

Pteridium Scop. BRACKEN, BRAKE

Pteridium aquilinum (L.) Kuhn var. *pubescens* L. Underw., WESTERN BRACKEN. Perennial herb, evergreen with some leaves (fronds) staying green during winter, rhizomatous, fibrous-rooted, not rosetted, aboveground having large, widely spaced, ascending to arched, solitary leaves, without a canopy, 35–220 cm tall; leaf arising as a coiled fiddlehead at each growing point of rhizome, initially with soft colorless hairs, having a distinctive scent when crushed; rhizomes horizontal, creeping in compact soil 150–200 mm belowground, black, lacking scales, in \times -section white with black spots (adventitious roots) and pale orange ovals (vascular tissues, steles). **Leaves (fronds):** alternate, mostly odd-2-pinnately compound and then ultimate divisions pinnately lobed, also pinnately lobed approaching tips of primary and secondary divisions, 1000–2900 mm long, long-petiolate; petiole (stipe) = $1/3$ – $1/2$ frond length, sometimes aboveground for 700+ mm, channeled but becoming flat approaching blade, at base dark brown to black with dense brownish hairs changing above to reddish brown or straw-colored, having a narrow white stripe on each side of channel, lacking scales, glabrate on large axes; blade ovate to broadly triangular in outline; rachis channeled, green to reddish brown, stiff; primary leaflets \pm opposite (especially lower ones) or conspicuously alternate (upper leaflets), > 20 per leaf, ovate to lanceolate, to 460 mm long at base of rachis decreasing upward, widely spaced below midpoint of axis (rachis); petiolules of primary leaflets ± 1 mm long; secondary axis similar to primary axis; secondary leaflets pinnately compound but pinnately lobed approaching tip (terminal 20%), narrowly lanceolate, to 180 mm long at base of secondary rachis decreasing upward, commonly with > 15 pairs of secondary leaflets or lobes along secondary rachis; pinnately lobed portions (pinnules) $\pm \perp$ tertiary rachis, lanceolate to oblong, 5 – 33×3 – 14 mm, becoming entire approaching end of tertiary rachis, dull green, narrowly membranous on sterile margins, recurved with broad, fertile margins, rounded at tip, venation open with ends free, upper surface glabrate, lower surface villous. **Sori:** \pm continuous along margin of pinnules on lower surface, covered by a recurved outer false indusium (outer indusium) and partially covered by a true but obscure inner, \pm outward-facing indusium (extrorse); false indusium ± 0.3 mm wide, irregular to short-crenate on margin, delicate, sparsely villous; indusium ± 0.1 mm wide, densely villous on outer surface. **Sporangia:** ± 0.2 mm wide, translucent brown.

Native. Perennial herb of southern oak woodland growing in loamy soil. *Pteridium aquilinum* is a tall fern, which has leaves emerging solitary from the ground, arising along a deep, long, horizontal rhizome. Our variety has ultimate lobes (pinnules) nearly perpendicular to the leaflet axis. Spores are produced on the lower surface of the blade along the margin, between an outer, false indusium and an inner, inconspicuous, true indusium.

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