



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

Church Hill Rd., Woodbury

Planted 2015 / **Revised 2024**

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.

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. 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 are not mentioned. Some of the observations for the Take a Hike Series were made during the fall. Some were made in the spring.

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 is 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, bee balm and many more. Enter the garden, 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 on a post.

Notice the oak trees on your right. There will be many oak leaves and acorns on the trail. Do all the acorns on the ground look the same? You can identify the kind of oak tree by the acorn it produces. Some have pointed ends. Some have scaly cupules (the cap). Some acorns are almost completely covered by the cupule. Some acorns grow in pairs.

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.

On the ground you will find shells from hickory nuts. The nuts have probably all been eaten. Originally the nuts were enclosed in a shell composed of 4 ribs. The brownish shells were covered by a reddish to black husk with 4 ribs. When the nut is ripe, the husk splits apart. If you try to put 4 pieces of the shell back together, you will see the spot where the nut used to be. These hickory nuts came from the Shagbark Hickory trees that you can see in the edge of the woods. The bark of mature Shagbark Hickory trees (*Carya ovata*) has long scales that curl up at the ends.

In the middle of the field you will see "cages." Please do not touch them. These are part of a 5 year National Science Foundation research project being conducted by Dr. Oswald Schmitz and his team from the Yale School of the Environment. They are studying the ways in which grasshoppers adapt as the environment changes.

After you have gone down one side of the field, turn right and cross the end of the field. At the next corner, you will see a tree with a white wooden arrow on it. Eventually you will follow that arrow to the right continuing along the next side 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 passport, 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**(*Rosa multiflora*). 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 - the curved thorns can really grab you.

There are more grasshopper cages on this side of the field. One of them has a QR code that you can use to learn more about the experiment.

You will begin to see blue bird houses.

You will pass several more bluebird houses. 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 bluebird houses are almost always planted in pairs about 10 feet apart. One will be occupied by tree swallows and the second by bluebirds. This helps the bluebird because the territorial tree swallow will chase away other birds. The population has now reached a sustainable level.

These bluebird houses are built by, erected by and maintained by **Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust VOLUNTEERS**.

At the corner of the field the trail splits. There is a post with multiple white arrows on it. One branch of the trail continues to your right and goes back to the spot where you entered the field. Do not go that way. Instead, follow the unmarked wooden arrow and turn slightly to your left. You will walk on a trail between two wetlands. You will cross a stream and enter another field. To your right and up a hill you will see a red barn. Walk in that direction. 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 uphill to a 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. Before you actually get to the pond, turn to your right and cross a bridge. The pond will now be on your left. Ahead of you there is a stone bench. Read the inscription on the bench. Then sit for a minute and listen to a bird's song.

Go back to the Farm Trail sign. Do not take the trail that goes uphill. Instead, go to the left of the sign. Take "the long trail" and keep the pond on your left.

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 uphill. As you climb the hill you will see more shagbark hickory trees on your right. A lot of hickory nut shells will be under your feet. Before the top of the hill, turn slightly right toward a bluebird house and two stone benches.

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

Look around. You will see arrows on a post. Go between the post with arrows and a bluebird house. Turn to your right and follow a white arrow.

On your right there are young trees planted behind a fence. These are part of an effort to promote permaculture.

- sustainable and self-sufficient land management. Don Maki, a Flanders Volunteer, and Dr. Brett Lehner from the UMASS Memorial Medical Center, have planted *Prunus americanus*, a native plum tree, and *Asimina triloba* also known as paw paw trees.

Just before you reach Church Hill Road, you will come to a trail intersection with signs and arrows on a post. Follow the unmarked white arrow and the sign pointing to the Flanders, Sugar House.

You will cross a boardwalk. At the end of it, continue on the white trail by climbing a small hill, turning to your right and walking on top of an earthen 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 VANVLECK FARM AND SANCTUARY TAKE A HIKE SERIES

Did you see:

A Monarch butterfly

A garden created to support monarch butterflies

An Eastern Bluebird house

Natalie's bench

Adam

A grasshopper

Multiflora Rose

A Pawpaw tree

A Shagbark Hickory Tree