

Abigail Nebb
New York Botanical Gardens
Summer 2012

New York Botanical Forestry Intern

This summer, thanks to funding from Sewanee, I was able to intern with the world-famous New York Botanical Gardens. Founded in 1891 as a research, educational, and recreational institution, the Gardens have become one of the most prestigious botanical institutions in the world. After a visit to the Royal Botanical Gardens in London, England, Columbia University Botanist Nathaniel Lord Britton and his wife Elizabeth, also a prominent research botanist, petitioned leaders of New York Society to sponsor the creation of a world class institution. Located on 250 acres of what was formerly the estate belonging to the tobacco magnate Pierre Lorillard, the gardens are made up of 50 different gardens and recreational areas. Some of the most well-known gardens are the famous crystal-palace style conservatory which serves as a display for some of the rarest and foreign plants; the world-renowned Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden; and the 50-acre old-growth Thaine Family Forest which is the last remaining area of original forest left in the metropolitan area. The Gardens mission is to act as a museum to plants, preserving not only rare living specimens but also dried samples dating back to Darwin and Captain Cook. In the tradition of scientists like Darwin, the Gardens have helped to fund approximately over 2000 explorations to search for new plants in almost every country around the world.

As a forestry intern, my job was to help maintain the old-growth forest and to aid on various research projects being conducted around the forest. Maintenance of the forest included propagation (or growth) of native plants used to prevent the growth of invasive species, trail maintenance to help improve accessibility within the gardens and to prevent soil

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compaction from off trail hiking, and the removal of invasive species such as Japanese Knot Weed, Garlic Mustard, and Devil's Walking Stick. The Gardens are fortunate in that many organizations are excited to use the Forest as a way to encourage community service within their companies. Often, when a company would volunteer groups of workers, as an intern I would supervise and help them to correctly proceed with their work. Occasionally I would be asked to aid in various research projects. On one occasion I helped to capture, measure, record and tag the ears of white footed field mice for a project regarding small mammal communities living in isolated forested areas and the impact of that isolation on their genetic make-up. In addition to that, as a team, the other interns and I used GIS to create a map of a salamander research project and to record the location and condition of host trees for Asian Long-Horned Beetle and Emerald Ash Bore.

In order to be able to use a global positioning device or GPS, I underwent a two-day training seminar hosted by the makers of the GPS units. I was nervous about the new technology and my ability to operate the six-thousand-dollar unit correctly while trekking through terrain filled with brambles, boulders, and fallen trees. After the training and watching my fellow interns who had both taken GIS courses at their colleges, I was able to efficiently use the system to find salamander plots in the middle of the forest that were hidden under a carpet of fallen leaves. For a person who had never used a GPS unit (not even a Tomtom or Garmin), I am quite proud of this achievement. Often several tasks required skills that I had been taught in my Introduction to Forestry class such as tree identification, pacing, and the proper way to

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water plants. The ability to perform certain tasks without needing instruction or guidance emphasized the excellent education that I receive as a student at The University of the South.

From this internship I learned the importance of hard work and perseverance: trail maintenance can be one of the most difficult and yet mind-numbing tasks, but it is also extremely important for the safety of the patrons of the Gardens. Because the internship was unpaid, the time I worked was technically considered volunteer work and so I was able to take classes at the Adult Extended Education program in soil sciences. While mostly a broad survey class meant as an introduction to soil sciences, I learned many useful and valuable ways of identifying the quality of a soil sample such as the way damp soil acts when held in your hand, various crumb structures and what they mean for drainage, and even how a soil's color can determine its mineral content as well as its historical drainage. While not a part of my internship, my favorite thing about being in New York City was the ability to spend time with my aunt and uncle and a Sewanee friend who lives just a short train ride away in Connecticut. On Memorial Day weekend, I spent that Sunday on a lake in Northern Connecticut and saw a Bald Eagle. What better way to celebrate America than to see the nation's most prominent symbol of freedom? Another great part of the internship was the Garden's internship educational tours and the Horticulture School's weekly plant walks. This provided me an opportunity to explore other areas of the Garden that in other circumstances most people don't get to experience. Two of my favorite tours are the Herbarium which stores over seven million dried and preserved specimens that date back to the 1700s, and the plant walk in the Rock Garden.

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This internship helped me to evaluate and affirm my future career goals. After taking a water policy class at Sewanee and experiencing the practical side of land management in my internship, I am now certain that my future lies in the legal side of water conservation and land management. I enjoyed working at the Gardens and it was an experience I will never forget, but as a long-term job the legal world is more suited for my interests.

I will never forget my internship at the New York Botanical Gardens and the experiences I was able to have through a generous grant from Sewanee and all the help I received from the staff at Sewanee's Career & Leadership Development.