. There are also **Black Locust**, a tree with straight trunks, dark bark and a compound leaf. This is considered invasive, because it grows faster than other trees and competes for sunlight.

Keep your eyes and ears open! You will soon approach standing pine trees amongst the downed ones. There is a spot along the trail where you can look back over the prairie just to the left of Amazing Space. You are standing on one side of the **Cedar River** and might be able to see the other side!

The pine grove you see is called Founders Grove. Pick up some pine needles and look at them. They should be about 3 inches long with 5 needles to a bundle. See if you can find a pine cone. **These are white pine trees, the only native pine tree to Iowa** and planted prior to when ICNC owned this land. **What is your theory about why many of these trees are standing but are nearly branchless?** One theory is these trees were planted all at once, and pretty close together. They have been competing for sunlight and other resources, and their branches are few and weak. When the derecho winds came through the trunks stayed, the branches went!

You have just a little farther to go. Look ahead at the trees on your left as you move along. Some pine trees have a reddish colored bark on them. **These are red pines**. Look for a bundle of needles and pine cones in this area, **how are they different from the white pines?**

As you walk back down the trail, **are you noticing things that you missed before?**

