

Dangerous Plants

PLANTS TO AVOID

BANE BERRY *Actaea rubra*

The berries, foliage, and roots are all highly poisonous. Just six berries can induce vomiting, bloody diarrhea, and finally respiratory paralysis.

Identification: Perennial with 1 to several erect, sparingly branched, leafy stems up to 3 feet tall. Leaves few, 2-3 times divided in 3s, segments coarsely toothed. Small white flowers in rounded clusters. Red berries are most common but some plants produce white berries.

Location: Moist, shady forest, stream banks, clearings. Several can be seen in the woods at the southeast corner of the lodge.

Uses: Native Americans chewed the leaves and spat them on a boil to bring it to a head, or spat the chewed leaves on wounds.

[photo 113.1397]

STINGING NETTLE

Urtica dioica

Nettle has stinging hairs, which contain formic acid. Brushing against the plant will produce a burning sensation that may persist for several days. Immediate treatment with a paste of baking soda brings relief. Wearing long pants gives protection in off-trail hikes.

Identification: Perennial up to 3 feet tall (usually smaller) with opposite lance to heart-shaped leaves, coarsely saw-toothed; flowers pinkish to greenish in drooping spikes from leaf axils.

Location: *En masse* in disturbed habitats; common along trails and roadsides.

Uses: Young leaves and stems were eaten as “Indian spinach”. Also a source of fiber for Native Americans. Used for a spring tonic.

[photo 113.1306]

Baneberry



Stinging Nettle



GIANT COW-PARSNIP

Heracleum mantegassianum

Huge garden escapee that can cause severe skin rashes and blisters in sensitive people after handling the plant and subsequent exposure to sunlight. The toxin furanocoumarin causes the reaction.

Identification: Leaves large, stalked, divided into 3 large segments, palmately lobed, maple-leaf-like. Base of leaf stalk hollow and winged. White flowers in a large, terminal umbrella-like cluster.

Location: Stream banks, meadows, roadsides.
Common at Drift Creek.

Uses: Cow Parsnips (there are three species locally, all poisonous when mature) were used as a green vegetable by virtually every Northwest Coast tribal group. Young stalks and leaf stems were peeled and eaten raw or boiled. Peeled young stems are mild and sweet, thus “Indian celery”. Leaves and outer skin have a strong odor.

[photo 113.1312]

Giant Cow-Parsnip

