

New Britain Parks and Recreation Department Presents....

A.W. Stanley Park Nature Trail Guide



**Written by Peter Picone, with contributions from Sylvia Halkin,
Elaine Lechowicz and Don Crockett**

This nature trail was designated a White House Millennium Trail in 2000.

Second Edition May 2014

The Benefits are Endless...

A. W. Stanley Park Nature Trail

Welcome to the A.W.Stanley Park Nature Trail. This nature trail was developed to encourage residents, students, and teachers to learn more about the habitats and wildlife found within this area of New Britain. It is hoped that projects like this will foster a greater understanding and appreciation for wildlife and their habitats. The development of this trail required the teamwork of town and state officials, groups, companies, and individuals. Please enjoy it and care for it. Please leave only your footprints and take out any trash. Please recycle this guide by returning it to the trailhead box so that others may use it.

[An electronic version of this guide can be found at www.foawsp.org]

Urban Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat is made up of four basic things: food, water, cover and space. This small forest provides a limited yet functional habitat for many species of wildlife that have adapted to living near human habitation. Although this forest has experienced many disturbances, both natural and human-induced, it has a broad diversity of plant species ranging in size from tall oaks and maples to tiny mosses and grass-high yellow trout lilies blooming on the forest floor in spring. You may observe a variety of wildlife, including common birds such as Northern Cardinals and American Robins, but do not be surprised to see some less common birds like the Pileated Woodpecker, and neotropical migrants like Baltimore Orioles and warblers that may have traveled thousands of miles north from South America to breed in the park. The park also provides important feeding stopover habitat for migratory birds that just travel through Connecticut during their southerly migration in the fall or their northerly migration in the spring.

For more information on wildlife habitat and habitat management please contact :

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Bureau of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division Habitat Management Program
Sessions Woods WMA Conservation Education Center
341 Milford Street
Burlington, CT 06013
860-675-8130 ext 305
<http://www.ct.gov/deep/site/default.asp>

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A.W. Stanley Park History

Mr. John Stanley, one of the original settlers of the Town of Farmington, was allotted 120 acres of land in 1644 as a reward for his services in the King Philip's War. This was the beginning of the Stanley land holdings in what is now the City of New Britain. Another noteworthy Stanley family member was Colonel Gad Stanley, an American Revolutionary War hero.

In 1927, Alix W. Stanley deeded 360 acres to the City of New Britain for use as a park to be perpetually held and used for public purposes. The property consisted of forested hills, a small farm and several brooks. It comprises the current A.W. Stanley Park and Golf Course property. The entire property lies in the center of the old settlement known since colonial days as the "Stanley Quarter".

On July 17, 1933, work was begun to develop the A.W. Stanley Swimming Pool and Recreation Center. Approximately 500 men from the Civil Works Administration (C.W.A.) program were employed on the project. The project included the construction of several fieldstone buildings that contained men's and women's bathing pavilions and lockers. Some raw materials, such as fieldstone and timber used to construct the buildings, were collected from the park.

The central focus of the Recreation Center was the 4.5 acre swimming pool (now the cattail marsh at Stop 1 on the nature trail). The water from two brooks passed through warming basins, settling basins, and sand filters before entering the pool. This process warmed, cleaned and purified the water.

Approximately 2 miles of paved road and several miles of footpaths were built through the property to provide access to other recreational features. These included a 8 acre pond for fishing and ice skating, a Boy Scout cabin, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, horseshoe pitching courts, playgrounds, and picnic areas supplied with tables, benches and fireplaces. The remains of the fireplaces are still evident today. When completed, A.W. Stanley Recreation Center was considered one of the finest recreation centers in New England.

New Britain is very fortunate that Alix W. Stanley had the foresight and generosity to donate this magnificent piece of land where residents continue to enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational activities. It is hoped that the development of this nature trail will help the citizens of New Britain learn about the natural environment of the park.

Note: Historical information provided by Friends of A. W. Stanley Park; Elaine Lechowicz, with excerpts from "The Swimming Pool", N.E. Weekly Pub. Co.

Stop 1—Cattail Marsh

This marsh was once a 4.5 acre swimming pool used by thousands of people during summer "hot spells" (New Britain Herald, 7/30/1936), and was the central focus of the Stanley Recreation Center. The swimming pool was created by excavating and enlarging a valley that was formed by the junction of two brooks and constructing a dam to retain the brooks' water in the pool. The pool depth ranged from shallows along a beach area to 12 feet at its deepest point. A diving platform was a favorite place to show off your diving skills on the 1-meter and 3-meter boards. Two bathing pavilions were constructed on the north and east sides of the swimming pool to provide dressing rooms and more than 600 lockers. The old swimming pool was closed during the 1960s and was replaced by the current pool located on the west side of the property. The vegetation that is growing here, especially the cattails, provides valuable habitat for wildlife including muskrats and red-winged blackbirds.

Look for the numbered yellow painted poles throughout the nature trail. They correspond to the numbers in this guide. Also, UTC codes can be scanned for electronic information at each stop.



Stop 2—White Ash and Poison Ivy

White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*) wood is quite strong and is used in making baseball bats, canoe paddles and furniture. White Ashes are dioecious (male and female on separate trees). This is a female White Ash tree which produces seeds in the fall that are eaten by birds and small mammals. North American Ash trees are facing a major threat from the invasive non-native Emerald Ash Borer beetle from Asia that causes significant damage by feeding under the bark and cutting off the flow of nutrients between the roots and the rest of the tree. The vine climbing here is Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), which can cause itchy, blistering irritation to your skin. Learn to recognize it and avoid it. It has leaflets in groups of threes, a lack of thorns, and "hairy" aerial rootlets that help the climbing stems attach to trees.

The Little League baseball field, down the hill from this White Ash, is one of many recreational uses that this Park has provided for local residents.



Stop 3 – Fieldstone Building

Some raw materials from the park such as fieldstone and timber were used to construct this and other buildings throughout the park. This building contained food concessions, office space, and restroom facilities. Today this building is used by the New Britain Little League. The footpath behind the building runs past the Little League baseball diamond to a bridge where you can see excess water flowing over the dam that was constructed to create a man-made 8 acre pond. Baltimore Orioles often build a hanging woven nest from the tip of a tree branch near the bridge.

Stop 4—American Elm & Spillway

American Elms (*Ulmus americana*) are adapted to grow in river floodplains and were once commonly planted along city streets. New Haven, known as the “Elm City”, had many elms along its streets. A disease called Dutch Elm Disease devastated most of the trees. The disease came to the US from Europe in lumber that housed both the fungus that causes the disease and a European bark beetle that transmits the fungus. Today, American Elms continue to survive in many forested areas. The seeds, produced in spring, are eaten by birds and small mammals. Looking to your right, you will see the spillway. The spillway was the safety valve for the old swimming pool, channeling overflow water into the lower pond; today it channels water from the cattail marsh into the pond. The spillway begins at the old swimming pool (on the other side of the road) and extends for several hundred feet where it ends at the pond. You can get a better view of the fieldstone that lines the spillway from its base, near where it enters the pond. Children still enjoy watching water flow down the spillway and looking for frogs, turtles and fish along the pond’s edge. Canada Geese and Mallards are common waterfowl that can be seen in and around the pond.

Stop 5—Red Cedar and Bathing Pavilion

Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a pioneering plant that colonizes abandoned fields. The female (tree over to the left) Red Cedar tree produces the valuable berries (actually modified cones) which are eaten by birds such as Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Across the street is one of the (former) bathing pavilions. This pavilion provided both open and private dressing rooms and about 200 lockers. Today, the building is used as the Parks staff office.



Stop 6—Black Cherry

The small fruits of the Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) are eaten in late summer and early fall by wildlife including migratory and non-migratory birds, squirrels, and raccoons. People use the fruits to make jams, pies and juice. The wood is used in furniture-making. This tree grows best in full sunlight but its seedlings are tolerant of forest shade.

Stop 7—Pin Oak

Pin Oaks (*Quercus palustris*) are found in moist or poorly drained soils. They provide small but often abundant acorns that ripen in the fall and are eaten by many wildlife species including Wood Ducks, White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, and squirrels. Pin oaks have no tap root and so are easily transplanted and commonly used in landscaping.

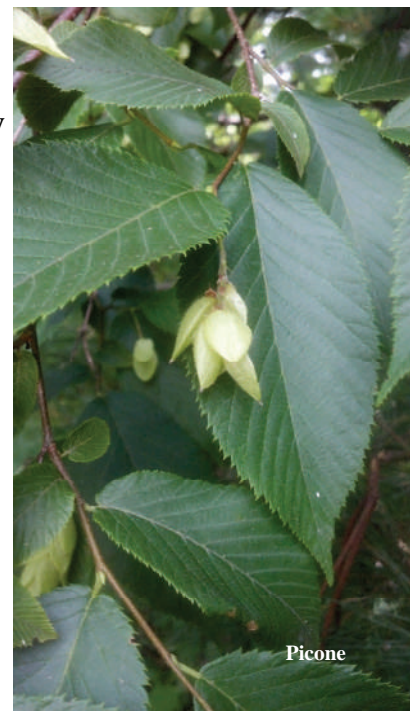
Stop 8—White Oak

White Oaks (*Quercus alba*) are important acorn producers in the forest. Wildlife prefer White Oak acorns for immediate consumption over Pin, Red, or Black Oak acorns, because they contain lower levels of bitter-tasting tannins. Connecticut's famous Charter Oak, pictured on the Connecticut State quarter, was a White Oak, and White Oaks have been designated Connecticut's State Tree. White Oak leaves have rounded lobes, while leaves of Pin, Black and Red Oaks have pointed lobes.



Stop 9—Hop Hornbeam

Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) is a small tree that rarely reaches a height of 30 feet. It has flaky bark and is shade tolerant. It is also known as 'Ironwood' because of its strong wood, which Connecticut colonists used to make handles for small tools and "yokes" that fit over the shoulders of oxen and horses and attached to plows pulled by these animals. Its seeds, each covered by an inflated capsule, and produced in clusters that resemble the "hops" used in beer-making, are eaten by wildlife including squirrels, chipmunks and wild turkeys.



Stop 10— Shagbark Hickory and Brook Views

Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*) has a unique shaggy bark that is utilized by a variety of wildlife for cover. Bats may use the bark crevices for roosting. Insects may hide under the bark for shelter from inclement weather and predator avoidance. Shagbark Hickory nuts are eagerly eaten by squirrels in early fall just before acorns begin to ripen, and the trees are usually teeming with squirrels in the fall. Southern New England’s early colonists collected the sweet tasting nuts for food and used the strong wood for making furniture and archery bows. This tree experienced storm –related damage and had a main stem cut off.

Looking across the road you see the brook that fed the old swimming pool. The wooden bridge that spans the brook is a relaxing place to spend time or to take pictures. The fieldstone building on the other side of the brook was the second bathing pavilion. It provided lockers and both private and open dressing rooms. Today, the Parks and Recreation department runs recreational programs such as the summertime ‘Camp TotalRec’ and dog obedience classes from this former bathing pavilion. They also conduct the 3-day 'Discover the Environment' program for sixth grade classes from the New Britain Public Schools in this section of the park.

Stop 11—American Hornbeam

American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*) is also called “Musclewood” because its smooth textured bark resembles the surface of a muscular human arm or leg. It is a shade-tolerant tree that produces fall seeds eaten by wildlife including squirrels, chipmunks and some birds.



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Stop 12— Eastern White Pine

Eastern White Pines (*Pinus strobus*) provide year-round evergreen cover for wildlife. Evergreen habitat comprises only about 12 percent of Connecticut's forest cover. White Pine needles are shed every third year, with needles of different ages remaining on a tree at any given time, providing consistent shelter at times of year when deciduous trees are bare. The seeds from White Pine cones are sought after by small mammals and birds. White Pine was important in the colonial period for ship masts. The King of England's representatives put a "King's Mark" on selected straight, tall trees reserved to be cut and shipped to England for ship masts.



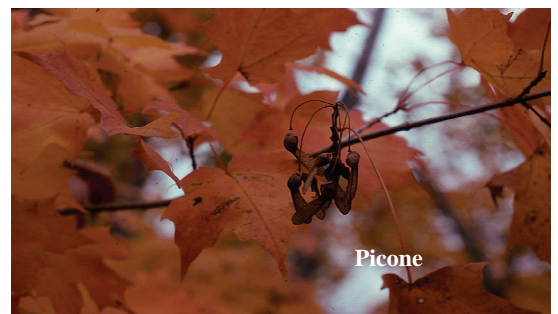
Stop 13— Red Oak

Red Oaks (*Quercus rubra*) have large acorns that take two seasons to mature. When given a choice, wildlife prefer to eat white oak acorns, which have lower levels of bitter-tasting tannins. Red oak acorns sometimes persist on the ground during bumper-crop years and are eaten in late winter when other foods are scarce. Red Oak wood is prized for its color and grain, and is often used as furniture veneer. The smaller diameter tree is a Sugar Maple.



Stop 14— Sugar Maple

The colorful autumn leaves of Sugar Maples (*Acer saccharum*) contribute to Connecticut's beautiful fall landscapes. They produce winged seeds that ripen in the fall and are eaten by a variety of wildlife including Eastern Chipmunks, squirrels and Wild Turkeys. Maple syrup can be made from the Sugar Maple's sap, which is collected in the late winter months. The hard wood of the Sugar Maple is used for making furniture and flooring.



Stop 15— American Sycamore

American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) has bark that peels off in patches to reveal a greenish white surface beneath. It gives the tree a “camouflage” look. This tree grows mostly in wetland or floodplain areas. Because of its lack of a tap root and ability to withstand soil compaction and low oxygen levels, it is well-suited for “street tree” plantings in urban and suburban areas. Its round, hanging seed clusters ripen in the fall and persist into the winter.

Stop 16— Bitternut Hickory

Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*) has a characteristic yellow bud. The nuts produced by this hickory live up to the common name “Bitternut”; Shagbark Hickory produces sweeter tasting nuts. Although their leaves are similar, the bark of this tree does not have the rough, shaggy appearance that Shagbark Hickory has.

Stop 17— Black Birch

Black Birch (*Betula lenta*) produces small winged nutlets that are eaten by wildlife such as Black-capped Chickadees and Eastern Chipmunks. It is also known as “sweet birch” because of its wintergreen-scented sweet-smelling and -tasting sap. It is very shade tolerant.



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Stop 18— Red Maple / Snag / Den Tree

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) is known for its brilliant red foliage in the fall. It is one of the first trees to produce seeds (samaras) in the spring. Red Maples are one of the most prolific cavity producing tree species in the forest. This particular tree has several cavities in it which make it a “snag” or “den tree”. The cavities can be used for nesting or shelter for wildlife such as Eastern Screech Owls, Flying Squirrels and Eastern Bluebirds. Cavities are formed in trees due to a variety of factors including diseases, insect damage, and storm-related damage.

Stop 19 — American Chestnut

American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), once a common large tree species in eastern North American forests, has been plagued by a non-native invasive pathogen that was imported from Asia in the early 1900’s. Chestnut blight was brought into North America on Chinese Chestnut trees that were planted in orchards for their valuable nuts, which are quite similar to those of the American Chestnut. The American Chestnut did not have resistance to the exotic blight and thus succumbed to it. Live stump sprouts (like you see here) are possible because the blight does not affect the roots of American Chestnuts so the stumps of the trees resprout. The resprouts usually reach about 25 feet before succumbing to the blight, and after they die the roots resprout again. Scientists at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, in collaboration with other scientists across the world, are trying to restore the American Chestnut to its former healthy state. There are ongoing experiments with creating blight resistant varieties and test plots can be found throughout Connecticut and the former range of the American Chestnut. The seeds produced by the American Chestnut are large and were highly valuable as a food source for people and many species of wildlife; the seeds are contained within a bristly shell that splits open when ripened.



Stop 20— American Hazelnut

American Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*) is a shrub that is generally found along edges of woods. It produces small nuts that are eaten by people and wildlife such as Eastern Chipmunks and Wild Turkey.

Stop 21— Mapleleaf Viburnum

Mapleleaf Viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*) is a small shrub that is tolerant of shade. Its berries, bluish-black when ripe, stay on the branches through the winter and help to sustain wintering birds and small mammals. This native shrub has pinkish-white blossoms in late May to early June.

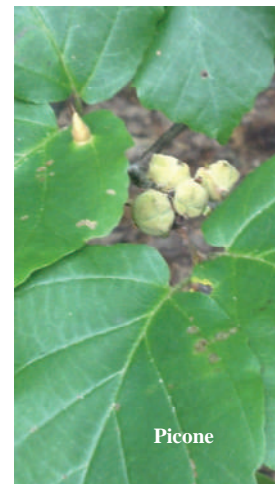


Stop 22— Black Oak

Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*) is closely related to Red Oak: along with Pin Oak, the acorns of these species delay germination until the spring immediately following their ripening, so they are suitable for over-winter storage and provide important winter food for animals such as squirrels. The wood of the Black Oak has a yellowish color.

Stop 23— Witch Hazel

Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is a forest understory shrub that is tolerant of shade. The sap of this shrub is harvested by a Connecticut company to make an astringent lotion used as a skin tonic/aftershave. Its hazelnut-like fruiting body contains two shiny black seeds that are propelled up to several feet away from the parent plant when the fruiting body springs open at fall maturity. Witch Hazel uniquely flowers in the fall, as many other species are losing their leaves. Its seeds are eaten by wildlife such as Eastern Chipmunks and Wild Turkey.



Stop 24— Eastern Cottonwood

Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) is known for releasing its numerous cottony seeds in the air during the months of May and June. When abundant, their silky-haired seeds can look like snowflakes floating through the air and building up in windrows on the ground.

Stop 25— Vernal Pool

Vernal pools are fishless, temporary water bodies to which some amphibians migrate on rainy spring nights to mate and lay their eggs. Spring Peepers, Wood Frogs, American Toads, and Spotted Salamanders all use this vernal pool as a breeding place where their eggs and tadpoles will be safe from predatory fish.

Stop 26— Tree Stumps

If you look carefully at the forest floor, you will see the bases of trees that were cut in the past for firewood. If you find a fresh cut on a stump you can determine the age of the tree by counting the growth rings (a new ring grows each year).

Stop 27— Bigtooth Aspen

Bigtooth Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) is distinguished by the large “teeth” of the serrations along its leaf edges. Like Eastern Cottonwood and Quaking Aspen, all native aspens share a vertically flattened leaf stem that causes their leaves to shake in the wind. Compare the leaf stem of the aspens to the rounder leaf stem of a red maple or other deciduous tree nearby.

Stop 28— Wildflowers

A variety of native wildflowers bloom in these woods: Bloodroot and Trillium in spring, Wild Geranium and Solomon’s Seal in summer, and Wood Aster in early fall, among others. In winter, you can see the white-striped leaves of Spotted Wintergreen, and the evergreen leaves of the non-flowering Christmas Fern.

Note: Up ahead, the next stops on the trail will be unpaved.



Wild Geranium

Stop 29— Japanese Knotweed

Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum* or *Fallopia japonica*) is a non-native invasive plant that was imported from eastern Asia to stabilize river banks and other steep embankments. Its stems are hollow and bamboo-like. It can spread rapidly by rhizomes (underground stems) and will displace native vegetation. The patch in this location appears to have come in with some debris or fill material. Eradication of Japanese Knotweed is recommended wherever feasible due to its invasive growth habits. As a demonstration of weed control methods, Dr. Todd Mervosh of The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will be applying an herbicide to this patch of Japanese Knotweed in late summer of 2014: if the application is successful, the patch may be gone by the time you visit! **NOTE: Please continue to the North along the main trail.**

Stop 30— Sugar Maple Stand

This area has many trees that are the same species. A group of trees of the same species in a forest is collectively called a “stand”. Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*) is the predominant tree in this area. Maple syrup can be made by boiling Sugar Maple sap. It usually takes 40 gallons of raw maple sap to make 1 gallon of maple syrup. Connecticut maple syrup producers tap less than 1 percent of Connecticut’s Sugar Maples and produce only 10 percent of the maple syrup consumed in Connecticut each year. There is a lot of opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started in sugar mapping as a business. Go to www.ctmaple.org for more information.

Stop 31— Pond View / Wood Ducks /Turtles

Careful and quiet observation may reveal some of the wildlife species that inhabit the pond. Fishermen cast their lines along the banks to catch bluegills and bass. Green Herons and Great Blue Herons can be observed hunting for fish and frogs. Listen for the rattling call of a Belted Kingfisher, which may fly out from a perch on a branch over the water to hover and then plunge in after a fish. Wood Ducks, one of Connecticut’s most colorful duck species, can be seen early in the morning looking for acorns and aquatic insects. Wood Ducks naturally nest in tree cavities, unlike the ground-nesting mallards. Look for painted turtles sunning on woody debris along the water’s edge. The floating dock was designed and constructed in 1999 by the CCSU Student Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers as part of the development of the nature trails. Looking to the south, you can see the dam that created this pond; to the west across the pond you can see the spillway. Freshwater wetlands like this pond and the cattail marsh provide habitat for numerous plant and animal species, protective nurseries for young game fish, and help to absorb and recycle nutrients that wash into our rivers, streams, and ponds in rainwater runoff. The A.W. Stanley Park pond is particularly valuable for wildlife due to its forested shores, which provide sheltering cover, perches overlooking the water, and shaded shallows where fish and waterfowl can nest in the heat of summer.



Stop 32— Young White Pine

Look into the woods about 50 feet or so and see the young pine trees. Growing conditions (i.e. shade/light/soils) in this forest understory support many young Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) seedlings and saplings. White Pine contributes at least half of the 12% of evergreen forest cover in Connecticut. White Pine lumber has multiple uses, including furniture-making, crafts, and interior and exterior trim.

Stop 33— Flowering Dogwood and Trail Branch Point

Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) fruit provides food for migratory birds in the fall. The berries are highly nutritious and contain good lipids that help birds fuel up for the fall migration. Songbirds, including American Robins and Wood Thrushes, readily feed on them. The spring blossoms of Flowering Dogwood are among the first to dot the landscape in the month of May. The color of the flowers can vary from bright white to light pink.

Note: To get to the next stop, take the trail branch closer to the pond: it's behind you as you face the Stop 33 post.



Stop 34— Traprock Basalt Ledge

This scenic overlook is on a "traprock" basalt ledge. This basalt rock is an exposed and broken edge of a massive lava flow dating from the Age of Dinosaurs (Jurassic Period). Portions of this same lava flow, broken by many faults and now tilted to the east, may be found from north of Springfield, Massachusetts all the way to south of Durham, Connecticut. Slightly older flows form the Hanging Hills in Meriden, Talcott Mountain, and Mount Holyoke, Massachusetts. **Note:** To get to the next stop, bear right as you leave the ledge (don't take the left trail branch that goes down a steep hill).

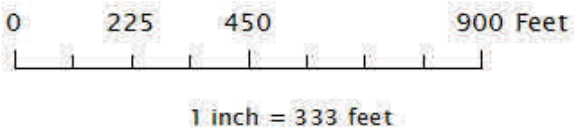
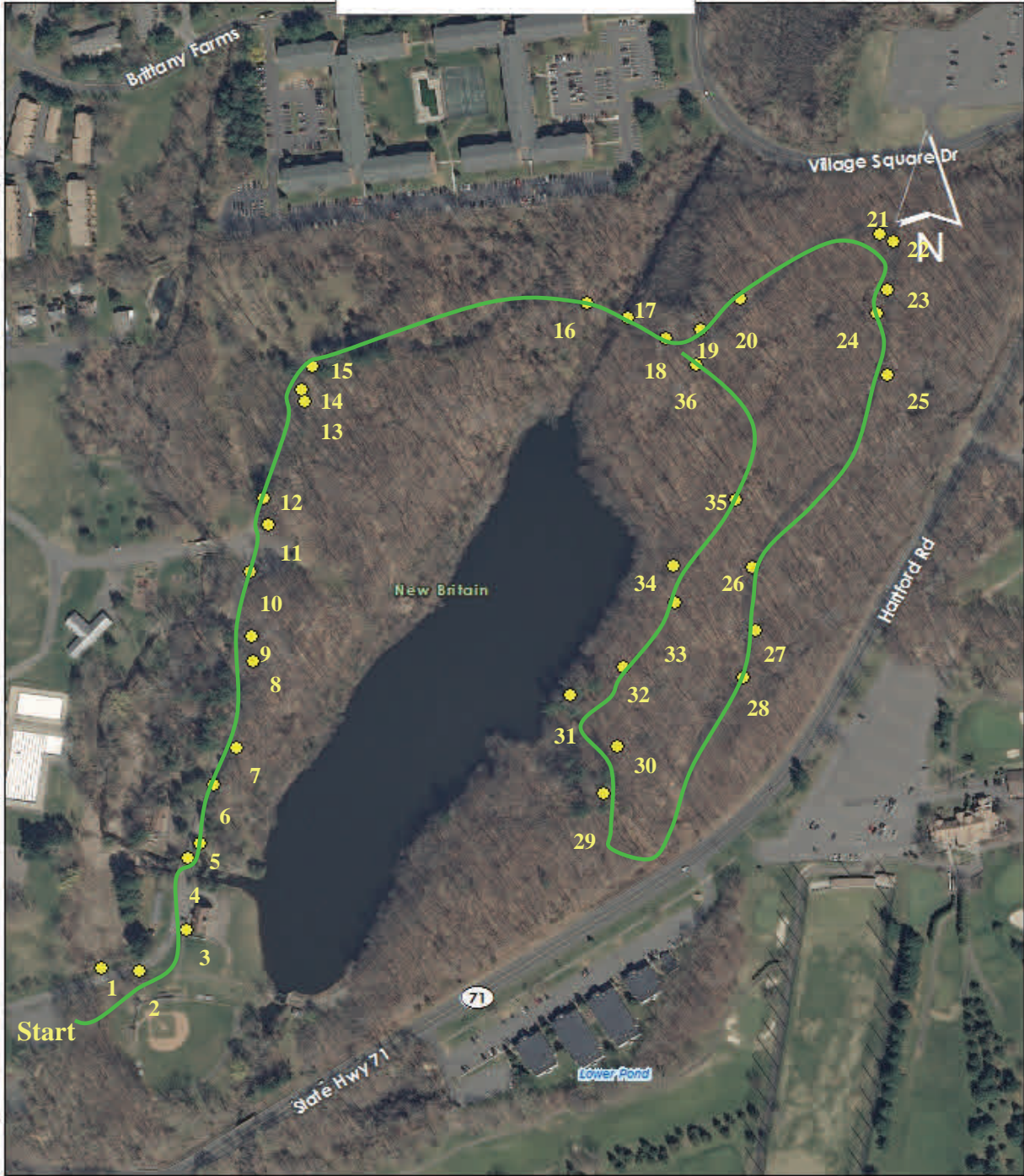
Stop 35— Burned Woods

Look carefully at the charred/burned exterior of many of tree stumps in this area. An accidental fire occurred here about 20 years ago. Be very careful with fire and prevent unwanted fires. Historically, fire was used by Native Americans as a tool to manage vegetation. Today, prescribed fires are utilized by habitat managers to manage certain uncommon habitats in Connecticut, especially Pitch Pine forests.

Stop 36— Connecticut's Forest Land / End of Trail

How much of Connecticut is forested? Answer: About 1.7 million acres is forested, which is about 59 percent of the Connecticut's land base. You have walked through some of Connecticut's forest land and we hope you have enjoyed the experience and gained an appreciation for the value of the natural features of A.W. Stanley Park. To find more information about your town's land cover and land use, go to UCONN's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) at <http://clear.uconn.edu/>.

**A.W. Stanley Nature Trail
New Britain, CT**



Legend

- Trail Stops

— 2014 Nature Trail

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Exercise Right Choice Program

The A.W Stanley Park work crew

New Britain residents, volunteers and businesses

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