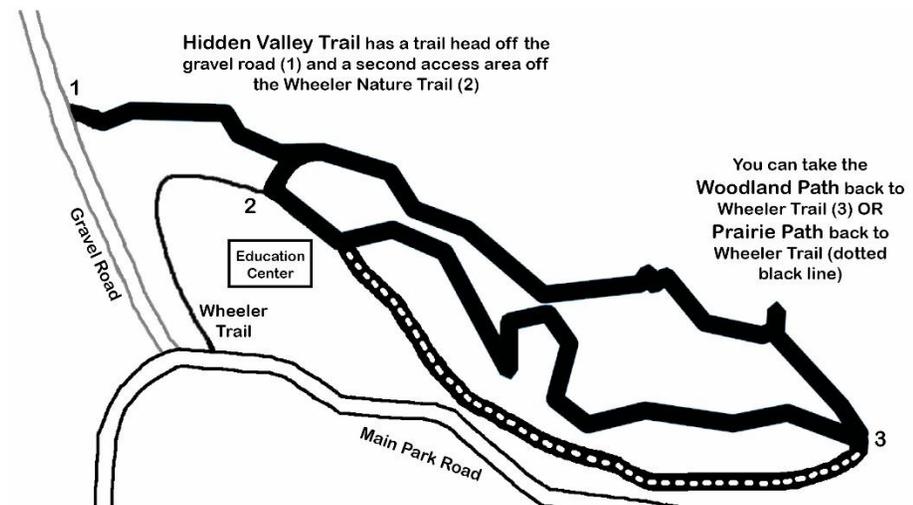


# Hidden Valley Trail Guide and Map



"To assure our people permanent access to their outdoor heritage"

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Welcome to Hidden Valley Trail! This moderate-hiking trail loops back to the all-accessible Wheeler Trail. Hidden Valley Trail is approximately 1-mile in length.

There are two starting points for this trail. One can be found at the bottom of the hill off the gravel road (1) before the marsh habitat. The second starting point (2) can be found along the Wheeler Trail. Both starting points are marked with an orange sign.

After hiking approximately 0.5 miles, there are two different paths that will loop you back to the Wheeler Trail (3). One follows through the forest and is called the "Woodland Path." The second, "Prairie Path" follows along the prairie and parallels the main park road. These paths are also marked with an orange sign.

The beginning of Hidden Valley Trail is adjacent to the Kennekuk Marshes. These marshes are excellent places to find birds, turtles, frogs, and other aquatic animals. The marshes are not part of Hidden Valley Trail but an excellent spot to view wildlife.



Numerous wild grape vines can be found along the first section of Hidden Valley Trail. The wild grape vine has no solid, upright trunk but will use tree trunks and branches to grow towards the sun. The vine will have many sections hanging free from trees. These vines will produce an edible grape in late summer but they tend to be smaller, tartier, and with more seeds than domesticated grapes we find at the grocery store. Though we may not find the wild grapes tasty, birds and other wildlife enjoy the fruits when they're fresh and after they've dried on the vines in winter.

Hidden Valley Trail will next begin to follow a stream. This portion of the trail is an excellent area to look for spring wildflowers from March to May. Spring beauties, mayapples, prairie trillium, Illinois' state flower the purple violet, sweet cicely and wild geranium (pictured) will bloom before the tree leaves pop out and block the sunlight from the forest floor.



If you are hiking the trail in late summer and early fall, you may find a large green round object on the forest floor. These are the seeds of an Osage Orange tree, or Hedge Apple Tree.



Despite the name, it is only distantly related to oranges and apples, but is instead a member of the mulberry family. Due to a sticky white sap and woody pulp, the fruit is typically not eaten by humans and rarely by foraging animals.

If you take the Woodland Path back to the beginning, can you find any holes in the trunks of the trees? A tree hollow or tree hole is a semi-enclosed cavity which has naturally



formed in the trunk or branch of a tree. They are found mainly in older trees, that can be dead or still alive. Squirrels, raccoons, owls, birds, and even snakes will use these cavities to find protection from predators or from the weather.

If you take the Prairie Path, notice how many of the prairie grasses can grow taller than we are! Some common prairie plants that are growing along the path are Indian grass (below, left) and Illinois' state prairie grass, Big Blue Stem (below, right). Prairie plants can have roots that extend down into the soil over seven-feet deep! Deep roots allow them to find water in the soil during our hot, dry weather in the summer.

