



GEOCACHING AT CLAYTOR NATURE STUDY CENTER

Geocaching is a worldwide treasure hunt using GPS devices. There are millions of caches hidden all over the world and over 6 million cachers looking for them. You can learn more about Geocaching at: www.geocaching.com. And, you can download the free app and start playing today!

Here at Claytor Nature Study Center (CSNC), there are five caches on the property. They are along or near our 7.5 miles of trails. If you choose to look for these caches while you are here, this sheet will give you some information about some of the natural features near each cache.

Before we begin, a big shoutout goes to *GreerX4*, the cacher who placed and maintains the caches here at CNSC.

North side of the Big Otter River:

Castle Rock Tree (Cache GC3KQRC)

Near the cache, turn and admire the interlocked roots of two very old Walnut trees. Note the profuse moss on the trees. They've been here a long while in a darker, wetter environment. Walnuts are also *allelopathic*, meaning they leach chemicals into the ground to reduce competition. If you continue on this trail uphill, you'll go through a more open *upland forest* of Poplars and Oaks, with much less *understory*.

River's Edge (GC3KQPX)

At the cache site, you will see vegetation and trees typical on a river *flood plain*. Sycamore, Birch and some Poplar are found here as well as a significant number of *understory* trees. This area can flood, and thus the soil is moist to wet, and rich. Japanese stilt grass (an *invasive species*) also grows here in abundance.

Between *River's Edge* and *Castle Rock Tree*, you'll find a nice bench along the path. You can sit and admire the large rocks weathered by water and time.

Otter Fury (GC3KQTG)

Here, we're further away from the river and on the edge of a rise with many large rocks protruding. Uphill, the forest changes from *flood plain* to *upland forest*. This area is dark and wet even in the summer, and you can see that moss grows high on the tree trunks.

Along the path there is lots of spicebush and paw-paw. In autumn you can see the red spicebush berries and the green paw-paw fruits.

South side of the Big Otter River:

Bog Garden (GC3MDJ3)

If you've crossed the Big Otter to the south side, you're on the wooden path that goes toward the *Bog Garden* trail. Look around at the young trees. What caused the earlier forest to die? Beaver? Fire? Logging?

As you move toward the cache, you'll walk through a wet, dark forest, and as a result, be able to enjoy a profusion of ferns on the forest floor and lining a small creek downhill from the trail.

Boyd's Lake (GC3MDGH)

The open space near the lake is both field and transitional forest and is a good habitat for many species of mammals, reptiles and birds. Young Poplars are growing up through both White and Virginia pines as well as some Cedars. If you walk by the lake, you'll see a standing dead tree, also known as a snag, which provides valuable habitat for nesting birds, insects and woodpeckers.

Glossary:

Allelopathy: The suppression of growth of a plant by the release of a toxin from a nearby plant.

Bog: Wet, spongy ground with soil composed mainly of decayed vegetable matter.

Flood Plain: A nearly flat plain along the course of a stream or river that is naturally subject to flooding.

Invasive Species: Introduced species (also called "non-indigenous" or "non-native") that adversely affect the habitats and bioregions they invade economically, environmentally, or ecologically.

Understory: The shrubs and plants growing beneath the main canopy of a forest.

Upland Forest: Upland hardwood forests are characterized by a distinct overstory of shade tolerant, deciduous trees with an *understory* of wood shrubs and herbaceous ground cover plants.