

Florida Torreya

Henry Foundation Specimens



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On Wednesday, August 1, 2018, I had the great pleasure of visiting the Henry Foundation in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. I met with Susan Treadway, Director of the Foundation, and despite the hot and humid weather we hiked out to reach a relic of the Jurassic and survivor of the ice age. The trees that I had traveled to visit are known scientifically as *Torreya taxifolia*, but are commonly known by a host of names – Florida Torreya, Gopherwood, Florida Nutmeg, Stinking Cedar and Savin. There are two large specimens growing on a partially shaded slope and they have been surviving in Pennsylvania since Mary Henry planted them in the 1940s to 1950s. One is believed to have been grown from seeds and the other was brought in as a seedling.

Mrs. Treadway told me that long droughts, over the past several years, have killed many plants and stressed most of the rest. When we arrived at the trees I was excited and captivated by the lush, dark green growth as well as several dead limbs that were reaching out of the foliage. It appeared that the trees, during the droughts, had sacrificed their largest limbs in favor of sprouting new growth from the trunk and basal sprouts. Looking towards the top of the largest, I noticed it had developed several leaders, a little over 24" tall, that were reaching up from the dead tip of the trunk. Both trees have multiple trunks as well as vigorous basal sprouts. Many branches have five laterals extending from their branch tips—a clear indicator of their vigorous growth.

The purpose of my visit was to take photographs and measure the circumference of both trees, so I could share the information with fellow members of Torreyia Guardians. I believe these trees are significant examples of how well Florida Torreyia can grow in northern climates and thrive near the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The larger tree, labeled 873, and Pennsylvania state champion, is growing about 30 feet upslope from the other Torreyia. I measured the circumference of the largest trunk at 32" and estimate a height of around 40 feet. The smaller tree, labeled 804, measured 23" in circumference and I measured a second trunk, because it was close in size, at 19 1/2". I would estimate the height of this tree to be 35 feet. Several sources had mentioned both of these trees to be male and I attempted to locate reproductive structures. Unfortunately, none could be found, but I hypothesize that the trees have aborted reproductive structures, for the time being, so that all their energy is invested in foliage growth. I believe this may be one of their survival mechanisms. I advised Mrs. Treadway to watch for reproductive structures in the future and informed her that sometimes Torreyia have changed sex or will become monoecious (have both male and female reproductive structures) after becoming stressed.

Work has begun clearing vines away from the Torreyias and trimming some nearby trees so that more sunlight will reach them. After the trek back to the house I looked over several records of Mary Henry's notes on encounters with Torreyia in Florida and correspondence she had with interested individuals and early Torreyia State Park employees. I was thankful to see these and for the time Susan Treadway had put into researching and locating this information for me. The Florida Torreyia trees are real treasures of the Henry Foundation and I look forward to someday traveling back to see them and more of the gardens.

