

STONY MAN



T R A I L



WELCOME TO SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK.

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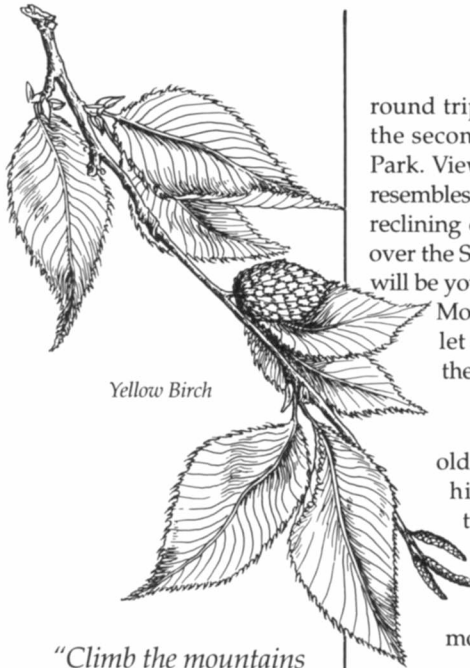
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Yellow Birch

*"Climb the mountains
and get their good
tidings. Nature's
peace will flow into
you as sunshine flows
into trees. The winds
will blow their own
freshness into you,
and the storms their
energy, while cares
will drop off like
autumn leaves."*

—John Muir

STONY MAN TRAIL

You are starting a 1½-mile round trip to the summit of Stony Man Mountain, the second highest peak in Shenandoah National Park. Viewed from the north, Stony Man Mountain resembles the face of a bearded man. He appears to be reclining on the slope of the Blue Ridge, gazing out over the Shenandoah Valley to the west. This booklet will be your guide as you begin to explore Stony Man Mountain. The numbered sections in this booklet correspond to the numbered posts along the trail.

1 Stony Man Mountain is both old and new. You will learn the meaning behind this curious paradox as you hike through the young forest, alive with newness and change, to the ancient rocks on its 4,010' summit. Stony Man will be your teacher as you climb up its tree-clad mountainside.

2 How old do you think these trees are? When the first settlers arrived, they saw a dense forest of huge chestnuts and oaks which had developed over thousands of years. However, the forest which once grew on Stony Man has been altered at the hands of man and is young, again becoming a mature forest. Many of these trees are less than 100 years old.

3 The signs of aging and of change surround you in obvious and subtle ways. Can you find seeds or cones on the surrounding trees or on the forest floor? Perhaps there are seeds lying dormant in the soil, or just beginning to sprout, creating a fairyland at your feet. Seeds are life packages, containing the tiny beginnings of plants, and they are everywhere! The incredible variety of seeds is a bridge to future generations of plants.



*"The wonder of the
world, the beauty and
the power, the shapes
of things, their colors,
lights and shades—
these I saw. Look ye
also while life lasts."
—from tombstone
in England*

4 Nature's changes can surprise and astound. This yellow birch is splitting the rock apart! Over a long period of time, perhaps millions of years, cracks developed in the rock from freezing and thawing. These cracks began to collect soil and, possibly 50 or 75 years ago, a yellow birch seed fell onto this soil and sprouted. It sent long roots down to find moisture and nutrients and the growing roots continue to slowly pry the rock apart.

5 Stony Man's forest changed forever when all of its large chestnut trees died. Sadly, a fungus disease killed the American chestnuts by the early 1930's. Because chestnut wood contains tannin, a natural preservative, the wood is resistant to decay. The grayish dead trees and logs, like the one found here, can still be found throughout the mountains.

When this chestnut tree fell, many forms of life began to live on, under and in the log. A variety of fungi continue to absorb its nutrients and are helping to decompose it. Beetles, termites, and millipedes chew at the wood, while ants, salamanders, and other animals find refuge under it. Even in death, the chestnut gives to Stony Man's forest as the ongoing changes eventually create a rich and fertile soil to nourish future life.

6 Some changes occur when nature is harsh. A mountainside receives more rain, wind, snow, frost, and ice than the sheltered coves. Twisted, gnarled, and stunted trees are living testaments to the fierce elements of weather and to the strength and endurance of these trees.

What do you think happened to this white oak tree? How might its shape change over time?

7 Seasons are a natural recycling of the earth, bringing constant change and renewal. Each season has its own distinctive sounds, colors and moods.

Summer brings a gentle rustling of oak leaves amid a soft quietness, tree frogs calling in the gathering dusk, and ferns swaying in the breeze.

Autumn's gifts are nuts falling amidst the glorious colors, the migration of hawks, and a mushroom paradise.

As winter closes in, its gifts are silently falling snow, the snap of an icy branch and chickadee calls.

Then, suddenly, it is spring, and a flood of wildflowers blankets Stony Man along with birdsong, reappearance of the chipmunks, and delicate shades of green.

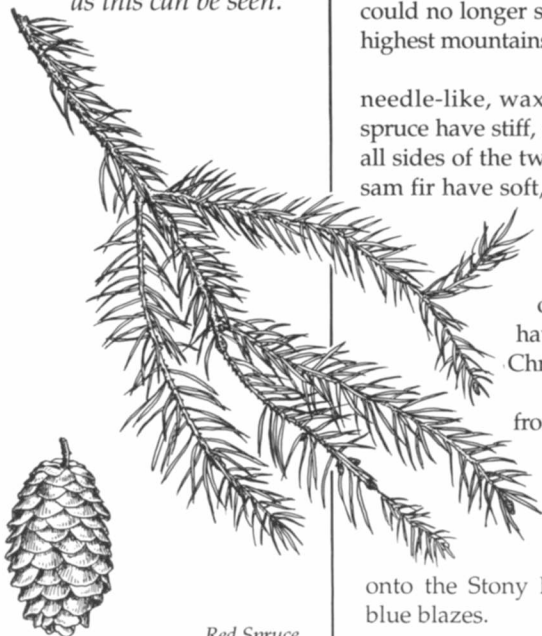
Each season brings beauty and change to Stony Man Mountain. But seasons are only a moment in time compared to the eons of change that Stony Man has known.

*"Wherever we go in
the mountains, we
find more than
we seek."*

—John Muir



*"Another heaven and
earth must pass
Before another such
as this can be seen."*



Red Spruce

8 Long ago, the climate here was cooler and trees such as red spruce and Balsam fir, more typical of Canada today, were abundant. Because of the dense forest canopy that these ever-green trees provide, the forest was very dark and quiet, and few small plants grew on the forest floor. When the climate became warmer, the spruce and fir could no longer survive this far south except on the highest mountains, like Stony Man.

The spruce and fir have needle-like, waxy leaves to help save water. Red spruce have stiff, sharp needles which extend out on all sides of the twig; its cones grow downward. Balsam fir have soft, flat needles, each with two white lines beneath; its cones grow upward. You will not find fir cones on the forest floor; they fall apart on the tree when ripe. Balsam fir have an aromatic smell reminiscent of Christmas!

These trees are true relics from a time long gone.

About 120 yards beyond this post, the white-blazed Appalachian Trail turns to the right. At this point walk straight ahead onto the Stony Man Trail, which is marked with blue blazes.

9 When the climate changed, about 10,000 years ago, the deciduous forest of oak and chestnut slowly began developing. Until the chestnut blight, nearly one out of every three trees was an American chestnut. This tree was important to the forest and to the wildlife. Mountain residents sold the nuts or bartered them and used the wood and bark for a variety of purposes. Young chestnuts, such as the young sapling to the right of the post, continue to grow from the living roots, but will eventually be infected with the fungus.

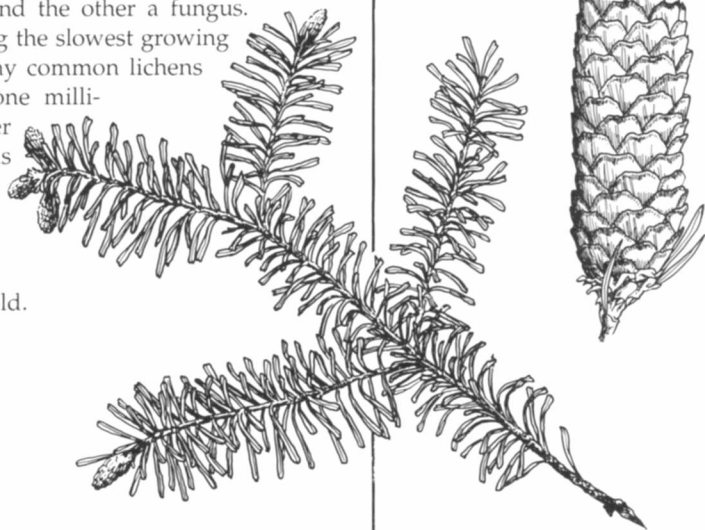
The fungus which decimated the American chestnut was unintentionally introduced from Asia. Native fungi play an important role as decomposers in nature's balance. Foreign plants and animals tend to upset this balance, with sometimes tragic results as in the case of the American chestnut.

10 When the chestnuts died, the oaks took over as the dominant trees in much of Shenandoah. An oak forest supports an amazing diversity of life. The acorns from these large oaks will feed many of Shenandoah's animals—squirrels, chipmunks, bear, deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, smaller birds, and countless insects. Well over 1,000 different kinds of trees, shrubs and smaller plants live and grow in Shenandoah's forest!

In the summer months, before the smaller plants die back for the winter, at least 32 different species of plants grow within 10 feet of the place where you stand! How many can you count?

About 70 yards beyond this post, just after a sharp right turn, the Stony Man Trail becomes a loop trail. Take the path to the RIGHT here to advance to post 11. Follow the blue blazes around the entire loop – to pass the posts leading to the summit, and then to pass the last 3 posts on the return side of the loop.

11 Lichens are primitive plants that can live on the barren surface of Stony Man's rocks. A lichen is actually two plants living together, one an alga and the other a fungus. Lichens are among the slowest growing of all plants. Many common lichens grow less than one millimeter in diameter per year! Lichens can survive periods of drought, heavy rainfall, extreme heat, and bitter cold.



Balsam Fir



*"Every part of nature
teaches that the
passing away of one
life is the making of
room for another."
—Thoreau*

12 The forces of nature can bring swift and sudden change, but from death comes newness. This red oak, struck and killed by lightning in 1987, is alive with life! Over time, more and more changes will be apparent as fungi and insects invade the tree. Chips and sawdust will rain from the trunk as insect residents excavate nests. Perhaps elongated holes will appear on the trunk, signalling the presence of the pileated woodpecker. Standing dead trees are important to Stony Man's wildlife as they serve forest animals with perches for hunting, den sites, nesting cavities, and safe and secure sanctuary from predators. A standing dead tree is nature's gift.

13 Stony Man Mountain is rich with the lives of those people who lived before us. In the distance is Nicholson Hollow, one of many isolated hollows where people built cabins and worked small subsistence farms with their gardens and hillside of corn. These people, as well as outside lumbermen and absentee landowners, altered the mountain landscape until the Park was established in 1935. Only a small portion of Stony Man is in its virgin condition because of the large numbers of oaks and chestnuts which were taken, either for building purposes or to be carried to sawmills or tanneries. Stony Man's adolescent trees are a tribute to the wealth this forest gave to the people who once lived in this area.

Soon, from the top of Stony Man, you will see a view to the west, over the Shenandoah Valley. Here, looking east, the view is of the Piedmont, a gently rolling landscape which slopes gradually toward the ocean. The ragged, rocky peak of Old Rag Mountain frames your view to the right.

14 The rocks you see around you are very ancient. 800 million years ago, there was tremendous volcanic activity in this area until a total of 12 lava flows, over hundreds of years, eventually added 1,800' of volcanic rock. This rock was slowly changed over time to GREENSTONE, the rocks exposed on Stony Man today.

This mountain has a long history of uplifting and erosion. About 200 million years ago, several of the earth's plates moved together, folding and pushing the land upward. This created the Appalachian Mountains, of which Stony Man is a part.

A close look at the rocks will reveal the presence of minerals of different colors and textures. Mineral deposits once drew people to Stony Man in search of the riches that could be found here.

15 Scattered copper mining sites such as this one can be found on Stony Man, but are becoming less apparent as nature reclaims the land. In the 1800's, nuggets of native copper were found on the forest floor. The copper ore was hard to work and mines were abandoned before 1850.

George Freeman Pollock, founder of Skyland and ardent naturalist, originally came to Stony Man Mountain to search for mammals for the Smithsonian Institute and to inspect his father's copper mining interest here. Visiting Stony Man for the first time, George was deeply moved by what to him was an almost unbelievable beauty. His enthusiasm for the natural and recreational values of this mountain was a strong force in the creation of Shenandoah National Park.

*"This mountain gave
our ancestors
strength."*

—George Freeman Pollock



*"Climb, climb and
climb; up, up and up,
as though we were
going into the sky.
Was I thrilled! The
wind blew hard and it
was cold, but I did not
feel it...a veritable
paradise on earth!"*

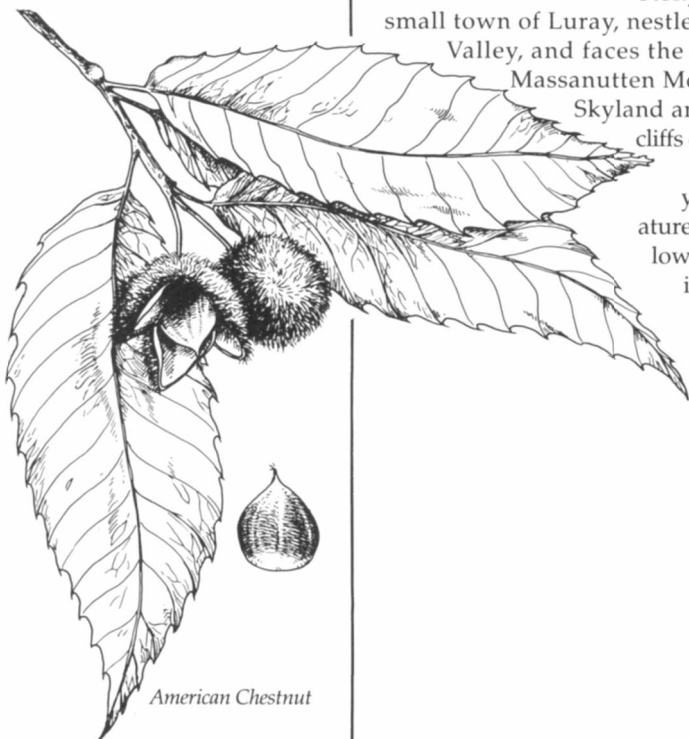
—George Freeman Pollock

16 Just ahead are the rock cliffs of Stony Man. You are standing at 4,010' above sea level, some 300' higher than the parking lot where this trail began, and 3,000' above the floor of the Shenandoah Valley. The forest on this rocky, exposed peak looks quite different from the forest in which your walk began. Ice and wind shape the small, gnarled trees. Evergreens such as red spruce, balsam fir, and white pine thrive in the drying winds and cold temperatures to grow here in greater numbers. Frequent fog and rain alternating with drying winds encourage the growth of lichens on nearly every exposed surface.

17 You are standing at the top of Stony Man's "forehead." If you were to view this mountain from Stony Man Overlook, north of Skyland, you would see a space for his eyes, his long rock nose, and his tree-covered beard. Stony Man looks to the west and slightly upward into the high mountain sky.

Stony Man rises above the small town of Luray, nestled in the Shenandoah Valley, and faces the distant ridges of the Massanutten Mountain. To the left is Skyland and to the right are the cliffs of Little Stony Man.

These rocks invite you to rest. The temperature on Stony Man will be lower than at other places in the Park; perhaps a breeze is sweeping upward from the



American Chestnut

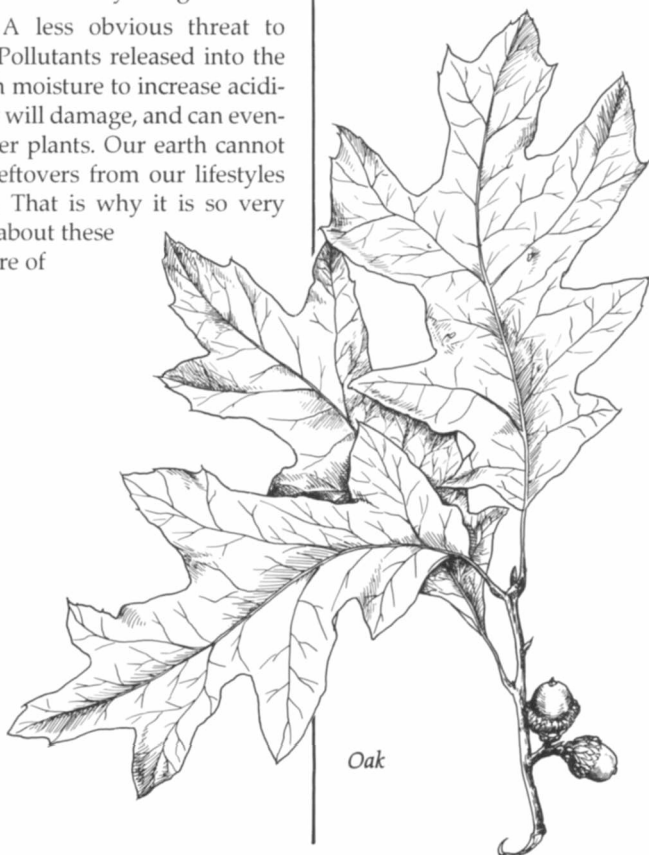
Shenandoah Valley. The patterns displayed on hills and valleys, ridge after ridge, will change as you watch. Turkey vultures frequently soar on updrafts and the acrobatic ravens can amuse you for hours with their aerial flips and croaking calls.

Wind, water, weather, freezing, and thawing will continue to chip away at Stony Man's face. But changes will come slowly to these resistant rocks and the mountain face will not change significantly in our lifetimes, a blur in time compared to Stony Man's age.

18 Even though the ancient, giant rocks will change very slowly over time, the harsh elements of nature will continue to shape Stony Man's forest. Human forces also bring change. Here on Stony Man Mountain and throughout Shenandoah you will see the effects of impacts like fire and ice storms. You will also see the results of the gypsy moth and the hemlock woolly adelgid.

A less obvious threat to these trees is acid rain. Pollutants released into the atmosphere interact with moisture to increase acidity in rainfall. This acidity will damage, and can eventually kill, trees and other plants. Our earth cannot continue to accept the leftovers from our lifestyles without showing stress. That is why it is so very important for us to care about these trees, and about the future of this fragile mountain.

*"What heart would
not be lifted...while
seated on Stony Man,
overlooking the valley?"
—In tribute to George
Freeman Pollock, 1949*





*"The days that make
us happy, make
us wise."*

—John Masefield

19 Stony Man gives pleasure just by being. A single day among its forest and upon its summit can bring peace as you experience the silence of this mountain, the joy in its breezes, the music of its birds, the strength of its trees. Stony Man is ever-changing, through the year and throughout history.

Stony Man's story is written for us in its relic trees, its dead snags, its seasons of growth and of rest, its weathered rocks etched with lichens, its struggling chestnuts, its strong oaks. Here on this ancient and young mountain is a sanctuary for plants and animals, and for the people who love them.

20 To prepare for the future, we should study the past. Wisdom comes only from close observation of the earth. Few of us live much more than 100 years in this world that counts its age in billions of years. Significant changes in earth's delicate web of life can occur in an incredibly short period of time. It is difficult to predict the consequences of our actions, but we can see trends and we can change our lifestyles to live more harmoniously with this earth.

THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS:



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SKYLAND AREA

TRAIL MAP FOR STONY MAN TRAIL AND TRAIL TO LITTLE STONY MAN

