



CREA Natural Communities Quest

Cornish, New Hampshire

Special Features: Natural

Physical Difficulty: Easy

Duration: :45

Bring: Boots, a field guide, compass and binoculars!

To get there:

From Route 1A in Cornish, just south of the Cornish-Windsor Covered Bridge, head east on the Town House Road. You will pass the Dingleton Covered Bridge. Both bridges are on your right. Just beyond Parsonage Rd. you will see the Cornish Fair Grounds on your left, along with Old Town Hall and Schoolhouse #9. Park by the old town hall. Your quest will begin across the street.

If you reach the new Elementary School, you've gone a bit too far.

Clues:

With the Town Hall just behind,

A large boulder your eyes will find.

Cross the road towards the sign that reads

"Rodney Palmer Environmental Study Area" amidst the weeds.

To the right of the sign, a trail you will see.

Take 50ish steps to a leaning oak tree.

The tree has been growing since it was small,

This tree likes swamps, but it might fall.

Be very quiet and animals you might spy:

Rabbit, snake, wood frog, chickadee and butterfly.

Here flies the monarch of orange and black;

Birds avoid this poisonous snack!

Up to the double trees (pine and oak) you should go

But not into the water with your toe!

A snapping turtle lives there all year long,

This C.R.E.A. land is where he belongs.

Two pink worm-like wrigglers on its tongue
Lure its prey in where it's no fun!
On your left, red oak, white pine, and white birch you'll see.
White birch is the official New Hampshire state tree.

Here the land is low and flat.
Pine needles make a lovely mat.
The hemlock forest is there if you seek.
All it takes is just a little peek.

All of these trees have many uses
But the maple is the one with the edible juices.
The others are great for building and timber
And white birch paper makes good tinder.

Along the path twin pines mark your way.
You wish you could linger there all day.
Take 22 steps to the start of a high mushroom trail.
Look to your left for the path, you can't fail.

Here at the "Y," on T.J.'s Trail, head up the hill.
Keep following the trail and observe as you will.
You'll see holes in trees that are called cavities
And fungus growing, too, on the trees that are diseased.

As you approach the stone steps, look to the right.
I used to be a tall tree...now I'm shortened in height.
Insects and fungus eat me for food.
They need me for nourishment when in the mood.

Nearby the steps find another tree.
With this one what is the mystery?
Its roots are eroded and show off like bones.
These make ideal spots for chipmunk homes.

At the top of the hill follow the trail,
It curves to the right, please do not wail.
A new monument for David Wood on the right,
May we notice his fire station is in sight!

Turn yourself around and go back down

To where there was a fork on the ground.
Now walk left to the rock past mushroom hill.
See the snapping turtle? Perhaps you will.

Look for chewed trees cut by beavers with ease,
Right next to two trees that might be home to bees.

You'll find a baby hemlock in the middle of 3 big trees.
Maybe someday it will grow to be as tall as these.
Now look for the place where dirt makes a small mound.
To hear chickadees and blue jays, make not a sound.

Walk a while to the "seat stump" where you can lunch.
Nearby are musclewood trees the beavers love to munch.
All along the right is a soggy wetland
Born from the stream and the beaver's teeth and hands.

Stay on the path; don't cross the bridge
No time to get lost on the ridge!
Safety first on Quests or hikes
Don't play on beaver ponds in winter or you might fall through thin ice!

Walk by aging birch trees sprouting hoof-like fungus
Also known as birch polypore mushroom to us.
Mushrooms and other fungus are decomposers,
So are worms and microscopic creatures.

Beyond the birches only a stone wall remains of the farm from days
gone by
Upon this spot a Cornish Farmer's field used to lie
And in New England if the farmer doesn't mow
The life cycles will change, and a forest will grow.

Go between two logs with hollow centers
Home to a mole escaping hunting owl dangers?
Daddy mole, watch out!
You better protect your little mole sprout.

Continue to the wild field past goldenrod and milkweed
Replenished every year by many dispersed seeds.
Alive with busy insects on a hot summer day
Dragonflies, wasps and crickets go along their way.

Walk to the mowed grass and feel the sun shining on your face
An open space where children love to race
Survey the land where mouse eats seeds and fox eats mouse
Up and down the food chain sun and water matter most.

Backtrack to the large flat rock on left; a perfect place to rest and roost
Scan the woods to your left, until you see a tangle of trees.
Break trail to this mysterious place
Walk gently and look down; you may find an orange newt's face.

We now see TJ's Trail sign on your left.
Look for a large moss-covered rock on your right.
Turn your head 90 degrees toward the trees.
Walk 20 feet in that direction to a tall pine tree.
Behind the pine is where your box will be!

Sign into our box, then re-hide it once more
You've learned of this place, now it's time to explore!

This Quest was created by Ros Seidel and the 4th grade at Cornish Elementary School in 2003. Special thanks to the Wellborn Ecology Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation / Upper Valley region for support of this project. Revised by Linda & Tom Kahl in 2023.

Did you know?

As the Quest states, you can see an area that used to be farmland but is now forest! When farmers leave their farms and don't tend to them, the native species of plants will start to take over. First, mostly shrub plants and weeds will take over fields, but slowly tree seedlings will even start to appear.

Source: foresthistory.org

Please be a good steward of the land: leave it better than you found it and pack out any trash you find.



Valley Quest is a collection of treasure hunts that share and teach the natural gems and cultural heritage of the Upper Valley with children, families, adults, and visitors. It is a program of Vital Communities, a regional nonprofit working to engage citizens, organizations, and communities in creating solutions to our region's challenges. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org.

Have a suggestion, question, comment, or idea for us? We'd love to hear from you. Reach us at valleyquest@vitalcommunities.org or 802-291-9100.