

Nature Notes

Devil's Club



The name of this plant says it all. The Latin name, *Oplopanax horridus*, comes from the Greek word hopolox, which means weapon. It is sometime called the Devil's Walking Stick.

This tall, one to three meter plant, is found in moist shady forest, along streams or in wet seepage sites in the Kimberley Nature Park. The thick, crooked stems are covered



with brittle yellow spines that break off easily if the plant is handled or disturbed. The very large maple-like leaves are deeply notched and also have spines on the underside. Contact with the spines causes inflammation and the wound soon festers if the spine stays embedded in the skin.

Photo: J. Duncan

In spring the small greenish-white flowers grown in a dense spike at the end of the stem. The fruit is a bright, shiny red berry in a large showy pyramidal cluster. These berries are not edible by humans but known to be enjoyed by moose. Slow growing, it takes years for this shrub to reach seed-bearing maturity. It can spread by the often-entangled stems falling on the ground and taking root.

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A member of the ginseng family, this plant is still a valuable medicinal plant for the native people.

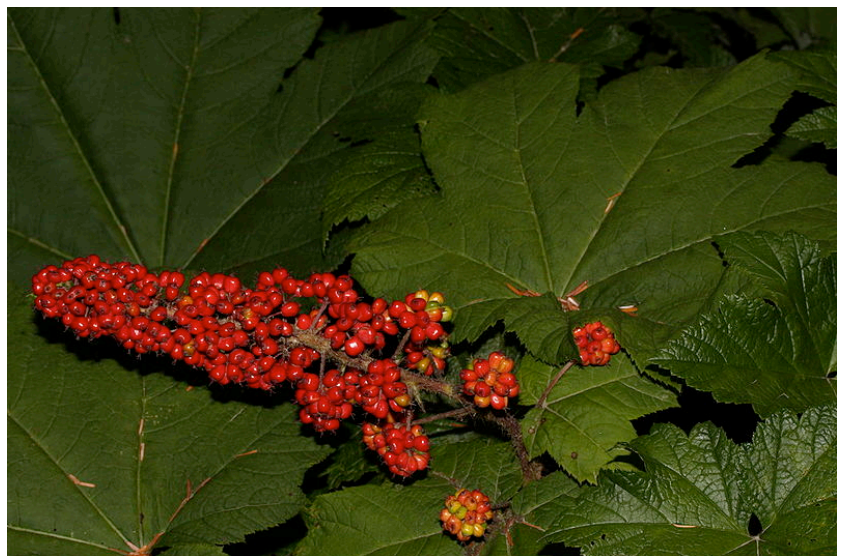


Photo: W. Siegmund

As you walk by this plant in the Kimberley Nature Park, look but don't touch!

Visit www.rockies.net/kimberley/naturepark for a hard copy or more information about Nature Park events.