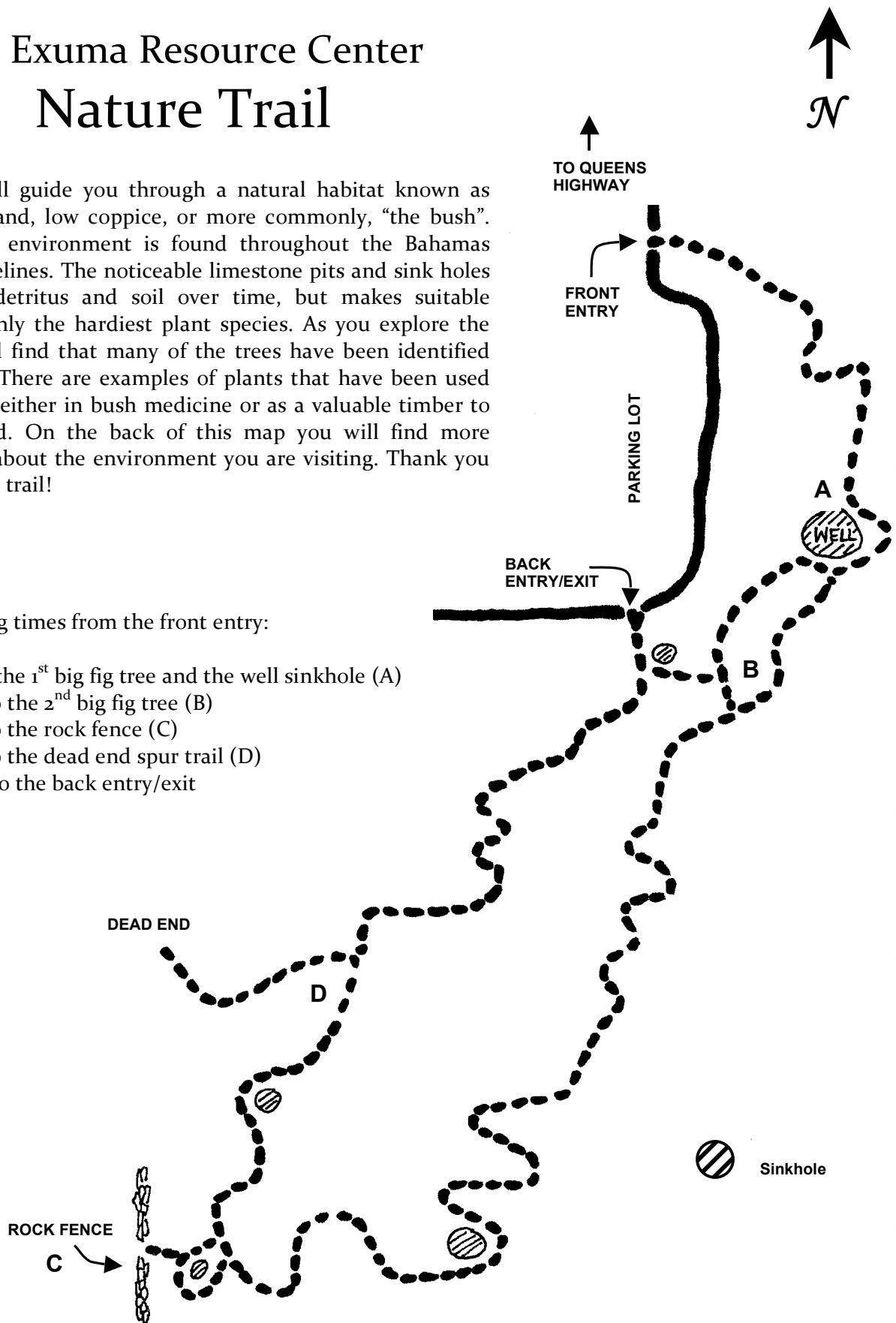


The Exuma Resource Center Nature Trail

This map will guide you through a natural habitat known as coastal rockland, low coppice, or more commonly, “the bush”. This type of environment is found throughout the Bahamas close to shorelines. The noticeable limestone pits and sink holes accumulate detritus and soil over time, but makes suitable habitat for only the hardest plant species. As you explore the trail, you will find that many of the trees have been identified and labeled. There are examples of plants that have been used for centuries either in bush medicine or as a valuable timber to be discovered. On the back of this map you will find more information about the environment you are visiting. Thank you and enjoy the trail!

Trail walking times from the front entry:

- 1 minute to the 1st big fig tree and the well sinkhole (A)
- 2 minutes to the 2nd big fig tree (B)
- 5 minutes to the rock fence (C)
- 7 minutes to the dead end spur trail (D)
- 10 minutes to the back entry/exit



Useful Plants

Besides providing oxygen, increasing rainfall potential, and providing habitat for many animal species, the trees of the Bahamas have been used for centuries in bush medicine and woodworking. These are some examples you may encounter on the trail.

Gum Elemi (*Bursera simarouba*)

This tree commonly known as gumbo limbo or turpentine tree and can grow up to 80ft tall and 3 ft in diameter. It is found throughout the Bahamas and most of the Caribbean. The resin it produces has been used for incense, varnish, glue, and to stop wounds from bleeding. It easily roots and is useful as a living fenceposts.

Longleaf Blolly (*Guapira discolor*)

This tree is commonly known as beefwood, pigeon berry, and narrow leaf blolly. It is found throughout the Bahamas, and in Florida, Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica. It can grow up to 50 ft, but is usually no more than 30ft in height and 30 inches in diameter. Branch tips have been used for a treatment of typhoid fever.

Boar Mastic (*Linociera bumelioides*)

Also commonly known as black ebony, fully grown examples (up to 30 ft) of this species are usually found in blackland coppice environments in the Bahamas and Cuba where there is more available soil. Mastic was among the many species logged extensively for their use in decorative woodwork.

How do sinkholes form?

The Bahamas was born in a shallow sea. Through the processes of sedimentation and the rise and fall of sea level, limestone rock was formed to create the many islands that make up the land today. The sinkholes, banana holes, blue holes, and caves which are found throughout the country are formed by the process of erosion. Limestone is a very porous rock and is easily dissolved by rainwater. As rain seeps into the rock it dissolves the limestone to form holes and channels beneath the surface. These holes are enlarged over time by the accumulation of sinking rainwater. Eventually, sinkholes will join and grow even larger. The largest holes, particularly blue holes, are found where the water table is deepest.

What lives here?

Coastal rocklands provide habitat for a variety of bird, reptile, and some mammal species. Bats and barn owls depend on larger sinkholes and caves for their homes. *Anolis* lizards are abundant. Boa constrictors, known as the Bahama Fowl Snake, also live in “the bush”. There are several endemic species of the *Epicrates* genus found throughout the Bahamas that can grow to be 6- 8 ft in length. Although the Fowl Snake is a very shy animal that is relatively harmless to humans and actually can help diminish rodent populations, it is widely feared and killed when encountered.

Plants that don't need soil!

Bromeliads and orchids are a type of plant known as an epiphyte. Epiphytes cling to tree bark and derive their nutrients and moisture from the humidity and dust in the air. There are many bromeliads to be found along the trail in varying sizes. Interestingly, the bromeliads you see along the trail are closely related to pineapples and Spanish moss. Orchids are rarer, but may be spotted by a careful observer.

References: Trees of the Bahamas and Florida, by William Cutts (2004); Bahamian Landscapes: An introduction to the Geography of the Bahamas, by Neil Sealey (3rd Edition); The Ephemeral Islands, by David Campbell (1978)