



Quest for the Raven

Vershire, Vermont

Physical Difficulty: Difficult

Special Features: Natural, Historical, Vista

Duration: 1:30

Bring: field guide, binoculars, compass

To get there: From Exit 14 on I-91, take 113 west to West Fairlee. 4.5 miles beyond West Fairlee turn right on Eagle Hollow Road (a paved road heading towards Corinth, Goose Green and Bradford). Travel 1.4 miles, up and over a knoll, to a small parking area on the left.

Overview

The Northern Hardwood Forest is the most common forest found in the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire. It is a transition from the boreal (spruce/fir) forest to the north and the deciduous forests further south. In this type of forest, four tree species tend to dominate: sugar maple, American beech, yellow birch and Eastern hemlock. Because these trees can reproduce in their own shade, this forest is self-perpetuating. Dappled light penetrating the forest canopy allows for a rich diversity of understory trees and shrubs. The species that thrive here, however, tend to be those that are shade tolerant. Pioneer species like paper birch and white pine seed-in when opportunity arises in the form of a disturbance: an opening created by a windstorm, perhaps, or by a logging operation. Northern Hardwood Forests are important habitat for many species. Mammals likely to be seen include red squirrels, Eastern chipmunks, porcupines, black bear, and moose, among many others.

Clues:

Cross two lanes to the forest road
But then into the woods is where we'll go.
After 10 steps or so, right onto the trail
As I begin to tell you a small forest tale.

If you look to the trees it does seem to me
That you'll find quite a species diversity.
There are beech trees here, with shiny grey bark
And paper birch peeling, bright white like starch.

White ash can be seen, its bark a lattice of diamonds.
Red and sugar maple, too, you will certainly find.
These dominant trees make our story-line clear—
We're in **Northern Forest**, a place we hold dear.

Bear right where the beech tree has blown down.
Disease & strong winds brought it to the ground.
Next, with big boulders left, look way up to see
The trees' tippy-tops – also called the "canopy."

Keep up the trail until you find a pair of white birch
This is the next place to conduct a quick search.
Trees grow *beneath* the canopy, 10' high or so
An "understory" it's called 'cause it grows below.

This understory—of sugar maple, beech and hemlock—
Another clue Northern Forest is where we walk.
Your trail climbs up across a wet and muddy place
Now at the ground is where to place your face!

In this forest many ferns choose to live:
Christmas, marginal, hay-scented, lady and sensitive!
These ferns are intricate, things that we adore
In Northern Forest you'll see them on the forest floor.

At the fork you can follow either left or right
As both trails come together just out of sight.
Where they rejoin you can find four clues
About this land's history—clues we can use.

The first clue is the stump of a tree
The 2nd a six foot scar you can surely see
The next is birch trunks lying on the ground
And last is a stone wall...but can it be found?

As you keep walking, heading up the trail
About each clue I will tell you a small tale.
The stump of a tree? Why that's a plain fact
Someone was here with a chainsaw or axe.

The six foot scar at the bottom of the tree?
Was left by loggers and their machinery.
The birch trees prostrate with bark so white?
This tree only grows where there's lots of light.

All these birches call out: "this land was clear"
Stone walls reinforce that it once was pasture here.
The walls are another clue: this is a boundary mark
Letting us know we're in EAGLE HOLLOW PARK.

When you reach the crest of the rise
Two new trees are a treat for our eyes.
They are trees with needles, both conifers:
One's called red spruce, the other balsam fir.

Spruce needles are smaller, and to touch are "spikey"
The "furry" fir needles lay flat, and smell oh-so-nicely.
Now that you know the trees of this habitat
Listen and look for animals..for calls and for scat.

Moose like to munch on the twigs and buds of fir
Red maple's new growth? Winter food for deer, high in fiber!
Sugar maples savored by squirrels and grosbeaks.
Hemlocks hold sap that the hummingbird seeks.

Calls you've probably heard...a loud "wrock, wrock?"
This is a great site to hear the boisterous raven talk.
And signs that we've seen? Why scat of deer,
Lots of tracks of moose, bobcat, and signs of little bear.

Stay on the trail, enjoying the fine view
For awhile proceed forward, without any clues,
Until you come to an alley of young saplings
Almost forming an arch where a choir might sing.

"Striped" stripe maple, "shiny" yellow birch and "dotted" pin cherry,
This tunnel may find a new home within your memory.
At the top of the rise, just to the left of the trail
Find a 12 foot rock outcrop...there's no way to fail.

Stand with this rock's face touching your back
Then ahead through woods on 230 degree track.
Keep on straight, yes, go on through the wood

At 55 steps 3-trunked birch sign for the good.

150 more steps, keeping towards the sky's light
And the top of the ledges will come into sight.
Perched atop of this rocky place see many things,
Like our friend the raven, with his jet black wings.

Of all of the wild places, raven likes cliffs best
Often it is up here they choose to build a nest.
Listen closely, quietly. Can you hear them sing?
Across Eagle Hollow their voices often ring.

Now, in order to find the Valley Quest box
Meander the top of the ledge: a long grey rock.
At one end of this rock, find a small cavity
For this is where the box must surely be.

Enjoy your stay up here for a good long time,
A wild place and view like this, both precious finds.
To get back, reverse your steps back to the rock
Then take the trail downhill left on a leisurely walk.

Quest For the Raven Species Check List

What did YOU see?

- American Beech
- White Ash
- Sugar Maple
- Marginal Fern
- Sensitive Fern
- Balsam Fir
- Common Raven
- Striped Maple
- Pin Cherry
- Eastern Chipmunk
- Black Bear
- Hermit Thrush
- _____
- _____
- _____

- Paper Birch
- Red Maple
- Christmas Fern
- Lady Fern
- Red Spruce
- Eastern Hemlock
- Moose
- Yellow Birch
- Red Squirrel
- Porcupine
- Bobcat
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- _____
- _____
- _____

Eagle Hollow Park is owned by the town of Vershire. Permission to create the Quest for the Raven was generously granted by the Vershire Conservation Commission.

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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 100+ 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.