

Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

The Writings of Eloise Butler



A Visit to Interstate Park In Search of the Fragrant Fern - 1916

The photographer of the garden [Mary Meeker] and the curator, the later part of August, were so fortunate as to be the guests for a few days of Mr. Hazzard, the Superintendent of the Minnesota Division of the Interstate Park of Minnesota and Wisconsin at Taylor's Falls. We were given possession of Mr. Hazzard's summer cottage at the park, which is luxuriously fitted for the accommodation of several guests. Although the park is of primary interest to the geologist on account of its wonderful rock formations, it is a first-class hunting ground for the botanist.

I will not attempt to describe the geologic features of the place, for I was familiar with them and gave them only a cursory glance, and I was determined to discover, the rare, fragrant fern *Aspidium fragrans* [*Dryopteris fragrans*], listed some thirty years ago in Upham's catalogue of the *Flora of Minnesota*, at Taylor's Falls. I have never seen a greater display and denser massing of *Polypodium vulgare* [*Polypodium virginianum* - Common Polypody], *Woodsia ilvensis* [Rusty Woodsia], *Camptosorus rhizophyllus* [*Asplenium rhizophyllum* - Walking Fern], *Cystopteris bulbifera* [Bublet Bladder Fern], and *C. fragilis* [Brittle Bladder Fern].



Fragrant Fern (*Dryopteris fragrans*).
Photo ©Emmett J. Judziewicz,
Wisconsin Flora



Rusty Woodsia (*Woodsia ilvensis*).
Photo ©Robert W. Freckmann,
Wisconsin Flora.

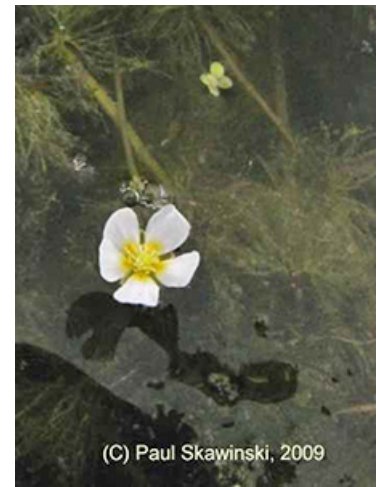
All that I had to help me in my search was a mental picture of the illustration of *Aspidium fragrans* in Clute's "Ferns and their Allies." The young and mature fronds of *Woodsia ilvensis* differ occasionally, and many a time I was falsely lured to climb precipitous ledges. My chief reliance in identification was the sense of smell. So I climbed sniff-sniffing at every frond that had a suspicious appearance. I found several fragrant fronds, but I was not positive that I had secured the prize.

On the third and last day of our visit, when I was making a farewell round of the place and had given up all hope of finding the fern, I espied a specimen that sent a thrill along my spinal cord. "There's my fern!" I exclaimed. "no, it isn't," scoffed the photographer. "It's only another rusty woodsia, just like hundreds all around here." "O, I am sure this time," said I. "Don't you try to get it. You'll break your neck if you do!" "You keep

still!" I commanded. "I can and will get it!" By holding onto a not over strong root of sumach I managed the plant. One sniff at it made assurance doubly sure --such an indescribable compound of sweet odors! -- and the plant was tossed to the photographer with a "There, didn't I tell you so?"

I have no doubt but that more of this aspidium could be found at Taylor's Falls under more favorable conditions. The season was so dry that many fronds were reduced to powder and could not be distinguished. This one specimen grew in a cool, sheltered place.

I was also able to obtain specimens of the floating white water crowfoot [*Ranunculus aquatilis* var. *diffusus*]. I had never found specimens of it in Minnesota before. In a deep ravine skirting an ancient indian trail that has on its course as as yet unexplored mound, I found an unusually rich growth of *Epipactis pubescens* [*Goodyera pubescens* - Downy Rattlesnake Plantain]. I also added to my collection a species of cactus which I have not identified. It grew in moss in the crevices of a ledge.



White Water Crowfoot,
(*Ranunculus aquatilis* var.
diffusus). Photo ©Paul
Skawinski, Wisconsin Flora.

Notes:

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©as credited.

The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published. The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.

In [] are updated names for the plants she wrote about. Photos have been added.