

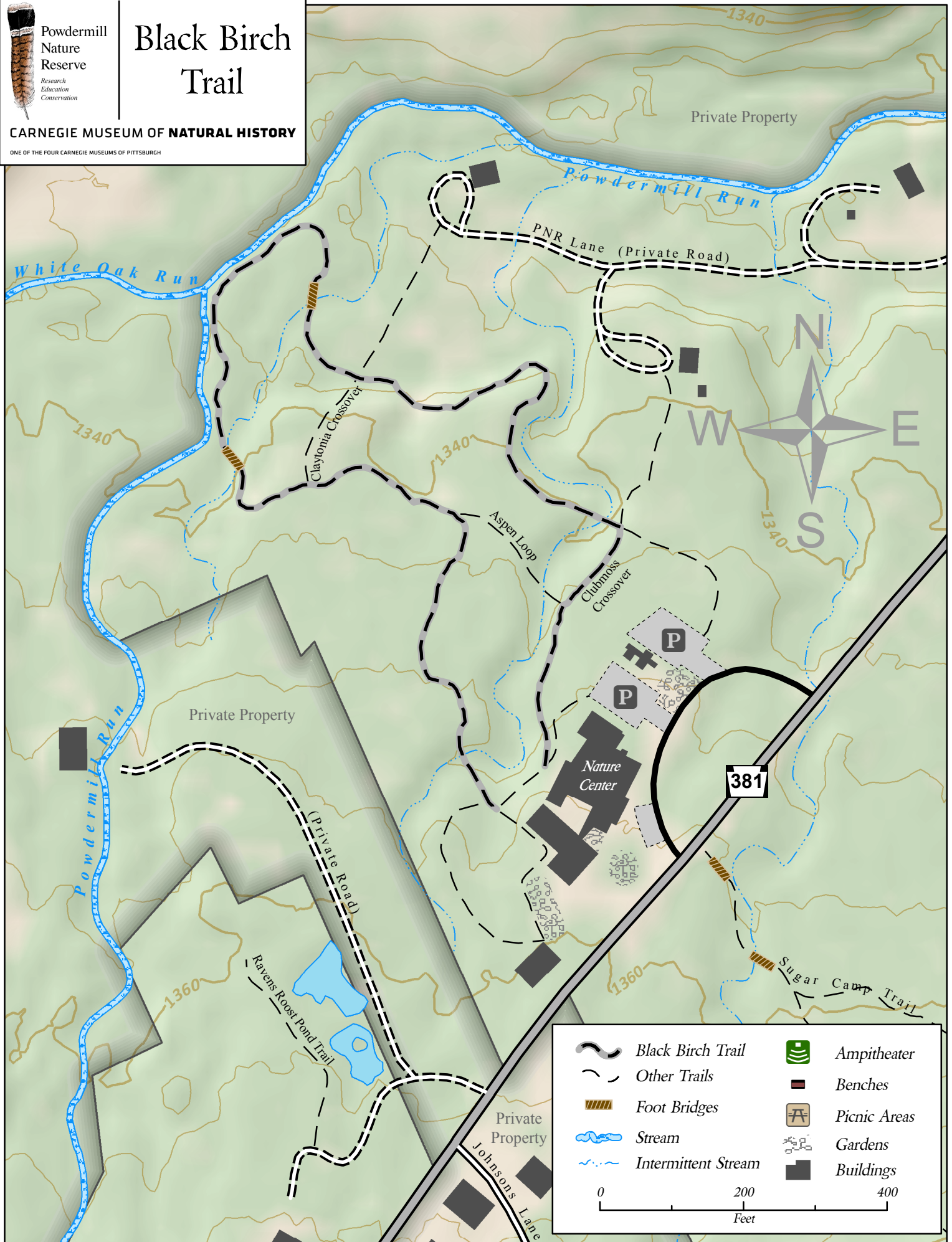


Powdermill  
Nature  
Reserve  
Research  
Education  
Conservation

# Black Birch Trail

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH



## Welcome to Powdermill Nature Reserve's Black Birch Trail



### **Before you begin your walk:**

This self-guided walk will allow you to experience some of the richest woodlands on the 2,200 acre Reserve. This is a protected area, so please do not disturb or remove anything. Stay on the trails and help keep this a beautiful natural area for future generations to enjoy.

This trail completes a three-quarter of a mile loop which takes about 20 minutes to walk. It has no official start or finish. The trail is located in back of the building, at the bottom of the stairs to the deck.

Poison ivy is common throughout the trail. Well known for its ability to cause skin irritation, you will know its location by 3-lobed leaves, or by its hairy roots climbing up trees, and its white poisonous berries in the fall. Birds and other small animals use these berries as a food source in the winter and do not develop the itchy rash experienced by humans.

Keep an eye out for jewel-weed, also known as spotted touch-me-not. The flowers are orange and shaped like little horns. Jewelweed has been hailed as a natural remedy for poison ivy because the juices of this plant have the ability to stop the itch. However, the plant has a high silica content so vigorously rubbing the skin with the broken stem may actually cause you spread poison ivy oil into the skin. The best defense against poison ivy is recognition and avoidance.

### **Trail History:**

This forest was once part of an old farm field. On the sides of the trail in certain spots you may find piles of rock that were removed from the field many years ago. Over time the thickets matured into a young forest and only the rocks show the boundaries.

Completed in 1985, Black Birch Trail is named for the large amount of black birch trees scattered throughout the area. Also referred to as sweet birch, black birch has glossy, dark brown bark, which appears to be torn or split. The twigs, bark, and wood are a commercial source of wintergreen oil. Birch beer is made from the fermented sap of the trees.

This section of forest is home to many animals and plants. Notice the holes that have been chiseled in the trees as you travel. If the shape of the hole is rather large and rectangular or oval, it was made by our largest woodpecker, the pileated. Be sure to visit the interactive bird call display in the nature center and listen to forest bird calls.

### **Stop at the stream:**

When you reach the back part of the trail you will be along Powdermill Run stream, for which the nature reserve is named. There was once an old gun powder mill along its banks. No evidence remains today.

Powdermill Run begins from an underground source and continues into the Loyalhanna Creek. It then spills into the Kiskiminitas River, joining the Allegheny, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers before it flows out the Gulf of Mexico. From there it will evaporate and become rain. The stream before you is part of an essential cycle which nurtures all life. Mayflies and stoneflies are two examples of insects which start out life underwater as nymphs, only able to survive in clean stream water. To learn more about this exceptional stream visit the nature center.

As you travel away from the stream you will leave the floodplain and begin to notice a change in the forest. The slightly elevated plateau above the floodplain has fewer sycamores and yellow birches but has more oaks and hickories.

Hiking the trail throughout the year will enable sightings of a good variety of wildflowers specific to each season. For instance, in April or May, trout lilies and dwarf ginseng can be spotted. Later in the summer you will find few wildflowers. This is because the trees have spread their leaves full and now the forest floor is shaded. When fall arrives the forest is full of berries, fruits, and nuts. All of these are an important food source for animals and birds. They also help plants spread to new places. These all develop from flowers.

As you near the nature center you will notice the trees are much smaller in diameter. This was once the clearing and now plants and trees such as crabapple, black locust, and aspen quickly take over. A few large trees remain in a line, telling us that they may have been used as natural property markers.