THE LARGEST KNOWN SOUTHERN RED OAK IN MICHIGAN IS LOCATED ON BELLE ISLE, AN ISLAND IN THE DETROIT RIVER, LOCATED JUST SOUTH OF THE CITY OF DETROIT IN WAYNE COUNTY OF MICHIGAN’S LOWER PENINSULA.

Description of the Species: The Southern Red Oak is a member of the red oak group in the genus Quercus. As such, it bears acorns and has leaves with 5–9 (usually 7) lobes. Each lobe ends in a bristle tip and is separated by usually narrow sinuses (see Fig. 1). The leaves are dark green and lustrous above and paler below with tufts of large pale hairs in vein axils. The young twigs are grayish brown and glabrous. The largest of the several terminal buds is up to 6 mm long and pointed. The acorns are borne singly or in pairs and are 2–3 cm long. The light brown cap is covered with a whitish tomentum and covers ¼ to ⅓ of the nut.

The Southern Red Oaks range, as given in Miller & Lamb (1985), extends from Florida to Texas, northward to Indiana and southern Michigan. In addition to being known on Belle Isle, it has been reported from near Portage Lake in Jackson County, Michigan (Sargent 1905, 1965). Miller and Lamb’s (1985) map also shows isolated sites in Kalamazoo and Jackson Counties.

Location of Michigan’s Big Tree: The Shumard Oaks on Belle Isle grow in the wooded NE part of the island between the Zoo and Nature Center. The State Champion tree is in a grove with pumpkin ash trees. It grows on the northern bank of the Nashua Canal, between the middle and eastern bridges of the bicycle trail which runs along the canal.

To reach the tree, take I-75 south through the City of Detroit to I-375. Follow I-375 south to Jefferson Ave. Exit I-375 onto Jefferson Ave. and go east to E. Grand Blvd. Turn right and proceed over the McArthur Bridge onto Belle Isle. As soon as you are on the island, the road forks. Take the left fork and proceed along Central Ave. to the intersection of Insleruhe Avenue. Turn right onto Insleruhe Avenue. Go one block and turn left onto Loiter Way. Follow Loiter Way until you come to a curve and then a small bridge. Park on the left and walk down the bike trail along the canal to the second bridge. The tallest tree you can see on your right as you walk over the bridge is the champion Shumard Oak.

Description of Michigan’s Big Tree: There are a number of Shumard Oaks growing with the Pumpkin Ash in what might be described as a Shumard Oak-Pumpkin Ash Association. These trees had been previously visited by Herb Wagner, Steve Koblarz, Susan Campbell, and Bill Brodovich who all agreed that
they are indeed Shumard Oaks. The State Champion tree was measured by Susan Campbell and Elwood B. Ehrle on 10 July 2001. Its girth at 4.5 feet above the ground was 150" (13′3″ or 4.0 m). The tree is 128′ high (39 m) and has an average crown spread of 70′ (21.3 m). The tree is healthy and has a solid straight trunk.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

If you would like to join us in extending this series of articles by visiting and describing one or more of Michigan’s Big Trees, please contact Elwood B. Ehrle for help with locations, specifications for taking measurements, and assistance with the manuscript. The Michigan Botanical Club encourages your involvement in this activity. Please remember to ask permission before entering private property.

LITERATURE CITED