

# Nuala's Tree and Concordia

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By The Balsamean

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2019

*There are about 45 pictures on this page, including a few maps. It may load slowly. You can optionally open/download a PDF copy of it to read offline. The PDF link will be added here shortly after the post is published.*

*This is the only long post in this series on Concordia. The rest have narrower topics and are mostly pictures and links.*

Dear Nuala (NOO-lah),

I have less than two weeks before your visit, and too many other things to do, including figuring out how to fix the refrigerator that turned itself into a freezer today (M-m-m, frozen pickles), but I want to document something going on in the Balsamea woods that is about you, or because of you. I want it to be on record, forever. I also want to make sure you know about it, just in case your tour here doesn't do this topic justice.

I've given you the pseudonym Nuala to protect you from the stigma of associating with me, and to protect your privacy. Even though only three or four other people will read this, if anybody, everybody on the Internet is a close neighbor with a fence to gossip over.

It's a nice Irish name. It came from Fionnuala (or Finnguala), notable in the popular Irish myth, ***The Children of Lir*** (PDF). *This presentation of the myth, with the art I added to it, a Thomas Moore poem, and extensive end-notes, may be the best treatment of the topic you'll find. Especially since you're probably not looking anyway. But seriously, it was a pile of work putting it together, and worth it. It's probably the best part of this post. (It even has a naked picture of Nuala.)*

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Nuala (/ˈnuːlə/; Irish: [ˈn̪ˠuə̃l̪ˠə]) is an Irish female given name, derived from Irish mythology – being either a diminutive form of Fionnuala [or Fionnghuala] (“fair shoulder”), the daughter of Lir, or an alternate name for Úna (perhaps meaning “lamb”), wife of Finvarra, king of the fairies. — from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuala>

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Fionnuala – In Irish mythology, Finnguala (modern spellings: Fionnghuala or Fionnuala; literally fionn-ghuala meaning “fair shoulder”) was the daughter of Lir of the Tuatha Dé Danann. In the legend of the Children of Lir, she was changed into a swan and cursed by her stepmother, Aoife, to wander the lakes and rivers of Ireland, with her brothers Fiachra,

Conn and Aodh, for 900 years until saved by the marriage of Lairgren, son of Colman, son of Cobthach, and Deoch, daughter of Finghin, whose union broke the curse.[1] 'The Song of Albion', with lyrics by Thomas Moore[2] speaks of her wanderings.

The name is anglicized as Fenella. The shortened version Nuala is commonly used as a first name in contemporary Ireland. — from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fionnuala>

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As you know, about ten years ago (maybe more, I'm not sure ... the earliest photo I have is 2009), I dedicated a special maple tree to you, with your name. Nuala's tree (or just "Nuala Tree") is now the centerpiece of a forest retreat with unique natural features and special relationships with many components of Balsamea's trail network.

The place is called Concordia Park, or, as I'll normally put it, just *Concordia*.

Concordia celebrates your role in my life. Everything that Nature and I have developed in Concordia (and will continue to develop) has been with you in mind. In your upcoming visit, your first time on Balsamea trails, I'm sure you'll feel the merging of our souls with these woods having happened before you got here, especially because you know what I mean by the word "soul." Right?

Someday children will play at Concordia and not understand its mysterious attraction, the lingering scent of love in the soul of the union of a man, a forest, a dog, and a true friend.

That friendship has always been part of my union with this forest, right from the first time I set foot here in January 2005, the same month I met you. Though never here in the flesh, you have always been a presence crucial to this forested union, this refuge that saved me, and saves me every day.

I have not forgotten that you were here once (in 2005 or 2006?) for about half an hour, a small fraction of the time you spent driving through a Thanksgiving snow storm to get here and back. But you saw almost nothing of Balsamea then.

Why "Concordia?"

***Harmony. Unity. Union of feeling. Accordance.***

**These are words translated from the Latin *Concordia*.**

On with the show ...

Get acquainted with the map of Concordia. Then you will go for a walk around its perimeter in photos. In future posts, you'll explore Concordia's interior and some items of special interest. (All images will open to a full screen version with a click. Much nicer views if you're on a human-compatible screen; i.e., more than 11" diagonal.)



Locations of Concordia and Aranyaka in Balsamea

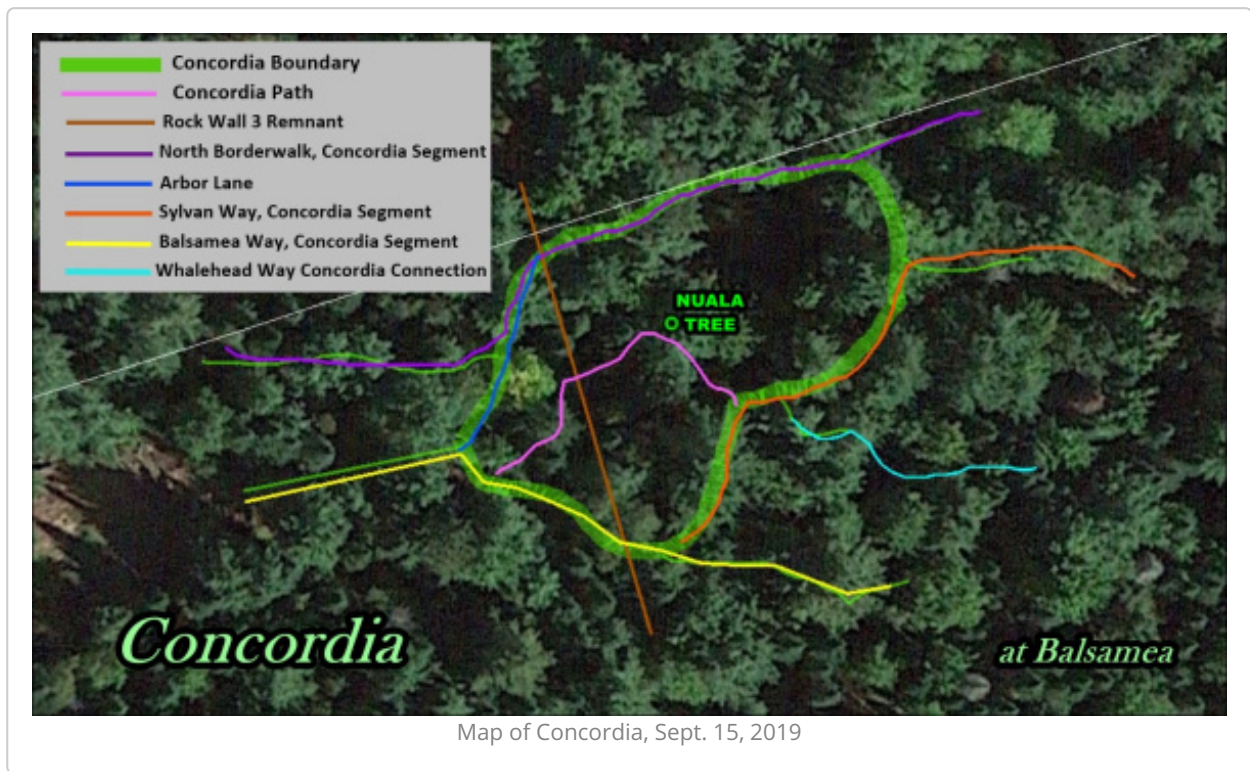
Nuala's tree is one of only two things in Balsamea named for a person. The other is Delaney Place. She probably will never know it. I am sometimes surprised by her presence in the air, always looking for answers that I tell her don't really need to be found, just keep walking the woods.



<https://youtu.be/2Kx2PbA8bCl>

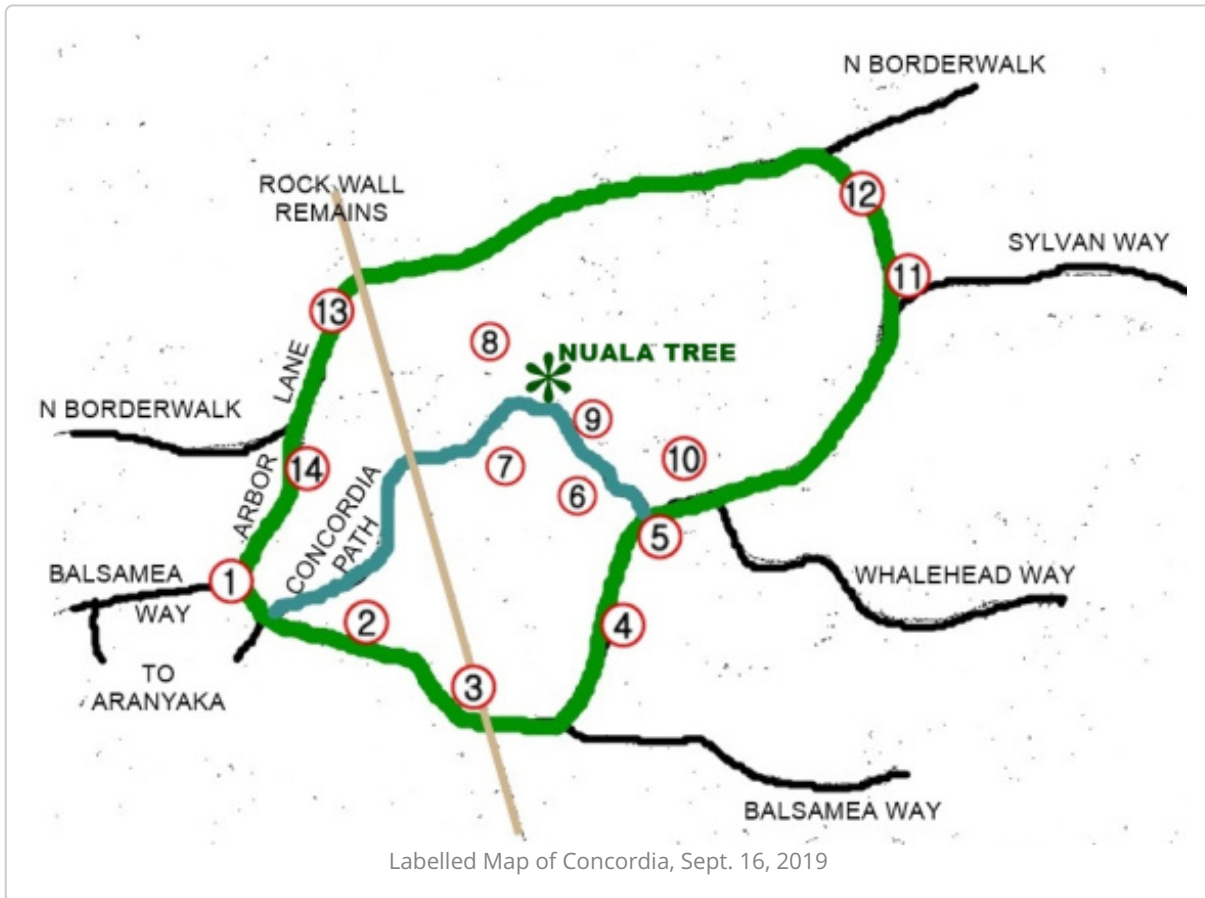
I can't tell her about Delaney Place for six years, and then it may be too late, given the likelihood of my departure from here in four or five.

Thank you, John, for the musical interlude. One of my all-time great favorite songs.



The numbers in the map below are mentioned in the text. Not all of them are in this post. This is only a stroll around the perimeter to get generally acquainted with Concordia. By the time you get to the end of this, you'll be glad it was only a perimeter stroll.





The perimeter (green line) is about 460 ft. long, enclosing about 0.3 acre. Nobody else will ever get anything of that scale dedicated to them in Balsamea.

Some interesting points about Concordia that I did not realize she had been developing for a long time without telling me:

1. "All roads lead to Concordia." Among other trails, there are five "Ways" in Balsamea; long, east-west routes: Whitetail Way, Balsamea Way, Whalehead Way, Sylvan Way, and North Borderwalk (qualifies as a Way but is named for its location). Concordia's perimeter is comprised of segments of three of them: Balsamea, Sylvan and North Borderwalk. Sylvan Way begins in Concordia and forms its east boundary. A fourth Way, Whalehead, begins at Concordia. I can't think of another place in Balsamea that connects so many major routes.
2. The Nuala Tree turns out to be right in the center of Concordia. I didn't plan it that way. In choosing the perimeter route, I just followed the most convenient ways. ("ways," get it? that's a joke). Then I made Concordia Path go through a convenient route that begged to be made.
3. Concordia has at least two tree species that are not found elsewhere in Balsamea (as far as I know), and I did not realize it — after 14 years of walking by them — until I committed to developing Concordia. They are the Eastern Hop Hornbeam and Beaked Hazel Nut. You'll meet them later. I was well aware of the hazel, but never

could figure out what it was until now.

**Map Item 1 – Arriving at Concordia by foot or by car from the house:**



Map Item 1, Y Intersection, Balsamea Way at Arbor Lane, Sept. 8, 2019

Concordia is the only developed special place in Balsamea accessible by car except the original Camp Balsamea now part of the house extended yard.

This is the “Y.” You have come here via Balsamea Way. It turns right (E) at the Y. Arbor Lane goes left (N) at the Y. It is the only route called a “lane” in Balsamea, another thing special to Concordia. All other named routes are Ways, Passes, Paths or Loops. There won’t be another lane. I won’t steal the distinction from Concordia.



Sept. 8, 2019

A closer look at the Y. That beech tree in the center was about four feet tall when I met it. Now it's about eighteen. It has been a special tree to grow with. More pictures of it coming in another tour.

**Map Item 14 - Arbor Lane:**





Map Item 14, Arbor Lane, Sept. 8, 2019

You bear right to stay on Balsamea Way, but look to the left and see Arbor Lane. The picture does nothing to show what a pretty lane it is. Wait until you see the fall pictures! That bright area at the end is on the other side of the property line. That used to be a dark forest. They tore it down.





Arbor Lane, June 8, 2019

Then your mind wanders back a few months to a different season and a different light. Is it the same place? I don't think so. This one even smells different. The warmth of the sun and the stillness of the air raise "essence of forest" in a different way.



Center Beech, Arbor Lane, June 8, 2019

This big old beech on Arbor Lane, coupled with the intermingling leaves of a red maple on the other side, creates one of Balsamea's nicest fall color displays. It's pretty darn nice in the summer, too! You don't feel the presence of this place as I do, but after you've been there, it will stay with you. The picture can help bring the heart of Arbor Lane back to you.

Before you leave the Y, take a look back at where you've come from.





View West on Balsamea Way from Y Intersection, Sept. 8, 2019

Standing behind the adolescent beech in the Y, you look west, down the leg of the Y.





Wait ... get closer to the beech, under the branches, and turn on the lights.



Your eyes see the car way out there, but the picture needed help to make the point. This gives you an idea of where you are in Balsamea, if you're not much for maps.





Balsamea Way departing Y intersection, Sept. 8, 2019

Okay, move ahead on Balsamea Way. Or, if your back hurts and walking makes it worse ...





You can safely go a little farther with a normal car, but this puts you far enough into Concordia.

Just behind you and just ahead of you on the right are two paths into Aranyaka Maze, surrounding the Aranyaka Great Pine Sanctuary:



Aranyaka Great Pine Sanctuary, Sept. 15, 2018

You may miss it because it's new and not worn in yet, but the west end of Concordia Path is right there on your left as you leave the Y, between those two balsams.





View from Balsamea Way into west end of Concordia Path, Sept. 13, 2019

Looking out from the path, you can see how near the Y it is.





I mention this because it is going to be on the test. "If you are escaping a skunk at Nuala Tree, what is the fastest way to get to Arbor Lane?"

Skunks are rare here. I've seen one only twice, and both times at night. For instance:



Skunk at Night on Birdsong Loop, Oct. 6, 2017

I met this pretty kitty on October 6, 2017 on Birdsong Loop. He whispered, "I am the locksmith of love." Then I knew it was Pepe Lepew.



<https://youtu.be/S1mK9En8NvE>

### **Map Item 2 - Beaked Hazel Nut Tree:**

Immediately after the Concordia Path connection, you come to the newly discovered oldly known tree. (If newly, why not oldly?) I've enjoyed this tree for a long time, but could never figure out what it was until last month when it all but threw its fruit at me. Another way Concordia grabbed my attention.

Until a few years ago this was a lush, happy bush. I lost interest in it, and during that time the deer caught onto it. But it has become tall enough now that it may escape their torture well enough to keep growing. There is a "chapter" devoted to this tree in a future post. I'll never lose interest in it again.

### **Map Item 3 - Multi-Trunk White Birch and Bridge Rock:**



MAP ITEM 2: Beaked Hazel Tree, Sept. 8, 2019





MAP ITEM 3: White Birch at hole in Rock Wall 3 remnant, Sept. 8, 2019

This is an odd spot. This is one of the remnants of Rock Wall 3's north end. South of Balsamea Way the wall is substantial and intact, like the other rock walls. Long ago — maybe 100 years or so — somebody scattered this end of RW3. I date it that far back because there are some big trees growing amidst piles of rocks here.

This scene has a very nice quadruple trunk white birch standing guard over a rock-lined hole in the ground below the former rock wall. This white birch is the prettiest of the few within Concordia. One of them was dead and eventually fell a few years ago. Behind this birch is "Bridge Rock" ...





MAP ITEM 3: Bridge Rock, Sept. 8, 2019

You need an active childlikeness to enjoy little things like this. Let this be an invitation to that in you.



Beginning of Sylvan Way, turn left (N) from Balsamea Way, Sept. 8, 2019



Now, if you had not stopped to look at these things and think about them, in about 30 seconds of walking from the Y, you would be here, where Sylvan Way begins, at a left (N) turn off Balsamea Way. But that's no way to explore a trail, just walking without investigating. So what does it look like if you don't turn onto Sylvan Way?



Balsamea Way, view east from intersection with Sylvan Way, Sept 16, 2019

Beyond the intersection with Sylvan Way, Balsamea Way slides through an S-curve into the heart of Balsamea.

As you turn left (N) onto the beginning of Sylvan Way, you'll get your first glimpse of Nuala Tree ...



Start of Sylvan Way from Balsamea Way, into east side of Concordia perimeter, Sept 8, 2019

Don't see it? It's the one in the upper left background seeming to have a V-shaped trunk.

Out on a trail, it's a good idea to look behind you now and then, to help recover your way if you get twisted up. Walk a bit up from here, then turn around and see this:





View south from Nuala Yard on Sylvan Way to intersection with Balsamea Way, Sept. 8, 2019

Yeah, see? You didn't know that big pine was standing there, did you? You walked right by and didn't hear a word it said.

One of several rock piles scattered from the rock wall is here on the left of the trail. Over a decade ago I moved some rocks from this pile to create Sylvan Way. The big pine on the right, within Concordia, grew right in the middle of a rock pile, largely buried in pine needles.

Turn around again.

**Map Item 4 – Approaching Nuala Yard from Black Cherry and Rock Pile on Sylvan Way**



View N to Nuala Yard from black cherry on Sylvan Way, Sept. 8, 2019

The tree on the right with the rough, scaly bark is — I believe — black cherry. I've never seen the cherries, but the branches and foliage are way up in the canopy. If it's not black cherry, it will be great if somebody tells me.

"Nuala Yard" is the open space on the left, in front of Nuala Tree.

Just right of center is the foot of another big pine, with a smaller trunk growing diagonally across it. The smaller one is the Eastern Hop Hornbeam tree, the only one (as far as I know) in Balsamea, thus unique to Concordia like the beaked hazel. You'll spend some time exploring it closely in another post.

The big pine on the right, beyond the black cherry, with two silvery things on the trunk has a two-foot long broken branch pointing the way into Nuala Yard. Keep that in mind as a reference point in future pictures and posts. By the time you get here in the flesh, you'll feel like you know the place already. Then, you'll find out how truly beautiful and interesting it is, in ways the pictures never came near telling. Pictures really have very little to say about reality. They are like ghosts.

The two silvery things are aluminum trail symbols for Sylvan Way. Balsamea's trail markers are another story for another time. For the moment, I'll just say that I cut up countless foil baking pans to make them. Each trail has its own symbol shape. The symbols are placed



on the right side of the trails, just after every intersection on the first suitable tree. Whenever you come to an intersection, look at the right side of the trail in both directions to find out what it is. That is, if you have the key to the symbols.



Same location, but three months earlier, in June 2019.

This picture is three months older, from June 2019, before I cleared and expanded Nuala Yard and created Concordia Path. Notice the trees to the left of center that are now gone. I removed many small balsams in the space between the hop hornbeam and Nuala Tree. In a future post I'll explain why.

(Remember, it's a lot easier to make out details if you click to open the pictures full-screen, and they are nicer to look at.)

### **Map Item 5 - "Big Pointer" Pine at Entrance to Nuala Yard on Sylvan Way**

The picture below is from May 2012, several years before the trails got aluminum trail markers. Recall that I mentioned a white birch that had died and fallen. There it is dead but still standing (amidst the balsams that I removed last month ... when they were twice the size shown here). When you create some trails and walk them more than 10,000 times, you notice little things like a fallen dead tree. And you also walk right by things of special interest and never notice them. Like the hop hornbeam growing across that big pine on the left side of the trail. Go figure.





IS THIS A BLACK CHERRY?



View NE on Sylvan Way at Nuala Yard Pointer Pine, May 14, 2012



## Map Item 10 – Eastern Hop Hornbeam at Big Pine on East Edge of Nuala Yard.

You'll see details of the hornbeam and its leaves and fruit in another post, but here's generally what it has been doing: climbing about 20 feet up that pine:



Eastern Hop Hornbeam growing from base of big pine, Sept 8, 2019. Balsams cleared from left. Sylvan Way trail on right.

I forgot to get a picture of it, but Whalehead Way begins on the right (E) side of the trail here, just off the picture.

Actually, though I don't remember doing it, the hornbeam says plainly that I cut a branch off it, probably because it was growing out into the space where I created the trail in 2005 or 6, maybe 7. I didn't notice what kind of tree it was, or I don't remember. Maybe it didn't have foliage at the time. Some things don't matter when cutting a trail through the woods, and you're up to your nose in forest debris and dirt, and sweating by the quart.

By the way, no chainsaw has ever been used on any Balsamea trails. If I can't do it by brute force or by lopping shear or by wood saw, the trail goes another way. It is against Balsamea Law to use a chainsaw in the woods. Always has been. Even when Nature throws a lot of trees onto the trails. She loves to redirect trail routes.

It was a real trick breaking off those big pine branches so I wouldn't have to go get a ladder to cut them off. They were very long dead branches that bent low enough to grab and hurl my weight into them. When you break a pine branch that thick, the impact on your body is like slamming a baseball bat onto a big rock with all your might. Over the years since then, I've grown more careful about stupid tricks like that. I go get the ladder and saw, even if it doesn't give me a fond memory of almost killing myself. This is why the tree gets a number on the map (5). It let me live.

On May 11, 2012, this image (below) found its way into my heart, looking back at the Pointer tree from around the bend. It has always been a favorite among the 850 bazillion Balsamea trail pictures. This, and many other little "signs" make it seem that Concordia has been in the making of its own accord for a long time. Accord. One of the translations of *concordia*.



Eastern Hop Hornbeam infused into big pine branches,  
Sept 8, 2019





View south on Sylvan Way near Nuala Yard, May 11, 2012

It took some doing to find the name for your “park,” Nuala. I was very happy to find Concordia because its translation to English is perfect for the job, especially because we had talked about the name Harmony.

But it was even more fun coming up with the name Nuala. I hope to hell you like it! I’m going to curl up into a little ball and roll under the refrigerator if you don’t. No pressure, though.

I have more fun writing these things than anyone has ever had reading any of them. That’s why I say I blog for my entertainment.

But this isn’t really a blog post. It’s an act of devotion. Doesn’t mean I can’t have fun with it.

Continuing your stroll around Concordia’s perimeter ...

We’re going to linger in the same area for a bit.

Stepping back toward the Pointer Pine, closer than the previous picture, in this one from late June of this year, Pointer is on the left, hornbeam-pal pine is on the right. The skinny dead leaner has fallen. I removed the balsams on the right. In the post about Nuala Yard, you’ll see that from multiple angles.

I like this picture mostly because of the different perspective provided by the position and

the light. These three big pines are like sentinels overlooking Nuala Yard. But there are several other big pines, red and white, in Concordia.



View southwest on Sylvan Way, through pair of pines overlooking Nuala Yard, June 23, 2019

Okay, turn around and resume the original counter-clockwise course around the perimeter. Next stop is “Quad Maple,” the eastern corner of Concordia, at the point where Sylvan Way turns from northeast to east.

### **Map Item 11 – Quad Maple at Sylvan Way Turn East**

That’s Quad Maple in the center, where Sylvan Way turns right (E).

Often Nature grabs my head and tilts it back, saying, “Hey, Dummy, you’re missing half the show by not looking up.” I appreciate the reminder.





Who cares what's there? It's a pretty scene. Quad Maple is in the center. Sylvan Way turns right. Sept. 16, 2019



Canopy of Quad Maple, Sept 16, 2019



It is actually two red maples with two trunks each. The canopy created by the four of them is massive. I love the layered shades of green varying with the amount of light they get as they mottle each other and the sky. It looks delicious, as if it would taste like candy. The longer you examine it, the more surreal it becomes. Maybe I'll put a blanket or tarp out there so you can lay down and study it. When you get here, the leaves will have begun Fall color change.

One day I laid in the moss and counted the leaves. There were 8,263!

Now why would I lie about a thing like that?



This is almost certainly logging damage, from dragging giant pines through the woods by a cable (they left a broken cable here for me to find). The most recent logging here was in 2000 or 2001, of a selective kind that did not wipe out masses of trees or destroy the forest. It did do some damage, but every year I see improvements in the recovery. In some places I've helped it along.





Quad Maple view 2, Sept. 16, 2019

There's a big pine in the background midway between the two maples. That is the northeast corner of Concordia, where the perimeter joins the North Borderwalk trail. But stay here at the maples for a moment.



View on Sylvan Way from Quad Maples SW to Nuala Yard Pointer Pine, Sept. 16, 2019

Looking back toward Nuala Yard, with the Quad Maples in the right foreground, you probably recognize those two big pines out there, straddling the trail. Whalehead Way begins on the left between them.

Now if you turn around again, to the east, you've got a nice view of Sylvan Way heading on its mission eastward, weaving through old tree stumps that I've watched change from wood to lichen- and moss-covered pulp. The lichens came first. When they exhausted the wood's usefulness, as it turned mushy, the moss moved in. Stumps entertain without making speeches. I don't know where they got the term stump speech.





View East on Sylvan Way at Quad Maple, Sept 16, 2019

**Map Item 12 – Trailless Connection from Quad Maple to Big Pine on North Borderwalk**

There is no trail from the maples to the pine, but it is sparsely treed ground over a span of only about 50 feet.



View from N. Borderwalk trail south to Quad Maple (left), Sept. 13, 2019

Now you are on North Borderwalk, looking south to the Quad Maple (left). This big pine is the northeast corner of Concordia. I am not going to open a trail here. I will let these little balsams grow to form a barrier from the border trail.

Turning east, away from Concordia, you see North Borderwalk heading into an area I call Maple Cove. This trail runs east-west along the north property line.





North Borderwalk view east from Concordia to Maple Cove, Sept 16, 2019

Turn and walk west, and you're on the Concordia perimeter again, following a portion of North Borderwalk back to Arbor Lane. From here you can see the "far side" of Nuala Maple towering above the new dense growth that has filled the formerly vacant space between Nuala and the property line. I am very pleased with this, especially now that the reckless, greedy logging on the adjacent property has turned that forest into an eyesore, especially at this location.



View of Nuala Tree from North Borderwalk, Sept. 13, 2019

That's Nuala Maple Tree, slightly right of center, mingling with the branches of that big pine to the right.

(Hmm. I sense a short story series heroic character named *Nuala Maple*. Too bad I could not write a short story to save my life.)

Walk a bit farther, and you get a clearer view of Nuala Tree. In a few years, you won't be able to see it like this. That's good. Like I said, I want the barrier here.

In a moment you arrive at the north end of Arbor Lane, almost back to the beginning of today's perimeter walk. You will turn left (S) into Arbor Lane.

This end of Arbor Lane is protected by the awesome power of two master pines. You'll see more of this area in the post about Arbor Lane. For now, here's a glimpse.





Better view of Nuala Maple from N Borderwalk, June 8, 2019



View south into north end of Arbor Lane, June 22, 2019



North Borderwalk used to continue west without turning into Arbor Lane. This summer I rerouted it to go into the lane and then turn west on the other side of that small beach to the right of the pink flags. Long story I already told you. You'll see why.

The chain is something new this year. It is related to the fact of the devastated (logged) forest behind you right now as you look south. We won't mess up this presentation by talking about that or showing pictures of it.

The big pine on the left (above) has some of those giant branches I was talking about. Ones you should cut with a saw, not break with your body. The ones on this tree aren't in the way of anything, so they can stay as long as they want. That will be a very long time. (Yes, this picture is from before the chain.)



Big pine at corner of North Borderwalk and Arbor Lane, June 8, 2019

This is the newly rerouted section of North Borderwalk departing Arbor Lane to the west. It is one of the many spider-like connections to Concordia.





View west from Arbor Lane into new section of North Borderwalk, Sept. 16, 2019

Finally, you saunter down Arbor Lane to the Y where this all started.



There is no way to end this story, because it is just beginning.

So I'll close with this, Nuala: Concordia is about you, because of you, and for you. Your presence in the Balsamea union all these years merged with Nature and me to bring Concordia to life. She will be thrilled to have you sauntering among her many connections to things we know and things we can't know until she shows us.



The next post will be about ... what? *Nuala Tree*, of course. We barely saw her at all in this tour.

An instrumental bit of entertainment to set the mood as you depart ...



Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest  
Come taste the sunsweet berries of the Earth  
Come roll in all the riches all around you  
And for once, never wonder what they're worth  
-from the song *Colors of the Wind* in Disney's *Pocahontas*



I'm considering this Enya piece, *The Memory of Trees*, as a theme song for Concordia. And an Irish singer fits right in here, no? There are no lyrics. The voices are just wordless vocalizations. Enya said so herself ...



What do you think? Is it about the memory trees have, or remembering trees, or remembering what it was like when we still had them before the destruction of the Amazon? All the above. It will be on the test.

Did you know there have been more than SIXTY THOUSAND fires in the Amazon forest this year? Seriously. Most of them caused by so-called farmers ... industrialized soy and cattle growers.

Will you remember when the planet could still breathe?

That's a trick question for bonus points on the test.