UNH Tree Walk Podcast Offers Fresh View of Campus

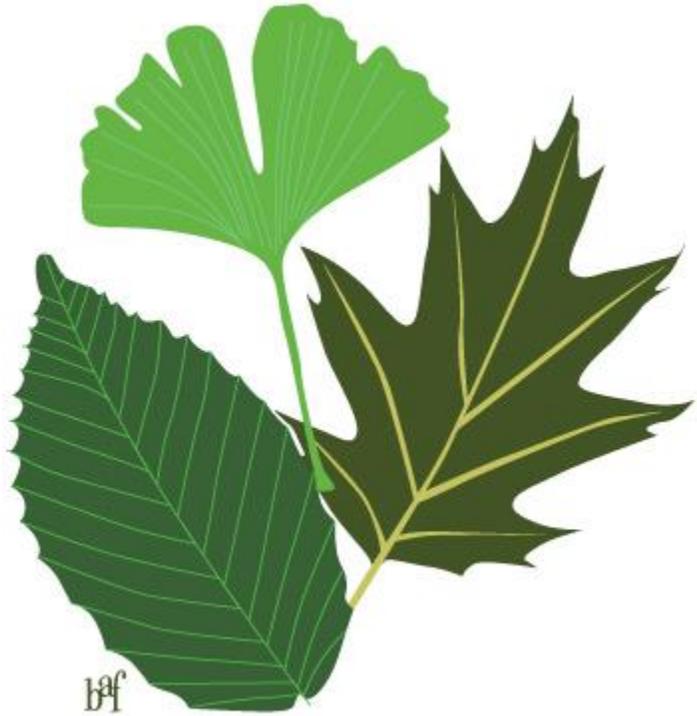**Thursday, July 12, 2012**

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Tree Talk

Looking for a new way to stretch your legs between reading chapters of "War and Peace" this summer? Take heart, the Sustainability Academy's UNH Tree Walk podcast can get you going on a fun stroll around campus that will invariably conclude not too far from a place that sells lemonade.

Download the two podcasts and map from UNH's Sustainability Academy. Each podcast is a little more than 30 minutes, has accompanying photos, and a cool soundtrack. Part I of the walk begins at the Memorial Union Building and ends at Thompson Hall. Part II begins at Thompson Hall, threads between Morrill and DeMeritt Halls, goes up to the library, past Hamilton Smith Hall, and ends in front of Hood House. The whole walk is handicap accessible.

What, you may wonder, could be so remarkable in such a short journey? Well, as it turns out, quite a lot.

Initially there's a review of simple botanical terms: compound leaves, alternate and opposite patterns, deeply incised leaves, rough or smooth bark, etc. Plus you see some different varieties of oaks. Walk further and get a news flash from 2010, when a storm caused the campus to lose its Colorado blue spruce. Then, enjoy the dappled shade under two mature honey locust trees.

So far so good! After a short lesson in maples—Norway, red, and sugar—it's all going pretty easily now, but here comes the kicker. All these years, you've moseyed by a nice row of small elm-like trees on the way to Thompson Hall. Turns out they're Japanese zelkovas. That's right. Look again.

Other highlights include the ginkgo tree by James Hall. Come October, the ginkgo will lose all its leaves in just one day. Show up on that day, catch a leaf before it hits the ground, and luck will be with you for the year to come. Promise!

The ravine, viewed on a bluff beside the library, is a wild forest tangle that has been called the "ecological heart of campus." Ironically, many invasive species dominate here. When you arrive at the sustainable landscape in front of Hood House, the narrator asks, "Would you like a garden like this at your house?" With all the native plant species to attract catbirds and butterflies, you would.

The Tree Walk introduces you to the history of the Durham along with the University's commitment to sustainability. White pines are the most common species on campus and there are several beautiful old specimens along the walk. But, easy to scurry by, are also many saplings. These include a young horse chestnut, American elm, and American beech. All have the potential to become giant trees. In that sense, these young trees are a bit like UNH students.

John Hart, professor of horticultural technology, who wrote the Tree Walk script, comments: "The larger context of 'landscaping' is not a tutu of shrubbery around a house. In the best landscape design the 'house' exists in an ecological system that filters and stores water, cleans and oxygenates the air, recycles organic nutrients, builds healthy soil biology, creates habitat, while providing food, utility, and aesthetic enjoyment for people."

Our advice? Put the book down, get out of the house, and give the UNH Tree Walk podcast a whirl. You'll be rewarded with a rich and lasting understanding of campus flora.

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