

Discovering the Heart of a Swamp by 13-year-old Brianna R. Fogal

I was able to go to Hockomock Swamp with four other people: Alison Bowden, Kate Frazer and David McGowan of The Nature Conservancy, and my grandfather, Richard Forman. This day would have to be the most tiring day of my summer. It was great fun, and I'm glad I was with the people we had. **At first, I thought it was a weird idea to go to a swamp, but once we really got into the swamp, it was very cool!**

When we stepped out of the car, and I looked at what we had to get through, I was shocked. I said, **"Is this really what we have to go through?"** There were so many plants so close together, it looked impossible. But somehow we managed and started weed whacking away. My grandfather was first, I was usually next, and the rest followed. **I felt like I was in a jungle.**

Hockomock Swamp was nothing like I expected. I thought it would be really muggy, buggy and have pools of water everywhere, but it was nothing like that at all. It wasn't muggy, but it was a little hot – maybe because we had to work so hard. The only bugs that were a pain were deerflies. They didn't bite us, just circled around our heads. There were some mosquitoes, but not many. There were NO water pools. I was amazed that there were none. We only got wet from the plants; it had rained the night before. Oh did we get soaked!

In the swamp, there were tons of plants and trees, obviously. Also some birds, like chickadees. Some spiders were spotted, but mostly we saw just abandoned webs. Deerflies were plentiful. Deeper into the swamp, moss was everywhere. I was so excited to see beds and beds of moss that I couldn't help but lie down in it every time we took a break. **The moss had to be my favorite part!**

Every 200 feet or so, we took a break and did some observations. We had to duck under and push away shrubs about 95 percent of the time. You couldn't see very far sometimes, but you could usually see about 60 feet all around. About half of the swamp had buried logs in the muck, within six feet of the surface, from ancient fallen trees. **At every stop there were at least one or two tree holes where animals could live.** There were plenty of spider webs, but most of them had been abandoned. The biggest spider we saw had to be about a half-inch long. Almost 80 percent of the time no mosquitoes touched a bare arm in two minutes!

My grandfather seems to think there were almost no deerflies except when we were walking along an abandoned railroad, where billions seemed to find us. For me in the swamp there were almost always a few buzzing around my head, but they never bit us. **I think that it was easier getting into the swamp than it was getting out.** We seemed to be going in a zigzag path, listening for traffic. It is very easy to get lost in a swamp!

Here are the rest of my observations:

- no thorny plants or vines
- no mucky or bad smell to the swamp
- no evidence of human footprints or discarded things, except along the railroad
- no snakes or wild animals
- no poisonous plants
- no ticks

I had a great time in Hockomock Swamp. **I think that swamps are very interesting – and tiring!** Once we got out of the swamp, everyone was exhausted and soaked. I was very happy to see the moss beds and lie down on them. If I had to lie there any longer, I'm sure I would've fallen asleep. **If anyone ever gets the chance to go to Hockomock, then GO!** I'm sure you'll have fun. It would be great to go again, but next time I want to bring a friend.