

PALMYRA RAIL TRAIL NATURE WALK

Please do not litter!--Enjoy!!

Trail Length: 0.6 miles one way; 1.2 miles round trip. Trail is flat and marked. *Stay on the Trail!!!*

Watch Your Footing: Steep Slope on sides, Branches, Tree Roots, Rocks, Poison Ivy

Trail Access: Main Street Parking Lot across from Courthouse Complex

Railroad tracks ran through here as part of a 30-mile section built by **Virginia Air Line Railway (VAL)** Company to connect Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railroad's James River Line at Strathmore near Bremono Bluff to its Main Line at Lindsay. The first passenger train departed Palmyra on May 1, 1908.



Figure 1. Arrowwood Viburnum

Station 1: Look back toward the Courthouse complex across the street. The Palmyra train depot had been located behind the courthouse where a parking lot now stands. Years ago, station agents sold tickets to customers at the station and took care of shipping freight and mail. They also operated the telegraph.

Here, where you stand, you are surrounded by native shrubs with straight stems. These are **Arrowwood Viburnum**. Native Americans used these stems to make their arrow shafts.



Figure 4. Black Locust



Figure 2. Redbud

Station 2: Many of the trees here are most likely younger than the rail line that once ran through here. Several trees surround this little area such as **Redbuds, Sycamore, Black Locust** and **Sweet Gum**. Seeds from the **Sweet Gum** tree travelled to the moon and back with Apollo 14 in 1971. After they returned to earth they were planted around the country. After Station 2, turn right to continue on the trail.



Figure 5. Sweet Gum

Station 3: Find the big “bowl” at the side of the trail. It is believed that railroad workers needed fill dirt to level the base for the tracks. They dug out the soil here to place under the tracks. A big round deep bowl was left which over the years filled with natural vegetation such as **Redbud** and **Hackberry** trees.



Figure 3. Sycamore

Look at the rail trail to see how level and flat it is. Immigrant laborers worked year around in difficult weather conditions to shovel the dirt to create the level base before laying train tracks. Imagine a train running through here. “Bulldog” trains carried coal and

other oversized freight that were too big for the tunnels crossing through the Blue Ridge Mountains on the regular train lines.

Station 4: Notice how the topography changes. It becomes steeper on each side of the tracks with lots of rock in the dirt. This area may have been blasted to clear the way for track. On the north side of Palmyra, railroad workers cut through 2.5 miles of cliffs along the river to clear the path for the tracks. Also notice the dead snag behind the sign. Dead trees in a forest are very wildlife friendly as they provide cover and food for many insects while the insects are food for other wildlife like birds.

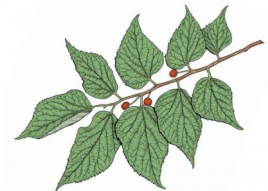
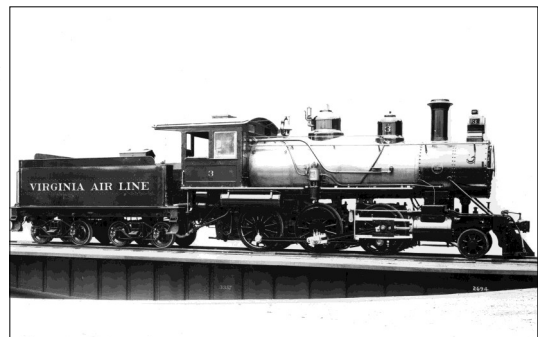


Figure 6. Hackberry



Virginia Air Line 2-6-0

Courtesy Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society (www.cohs.org)

Station 5: Notice the clumps of ferns. Ferns prefer plenty of shade and moisture. Which side of the trail do the ferns like best? On the opposite side of the trail there are several **Black Walnut** trees. Note also the **Spicebushes** on the sides of the trail with their yellow flowers in Spring and red berries in Autumn.



Figure 7. Black Walnut

Station 6: See rocks and a huge boulder on the river side. They are surrounded by invasive plants, such as Japanese Stiltgrass and Multiflora Rose, that are not native to this area. How did the plants get here? On the opposite side of the trail there are more rocks. Were these blasted out by the railroad workers too?



Figure 8. Spicebush

Station 7: Look down to see the Rivanna River and a sandy beach. This is a real beach located at Pleasant Grove Park. Erosion is slowly wearing the beach away making it smaller. What is causing the erosion?

Station 8: You can see the Rivanna River zigzag its way downstream. Listen, can you hear the water? Across the rail trail there are bunches of Christmas Fern whose leaves are shaped like Christmas stockings! Further down the trail is a lighter green fern. These are Hay Scented Ferns.

Station 9: As you walk the trail, the sides along the trail become steeper. This may be another area blasted to open it up for the rail tracks. Where is the **American Beech** tree? Deer don't care for these. Beech trees provide good shade and are deciduous meaning every autumn their leaves drop to the ground.



Figure 9. American Beech

Station 10: Look high up at the ridge line along the trail for wire fencing. These have a purpose. Local residents use fences to keep their livestock safe. Notice the broken branches and fallen trees. What caused this? Strong storms may have broken branches and forced the trees to uproot and fall over.

Station 11: Look for old wood railroad "ties" that used to support the metal railroad tracks. These ties had been torn up years ago and left behind. Notice the small **American Beech** trees behind the trail sign.



Figure 10. Tulip Poplar

Station 12: The Palmyra Rail Trail ends at the wire fence. The train tracks at one time continued to run northward from here for several miles. What remains next to the trail is a beautiful valley with a stream running through. This was created by rail workmen who dug out the dirt to fill a level base for the train tracks. Look for the cluster of tall straight trees in this valley. These are **Tulip Poplar** trees. Also note the **Coral Berry** bushes along both sides of the trail.



Figure 11. Coral Berry

End of the Virginia Air Line Railway (VAL): On June 23, 1954 C&O discontinued passenger service because people preferred driving their own cars. In 1971 C&O announced its plan to completely shut down the Air Line. The Fluvanna Board of Supervisors fought it, represented by James F. Perrin, who said that losing the Air Line was "a great tragedy for Fluvanna County." Freight service ended in 1975 and the tracks were torn up between 1977 and 1978. In 2004, more than 25 years later, this section of the former **Virginia Air Line Railway (VAL)** in Palmyra gained a new purpose as the **Palmyra Rail Trail**.

On your walk back to the trailhead look around to see other items of nature. See if you can spot a tiny toad crossing the trail or a spider web glistening in the sun.

*Written and produced by the Palmyra Area Revitalization Committee (PARC)
With assistance from Fluvanna County Parks & Recreation and Rivanna Master Naturalists
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Flora Pictures: nature.mdc.mo.gov*