
Mississippi Native Plant Quarterly

Mississippi Native Plant Society

September 1994

Mississippi natives as good as better-known medicinals from other areas

by Darrell Martin

This article is intended in part to address the concept that certain areas of the country are endowed with medicinal plants that possess extraordinary healing properties, while others are inferior.

Actually, this concept occurs when plants are introduced into a commercial market but, in actuality, every area is endowed with a certain number of very valuable, but lesser known, plants. No one can dispute the fact that certain areas such as the mountainous regions are endowed with some plants that are very useful. But if you look closely enough, you will find the area where you live is also full of useful, but little known, plants.

The key to finding and using such plants is to have good resource books. First, good identification books are essential, and these are easily available. Secondly, one must have quality books describing the former uses of these plants by serious practitioners. Once these are acquired, then the rest is due solely to the inspiration of the herbalists. If you take a walk in most area, you can discover something new about medicinal plants for the rest of your life, no matter how old or young you are.

The following plants are a few of the ones that I have been fortunate enough to work with in the area where I live.

Alnus serrulata, tag alder

I spent a good many years reading about tag alder before I finally got positive identification and was able to put it to practical use as God intended it. It is very useful in all kinds of skin disorders such as boils, eczema, impetigo, herpes, etc. It helps aid the body in assimilation of nutrients. Simultaneously, it helps to assimilate waste. It helps in diarrhea and indigestion. It is a much-praised remedy for children with sore mouths. I use it in combination with iris versicolor and wild cherry to aid in digestion. This formula is very helpful in many forms of skin disorders.

Tag alder will be found growing in what we refer to as "bottoms". It is also found near creeks and rivers. It has leaves somewhat resembling birch. The name tag alder refers to the cones that hang on the plant all winter and into the next growing season.

The medicinal parts used are the leaves and bark of the limbs. Actually, "twigs" are a better word, as tag alder doesn't grow very large. It looks more like a large shrub at maturity. When harvesting it, be sure to leave enough branches to make sure you don't destroy the plant.

I recently had very good success with this digestive formula in a very long standing case of successive crops of boils that had been causing a great deal of discomfort to a middle-aged lady. She said she had spent thousands of dollars seeking treatment, even resorting to surgical removal of many of the boils, and had as many as 50 boils at one time under her arms, breast, and on her legs. After using tag alder, her condition improved rapidly. She was greatly pleased to report that, at last count, she had only three boils. I gave her other herbs as well, but feel the tag alder was a very important part of her success.

Although tag alder is very useful and important, it is not commercially available. This may be due to the fact of its location, and that it isn't found in Oregon or some mountainous region along with commercially attractive herbs such as ginseng and goldenseal.

Lycopus, Bugleweed

Bugleweed will be found growing in marshy areas near pond and bogs. It's name, Lycopus, refers to its leaves, said to resemble a wolf's paw. It has a distinct odor, somewhat acrid, and its sap is very resinous, adhering to the hands with some tenacity. It has a square stem like the mints.

I like bugleweed very much, as it is very useful in assorted ways. It is a nice sedative to control a tumultuous vascular system. It helps increase the power of the heart in these cases while improving the circulation. It helps in general irritability, improves the appetite, and serves as a gastric tonic. Simmered in butter, it helps externally in old ulcers. Bugleweed helps purify the blood, assists in bloodmaking and nutrition. It relieves lung disorders, both chronic and acute. Bugleweed is very effective in controlling bleeding from the lungs in cough. I use it in several formulas, but its most remarkable results have been in diabetes, where I have received several complimentary replies from diabetics who have used it. I combine it in an old formula of fringe tree and bugleweed and, according to Dr. Ellingwood from the early school of Eclectic Medicine, many physicians reported very good results in diabetes. It is perfectly safe, very useful, and was in the trade at one time. The more serious herb books all give significant accounts of its use in early medicine. Due to its scarcity in modern times, bugleweed is now used only by native plant specialists.

Passiflora incarnata, Passionflower

Passionflower is a very useful nervine. It helps to give a fatigued person a restful sleep without causing drowsiness the following morning, allowing you to wake very refreshed. It is very useful in many nervous disorders; it is used to control the spasms of children whether from dentition, worms, etc. Many different types of headaches and painful conditions can be remedied by

passion flower. It is helpful in cardiac palpitations. I made a formula using passion flower, wood betony and bugleweed which is very effective for all the indicated forms of pain or nervous disorders.

Passionflower is very easily recognized by its very unusual flower. It is shaped in the center in the likeness of a cross, thus the latin name incarnata. It is a vine that grows in meadows and fields and around old piles and fence lines. It can be used as a tea as well, and is very effective in this form. It is very safe. Iris versicolor, Blue Flag Iris

Iris is an herb that is best dispensed by a health care practitioner, although it is safe when taken in medicinal doses. It can cause gastric disturbances if taken in improper doses. I have used it for some time, and have been greatly pleased with the results. Iris is an alternative, meaning that it influences the process of waste and repair. It works with the lymphatic glands and ductless glands. Whenever there are lymphatic enlargements, look to iris. If the glandular swellings are hard, iris can be combined with poke root, another herb which cannot be taken without supervision. It will cure goiter or enlarged thyroid. This fact was pointed out by Professor King in King's Dispensatory. I have used it with good success in acne and other skin disorders. Again, it cannot be taken ad lib, but must be carefully dispensed. Blue flag grows in wet areas. It has a very distinctive flower and leaf structure common to the iris species. It influences the liver, acting as a stimulant.

Ligustrum vulgare, privet

This is the very common species of ligustrum that grows along the fence rows and roadsides. It is actually an amazingly effective herb for use in sore throats and mouth sores. The berries are said to induce diarrhea. I have used the bark and leaves in a sore throat formula mixed with Salvia officinalis, the common garden sage. It cures sore throat very quickly and effectively. Becky Gillette requested that I mention this plant because it is so common that she was glad that it had some purpose. It certainly is available and, should it become commercially popular, it would certainly delight many landowners in rural Mississippi.

The old farmers around here often ask me if I can find a use for coffee weed; they will donate as much as I like! It is the same with privet: it is very common. Fortunately, it is also proven to be very useful.

In closing, I would like to say that herbs are safe and very wonderful gifts from God, but one must be very careful and never disregard the importance to find a good physicians and use herbs only when you are 100 percent sure of their identification and properties, as some herbs can be dangerous.

Also, always remember that herbs can easily be propagated simply by not overharvesting. Always leave plenty to reseed. There are many more herbs I have worked with in this area, and hope to be able to discuss them at length with any interested person the next time Becky has a Medicinal Plant Conference. It is a very satisfying experience to gather with interested non-skeptics and

freely discuss the wonderful herbs that the good Lord has given us all to health our bodies so that we can better serve Him.

For more information, herbalist Darrell Martin can be contacted at Blue Boy Cottage Herbs, Rt. 2, Box 457D, Carriere, MS 39426, 1-800-798-9951.

Bear's foot as a treatment for arthritis

by H.W. "Shine" Grave

My brother was first introduced to bearsfoot (Polymnia uvadalia) as a treatment for arthritis in 1988 and he has been using it faithfully since then. He has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis since he was 23 years old (for 27 years). At the time he began using this remedy, he was taking prescribed medication which cost him six dollars each day. He has not found it necessary to take any other medicine for arthritis since he began taking the bearsfoot root treatment.

Bearsfoot is native to low, damp woodland. The plant normally has four to six stems, and a mature plant may be as tall as eight feet. The leaves of the plant are shaped somewhat like a sweetgum of poplar leaves, but may be six inches across and nine inches long. In midsummer the plant produces a multitude of yellow flowers similar to those of the goldenrod. Seeds form around the edge of the flowers. The seeds are easily harvested and can be successfully propagated. Our recommendation is to plant these seed about 3/4 inch deep in rich soil in spring or in flower pots. Keep the soil moist and place the pots where they will get sun at least part of the day. We have been able to get approximately 50 percent germination this way. When the plants are about two inches tall, transplant to a shaded spot where the plants can be watered.

As mentioned earlier, the mature plants normally have four to six stems. When dug it is often found that each of these stems are actually individual plants. these plants can be separated and replanted. In this case, the plants can be harvested the following year, while the plants propagated from seed must be two years old before being harvested.

When the roots are harvested, it is necessary to dig a hole about the size of a wash tub in order to get all the roots of the plant. Holes of less diameter and depth will leave parts of some of the roots. Roots to this plant are very similar in appearance to sweet potato "strings" and may be up to 18 inches long. The roots that are 3/16 inch or more in diameter should be severed from the plant. those smaller than this should be left attached to the parent plant. Replant the parent plant, keep it watered, and new shoots should appear from the plant within three weeks. The plant is much easier to handle if the stems are cut to four or five inches above the roots before replanting.

The harvested roots should be rinsed with water from a hose to remove most of the soil from them. Individual roots are then washed three times (a soft-bristled brush is very helpful), to remove all

remaining soil.

The roots are now ready to be placed in containers. Cut them into lengths suitable for the container to be used. Put as many root parts into the container as possible without damaging the parts. Cover with whiskey (our experience has been that cheap whiskey does as well as any) and let set for ten days. The remedy is now ready for use. take two tablespoons each day. When solution is used, pour more whiskey over the roots and let set ten days. Roots may be used in this manner three times, or until solution begins to taste like whiskey.

If roots are harvested in late summer or fall, a white, starchy substance will form in the bottom of the container. This does not alter the effectiveness of the remedy, but does make it even less appealing to the user.

Editor's note: If anyone has seeds or roots of this to share, please offer them in the next newsletter.)

Wild Medicinal Plant Conference

by Becky Gillette

The MNPS Wild Medicinal Plant Conference held on the Coast the first weekend in June drew 150 people for the Friday evening program, and about 250 for the Saturday program. The conference brought in some new members to the society, and netted about \$300 in profits for the club. Thanks to all of you who participated.

There was great interest in the conference, and many people have asked that we do it again next year. We're currently trying to find co-sponsors for the conference, and want to expand it to also be a bioregional fair that would allow booths for books, herbs, plants, local crafts, etc. We also want to bring in a nationally known speaker, perhaps David Hoffman, author of the best-selling "New Holistic Herbal." I went to the Folk Medicine Festival in Red Boiling Springs, Tenn. in July where Hoffman was the featured speaker. He is an excellent speaker, and I particularly like his views on the importance of herbs to ecology. He has willing to speak at a conference here on the Coast if it can be arranged.

Some potential additional topics/speakers for next year's conference: Native American healing traditions, Medicine Hawk (Bob) and Maryanne McClellan of Folsom, La.; black Mississippi healers; workshop on women's herbs for infertility and childbirth, PMS, menopause, fibrocystic breast disease, Alabama midwife Renata Hillman; landscaping with herbs and native plants; mental attitudes and health; healing properties of dance and mini trampoline; reiki (healing touch); massage therapy; and healing properties of music.

If anyone is interested in being a speaker, helping plan or working at the conference, please give me a call at 601-872-3457. I would also love to see a MNPS conference on native plants in Jackson next year. If anyone is interested in planning or participating in a Jackson conference, please call me or Vic Rudis.

Devil's walking stick or hercules club?

By Louanne Fossler

I've noticed that in some cases two trees--Zanthoxylum clava-herculis and Aralia spinosa have the same common name, Hercules Club. To avoid confusion, it would be better if devil's walking stick was used as the common name for Aralia spinosa.

It's interesting that both trees had similar medicinal uses by Indians and pioneers. But the manner of preparation was quite different.

According to The Field Guide to Medicinal Plants by Arnold and Connie Krochmal, Aralia spinosa had the following uses: "Indians drank a decoction of the bark and root to purify the blood and to treat fever,. They used the boiled mashed root as a poultice to bring boils to a head. Blacks used the fresh root to treat snakebite, and applied a dried powder of the root to the site of the bite. The water that fresh roots were stored in has been used to treat irritated eyes. The bark has been considered a stimulant and is also a means of breaking fever by increasing perspiration."

The same field guide lists the following uses for Zanthoxylum clava-herculis: "Indians used this plant for an amazing range of ailments. A decoction of the bark was used for gonorrhoea; the wood for toothache; and a decoction of the boiled roots to increase perspiration. Both Indians and early settlers mixed the inner bark with bear grease and applied it as a poultice to treat ulcers. Ripe berries were thrown in hot water to make a spray used in the mouth and blown on the chest and throat for chest ailments. The bark was also used for inflammations of the throat. The inner bark, boiled in water, produced a lotion used to treat various itches. The berries have been considered tonic, stimulant, anti-rheumatic, and effective in relieving gas, colic, and muscle spasms."

Carmine A. Stahl, a naturalist in Humble, Texas, says leaves Zanthoxylum clava-herculis were used by Indian and pioneer mother to rub on the gums of babies to ease teething pain. "The corky prickles, removed with a bit of bark, were more potent and used by adults," she says. "The taste is rather sharp, somewhat like lemon rind, and indeed this tree is in the same family as the citrus group. A tingling and numbing sensation is produced in the mouth, but the effect lasts only a short time."

Note from editor's: The largest group of toothache trees we've see is at the Indian shell mounds on Dauphin Island, Ala., also site of some of the largest ancient oaks on the Gulf Coast. It's well worth a visit to this site if you're in the area. This is also a favorite place to see spring and fall bird and butterfly migrations.

Seed swap offer: I'm looking for seeds of Carolina lily and so far can offer stokesia, Indian blanket and long leaf pine in return. As the season progresses, I'm sure my collection will get larger. Send SASE to Louanne H. Fossler, 800 Myrtle St., Hattiesburg MS 39401-4851, telephone: 601-545 3200.

Tree tour leader Chris Verdery: "The man is a walking data bank"

by Roger Danley

The tree tour led by Chris Verdery was a pleasant surprise after the Horn Island trip last spring. Since the island was the big ticket event, I had forgotten that Davis Bayou, where the tree tour began, is an important part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore system.

Chris, who has wandered many hours through the woods bordering the bayou, gave ample evidence of the wealth protected by the park. His enthusiasm was contagious as we hiked the perimeters of the forested areas and plunged into the dense growth to find selected trees which Chris had earlier identified. Some of the most interesting trees were a large dwarf pawpaw, a champion or near champion specimen, and the rare Bumelia.

This tour was started in anticipation of identifying all the native trees in the coastal zone. Chris had selected a route which after only a mile had netted nearly 40 percent of the species. He also kept up a running commentary on aspects of the plants we saw in addition to their names which would satisfy the most ardent dendrophile. While we moved briskly through trees, Chris amazed us by clicking off the trees like a birding Life Lister. As Ron Wieland said, "The man is a walking data bank!"

Chris's belief is that all the species of trees in the U. S. are accessible from roadside parks. So you don't have to be an Olympic hiker to see all of trees native to the U.S.

After Gulf Islands, we went back to the subdivision where we live, Gulf Hills, for another fascinating walk. Chris showed us how much you can miss even in your own neighborhood. Also, he has planted a number of species in his yard specifically for educational tours such as the one he led for us. One interesting aspects of the tour in Gulf Hills was showing gum trees in evolution. In a walk of about a half mile Chris showed us variations in gum trees that could be construed as showing how the tree is evolving into a new species.

We had planned on visiting the Pascagoula River swamp and a couple of other areas Chris has picked out in order to show every species of tree native to this region. But, being a Sunday, most of the group had to travel back home and so the tour was cut short at noon. My head was reeling with such a wealth of information that I doubt I could have absorbed much more. A big thanks to Chris for such an excellent tour.

Clower-Thornton survey conducted

Chris also recently did a tree survey for the Clower-Thornton Nature Study Area, a Gulfport park owned by the Gulf Coast Council of Garden Clubs, while Becky and I did a survey of the herbaceous plants. Mississippi Power Company has donated labels for the plants

which are currently being installed. When it's finished, Clower-Thornton will be the most thoroughly labeled arboretum in the area, which will be excellent for educational purposes. Next spring we'll have a field trip to Clower-Thornton led by Chris Verdery.

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

Saturday, Sept. 24, Starkville: Tour of Botanical Garden of the South. Meet before 9 a.m. at Deposit Guaranty on Russell St. Tour will leave promptly at 9 a.m. to travel to Sessums. More info: Gwen Perkins, 323-7840.

Saturday, Oct. 1, Pascagoula: Marsh tour of wetlands mitigation project, storm water retention ponds (abundant bird life here) and natural marsh at Chevron Oil Refinery led by Dr. Mark LaSalle, Coastal Experiment Station, who says fall is the best time to see marsh plants in bloom. He will discuss what factors influence successful mitigation projects. Joint field trip with Coast Audubon Society. Meet at sharply at 8:30 a.m. at Chevron visitor entrance. Chevron is located at the end of Highway 63 South. (Take Highway 63 exit off Interstate 10, cross highway 90. Chevron last on left. Following Chevron we will visit a wet pine savannah area at Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Bring a lunch. Chevron will be providing a bus or vans for transporting us first the morning part of the trip, so you must RSVP by Monday, Oct. 26 by calling Becky Gillette at 1-601-872-3457.

Mid-South Native Plant Conference

The Mid-South Native Plant Conference which will be held Oct. 21-23 at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tenn. will include talk's by two MNPS members, Gail Barton of Meridian and Felder Rushing of Jackson.

This conference, an outgrowth of the Cullowee Native Plant Conference held yearly in Cullowee, N.C., provides an open exchange of information between novice gardeners, plant enthusiasts, academia, professional nurserymen and landscape designers. The fee is \$70 if you preregister by Oct. 1 by sending a check to MSNPC, LNC, 5992 Quince Road, Memphis TN 38119.

Field trip planners needed!

It's time to be thinking of spring field trips. Do you know a special place to view spring wildflowers? It would be great to have more field trips next spring, and it doesn't really take all that much work to plan one. So EMPOWER yourself to plan a field trip, and then send us details so we can print it in the winter newsletter (deadline for submission: Nov. 15).

Letter to Vic Rudis:

Thank you for all you did to help us with Mississippi Week at Overstreet. The display was beautiful. The children always enjoy the week and I think they learn a lot, too. Such a week would not be possible without the help of people like you. Thank you.
Sincerely, Jane Windham

(Note: For the past three years, Vic has put up a display of Mississippi native plants in May for the 1st and 2nd grade's Mississippi Week at Overstreet Elementary School. This year MNPS gave out Coreopsis seeds to all 2nd graders.)

Member wants more wildflower articles

Dear Editors,

Let's have MORE articles about wildflowers. The article about the orchid by Vic Rudis was exciting and caused us to do some research of our own. We discovered that two "unknowns" on our farm are orchids? Green adder's mouth: Pg. 31 and purple fringeless orchid: Pg. 34; S. Lee Timme. Our crane-fly orchids are just beginning to bloom (pg. 36) and it's delightful to watch these thin brown shoots turn into flowers.

Who can answer this question?

Question for readers: We bought three "beardtongue" at the Dixon Wildflower plant sale in the spring. They bloomed well and the plants are very sturdy with burgundy leaves. They were named Penstemon digitalis "Husker's Red. I cannot find that name in any of our books. Is it possible that the nurseries are hybridizing our wildflowers? Should we be worried? We certainly don't want to buy any of them!

Seed swap offered: We have many different wildflower perennials that we grow from seed and they will be ready to plant into the garden this fall. Would anyone out there like to swap wildflowers with us?

Shelley Crawford
Rt. 6, Box 9A
Oxford MS 38655
Phone: 601-234-1836

Don't overlook our native plants

by Felder Rushing

(Reprinted from The Clarion-Ledger, July 27, 1993)

Do you know the delicious elderberry from the poisonous pokeberry? They're both fine--as stunning and hardy and dependable flowering and fruiting plants as anyone could find, anywhere on Earth--except here, in their native lands.

It's long been odd to me that we overlook native plants because they're...well, I don't know. We're...I don't know.

But I'm getting into opinion, which is not my job.

When we think "wildflowers" we conjure Texas roadsides.

Colorado mountainsides, or treeless prairies, amber waves of broomsedge loaded with colorful flowers. That's not the way it is around here, where trees and vines are more natural than open meadows. Most of "our" wildflowers are forest perennials, often found naturally only in disturbed areas or at woodland's edge.

No reputable garden in England or Germany or other garden society goes without goldenrod, asters, blazing star (Liatris), all of the Phlox family, false dragonhead (Physostegia), rudbeckia, Bolton's aster (Boltonia) Stokes' aster (Stokesia), perennial sunflowers (Helianthus angustifolia)--all natives to our area, all beautiful, tough, predictable and available at select garden centers and through mail order.

So many of our best garden flowers are wildflowers, only we don't realize it. Review the plants listed in the preceding paragraph, and look up any you don't recognize in any flower book. They're there, as valid as any Asian import. And tough.

Pokeberry and elderberry are among the boldest, if we could only see them separate from the blur of our other, less showy "weeds." They should be grown as mainstay garden perennials.

Elderberry is a large perennial flowering plant with leaves of five to 11 leaflets, and great, nodding, flat umbels of white flowers (which can be mixed delightfully into pancake mix), turning to darkpurple berries. The berries, which are very high in vitamin C, make fine jelly and, according to the late Euell Gibbons, are equal to huckleberries for making pies (he suggests adding a little vinegar or lemon juice to make up for their lack of acid). Spread elderberry clusters on an old screen door and dry them in the sun to half dry before freezing for winter pies. Pokeberry, on the other hand, has reddish-purple stems, large single leaves (kinda oval, and pointed) and flowers and berries that hang down on long stems. I grow it behind a front deck for shade and color, though its berries sometimes stain our metal chairs. Settlers used the inky juice of this "inkberry" to write with quill pens, and most are still legible.

Early shoots and leaves of pokeweed are edible--you've heard of poke salad all of your life--but the plant and especially the berries are poisonous--they and the roots contain phytolaccin, a drastic purgative. I won't get into preparing poke for eating, since only the tender new shoots are free enough of phytolaccin to eat safely. Once the plant is mature enough to flower, they become very powerful laxatives. Too strong. Find one of Gibbon's books like Stalking the Wild Asparagus for details of eating poke, elderberry, sumac, daylily, dandelion, etc.

Main thing is not so much that elderberry fruits are edible and pokeweed is not; rather, they are both overlooked as large, flowering, fruiting perennials for flower borders.

Neither pokeberry nor elderberry are generally available for sale, though I've seen both from mail order and at plant sales at native plant meetings. But they're real easy to dig (they aren't protected species. Transplant roots in the fall. Be sure to obtain permission before digging.

Look around at our natural wealth. Grow it, and own it.

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New MNPS t-shirts for sale

The popular new MNPS t-shirts are good quality 50% cotton-50% polyester, white, and the flower design contains five colors: black, green, yellow, red and purple. Sizes M,L & XL are \$10; XXL is \$12. T-shirts are available at some of our meetings. If making a request by mail, please include an additional \$1.50 per shirt. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Send t-shirt orders to MNPS, P.O. Box 2151, Starkville MS 39759.

Send renewals and questions about society activities to Ron Wieland, MNPS Secretary/Treasurer, Miss. Museum of Natural Science, 111 North Jefferson St., Jackson MS 39202. Phone: (601)-354-7303.

Send items for newsletter to Becky Gillette & Roger Danley, 6104 Olvida Circle, Ocean Springs MS 39564. The next issue will focus on grasses. The deadline is November 15.

Membership Application or Renewal

_____ New member _____ Renewal
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All members receive MNPS Quarterly. Life members also receive Wildflowers of Mississippi, by S. L. Timme. Return form and check to: Miss. Native Plant Society, c/o Ron Wieland, Miss. Museum of Natural Science, 111 N. Jefferson St., Jackson MS 39202. Include the following information with your payment:

Name _____ Address _____

_____ Telephone: _____

_____ If Mississippi, county _____

_____ Check here if you do not want your name to appear on membership list.

Mississippi Native Plant Society

The purpose of the Native Plant Society is to further knowledge about the native and naturalized plant species of Mississippi, and to encourage an attitude of respect and appreciation for these species.

Programs include field trips to locations throughout state and lectures, seminars and slide shows by native plant experts, ecologists, landscape experts, knowledgeable amateurs and gardeners.

The goal of the society is to gather and disseminate knowledge about the native and naturalized plant species and their habitats in Mississippi. The society works for the preservation of these species and conservation of their habitats. We inform the public about these species and habitats, including their propagation, importance, ecology and need for protection, and encourage the propagation and use of native plants and habitats in designing residential, commercial and public landscapes.

We also facilitate the study of state flora and monitor nature preserves through newsletter announcements, networking and awarding small research and education grants. Other projects include plant and seed exchanges, maintaining displays for public education and plant rescues in areas about to be developed.

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