

Rare plant found on Eagles Nest



By Kristena Schutt-Moore

Two weekends ago while enjoying the weather and walking the trails of Eagles Nest Park, Karla Thompson and her husband Clayton came upon a strange plant growing along one of the trails. Turns out that plant is the rare Indian pipe plant, also known as ghost plant, corpse plant, convulsion root or ghost pipe.

This plant is often a pure, almost see-through, white or pinkish as it doesn't have chlorophyll like regular green plants. Instead of using the sunlight and photosynthesis to get nutrients it works in partnership with fungus often found on beech and similar trees and that is where it gets most of its nutrition from.

Different species of pipe plant are found in North America, South America and Asia. However all types of pipe plants are considered rare. Since it gets nutrients from fungus instead of sunlight it is usually found in moist, shady or dark forest areas growing from the soil around a thick mass of tree roots.

The pipe plant grows to be 15 to 25 centimeters (six to 10 inches) tall and its leaves look like small scales running along its single stem. A single, odourless, cup-shaped flower that droops over from the top of the stock that can be seen mid-summer and sometimes a capsule shaped colourless/white fruit can be found as the flower dies off.

?I had only seen one in my lifetime. There were about eight of them in different spots on the trail,? says Thompson. The pipe plant is not used for any type of food, and since they are considered rare they are not allowed to be touched. Though in the early 1900s the pipe plant was sometimes used in different ways as a medicine for the nerves.