

# SELF-GUIDED NATURE WALK IN FAUNTLEROY PARK

This walk will introduce you to many natural features of Fauntleroy Park. The basic loop is about 1/2 mile. Add to your walk by taking optional trails.

You won't need hiking boots, but a walking stick could come in handy. For your safety and the health of the habitat, stay on established trails. Points 1-6 have flat access; points 11-13 have stair access.

Numbered points of interest start at the park entrance on SW Barton Street. To return there after Point 15, skirt the east end of the church's parking lots, go through the gate, turn right into the alley, and walk a few yards back to Point 1.

**1. City meets nature.** (as you enter) The park is a vibrant remainder of an ecosystem that once lined Puget Sound and its salmon-rearing rivers and creeks. When English ivy, Japanese knotweed, and other invasive species migrate from nearby yards, they threaten beneficial native species. Such weeds would quickly overrun the park if not for volunteer stewardship. Tree seedlings eventually shade out some invaders.

**2. Fell wood.** (at the triangle) "Nurse" logs throughout the park nourish plants, bugs, and bacteria where they fall and slowly decompose into rich soil. If you walk here often, pick one along this trail to monitor over time.

**3. Early bloomers.** (left along the trail) The delicate white flowers of Indian plum start the show in March, with salmonberry's hot-pink blooms close behind. White Western trillium dots the forest floor in April, then creeping buttercup's golden flowers begin to line the trail. Bigleaf maple and red alder join conifers to green the forest canopy.

**4. Main channel.** (at the big bridge) Water from springs and runoff feeds the creek year-round. The coho fry that students release here in May spend a year in the creek before heading to saltwater. Logs in the channel create pools for these juveniles and habitat for the aquatic insects they eat.

**5. Wetland plants.** (along the boardwalk to the left of the bridge) Rain and runoff sustain many wet-loving plants here. After the brilliant yellow hoods of skunk cabbage die back in the spring, its leaves grow in the mud to as long as 3 feet. Resembling the garden variety, water parsley sends its roots firmly into the soil.

**6. Snag and fire.** (east end of boardwalk) Standing dead trees like the one just beyond this platform provide habitat for birds that nest in cavities and feed on bugs in the soft wood. Look for the orange trumpets of Western honeysuckle here in late spring. The "wetland" stone at your feet marks one of three water-related habitats in the park. Look closely for a large snag across the channel blackened by fire, a natural part of a forest's life cycle.

**7. Trees.** (Back to the big bridge, then a few yards up to the platform left of the T) Towering above salmonberry thickets, seasonal trees visible from here include bigleaf maple, red alder, and vine maple. Evergreens include the drooping Western hemlock behind you.

**7a. Evergreens.** (continue up, past the small bridge over a tributary) To your right is the largest stand of evergreens in the park. Douglas fir and Western red cedar grace the hillside, along with ferns and other understory plants. To the left of the trail is a wetland bog with riparian (streamside) plants. Watch for birds and insects in this "ecotone" area where wet and dry habitats meet.

**7b. Trail junction.** (at the big hemlock tree) The trail to your left boasts the largest spring display of Western trillium in the park, plus more skunk cabbage in wetter areas. This trail skirts the wetland and the lower edge of a large grove of mostly Western red cedars. Constant shade below these giants keeps vegetation sparse in this nesting area for barred owls.

**8. Ferns.** (back to the T, then left toward the boardwalk) Notice the erosion-fighting ferns on both sides of the trail. Fronds of the tough sword fern stay green throughout the year; those of the delicate lady fern die back in winter. Birds forage in dry fronds for spiders and other bugs.

**9. Sometimes pond.** (a few yards ahead) When water pools here, it creates the closest thing to a pond that you'll see on your walk. Silt from erosion of fine hillside soils provides moist habitat for microscopic organisms here. When water carries pesticides from yards into such a pool, many species die.

**10. Glade.** (several yards ahead) Like other conifers in the park, the 110-year-old decaying Douglas fir that you pass through was felled by



BIGLEAF MAPLE



WESTERN HEMLOCK



DOUGLAS FIR



VINE MAPLE



RED ELDERBERRY



RED ALDER



SALMONBERRY



WESTERN HONEYSUCKLE



OREGON GRAPE



SALAL



RED HUCKLEBERRY



WESTERN TRILLIUM



SWORD FERN



WESTERN RED CEDAR

saturated soil and heavy wind. The split cedar log here also testifies to the effects of wind; note the nature of the wood and imagine its many uses. A mix of mature, young, and rotting trees slowly enclosing this area illustrates the natural forest life cycle. Gray-barked Douglas fir branches high in the canopy, while Western red cedar branches all along its shaggy, reddish trunk; small vine maple trees add fall color.

**11. Overlook.** (down the slope, over the bridge, and up the stairs to your right) A candidate for Eagle Scout restored safe steps here so you can enjoy the view from the crest of this bluff, listen for birds, and see trillium in season. Low evergreen natives include Oregon grape and salal.

**11a. Erosion.** (left on the loop trail to the Forest Court entrance) Rainwater flowing off pavement can erode sensitive soils that nourish underbrush. Here volunteers and staff with Seattle Parks continually redirect runoff and regravels the trail to keep it safe.

**11b. Bird activity.** (along this trail) Watch for flickers and pileated woodpeckers in snags and listen for other bird activity. Noisy crows could indicate the concerning presence of a Cooper's hawk or barred owl. Notice oxalis, fringe cup, and other groundcovers that flourish here as the trail curves to rejoin the main trail (to your left at the junction).

**12. Berries.** (along the trail) Birds count on berries and other fruit in the ecosystem to ripen over several months. Look here in late summer for shade-loving red huckleberry bushes growing in rotting wood.

**13. Slope.** (right at the fork, then down the hill) Trails throughout the park are continually upgraded and are designed for safety and erosion control. Notice the varied bark of trees that provide habitat for animals and plants. Also note how roots of the Douglas fir anchor the hillside.

**14. Tributary.** (at the bridge) The chemistry of creek tributaries affects habitat all the way downstream. Student monitoring of the abundance and diversity of aquatic insects in the creek and occasional water testing by agencies help focus advice to residents about creek-friendly gardening practices.

**15. Trail extension.** (to the church parking lot) A conservation easement between Fauntleroy Church and Seattle Parks and Recreation makes possible this pedestrian-friendly segment of the trail system. Forest stewards and other volunteers have replanted this area with native species and annually add more natives to the park.