



# A MATURE FOREST

The smooth, gray-barked trees in the vicinity of this sign are American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). Of the local tree species, the Beech is best adapted to growing in moderately drained soil.

In order to establish farm fields, an early owner cleared most of the Beech woodland from the property in the mid 1800s. The farmer retained this particular stand of Beeches to serve as the farm woodlot where trees could be harvested continuously for lumber and fuel. Beech is excellent firewood because it splits easily and burns slowly.

Hogs were penned in this woodlot to allow the animals to eat their favorite food, beechnuts. Two triangular nuts are found in each spine-covered fruit that drops from the Beeches in autumn. Beechnuts are sweet and highly nutritious, comprised of about 20% protein and 20% oil.

During the warm months, the overhead canopy of Beech leaves intercepts the sun's rays and allows only small flecks of sunlight to reach the ground. Note that little vegetation survives in the heavy shade. The few forest floor plants that do grow here call attention to themselves in the spring when they flower prior to leaf emergence in the Beech canopy.

If you are here in the fall, you may notice bunches of what look like brown sticks growing on the ground in this Beech forest. These are Beechdrops (*Epifagus virginiana*). These plants do not photosynthesize and so they are not green. Instead, they parasitize the roots of Beeches, deriving all their nutrition from the trees instead of from the sun and soil, like green plants.

**This sign marks the end of the path.**



American Beech

**Ecological Succession  
- from disturbance to a  
mature forest**

