This trail is dedicated to the memory of Dr. James Ray Watson (1935-2006), retired professor of botany at Mississippi State University. Dr. Watson, who taught dendrology (the study of tree anatomy, plants, trees, shrubs, vines) for many years, frequently utilized the forests of Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge for outdoor laboratory sessions with his students. He also enjoyed hunting, birdwatching, and other outdoor experiences on the Refuge and in nearby forests.

One of his favorite trees was the cherrybark oak, a highly prized red oak for both wildlife and timber. You can see several nice specimens along the trail. Dr. Watson enjoyed the writings of Edward Abbey, especially this quote: "The idea of wilderness needs no defense. It only needs more defenders."

He was a charter member of the Friends of Noxubee Refuge (FONR), a nonprofit organization providing support and assistance to refuge programs and projects. After his death, members of FONR and many others in the surrounding communities donated funds to establish this interpretative trail in honor of Dr. Watson.

This walking trail originates and ends directly across the road from the Refuge Headquarters and Visitor Center. Approximately 1 mile long, it will take you through a typical gulf hardwood forest of the upper Coastal Plain. This is not a virgin forest but a second-growth stand that has existed in nature under "wild" conditions, with no trees having been planted here by man. Before the federal government acquired this land in the 1930s, it was under cultivation. In fact, if one looks closely along the trail, a few old elevated plows can still be seen.

More recent evidence of human activity is the bowfire fence lines that were planted by refuge personnel to prevent the spread of forest trees. Although only about 11 miles south of the Noxubee National Refuge, the trail will lead into a "second-growth" forest, but not a "second growth," or "second" site within the refuge's floodplain.

The trail is laid out to return users to the starting point (trailhead). There are over 30 species of trees, shrubs, and woody vines that have been identified along the trail. Examples of each are marked by numbered signs and plant identification markers. There are numerous examples of most species along the trail, but only one will be marked with a sign. The location of the numbers' leaves in this brochure indicates whether the plant is on the left or the right side of the trail and a symbol identifies deciduous or evergreen plants.

Scientific names of all plants follow the taxonomy of the USDA Plants Database, NRCS 2009. "Tissues of blooming or flowering are specific to Northern Mississippi."

More information and photographs of leaves and fruits or seeds are included on the hand-held electronic devices available for check-out at the reception desk in the Visitor Center.

Deciduous plants (lose all leaves for part of the year)

Evergreen plants (retain leaves year-round)

White Oak (Quercus alba)

White oak is one of the most familiar oaks in the eastern United States, as it occurs in every state east of the Mississippi River. It grows on a wide variety of soils and sites, but best development is on well-drained sandy soils where it may reach 100 feet in height. The wood of white oak is used to make barrel staves, leading many people to call this oak "drum oak.

White oak seeds are in acorns, which may be up to 1 inch long. A large tree can produce over 20,000 acorns per year. More than 100 species of birds and animals may feed on its acorns.

American Hornbeam (Carpinus caroliniana)

Modern hornbeam is found primarily on dry, upland soils, but it also grows on moist-bottomlands. The wood of this tree is strong and hard, making it valuable for tool handles, lobster traps, poles, shafts, and athletic equipment. It is also excellent for firewood and charcoal production. The 1 to 1 ½ inch long nuts are embedded in thick hooves. Squirrels love these nuts as well as they eat them green (unripened). Other wildlife that feed on the acorns include black bears, foxes, rabbits, deer, and birds.

Mockernut Hickory (Carya tomentosa)

Mockernut hickory is found primarily on dry, upland soils, but it also grows on moist-bottomlands. The wood of this tree is strong and hard, making it valuable for tool handles, lobster traps, poles, shafts, and athletic equipment. It is also excellent for firewood and charcoal production. The 1 to 1 ½ inch long nuts are embedded in thick hooves. Squirrels love these nuts as well as they eat them green (unripened). Other wildlife that feed on the acorns include black bears, foxes, rabbits, deer, and birds.

American Hornbeam, also called ironwood or musclewood, occurs throughout the eastern United States and into Canada. It grows on many sites, but the best development is in rich stream bottoms. Tree trunks are small, resembling a fir tree but its wood is very hard. It is used to make arrows and spears products like tool handles and wedges. The fruit is a small, ribbed nutlet that occurs in groups of 1 to 4. They are a favorite food of squirrels and are also eaten by a number of birds, including blue jays, quail, turkeys, and many songbirds.
BAYATT VINE
Begonia semperflorens
Four to five feet in height, this vine is beautiful, with its bell or trumpet-like flowers. It is deciduous and its leaves appear in the spring. It is very easy to grow and requires a lot of indirect sunlight. The flowers bloom throughout the summer and will attract hummingbirds. It is also very hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5.

BLACK CHERRY
Prunus serotina
Black cherry trees are very popular in the western United States. They are tough and very adaptable to various climates and soil types. They are also quite easy to care for, requiring little maintenance. The dark red cherries are delicious and can be enjoyed fresh or dried for use in desserts.

BLACK CHERNY
Prunus avium
Another popular fruit tree, the black cherry is known for its dark, sweet cherries. It is quite hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. The cherries are usually harvested in the fall and can be used in a variety of dishes, from pies to jams.

BLACK LOCUST
Robinia pseudoacacia
Black locust trees are very common in the eastern United States. They are fast-growing and can reach heights of up to 60 feet. The flowers are yellow and bloom in the spring. The seed pods are pod-shaped and contain 8 to 10 seeds each. These trees are quite adaptable to various soil types and can be used for erosion control.

BLACKBERRY
Rubus occidentalis
Blackberries are very hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. They are quite easy to care for and can produce large, tasty berries. Blackberries are a great addition to any fruit garden.

BLACKWOOD
Gleditsia triacanthos
Blackwood is a deciduous tree that is fast-growing and can reach heights of up to 80 feet. The leaves are compound and turn yellow in the fall. The tree is quite hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. It is also quite adaptable to various soil types.

BLUEBERRY
Vaccinium angustifolium
Blueberries are a popular fruit that is quite hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. They are quite easy to care for and can produce large, juicy berries. Blueberries are a great addition to any fruit garden.

BLUEBELL
Hyacinthoides non-scripta
Bluebells are a beautiful spring flower that is quite hardy and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. They are quite easy to care for and can add a pop of color to any garden.

BLOOMING ROYAL
Regal Lilies
These lilies are deciduous and can survive cold winters in Zone 5. They are quite easy to care for and can produce large, beautiful flowers. They are a great addition to any garden.

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