The Kasey Hartz Natural Area is a wooded tract which has been shaped by natural processes, weathering and glaciers, and human influences particularly lumbering and fires. Four Mile Creek flows through the area on its way to Muskegon River. Look, listen, and feel as you proceed through the different habitats. More information is located on our website.

Since their existence, the trails are available to the Muskegon community including school aged children and those young at heart. We hope our service here “will help to create a greater awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and a real sense of responsibility to work toward environmental quality for the Muskegon community.”

- Kasey Hartz

Mary Kathryn “Kasey” Hartz
Muskegon Community College
Biology Instructor
1958-1973
Upland Oak & Pine Habitat: Trail Posts 1-9

1. Representative trees are white oak (Quercus alba), with its lighter bark, black oak (Quercus velutina), and red oak (Quercus rubra). Our state tree, white pine (Pinus strobus) can be identified from its bundle of five needles. After this station is a shortcut trail to the left or south that leads to the end of the trail.

2. Prunus serotina, black cherry, is common but doesn’t grow tall. Easily recognizable is sassafras (Sassafras albidum) by its three different shaped leaves.

3. The low bushes are huckleberry (Gayla-sacia) and blueberry (Vaccinium angustifoli-um). Huckleberry has orange resin spots on the backside of its leaves and blueberry has a darker green leaf. Also common before frost is bracken fern (Pteridium aquilinum).

4. The large-leaved aster (Eurybia macrophylla) blooms in the fall with a blue-purple flower. Also blooming in the fall is the blue stem goldenrod (Solidago caesia) which you may have noticed as you walked along the trail. As you proceed along the trail, notice the oak on the right hand side that has been infected with a shelf fungus.

5. Take a short spur off to the left to find this number at the flowering dogwood tree (Cornus florida). Return back to where you previously were (if you continue downhill you will join the trail loop near its end).

6. Have you heard or seen any animals yet? Be careful around the bend, the thorns of greenbrier (Smilax) may snag you.

7. Can you recall the names of the trees in this location? Which tree is white pine? Which is white oak?

8. To the north you will see a newer grassy ravine area which was part of the new sewer system and is now proposed to be planted as a prairie.

9. Rest for awhile on the bench under the arching branches of witch-hazel (Hamamelis virginiana) and listen. As you continue down the stairway, be careful especially when they are wet with dew or other forms of precipitation.

10. At the bottom of the steps, you may take the short spur to the right on an old roadway to see the proposed prairie area and then return.

Creek Bed Habitat: Trail Posts 11-13

11. Have you noticed a change in the temperature? Do you see the miniature “pine trees” about 10 centimeters tall? Sometimes called clubmoss or princess-pine, they are neither pines nor mosses, but are Lycopodium.

12. Four Mile Creek flows through a mostly residential watershed and our immediate habitat supports many wetland plants such as skunk cabbage (Symplocarpus foetidus) and cinnamon fern (Osmunda cinnamomea).

13. Do you see the two small plants with red berries? Wintergreen (Gaultheria procumbens) is larger than the creeping partridgeberry (Mitch-ella repens).

14. As you climb the stairway, notice that you are moving into another type of habitat. Red maple (Acer rubrum) and white oak (Hamamelis virginiana) dominate the slope with a smaller percentage of white pine and oaks. Rest for a moment at the bench. A short Arbutus trail loop begins at the top of the stairway if you so desire.

15. Overlook Four Mile Creek and its meandering curves. Early in the spring, marsh marigold (Caltha palustris) will be blooming a bright yellow flower along the water’s edge. Listen for the frogs.

16. Witch-hazel arches the trail and blooms in the autumn. Little star flowers (Trientalis borealis) bloom white “stars” in the spring.

17. Also in the spring, look for the plant with the large umbrella type leaves on the wetland side of the trail: mayapple (Podophyllum peltatum).

18. Other ferns besides cinnamon fern are royal fern (Osmunda regalis) and sensitive fern (Onoclea sensibilis). Beware of poison ivy (Toxicodendron radicans) along the trail.

19. In the very moist microhabitat along the creek, a liverwort (Marchantia) grows and looks like a green flat leaf-like plant.

20. Red maples abound and so does poison ivy near the current access road ahead. If you want to take the shortcut to the beginning of the trail continue on the dirt trail on the left or proceed on the current path toward the college and turn left on the access road to go to the parking lot.

Red Maple & Witch-hazel Habitat: Trail Posts 14-20

14. As you climb the stairway, notice that you are moving into another type of habitat. Red maple (Acer rubrum) and witch-hazel (Hamamelis virginiana) dominate the slope with a smaller percentage of white pine and oaks. Rest for a moment at the bench. A short Arbutus trail loop begins at the top of the stairway if you so desire.

15. Overlook Four Mile Creek and its meandering curves. Early in the spring, marsh marigold (Caltha palustris) will be blooming a bright yellow flower along the water’s edge. Listen for the frogs.

16. Witch-hazel arches the trail and blooms in the autumn. Little star flowers (Trientalis borealis) bloom white “stars” in the spring.

17. Also in the spring, look for the plant with the large umbrella type leaves on the wetland side of the trail: mayapple (Podophyllum peltatum).

18. Other ferns besides cinnamon fern are royal fern (Osmunda regalis) and sensitive fern (Onoclea sensibilis). Beware of poison ivy (Toxicodendron radicans) along the trail.

19. In the very moist microhabitat along the creek, a liverwort (Marchantia) grows and looks like a green flat leaf-like plant.

20. Red maples abound and so does poison ivy near the current access road ahead. If you want to take the shortcut to the beginning of the trail continue on the dirt trail on the left or proceed on the current path toward the college and turn left on the access road to go to the parking lot.