



2015 Take a Hike Series-The Van Vleck Farm and Nature Sanctuary

Church Hill Rd., Woodbury

Planted by Two Adventuring Ladies

Hike time: 1 hour

Hike length: less than 1 mile

Introduction:

A map of the Van Vleck Farm and Nature Sanctuary and its location can be downloaded at:

http://www.flandersnaturecenter.org/flanders_places/hiking_trail_maps.html

The Take a Hike series is a set of four letterboxing trails created to continue to lure people to the family friendly properties with trails at Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust. Since we expect families to be hiking with children, we have added a checklist and included observations and information about what you might see as you hike in order to keep everyone engaged. One of the letterboxes on each trail will contain a rubber stamp for one of the letters: H, I, K or E.

Flanders has also created a passport to use when hiking the trails planted by the Two Adventuring Ladies. Anyone who hikes twelve of Flanders' letterboxing trails should go to the Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust office, present their passport with the twelve letter stamps from those trails and sign their Trail Name on our poster of Successful Flanders Letterboxers. They will receive a prize. The office is open Monday-Friday from 9 until 4.

The Flanders Passport and all the trails with hidden letter stamps can be downloaded at:

<http://www.flandersnaturecenter.org/letterboxing.html>

Dogs are allowed on the trails but must be leashed.

You may not see all the plants and animals that we mention. You will see many things that the Two Adventuring Ladies have not mentioned. The observations for the Take a Hike Series were made during the fall.

Clues:

Park near the kiosk in the sugar house parking lot off Church Hill Road.

Walk to the sugar house and turn to your left. Ahead of you, there is a small garden surrounded by a rope fence. This a Monarch Waystation that has been created by volunteers from the Pomperaug Valley Garden Club. The plants include common milkweed, butterfly weed, coneflower, Swamp milkweed, sunflower, Joe Pye weed,

fennel, mallow, beebalm and many more. If you enter the garden, sit on the rock and watch for butterflies. While you watch, contemplate the plight of the beautiful Monarch butterfly. This species winters in Mexico and comes north during the summer. Their Mexican habitat has shrunk dramatically – from 50 acres down to 2 acres. When they come here, they are dependent on Common Milkweed and related plant species. These plants are not nearly as plentiful as they once were. We can help. YOU CAN HELP. Visit www.monarchwatch.org.

When you leave the Butterfly Garden, return to the Sugar House. Turn right – toward the parking lot. Before you reach the parking lot, you will turn left, down the white trail marked by a white wooden arrow.

Notice the oak trees on your right. Do all the acorns on the ground look the same?

As you walk you may pass remnants of fairy houses created by participants in the Festival of Forest Fairies and Woodland Wizards that Flanders holds each summer. This family friendly event is usually held in July and becomes more entertaining and popular each year. There are dancers and puppets. There are educational programs, and tractor rides. There are crafts and food – and, of course - there are fairy and wizard houses that participants bring. Enthusiastic volunteers will be welcomed. Contact the office at Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust (203 263 3711) in order to find out how you can become a member of this team!

You will enter a field and find a post with multiple white wooden arrows on it. Turn left to the “Long Trail.”

You will be walking along the edge of a field. After you have gone down one side of the field and crossed the end you will see a tree with a white wooden arrow on it. Eventually you will follow that arrow to the right continuing along the edge of the field. However – first approach the tree with the arrow. Behind this tree, there is a larger tree and behind that tree, under a bit of bark, you will find a letterbox. Which of these two trees is an oak?

After you stamp our logbook and your logbook, replace the letterbox and recover it with the bark.

Continue to walk along the edge of the field. Watch out for the multi floral rose. It will be trying to grab your left arm and leg. This plant, *Rosa multiflora*, was purposefully introduced to the United States from Japan in 1866 as a root stock for ornamental roses. Then, in the 1930s and later, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service encouraged its use to stop erosion, limit head-light glare from on-coming traffic on divided highways and as a “living fence.” As recently as the 1960s, Multi-flora rose was promoted as an effective habitat for pheasants and cottontail rabbits. This pervasive and thorny weed now invades pasture, inhibits reforestation and has altered native habitats to the detriment of the local plants and animals. Be a bit careful – its curved thorns can really grab hold.

You will begin to see blue bird houses.

At a post with multiple white arrows, turn left following the unlabeled white arrow. You will pass several more bluebird houses. There are 21 nesting boxes on Flanders property. The Bluebird population was in serious decline because of destruction of their habitat, pesticides and the introduction of the English House Sparrow and European Starling. These boxes are an attempt to provide a safe nesting area for the Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis*. The population has now reached a sustainable level.

The Bluebird project at Flanders was maintained and monitored by Mike Amodeo for many years. It is now cared for by Edward Boisits. These are all **Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust VOLUNTEERS**.

Before you get to the barn, the trail splits. Look to your right. You will see a wooden arrow on a post. Go to that post and then turn left across another field.

You will come to another fork. The left branch turns up hill to another parking lot and kiosk. You are to stay slightly to the right and approach Church Hill Road.

Turn left on the road for 20 to 25 feet. Then go to your right through a gateway.

There will be sheds on your left and a pond on your right. There are no trail blazes. Turn to your right and cross a bridge. The pond will now be on your left and a wooden bench will be on your right.

When you come to a sign that says "Farm Trail", turn left on the long trail.

As you cross the next tree line and enter a field, there will be a large boulder on your left. It is actually part of a stone wall. Look behind it and you will find a letterbox.

After you stamp your logbook, your passport and our logbook, return the letterbox to its niche and go on your way. Just after the rock you will see a post with white wooden arrows on your left. Follow the arrow that points up hill and to your right. Before the top of the hill, turn right toward a group of bluebird houses and two stone benches.

The bluebird houses are almost always planted in pairs about 10 feet apart. One will be occupied by tree swallows and the second one by bluebirds. This helps the bluebird because the territorial tree swallow will chase away other birds. In 2014 there were 55 fledgling bluebirds at Flanders.

One bench is dedicated to Natalie Van Vleck, the founder of Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust.

Between the two benches, there is a Shagbark Hickory tree. The ground is often covered with the nuts or the four ribbed shells and four ribbed husks from those nuts.

Look around. You will see arrows pointing to the right. Follow them. Just before you reach Church Hill Road, you will come to a trail intersection. Eventually you will come back to this spot, but first take a short side trip to the right. You will see the pollinator garden on your right. This garden may not look like your neatly mulched and trimmed array of ornamental flowers. However, this is a garden full of Milkweed, Queen Anne's Lace, goldenrod, and other plants that are essential to our pollinators such as Monarch butterflies and honey bees. It is carefully maintained by NOT MOWING it until the plants have the time to produce and spread seeds. Use the QR reader to gain more information about the Xerces Society and the efforts to protect our pollinators.

Go back to that intersection and follow the unmarked white arrow and the sign pointing to the Flanders, Sugar House.

You will come to a wooden arrow on a post. Turn to the right and walk across the dam. Climb the little hill at the far end of the dam and turn right to pass the trail house. Cross Church Hill Road and return to your car.



CHECKLIST FOR VAN VLECK FARM AND SANCTUARY TAKE A HIKE SERIES

Did you see:

A Monarch butterfly _____

A garden created to support monarch butterflies _____

A fairy's or wizard's house _____

An Eastern Bluebird house _____

Natalie's bench _____

A dam _____

A carefully un-mowed pollinator garden _____

Multiflora Rose _____