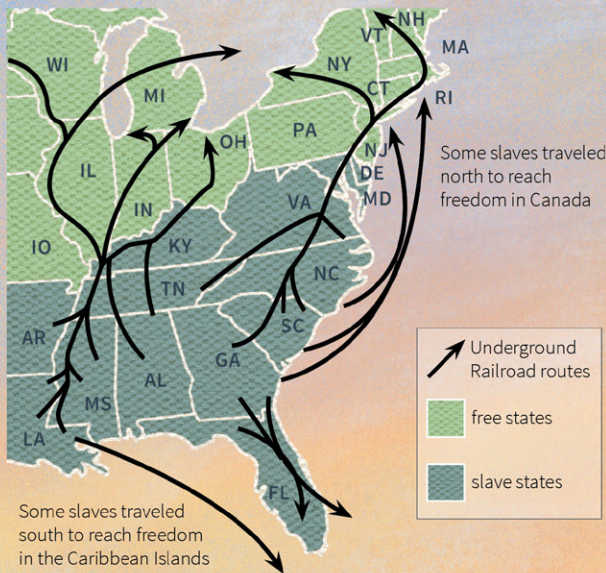


SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

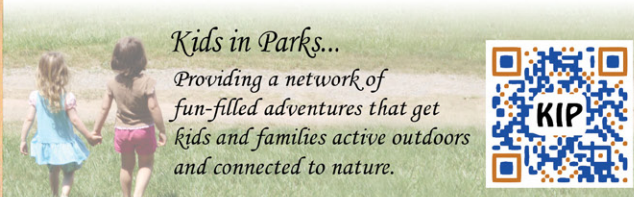
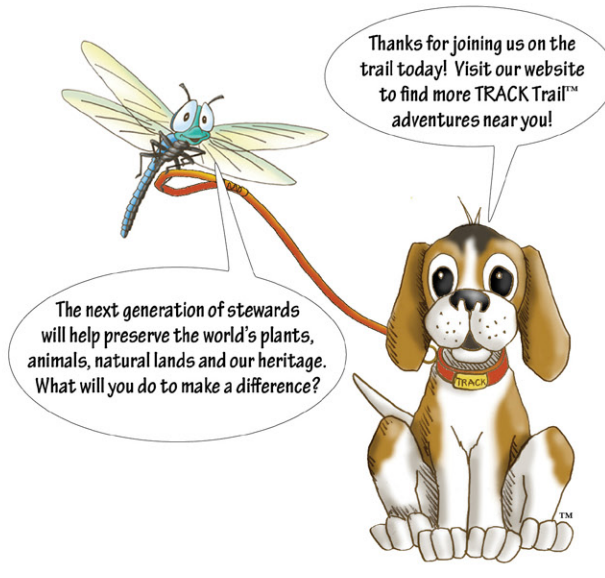
Until 1865, slavery in southern states was legal. In northern states, slavery was illegal. The Underground Railroad was a network of courageous people who helped escaped slaves travel secretly by offering guidance and safe places to stay. If runaway slaves were caught in any state, north or south, they had to be returned to their masters. People who helped runaway slaves had to pay fines or go to jail.



THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN DISMAL SWAMP

Many escaped slaves lived in Dismal Swamp. Some stayed for a while before traveling farther north. Others lived deep in the Swamp for the rest of their lives. Because the Underground Railroad was a secret, few records were kept. Even today, we don't know exactly how the Underground Railroad operated. If you were a slave in the 1800s and had made it to Dismal Swamp, would you stay or continue north? Why?

TRACK your hike at
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THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN DISMAL SWAMP

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

- Harriet Tubman, Underground Railroad conductor



By the mid-1800s, four million people in the United States lived as slaves. The Dismal Swamp was a safe haven for many people who were escaping slavery in the South. Discover how escaped slaves could live in the Swamp in freedom.

FINDING FREEDOM IN THE SWAMP

Many of the slaves that built the Dismal Swamp Canal became familiar with the Swamp. Some of them escaped into the wilderness. They formed communities called “maroon colonies”. The maroons built shelters on areas of higher ground in the swamp. Dismal Swamp was probably home to the largest maroon colony in the United States. What do you think life was like in the Swamp?



WHY LIVE IN THE SWAMP?

The Swamp is a tough place for humans to live. It is nearly impossible to travel in some areas because the peat soil can be up to 15 feet deep. This kept most people out, but escaped slaves who knew the Swamp were able to navigate through it. Be sure to see the exhibits in the visitor center to get an up-close look at the soil.

Slave catchers also avoided the Swamp because of its many myths. The legends of poisonous vapors, ghosts, balls of snakes, swamp creatures, and even an evil spirit called the Swamp Witch kept people from searching here. Tell a story that would scare people away from the Swamp.

Written & Illustrated by Elise A. Kahl

PASSAGE ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The journey to freedom was filled with uncertainty. Escaped slaves often traveled for days or weeks between Underground Railroad stations, and they were always in fear of being found. Slave catchers rode horses and used dogs to track escaped slaves. Most of escaped slaves' time was spent hiding. They had to survive on very little sleep or food.



How would you move undetected through the wilderness?

1. Be quiet by not talking.
2. Walk slowly and carefully to avoid snapping twigs or crunching leaves.
3. Stop every few steps and listen for others.
4. If you see a person or animal, or hear a noise, slowly crouch down.

(Because walking on the soil can be dangerous, please stay on the boardwalk.)

SURVIVING IN THE SWAMP

SHELTER

Bald cypress and Atlantic white cedar trees were used to build shelters in the swamp since they have wood that does not rot easily. Can you find these tree species?

Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)



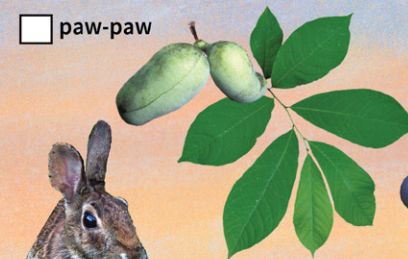
Atlantic White Cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*)



FOOD & WATER

The maroon colonists ate small game and native fruits, such as paw-paws and grapes. Can you find some of the foods that they depended on for survival? *(Many plants have poisonous look-alikes. Please do not collect or eat any of the plants along the trail.)*

paw-paw



muscadine



small animal

LIFE LESSONS

The Underground Railroad is proof that through individual and collective acts of courage, injustices can be overcome. How are you courageous? How will you help others who are treated unfairly throughout your life?