

# Welcome Friend

This page is taken from our Trail Guide. You are invited to read it and sense the pleasure that awaits you when you visit Wilderstein.



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**This stroll crosses a field to an overlook; descends a bluff dissected by several ravines to a cove; doubles back and remounts the hill by way of a meadow to the house. Taken at a leisurely pace with a pause at each viewing site, the walk should take less than an hour.**



**To minimize your exposure to slippery footing, poison ivy and deer ticks, please stay on the marked paths.**

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## To Umbrella Point



☀ Follow the Umbrella Point Trail. Leaving the well-tended lawn, you enter the area of taller grasses. In the spring, this hay field or meadow will be sprinkled with yellow buttercups and the low-growing pale blue speedwells. Through the summer and fall you will find here numerous blue and yellow members of the aster family; black-eyed susans; blue chickory; yellow golden rod; and ragweed. The round lobed fern growing along the path is called sensitive fern.

By 1850 Dutchess County was 90% clear cut to create farm land. The Revolutionary War speeded the process and much that was raised in this area fed American troops. This land was sheep meadow before 1852. Thomas Suckley added orchards of apple, pear and cherry on these slopes and to the west of the house.

Almost every estate had a hay meadow. At Wilderstein, Robert Suckley raised some sheep, cows and chickens to support the household. He had work horses and carriage horses. When he died in 1921 the single most valuable item in the appraisal of his holdings here was the hay in the barn.

☀ The trail enters a wooded area which slopes toward the river. Some ravines have deepened as erosion from the meadow occurs. Common to the slopes are native species; White Pine; Hemlock; Basswood; Red Maple; Sugar Maple; Sweet Gum; Black Walnut; Red and Black Oak; Flowering Dogwood; Black Cherry and American Elm.

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## At Umbrella Point

☀ The trail takes you to a clearing called Umbrella Point from which there is an excellent view south into the Hudson River Valley. If the day is clear, you can see the Shawangunk Mountains on the distant horizon to the west of the river. In the near distance on the river is the Esopus Meadows Lighthouse. Built in 1856, it is the only wooden lighthouse on the Hudson. Immediately below Umbrella Point is Suckley Cove, created by railroad fill constructed in the 1850's. The Hudson River is an estuary - a body of water broadly connected to the ocean which shares the tidal cycles of the sea. Salt water tides ride atop the fresh water flowing to the sea. The tidal flow at Esopus Meadows is normally one meter but no salt water penetrates this far north.



🏠 Wilderstein is a mock German word meaning "wild man's stone". In Suckley Cove is a large stone believed to be a marker for an early purchase of land by Dutch settlers. On the stone is a carved petroglyph of an Indian head and above it the initials AR.

Robert Suckley was a true Victorian and lover of winter sports especially ice boating. He had a standing order with the stationmaster in Rhinecliff to telegraph him in the city if the ice was perfect. Upon receiving such a summons, he would immediately leave New York by train for Wilderstein. The train stopped at the bottom of the hill and Mr. Suckley would walk uphill for home. The largest ice boats could travel at 90 miles an hour and would sometimes race the trains. Amid much stoking of coal, cheering of passengers, blasting of whistles and taunts by local ice boaters the challenge would be taken up. Such races were talked about for years.

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## Ravine Trail



*Herb-Robert*



As we retreat from Umbrella Point and take the left branch of the trail (Ravine Trail) across the foot bridge, look for the tall white baneberry and low-growing Herb-Robert flowers in the spring. Baneberry flowers form a tight cluster on a leafless stalk and in the fall become white berries with "black eyes" supported on a thick red stalk.

Herb-Robert has pink flowers with five petals, hairy stems and fern-like leaves. Its fruits resemble the head of a long billed crane.

In the ravine by the bridge may also be seen a tall plant with tongue-like, fuzzy green leaves - mullein. In the summer it will have a spike of bright yellow flowers.

Beyond the bridge you will pass on the left a sugar maple, box elder, hickories and a large white pine with thriving poison ivy vine. Notice the beard-like holdfasts on the vine, but don't touch any part of it!

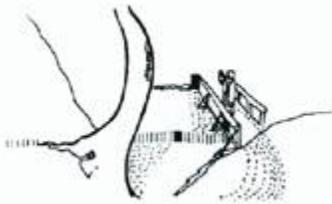
Shortly the Ravine Trail enters a grassy clearing and branches to the right (Hudson View Path) and to the left (Boathouse Road Spur). We will go left. As you descend the slope to the woods there is a large evergreen cedar tree on the right (spiny leaves and shedding bark) and a large white pine on the left.



*Baneberry*

## Boathouse Road

☀ You will meet Boathouse Road and follow it to the left. As you stroll through this lovely woods, listen for bird songs; the chuckle of a flicker, the melodic whistle of the wood thrush, or the phoebe insistently calling its name. If you are visiting the trail during the spring, watch for warblers which pass through on their northward migration. These woods are also home to vireos, tanagers and woodpeckers.



The Wilderstein estate is underlain by Hudson soils of two types: Hudson silt loam under the flat high meadow and Hudson silty clay loam along the forested slopes. Both are derived from glacial lake clay and silt sediments. The Hudson silty clay loam is highly susceptible to erosion.

These heavy clay soils occasionally become saturated with rainwater and acquire the consistency of stiff pudding. On particularly steep slopes, the mass will creep downhill. Note several of the trees in the vicinity of the bridge are curved at the base, evidence of past slumping. Trees always grow erect; thus, after being tipped by soil that slid, the tops grow upright and the trunk is eventually curved at the base.

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## Cove Point



☛ Past the switchback on the Boathouse Road is Cove Point on your left. Walking out to the bench you will see flanking the trail some witch hazel shrubs. They have alternate, broad leaves with wavy margins and uneven leaf bases and produce stringy yellow flowers in the early winter. An extract of the bark is used for medicinal purposes. Nearby to the left (south) of the point are trees Skunk Cabbage with broad leaves and uneven leaf bases, but which have fine-toothed leaf margins: American basswood or linden. In the summer it produces small clusters of yellow flowers which dangle beneath a leafy "wing".

From Cove Point is a lovely view of the Catskill skyline, the Hudson River estuary, the railroad and Suckley Cove. Shallow water embayments like this are very productive areas which attract wildlife of all kind. Killifish and the fry of other species such as alewife are preyed upon by great blue herons which can frequently be seen in the bay. Along the edges you may see a bittern stalking its prey, or a kingfisher perched on a limb over the water watching for fish and laughing its loud, rattling call at you. Osprey, also called fish hawks, hover high over the water then suddenly plunge to grasp a fish from near the surface. Several red-wing blackbirds are likely to be guarding territories in the area.

Many species of waterfowl use the Hudson River as a migratory flyway in the spring and fall and can often be seen in large numbers. This is an excellent place to observe waterfowl. Among the species which may be seen are Swan, Canadian goose, mallard, black duck, blue-winged teal and common goldeneye.

☛ The cove has open water in the middle near the bridge, but is largely a freshwater tidal marsh. The majority of vegetation before you is sweetflag, which resembles cattail or iris leaves. Note, however, that the large vein in the leaf is offset slightly from the midline. Compare this with a nearby narrow-leafed cattail leaf.

Purple loosestrife, with its short stalked purple flowers is also present. While it is pleasing to the eye when in bloom, be aware that the introduced European native is an aggressive competitor. It appears to offer little to the marsh, while the cattails it replaces are source of material and food for most animal inhabitants.

One very large member of the mouse family, the muskrat, is in evidence with tracks sometimes visible along the marsh edge at low tide. Its fondness for cattail and other aquatic marsh plants, together with its waterproof fur, flattened tail and webbed feet make it a common resident. Look for lodges constructed of shredded vegetation,

especially in the winter. Where muskrats are present minks, which prey on them, are not far removed.

In the early spring, look for the cryptic green and brown flower of the skunk cabbage looking a bit like clasped hands emerging from the cold mud. Skunk cabbage flowers generate enough heat to melt through ice and snow as they grow. The homely flowers are followed later in the spring by large green leaves which, when crushed, emit the odor which gives the plant its name.



## Return on the Boathouse Road



As you leave Cove Point glance to your left. The ravine is marked by an end of trail barrier and sign. Beyond are the railroad tracks which are dangerous. The trains are surprisingly quiet and high-speed. Please do not trespass.

As you walk back up the Boathouse Road in the spring, watch for wildflowers like the small, blue hepaticas, pink spring beauties, yellow trout-lilies, white wood anemones and many others. The unusual jack-in-the-pulpit is very abundant in these woods. Look for long-stemmed, three-parted leaves and a greenish or purplish, narrow, cup-like flower with a flap over the top and a club-shaped stalk inside. In the late summer you will see the fruits of this flower; a cluster of scarlet berries atop a bare stem.

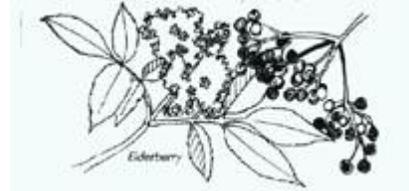


There are gray tree frogs in the woods, wild turkeys in the openings, moles and shrews in the soil, American toads among the leaves and mice in logs. Under the logs you are likely to encounter the red-backed salamander, one of the most abundant amphibians in the forest.

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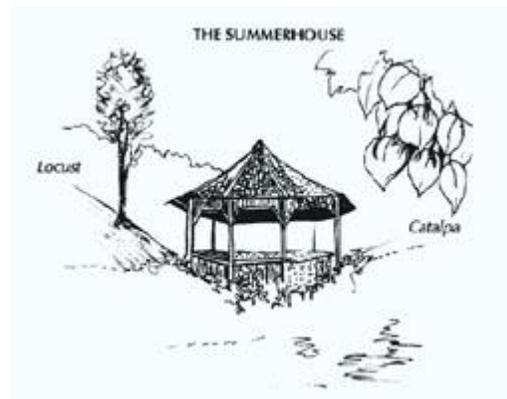
## Hudson View Path

☀ Turn right onto the Boathouse Road Spur trail, walk through the brushy meadow past the Ravine Trail, and follow the Hudson View Path to the left. Here we can note the mixture of woodland vegetation (grasses) and field vegetation (trees). The zone where two or more different communities meet and integrate is known as an ecotone or edge. These zones are especially important for wildlife which usually require the vegetation of two or more communities. The ruffed grouse, for example, requires a combination of open forest, found along the slope, with the abundant herbaceous plants and shrubs occupying the area between the forest and mowed fields. Deer also prefer these edges along with woodchucks, robins, cottontail rabbits and mockingbirds. The woods provide shelter and the field is a productive source of food. The increased variety and density of life in the about edges is a phenomenon called the "edge effect".



The edges of Wilderstein are composed chiefly of shrubs such as gray dogwood, honeysuckle, raspberry, spicebush and viburnums. The presence of honeysuckle often indicates recently disturbed areas. As you reenter the woods look left and find an elderberry bush. In the early summer look for umbrella-like clusters of five-petaled white flowers, later followed by green berries and, finally, the purple-black fruits.

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## The Summerhouse



The gazebo is a peaceful place to rest and think. Members of the Suckley family would come to read a book here in summer. Through the woods and down the slope to the left can be seen the Carriage House and above the gazebo is the ice house. During the winter, people would cut blocks of ice from the river, then store it for use during the summer. Ice was also carried by sloop to New York City and sold commercially.



The trees with the deeply furrowed bark near the gazebo are black locust. Just before the lawn to the right of the Garden Path is a catalpa tree with its large heart-shaped leaves. In the early summer it sports attractive clusters of white flowers with yellow and purple spots which mature into long, cigarshaped fruit pods in the fall.

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# The Lawn

 As you make your way back to the house note the several trees which shade the lawn. The tall tree with the fuzzy, needle-leaved, green branches is a European larch. Larches are unique among conifers in that they are deciduous: their leaves turn yellow and fall off in the autumn. Next along the lawn are red oak, silver maple and sycamore-one of the most massive trees species of the eastern forest. Many of the trees within the parkland around the house are identified with mounted horticultural labels by their common name. Please stroll the grounds and identify those specimens you are curious about.

 In 1891 Vaux ordered 1,091 shrubs and 41 trees from John T. Mullins Nursery in Rhinebeck for planting at Wilderstein. Many of these specimen trees and flowering bushes still survive-the redbud around the larch has gone to root but blooms magnificently every year as does the tree hydrangea in back of the house. On the entrance drive are two ginkgo and a large clump of fringe trees. The complete planting plan and many other Vaux documents are preserved in the Wilderstein archives.

Calvert Vaux was instrumental in creating some of America's most famous parks; Central Park, Morningside and Riverside Parks in New York City; Prospect Park in Brooklyn; Downing Park in Newburg. Because of these creations people dared to dream of National Parks for America.

Black locust trees are planted in the entry circle. These trees were believed from colonial times to draw lightening thus protecting the house from harm. Their deep roots generally reach ground water. Traditionally these trees were planted in front of all Livingston houses and their presence here is a statement of the descent of the Suckleys from Livingston ancestors. If you look closely at these mature trees you will see that each has been struck by lightning.

**WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED YOUR "VIRTUAL" VISIT TO WILDERSTEIN'S VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE. DO COME TO VISIT WILDERSTEIN IN PERSON!**

