Fall Treasure Hiking

It’s early November and the flora and fauna of Umstead State Park are preparing for winter. The rays of the rising sun warm the crisp autumn air, lifting tendrils of fog from the pond on Loblolly Trail. Acorns and leaves rain to the ground along the shore. As you enjoy the park this fall, look for signs of seasonal change. It’s a treasure hunt of sorts.

Of course, changes in **leaf color** are the most obvious and anticipated indication of the seasonal shift. **Take time** to notice which tree types are first to color and drop, and **be aware** of those that retain their leaves well into the winter. Beech and oak leaves are those you see still hanging on when the snow falls. You might even have a contest to see who can find the most beautifully colored leaf or try to catch one as it falls – it’s more difficult than it sounds.

**Breathe in** the earthy **scent of fallen leaves.**

**Notice** all the **tree nuts** falling to the ground thereby providing sustenance for deer, squirrels, and other woodland animals. **Watch** the squirrels scrambling around to add to their winter stores and build winter nests.

If you hear honking, **look up** to see geese migrating south in wobbling “v”-shapes like arrow tips pointing in the direction of their winter homes. While you are looking, **observe** the deeper blue of the autumn sky.

Fall walks are filled with treasure. I make a goal of discovering at least two interesting finds on each walk. While searching like a nature detective, I tend to see and appreciate things I might otherwise overlook. . If you are interested in understanding more about the process of seasonal leaf cycle or why the sky appears more blue in autumn, check out these articles.

<http://ncdnaday.org/2016/11/maple-trees-vs-winter-how-trees-survive-and-thrive-again/> the science of blue sky: https://wildcardweather.com/2013/09/10/the-blue-autumn-sky-illusion-or-reality/

<https://northernwoodlands.org/articles/article/why-do-some-leaves-persist-on-beech-and-oak-trees-well-into-winter>

**Suggestions for fall treasure hike activities for all ages:**

* Pinecone Bird Feeders

Collect pinecones to make into bird feeders. Simply attach a string to the pinecone, spread peanut butter or lard over the surface, roll in birdseed, and hang from a tree in your yard.

* Leaf Print Cards

Gather fallen leaves to create leaf print cards. Just paint a leaf while holding it by the stem, press it to cardstock, cover with newspaper and gently rub. Remove paper and leaf to see your print.

* Magic Wands

Search for smooth, bark-free sticks to use as “magic wands”.

* Nature Detective Scavenger Hunt

Make a list of things to look for on your walk such as hickory nuts, squirrels, mushrooms, and star moss.