

### **Section 3: Forest / North Creek / Tree Identification**

You should be located on Colonel Samuel Smith Drive, just before it bends in front of Father John Redmond High School. Carry down the forested pathway ahead.

We are now entering Colonel Samuel Smith Park. Samuel Smith was the first settler owner of this land and the namesake for this park. After the land was surrendered by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation in the Toronto Purchase, Smith was granted 3000 acres of land for his military service. This area includes the park and Lakeshore Campus. Another interesting fact about this area is that black alder, as mentioned in the Indigenous caretakers section, is actually not native to North America, meaning the word for Etobicoke, “Adobigok” is probably a misnomer. As we enter this forested portion, we’re greeted with trees that European settler Samuel Smith might recognize, but that the Indigenous people of this land prior to colonization would certainly not. While it might be clear to them that there were elms, maples, basswoods, and spruces, the species would differ from the native ones. They would in fact be seeing Wych Elm, Norway Maple, European Linden, and Norway Spruce. These species were planted by the early Europeans who settled in this area and have since become naturalized. They currently make up the dominant tree species along this stretch of forest.

#### **North Creek**

Pause for a moment at the bridge located on the left hand side of the path.

This is the remnants of North Creek, which was buried into sewage lines sometime after 1958 due to complaints about local industries dumping waste in the creek. According to

a map from 1811, this creek used to extend all the way to the current intersection of the QEW and the 427. In a 1954 meeting, councilor Maurice Breen acknowledged the problem, citing the overload of the local waste treatment plant as the reason for dumping. Following heavy community pushback, the creek was diverted into a sewer. This is the most natural portion, flowing through its original ravine and retaining much of its tree coverage.

## **Tree Identification**

As you explore this area, you'll notice various types of leaves and trees. Of these four, the easiest to recognize is the Norway Spruce. This is the only coniferous tree of the bunch, meaning it has needles, unlike deciduous trees which have leaves. The next easiest tree to recognize is the Norway Maple, which has leaves resembling the maple leaf symbol on the Canadian flag. Not all maple trees are native to Canada, though, and the Norway Maple is actually native to central Europe and Western Asia. Sugar Maple and Norway Maple are often confused as the leaves do look very similar. The biggest difference is that Norway Maple leaves have 5 to 7 lobes with sharply pointed tips, whereas Sugar Maple leaves have 5 lobes with less pointed tips. European Linden trees have broad, heart-shaped leaves and are highly attractive to bees due their rich nectar. Finally, the Wych Elm leaves are alternate, oval in shape, and have a long pointed tip. Take some time to identify these trees along this stretch if you wish.

## **Sumac**

A distinctive and popular shrub found here in the park is sumac. It typically grows between 15 to 30 feet tall, adorned with yellow-green flowers that give way to fuzzy,

bright red berries. These berries often persist into winter, arranged in a pyramidal shape. During the spring, its flowers bloom, serving as a rich source of nectar for native bees and butterflies. By late summer, the mature berries become a vital food source for numerous birds and mammals.

Sumac also holds significant historical and cultural importance. English settlers used sumac for decoration, appreciating its more aesthetic qualities. While Indigenous peoples across North America valued sumac for its spiritual purposes; it was often mixed with tobacco for smoking rituals, a practice that endures to this day. Additionally, sumac berries were used to make a refreshing lemony drink similar to lemonade.