

MEDICINE MEN OF THE INDIANS PRESCRIBED WITCH HAZEL

Witch hazel extract, long accepted in medical and domestic practice as a reputable sedative for the relief of pain and inflammation, and as a mild antiseptic, had its origin as a remedy in the magic of the medicine men of North American Indians, according to Dr. Julian A. Steyermark, Assistant Curator of the Herbarium at Field Museum.

In the Hall of Plant Life (Hall 29) is a branch of the witch hazel shrub in full flower and leaf, reproduced from nature, and a model of a flower of the plant enlarged to illustrate its characteristics. Also shown are specimens of its bark and leaves, and of allied plants.

The Indians were the first to use the bark and leaves of the witch hazel plant to alleviate pain, under the direction of their tribal medicine men who accompanied treatment with magical incantations, Dr. Steyermark says. The white invaders of the American continent learned of their efficacy from the Indians, and today millions of households always have on hand a bottle of extract obtained from the bark and leaves by modern pharmaceutical manufacturing methods.

The name "witch hazel" has its origin in superstition. The shrub has unusual living habits, as it blooms in the autumn, often after frosts have come, and ripens its fruit in the spring. This phenomenon, contrary to the behavior of most plants, gave rise to an idea that the plant was supernatural, and caused it to be invested, in the minds of the superstitious, with many peculiar powers—hence the name, "witch hazel," a plant regarded as capable of the sorceries of a witch. There are several species of witch hazel trees and shrubs, each with a number of varieties, growing throughout the northern temperate zones of the Old and New World.

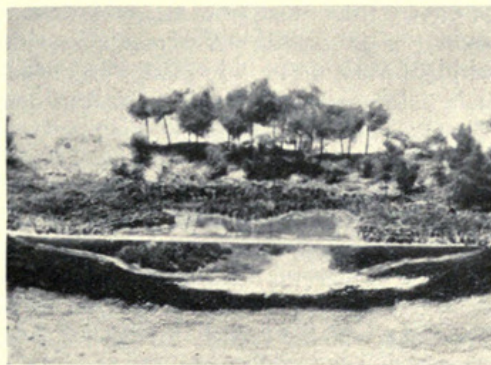
THINGS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

Formation of Peat Shown in Model

A model representing a small lake of glacial origin which is filled with peat formed from the swamps and pond vegetation growing in it is on exhibition in Hall 36 in the Department of Geology. Such lakes, in all stages of filling, and the marshes and even fairly dry meadows which indicate their former sites, are numerous in the Chicago region and also in the lake country of northwestern Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

The original lake bottom composed of stony glacial clay, or "till," may be seen in the model. The till is covered with a thick bed of other clay deposited from the muddy water of the lake. Above this clay

lie beds of dark brown peat and partially decomposed vegetation which grows in the lake. The light-colored bed near the center of the model is "marl," a limy substance formed by the deposition of carbonate of lime from solution in the water around the stems of certain algae, the life processes of which bring about this deposition. Beds of shell marl—limy deposits formed from the accumulations of shells on the bottom of such lakes—do not appear in this model, as the conditions in the lake represented do



Model of Peat Bog

Down to the line representing the surface of the lake water it shows the scene a traveler would see; below this line it represents, in cross-section, the underwater conditions which cause formation of peat.

not favor the formation of such deposits. In some lakes marl deposits are often entirely absent.

The vegetation from which the peat is derived grows in the lake in well-defined zones. The more important of these zones are: (1) a zone of algae; (2) a zone of floating weeds, such as bladderwort; (3) a zone of floating bog which is a mat of sedges and rushes with clear water below; (4) a zone of grasses, sedges, and shrubs occupying the inner part of the filled-in edge of the lake; (5) a zone of tamaracks and spruces. At the edge of the swamp area is a depression which is wetter than the tamarack and most of the sedge zones. The depression marks the original shore line of the lake and is called a "fosse." The chief sources of peat in these local lakes and bogs are sedges and rushes. In many parts of the world peat is formed largely from the swamp moss known as sphagnum.

Source of Digitalis

The foxglove, a member of the figwort family, is a biennial plant which during its first year produces a rosette of leaves at the ground, and in its second season develops a stem two to four feet high with large leaves and conspicuous purple bell-shaped flowers. The leaves are used in preparing digitalis, a drug used as a cardiac tonic in some forms of heart disease. A native of northern Europe, the plant is widely cultivated. It is found in old-fashioned gardens in the United States and has become naturalized in certain sections of this country. A specimen is exhibited in Hall 29.

SILENT TRADE

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In these days of keen competition, in which bargaining may sometimes be none too scrupulous, it is interesting to look back to the period some 2,500 years ago when the "silent trade" took place on the north-west coast of Africa, as described by the Greek historian Herodotus.

Merchants from the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage, on the north African coast, sailed regularly through the Strait of Gibraltar, then known as the Pillars of Hercules. They unloaded their wares, and having disposed them in an orderly fashion along the beach, returned to their ships where they raised a dense smoke as a signal to tribes ashore. The natives of that part of the African coast responded to the signal, and disdaining any temptation to dishonesty, laid a quantity of gold near the goods. The natives thereupon withdrew to a safe distance.

Then the Carthaginians would come ashore, and appraise the gold. If it was not a satisfactory payment, they would return to their ships. The natives would then advance again, and if they thought the goods were worth more they would add a small quantity of gold dust to the pile already offered.

Again the Carthaginians would land, and if the amount of gold was satisfactory, they would take it away. The natives would then advance and collect the merchandise.

Herodotus says: "Neither party deals unfairly by the other; for the Carthaginians never touch the gold till it comes up to the worth of their goods, nor do the natives ever carry off the goods until the gold is taken away."

THE HEIGHT OF PRECAUTION—

—is exemplified by one animal which always enters its home backwards. This suspicious creature, which fears to take its eyes from the direction of possible approach of enemies as it goes into its burrow, is the African warthog, of which a group is on exhibition in Carl E. Akeley Memorial Hall (Hall 22). The specimens were collected in Somaliland.

The warthog is about as far removed from beauty as a creature can be. One writer has described it as "more like the incarnation of some hideous dream than any other extant animal." It is a cousin of the domestic pig, and gets its name from warty protuberances on its face. These are especially marked in the male. Both sexes have tusks, those of the male being larger. Zoologists state that warthogs are not ferocious unless wounded or hard pressed, when they may slash viciously with their tusks. The neck of a warthog is so short that the animal cannot turn its head very far, and when it wants to look back quickly it raises its snout straight up in the air.



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