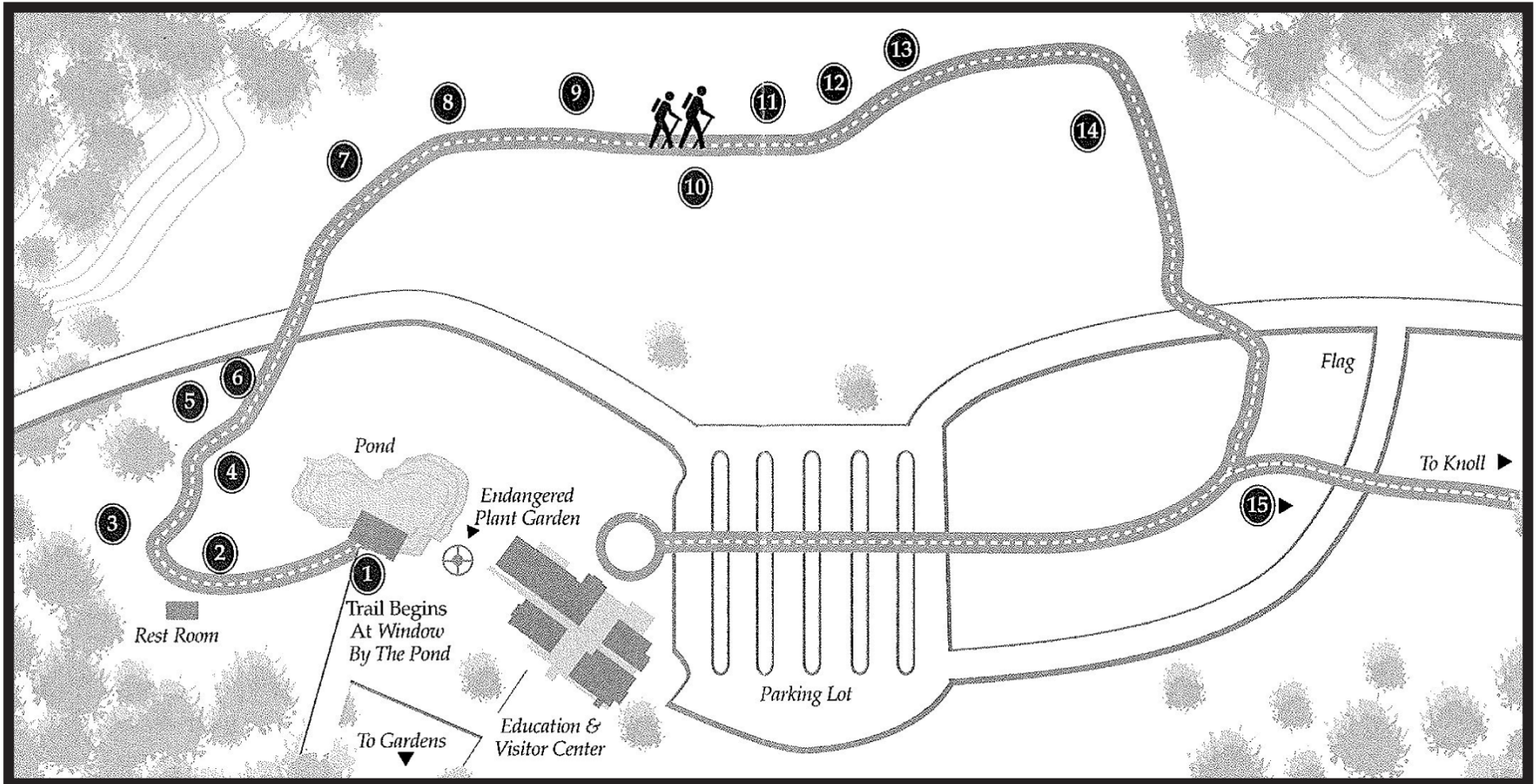


Pine Ridge Nature Trail



The Pine Ridge Nature Trail at Bok Tower Gardens is a longleaf pine/turkey oak habitat. The 3/4-mile walking trail takes you through this unique habitat that once covered millions of acres of the Southeastern United States. The longleaf pine forest is now in danger of disappearing. Fortunately, we have been able to preserve a portion of this habitat for visitors to experience and learn from. The trail begins near Window by the Pond and ends at the Visitor Center and parking lot area.

1. WINDOW BY THE POND BOG GARDEN

This is an example of a herbaceous Florida bog. Bogs are wetlands which are important for water filtration and storage, as well as for amphibian procreation. At its edge, look for the yellow Florida tickseed (*Coreopsis floridana*), the state wildflower. The red cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and yellow canna (*Canna flaccida*) add summer color. Other bog plants include duck potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepia perennis*) and swamp fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*).

2. OPEN GLADE This is a restoration in progress of the longleaf pine forest community. The prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) is prevalent. This is a favorite food of the gopher tortoise (*Gophens polyphemus*), a species whose numbers are rapidly declining as their habitat disappears. These lumbering tortoises build burrows up to 10-feet deep and 30-feet long. Gopher tortoises are particularly important as keystone species because their burrows provide shelter for a number of animals. In fact, a total of 350 different animal species have been documented as inhabiting a burrow, including the rare indigo snake, Florida mouse and gopher frog.

3. SAW PALMETTO (*Serenoa repens*) This slow-growing palm may be well over 100 years old. The name comes from the saw-like teeth along the petiole of the leaves. For Native Americans, the black fruits were an important food source. Today, the berries are eaten by wildlife and used for medicinal purposes.

4. SCRUB This area contains a small collection of plants native to the scrub habitat. The scrub habitat differs from the longleaf pine habitat in that it has less ground cover. The well-drained, sandy soil is practically devoid of silt, clay and organic matter, making it low in nutrients. Large patches of bare sand and sparse ground cover are typical of scrub.

5. SAND PINE (*Pinus clausa*) These trees are common on well-drained, infertile soils of white sand scrub and coastal dunes. The cones of many sand pines will remain closed after

maturing and only open when exposed to fire. This adaptation allows fresh pine seeds to be scattered after the ground has been cleared of debris by fire.

6. SCRUB LIVE OAK CANOPY (*Quercus germinata*) This canopy of oaks is evergreen, hence the name live oak. Dead trees left standing are referred to as snags. The many insects that inhabit and seek shelter within snags provide food to various species of wildlife.

7. SANDHILL FOREST After crossing the road, you enter a forest that is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world. Once covering 60 million acres in the prehistoric South, the sandhill forests have been reduced by 98 percent. The dominant tree species of the sandhill are the longleaf pine and the turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*). The turkey oak is deciduous, unlike the scrub live oak mentioned previously.

8. WIREGRASS A thick ground cover, wiregrass flowers only if it has burned during the spring or summer. Wiregrass spreads very slowly. A single clump may be 20 years old or older, yet it responds quickly after a burn with an initial flush of growth of one-half inch per day. The flammable wiregrass allows the fire to spread through the sandhill community and is considered one of the more important plant species in sustaining the fire-adapted sandhill forest.

9. TURPENTINE PRODUCTION This longleaf pine stump bears the scars of turpentine collection, once a pioneer industry in the area. These scars did not kill the tree, The diagonal slashes were made to induce sap flow. The pine sap dripped into clay pots hung on the tree, then was processed into turpentine, pitch and tar. Turpentine was an important solvent. Pitch and tar were used in wood shipbuilding industry for waterproofing.

10. THE LONGLEAF PINE Of all the pines, the longleaf is the most fire-adapted. The young seedling pines look much like a grass in their early stage. In this stage, the tree is able to survive the heat of the fire by having its growth

buds close to the ground. The grass stage will last 3 to 12 years while the longleaf establishes its deep root system, Once its deep taproot is established, the pine enters a shoot stage and rapidly grows upward, appearing much like a broomstick. The thick and multi-layered bark of the adult longleaf pine acts as insulation against damage by fire.

11. OAK DOME OF SCRUB LIVE OAKS This is actually a single plant with many trunks connected by an extensive root system. The scrub live oak occurs in sandhill ecosystems where fire had been excluded for many years. One goal of the prescribed burn programs is to reduce the number of live oak trees in the preserve that shade out the sandhill plants.

12. SANDHILL FOREST Fall is the most colorful time of the year in the sandhill forest. Many plants are in bloom after the summer rainy season. Fire also encourages plant growth and flowering. Within days after a burn, new tender plant growth appears, providing food for wildlife. This natural cycle, which has occurred in nature for thousands of years, sustains the delicate balance of the important, majestic longleaf pine community.

13. KISSIMMEE RIVER PLAIN To the east, these picturesque lowlands were once part of the ocean floor. The body of water in the distance is Lake Pierce. The waters of this area flow to the Kissimmee River and on to the Everglades.

14. LIVE OAK TREE The magnificent spreading branches provide the perfect shade for reading a book or taking a nap.

15. THE KNOLL This trail takes you to the Knoll, where you can enjoy a grand view of the countryside. The majestic snag was planted as a raptor perch, and visitors often can see a raptor searching for prey. This trail connects to the Preserve Trail which continues to our entrance gate.