

Forest Plants of Pennsylvania: Our Native Botanical Wealth

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This tour involved visits to two field locations in Central Pennsylvania. The first field site (*Rothrock State Forest*) was used to introduce attendees to the ecological, historical, and economic uses of many of Pennsylvania's forest plants through close observation and discussion of wild-occurring specimens. The second field destination (*Penn Mountain Ginseng*) was used to introduce attendees to one of the commonwealth's premier forest resources—American ginseng—via a visit to a privately-owned and operated agroforestry venture to conserve and propagate native germplasm for breeding and planting efforts.

Tour attendees were representative of the conferences as a whole—both culturally and intellectually diverse. This opportunity allowed me, as the tour guide, to indulge in some great conversation. Perhaps the most salient impression left upon me through such dialogue was the overwhelming respect that these individuals (Kenyan, Indian, and Western North American) have for plant-based healing and contextualized usage. In the United States, as we discussed over lunch, there is tremendous opportunity for the development of botanical medicine; yet, there is little appreciation of such practice and knowledge. On the other hand, a botanically-based approach to healing is at the core of practice in other regions of the world, as I learned from some of my new friends. While the reasons for these differences are complex and have an admittedly largely socioeconomic basis; nonetheless, we all seemed to agree that our discussions mirrored those of the conference as a whole. Specifically, we felt that the loss of indigenous knowledge is often tied to a misleading notion of “progress” and a profound disrespect for “folk” wisdom and the biological riches of natural world.

As a backdrop for our conversation, our hosts at *Penn Mountain Ginseng*, Dave Thompson and Russell “Bud” Bollinger, indulged us with good cheer, a beautiful forested setting, and fine fishing! In Dave and Bud, I think we should all recognize a type of indigenous knowledge that is often overlooked—one that comes simply from local folks who have a profound knowledge of, and respect for, their natural world. Often times, it is easy to become preoccupied with the idea that indigenous knowledge is only held by some exotic ethnic group in some remote part of the world. Yet, in Cambria County, Pennsylvania, we can find great examples of such knowledge. Folks like Dave and Bud share in an appreciation for their natural surroundings, and have developed a set of “norms” that reflect this circumstance, reminding us that indigenous knowledge is often where we might least expect it—right outside our door.

Many thanks to Dave and Bud and my new friends from distant places; may we all perpetuate and benefit from indigenous knowledge wherever we find it.

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