

While rapidly growing Sussex County races towards the future, The Nature Conservancy tries to turn back the clock at the Pemberton Forest Preserve's Ponders Tract. Once dedicated to timber production, Ponders provides visitors with a front row seat to the transformation from former working lands into native coastal hardwood forest.

About Ponders

Before being added as part of the Pemberton Forest Preserve, the lands and waters comprising Ponders were managed for loblolly pine production by the Glatfelter Lumber Company. Restoring this portion of the preserve enhances the local ecology of places such as neighboring Redden State Forest, and provides an excellent opportunity to increase forestland for migrating birds and other wide-ranging species. Trail routes were selected to feature wildlife, diverse habitats, varying stages of forest succession, examples of active management and secluded spots where nature has been left to take its course.



What You'll See

Prior to its removal from timber production in 2003, Ponders already represented a crucial stopover for neo-tropical songbirds during spring and fall migrations. Ovenbirds, whip-poor-wills and other birds nest and breed throughout the tract's 908 acres. A variety of amphibians, including Fowler's toad, southern leopard frog and grey tree frogs find shelter among wooded wetlands. Stands of Atlantic white cedar emerge from rivers and streams that eventually flow into the Delaware Bay.

Hessel's hairstreak, a rare and threatened butterfly, has been observed in this portion of the preserve, and the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel has been documented nearby.

Turning Back the Clock

Restoring Ponders—and connecting it with nearby protected conservation areas—will increase and improve natural diversity in the Delaware Bayshores. That's why the Conservancy is implementing state-of-the-art timber thinning practices to transform loblolly pine plantation into a native coastal forest of several oak species, hickory, tulip poplar, sassafras, red maple, Virginia pine and numerous woodland shrubs. These practices enhance a wide variety of grasses, sedges and wildflowers that thrive here.

In 2017, a prescribed burn was conducted on 110 acres located between Ingram Branch Way and Ponders Road. The controlled burn was the first ever conducted on forested lands owned by TNC in Delaware. In this area you will notice that the immature loblolly pines have thinned, making way for a more natural mix of hardwoods.



The Nature Conservancy is a leading international nonprofit conservation organization, dedicated to preserving plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth, by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Since its inception in 1951, the Conservancy and its one million members have helped protect more than 117 million acres around the world, including more than 30,000 acres in Delaware.

Support our work: To become a member of The Nature Conservancy, visit nature.org/member. To support our work in Delaware, go to nature.org/DEgiving

The purchase and restoration of the Ponders Tract was made possible with support from:



The Nature Conservancy 
Pennsylvania & Delaware

Wilmington Office

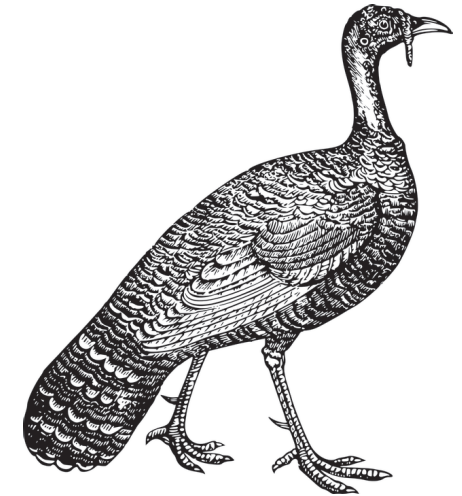
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900 ACRES FOR YOU TO EXPLORE

Ponders Tract Trail System

*Pemberton Forest Preserve
Milton, Delaware*



The Nature Conservancy 
Pennsylvania & Delaware

Visiting the Ponders Trail System

Ponders Road bisects Ponders from west-to-east and provides access to the loop trail system. This trail once served as the central route for incoming and outgoing logging trucks, whole tree shredders, and other maintenance vehicles.

Round trip length: 4 miles.

Pemberton Loop can be accessed at the head of Ponders Road. This trail travels west, then north along the border, passing through areas replanted in a mix of hardwoods and shrubs. Parts of this loop pass near wooded wetlands, and during the right season display wildflowers blooming throughout wet soils.

Approximate loop trail length: 0.7 miles.

Piney Fork Lane passes along the north end of the buffer plantings along the Piney Fork Branch, and then travels north, passing remnant Atlantic white cedar swamps and maturing second growth forests. This corner of the preserve is a good place to listen for a variety of migratory birds in the proper season.

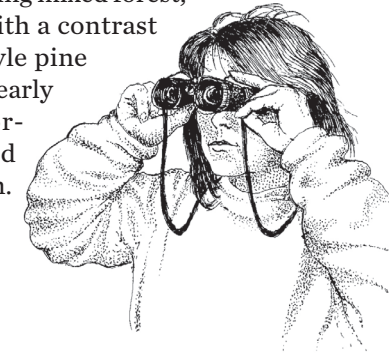
Approximate length: 1.9 miles.

Red Oak Trail gives visitors a glimpse of areas recovering from the final clear-cut executed by Glatfelter Lumber Company prior to acquisition by the Conservancy. The northern portion borders privately-owned agricultural lands and provides opportunities for visitors with a keen eye to view open country birds such as Horned Lark and American Pipits during the proper seasons. Please respect our neighbors' property rights and remain on the trail.

Approximate length: 1 mile.

Frog Pond Trail leads off Ponders Road, winding through dense loblolly pines planted in the old timber operation days, and passing by one of the many old decking sites used by the lumber company to collect felled trees for removal from the site. The trail crosses Piney Fork Lane and travels near Frog Pond, home to many amphibians. The trail then snakes through a naturally regenerating mixed forest, providing visitors with a contrast to the plantation-style pine forest. In spring and early summer, whip-poor-wills might be heard during the early dawn.

Approximate length: 1.3 miles.



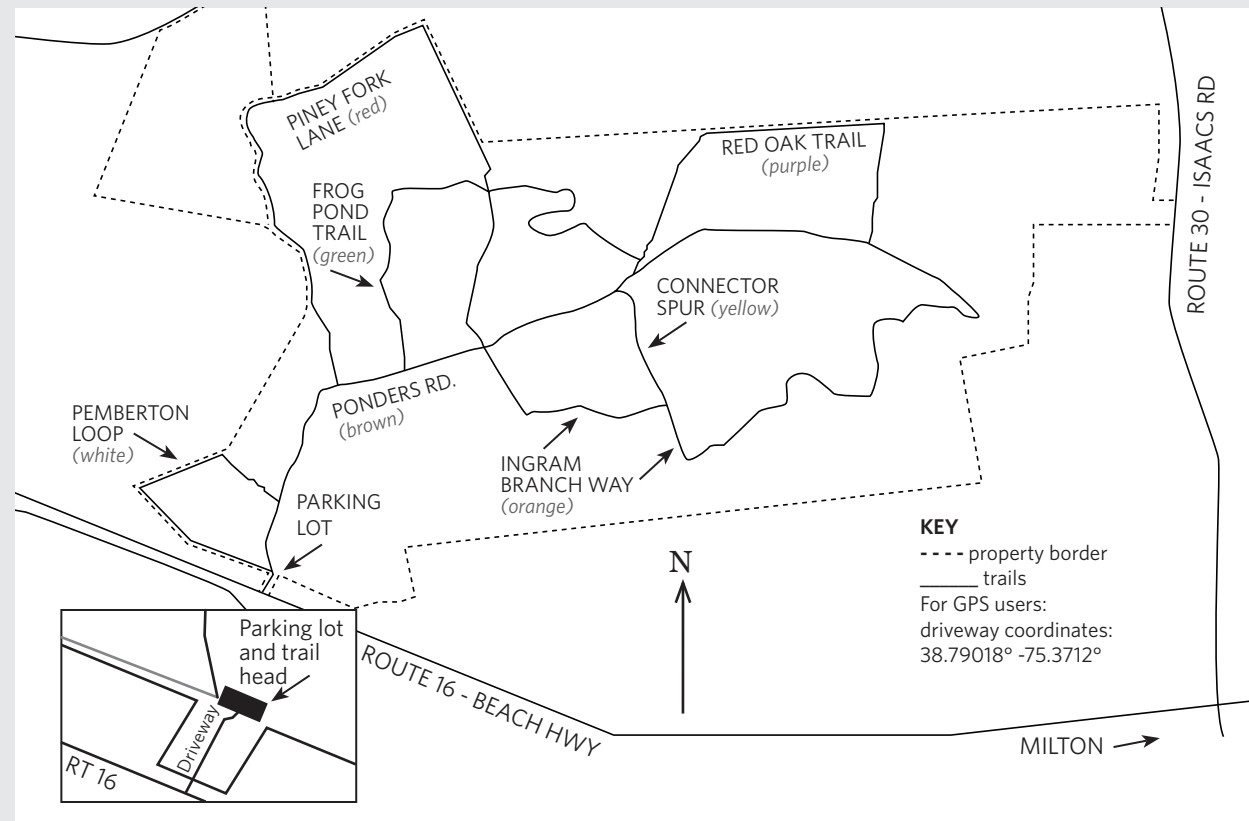
Above: Birdwatcher © Robert Savannah/US Fish and Wildlife Service

Ingram Branch Way can be accessed by turning south at the major four-way intersection with Ponders Road and Piney Fork Lane. This trail traverses maturing mixed hardwood forests and provides opportunities to see many neo-tropical migrants such as Indigo Bunting and Grey Catbird. The trail highlights one of the largest areas dedicated to the use of selective thinning as a way of hastening the return of a truly native forest. Depending on the season, visitors with a keen eye might spot birds of the open forest, including the Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper and Ovenbird.

Approximate length: 1.6 miles.

Connector Spur provides a short trek from the main Ponders Road to the Ingram Branch Trail and provides alternative views of thinned areas, as well as some seasonally wet woods.

Approximate length: .3 miles.



Trail Guidelines

- Please enjoy, but leave no trace—carry out what you bring in to the preserve.
- Take precautions against ticks, mosquitoes, chiggers and sunburn. Watch for poison ivy.
- Respect our neighbors' property rights and remain on the trail at all times.
- Motorized vehicles, ATVs, bicycles, horses, alcohol and firearms are prohibited.
- Dogs must be leashed; all waste must be bagged and taken with you.
- Do not feed or disturb wildlife.
- Do not remove plants, animals or other artifacts.
- Swimming, camping, smoking and fires are not allowed.
- Hunters may be active during deer hunting season. Please check for hunting notices at the kiosk before your hike.
- **Private parties/events, loud music, BBQ's/grills are strictly prohibited.**

Directions

From Wilmington (approximately 1.5 hours): Take Route 1 South to intersection with Route 5 to Milton. Turn right onto Route 5 toward Milton. At the intersection with Route 16, take a right and head west. Go through intersection with Route 30 and in two miles look for the preserve sign on the right. Turn right into the preserve lane.

From the Washington/Baltimore area (approximately 2.5 hours): Take U.S. 50 East across the Bay Bridge. Turn left on Maryland Route 404 East. Before Bridgeville, DE, turn left on Route 16 heading northeast toward Greenwood. Follow route 16 past Route 13 and Route 113. About 4 miles east of Ellendale, look for the preserve sign on the left. Turn left into the preserve lane.

From Rehoboth Beach area (approximately 20-30 minutes): Take Route 9 west to Route 30 north towards Milton. Take a right onto Route 30. At the intersection with Route 16, take a left and head west. Look for the preserve sign on the right. Turn right into the preserve lane.