

Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge

Driving into this reserve, you will be impressed by the big country view of the Presidential Range and other mountain ranges rising out of the valley. They seem to always be in the background providing grand views wherever you go. This is an easy trail starting in Whitefield, going in about 1.7 miles along an abandoned railroad bed, and ending up in Jefferson, New Hampshire. The trip will take you into Cherry Pond with one of the best mountain views in the state, then off the main trail and through the spruce, fir, and tamarack woods to Little Cherry Pond. Along the way you will see a few county champion trees, a state champ, and the National Champion black spruce. The first tree to see is the white spruce, about a quarter mile in on the right and about sixty feet or so off the trail just over a wire fence. Some smaller trees have been removed in the immediate area to allow a nice view of this state champion spruce. You can notice the fuller foliage from the ground up and the very light gray bark, which differentiates the white spruce from the other spruces. White spruce also can get considerably larger than red or black spruce.

Spruce has many uses in the building of boats. The lumber is light in weight and strong, and holds fastenings much better than pine or cedar. I use it for things such as gunwales, deck beams, and carlins, where lighter wood is important but screws or nails must hold well. If the tree is cut about three feet above the ground, the trunk and roots can be dug out and re-sawn for ribs and stems in Adirondack guide boats. These trees are also a source of the 2 by 4s and dimensional lumber used in building houses and other buildings.

Keep going on the main trail down past some power lines and then to Cherry Pond. Take a side trip over to the viewing platform on the right where a sign directs you toward it. What a view. In the winter it is definitely a white wonderland, and the spring or fall will offer bird-watchers a treat with many kinds of birds migrating through the reserve.



View of Mt. Washington from the outlet of Cherry Pond



State champion white spruce and Dave Govaski

Go back to the main trail and keep an eye out for the trail sign to Little Cherry Pond. There is another sign on the Coos County champ gray birch saying that this is a wildlife preserve owned by the New Hampshire Audubon Society. Audubon owns the land around both the Cherry Ponds, and classifies this as an important birding area in New Hampshire.

The gray birch is known as a pioneer species as it is one of the first to venture into new clearings or burns. It is often seen in clumps of several trees together. When a breeze blows through them, the leaves quake the way poplar leaves (quaking aspen) do—hence their scientific name, *Betula populifolia*, meaning birch with poplar leaves. The species is thought of as temporary, just holding a spot for the more permanent forests that will come after. Gray birch are short lived so do not get large; they are used for pulpwood (for making paper) and for firewood.

It will feel good to get off the wide railroad tracks and on this narrow woods trail. About 600 feet in after passing a good-sized balsam fir, start looking for the National Champion black spruce on the left about fifty feet off the trail. It is quite tall and very healthy looking but not what you may expect to see for the biggest of its type in the United States. This is an example of why it is important to look at other trees while on the trips in this book. As you see many examples of a certain

kind of tree, you will learn to appreciate the champions more, even the ones that do not grow to a giant size.

Farther into the woods, your GPS may tell you that you are at the bigtooth aspen, but after looking around a bit you likely will not see it. There should be some red flags on the trees to your right, and if you follow them a hundred feet or so they will bring you to the tree. If you visit in the late fall, you will notice the tops of the aspens rippling in the breeze with their nice yellow color among the nearby greens of the softwoods. Commonly known as poplar, the lumber from the species is available at retail lumberyards and small sawmills.

It is not much farther to Little Cherry Pond, so keep going through these fine northern woods. You will pass some pure spruce groves and then all balsam fir, with their spire-like tops. Finally after some blow downs when you are almost at the pond, you will see some small tamarack, also called American larch.

Difficulty rating 2

1. White Spruce

108" CBH 98' VH 39' ACS Total Points 216 Good Condition

GPS: N 44° 21.706' W 71° 32.030'

Δ State Champion

2. Gray Birch

56" CBH 62' VH 19' ACS Total Points 123 Fair Condition

GPS: N 44° 22.650' W 071° 31.063'

Δ County Champion

3. Black Spruce

71" CBH 93' VH 35' ACS Total Points 173 Excellent Condition

GPS: N 44° 22.642' W 071° 31.208'

Δ National Champion

4. Bigtooth Aspen

68" CBH 93' VH 37' ACS Total Points 170 Excellent Condition

GPS: N 44° 22.637' W 071° 31.364'

Δ County Champion



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Directions

Get on Route 115 that goes from Route 3 in Carroll to Route 2 in Jefferson. About 4 to 5 miles (halfway) in, take Hazen Road and go in 1.5 miles to the parking area for the Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge on the right. Drive across the bridge to the kiosk and park.