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Day 14: Greenest



Binghamton University prides itself on the Nature Preserve, which is located on campus and teeming with wildlife. It is easily accessible to any student who wishes to randomly venture into the Preserve, and today, those students were us. Past the dorming community called “College in the Woods”, which aptly lives up to its name, is a path leading to the nature preserve. I’ve passed by this trail multiple times but never recognized it as a path into the Nature Preserve. It felt like the woods stretched forever beyond the dorming community. However, today I noticed a rock with a plaque that specifically showed that the Nature Preserve started on the path we were taking.

And thus, our adventure began.



As soon as we entered the Nature Preserve we spotted a flower that was in the midst of drawing its last breath. Even the wilting dandelion was a surprising find, considering the Binghamton weather. In the past week, the temperature had dropped from 70° Fahrenheit (70°F/21°C) to today's 40° Fahrenheit (40°F/4°C) weather. The cold Binghamton weather is ruthless and the amount of flowers seen on campus have dramatically decreased. However, the day was extremely nice, with clear skies covered with the occasional clouds floating by.



Once we entered the Preserve it truly felt like another world. The sky was no longer clearly visible from being blocked by the tree branches which sprawled in every possible direction. The ground beneath us was covered in leaves ranging from orange to dirt brown. While some trees remained green and untouched, a large portion had begun to shed their leaves, barring naked branches. While following our friend who frequents the Nature Preserve, often the sense of calmness settled over me. Freshman year has been extremely stressful and fast paced; the days spent studying for tests or late night homework while juggling multiple extracurriculars had consumed me for the past 2 months. However, in the woods, surrounded by nothing but trees and my close circle of friends, I'm so grateful for all the good memories that I created.

I wanted this moment to last forever.



There were many plants surrounding us but the ones that most prominently stood out were the trees covering the entire forest. My team mate posed next to a Douglas fir while our other friend began to recount about his job over the summer delivering Christmas trees to people and being handsomely tipped to set them up in homes. Now when I look at a Christmas tree I'll think about him delivering it to me on a truck. I also have a lucrative career option in mind if my major in Binghamton doesn't work out.



While parts of the trail had signs of wood chips and mulch laying down a path, the intense rainfall last week had washed away almost everything. The only things left in its path were torn branches and patches of grass covered in more dead leaves. Certain spots of the ground were easy to maneuver and step on but patches of mud would grab onto our shoes and leave their presence. Our friend's shoes were extremely muddy from adventuring in the nature preserve earlier in the day without us.



With its brightly hued orange cap, this mushroom almost looks like the art out of a video game. Its vibrant colors are extremely eye-catching, making it stand out amongst the dead foliage the same way the moon stands out against a starry sky. Looking at the small size of this mushroom is incredibly charming and endearing to me, simply because it seems so perfect in its existence and uniformity. My excitement for this fungi cannot be contained, and I eagerly spend the rest of my adventure looking for more mushrooms to spot.



I snapped this picture in the midst of our friend eating his sweatshirt, as it was a habit that he picked up recently. Coming back from fall break, we went straight to the Nature Preserve after unpacking our luggage. We planned the trip ahead of time and executed it right away.



In the thick wooded areas of the Nature Preserve, there is no end to sounds of the wild. From the calls of birds to the flutter of wings, nature is breathing and moving all around us. As we continued our trek uphill, I heard the rustle and movements of birds all around us. I turned my eyes towards the sky, trying to see the source of the sound, and to my surprise and delight, I spotted the birds in flight. Agile and quick, these brilliantly blue birds hopped from one branch to the other, chirping their birdsong at a rapid fire pace, before spreading their wings to move onto another tree branch. As a New Yorker who has only seen pigeons and sparrows, seeing these blue jays was an experience that I never thought I would get to see.



When we exited the nature preserve we were greeted by a surprise on a bare patch of untouched grass. A butterfly on a flower! It's bright, white wings were easily noticeable, especially against the rich yellow of the dandelion flower. When the butterfly finally took flight, its wings danced in the wind, moving to and fro, as if it was letting the wind to take it to its new destination.



Before coming to Binghamton University, I didn't think there was a difference between chipmunks and squirrels. To me, those were just synonymous words that I used everyday. But after spotting this little creature, I felt as if I suddenly understood the distinction between the two species. With its alert, dark eyes and iconic black and white stripes on the sides of its body, I couldn't help but fawn over how small and adorable this chipmunk was. As quickly as this little chipmunk scampered out of its hiding spot, he took a quick look at me and my friends, and then darted away, faster than my eyes could follow.

You're Invited!

I had the most wonderful adventure today and saw the most amazing creatures. But most importantly, I experienced a feeling that I never felt before—peace and serenity and strength. Being in the Nature Preserve makes me feel as if I can do anything I set my mind to. I become capable, unstoppable, and a force to be reckoned with.

Join me next time on my adventures! I hope you can experience the same things that I did!