THE WALKBOOK SIMSBURY LAND TRUST

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Simsbury Land Trust – Who Are We?

The Simsbury Land Trust is a member-supported organization that protects the natural habitats, farms, scenic vistas, and geological features that visually define our town's character and contribute to a healthy environment. Our mission is to protect, in its natural state, land that has special conservation, scenic, or historic value. In most cases this means parcels of a size and with features that provide noticeable impact, or parcels that provide a buffer for or extension to land that is already protected for the same purpose. We accomplish this by acquiring land, normally through voluntary donation, and managing land and development rights.

The Simsbury Land Trust is governed by a volunteer board of trustees, a variety of advisory committees, and a paid part-time professional executive director. More than 775 member families and local businesses make annual membership donations to fund operations to help volunteers care for its properties.

Since inception, we have concentrated on several land types: ridgeline, wetlands, open fields, and farms. This book features examples of each type. We hope that by walking these properties you will come to recognize or strengthen your conviction in the importance of this focus. Each of these land types is rapidly disappearing from our landscape. Some observers point out that change is a natural occurrence and that the town's natural environment has changed dramatically since the first colonials arrived. However, once these parcels of land are developed, they will no longer evolve naturally.

Simsbury is our home and we all have a chance to leave it as good as or better than we found it. Each of us can help achieve a deliberate balance between residential growth, commercial development, and our natural setting. You can help us continue to protect these special places by becoming a member and contributing to our land acquisition fund. By preserving the beauty and environmental vitality of our town we ensure an exceptionally good quality of life, we protect our investment, and we create a legacy for the next generation!

CONTENTS

Trail Guidelines		
Useful Tips		
Walk Feature Symbol Key		
Walk Locator Map		
A Geologic History of Simsbury		8
The Western Highlands		11
Hedgehog Trail	14	
The Cathles Trail	16	
McLean Game Refuge	18	
Onion Mountain Park	22	
Wetlands		25
Bog Walk	28	
Riverwalk Nature Trail		
Nod Brook		
Sand Plain Forests		35
Great Pond State Forest	38	
Stratton Brook State Park	40	
Still Brook Open Space		
Town Forest	44	
Ethel Walker School Trails		
Belden Forest	_48	
Simsbury Farms Family Fitness Trails		
The Farmington Valley Greenway	52	
The Terry's Plain Area		55
Colonial Traineband Field	58	
Case Property/Wet Meadow	59	
The Ketchin Quarry	60	
Area Map	61	

Eastern Ridge		63
Metacomet Trail	66	
Penwood State Park	68	
Talcott Mountain State Park	70	
Short Walks		73
The Farmington Canal	74	
Owens Brook Trail	74	
Town Forest Road	75	
Farmington River	75	

TRAIL GUIDELINES

Please respect your neighbors and fellow hikers:

- Use trails only between sunrise and sunset
- Please pick up litter; leave the trail in better shape than you found it
- Enjoy and respect the peace and guiet
- Leave all flowers, plants, and small animals for others to enjoy
- Keep pets on leash
- Stay on marked trails

Passive recreation is encouraged, while the following are prohibited:

- Motorized vehicles
- Cutting trees and other plants
- Transplanting vegetation
- Building fires
- Camping
- Building tree forts, clubhouses, or other structures
- Hunting or trapping
- Using alcoholic beverages

USEFUL TIPS

Protecting against ticks and Lyme disease

Each year several thousand cases of Lyme disease are reported in Connecticut, and the numbers are climbing. The disease, caused when a bacterium carried by the deer tick enters the bloodstream, is endemic to Simsbury and its surrounding areas. To avoid contact with ticks, stay on open paths, avoiding thick brush and grass. Wear long pants tucked into socks. Permethrin products applied to clothing and newer DEET repellents on skin are extremely effective. Careful full-body inspection is a critical posthike ritual, as is an awareness of the signs of Lyme Disease.

Avoiding rabies

Over 3,000 confirmed cases of wild animal rabies have been reported in the state since 1991. Raccoons and skunks are the most common carriers, but hikers should be suspicious of any mammal, especially those that are active during daylight hours and/or behaving strangely. Rabid animals may appear vicious, friendly, or confused. Bites from rabid animals spread the deadly virus and must be avoided at any cost.

WALK FEATURE SYMBOL KEY

WALK LOCATOR MAP



Bogs and Marshes



Plants and Wildflowers



Waterfalls



Picnic Area



History



Recreation



Fields



Birds



Ponds



SLT Property



Forests



State of CT Property



Scenic Vista



Town of Simsbury Property



Geology

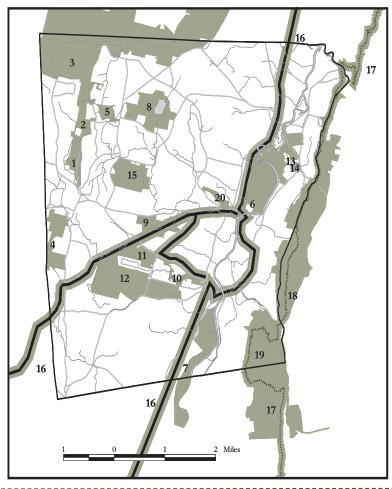


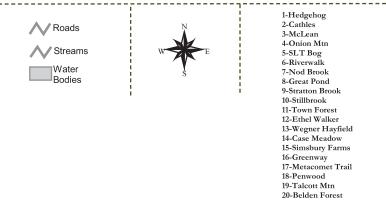
Privately Owned Property



Wildlife

These symbols represent some of the key features of the walks in this book. They are found on each walk description page.





A GEOLOGIC HISTORY OF SIMSBURY

People often talk of a recognizable sense of place, a particular character, when they speak of Simsbury. Much of what they mean by this derives from a number of geological features highlighted by a grand river valley tucked between two dramatic ridges. Like much of New England, the land that is now Simsbury has had a varied and complex geological history, with lengthy episodes of deposition, deformation, erosion, and glaciation.

The magnificent West Mountain in the northwest corner of town represents the oldest exposed bedrock in Simsbury. This rock formation can be readily viewed in the road cuts along Route 309 leading to North Canton. Formed between 400 and 500 million years ago (during the Ordovician and Devonian ages, respectively), this bedrock consists primarily of silver-gray, mica-rich schist, highly metamorphosed rocks which probably originated as ocean floor sediments in a long-vanished primordial sea. The sediments were then deeply buried, compacted, and deformed during the plate collisions; ultimately, they created the Appalachian Mountain chain. Over the next 200 to 300 million years the bedrock eroded, depositing a variety of sediments into a subsiding basin. As these hardened they became the distinctive ledges of brownred siltstone, sandstone, and conglomerate from which were built the brownstone buildings along Hopmeadow Street, including Town Hall and the Methodist Church. Excellent examples of this rock can be seen along the entrance to Metacomet Road and at the nearby quarry on Ouarry Road.

The unusual collection of knolls on the west side of town that poke up unexpectedly along the front of West Mountain (Barndoor Hills, the East Ridge of West Mountain itself, the Hedgehog, Sugarloaf, and Onion Mountain) as well as the massive ridge along the east side of town (Metacomet Ridge, of which Talcott Mountain is the most notable feature) consist of igneous rock from 200 million years ago (Triassic and Jurassic periods). In the earliest Triassic period, Simsbury was tectonically dynamic, with active faults, violent earthquakes, and volcanic activity. Major faults ran north-south and molten rock flowed upward through at least two of them. The igneous formations that resulted are composed of a greenish-black, dense volcanic rock called basalt. The slow disintegration of these basaltic ridges has created the fascinating piles of talus at

their bases and the unique "traprock" habitat. (The term traprock is derived from the Swedish "trappa," meaning "stairs.")

A scant million years ago, during the Pleistocene Era, Simsbury was profoundly influenced by massive continental glaciers. As they moved, giant ice sheets smoothed and rounded local ridges as well as scoured and deepened valleys in their paths. When these glaciers finally melted away some 12,000 years ago, they left behind accumulations of bouldery till and thick deposits of sand and silt sorted by glacial meltwater. Thus, the prominent hills just west and north of the town center consist not of bedrock, but of sand terraces formed on the margin of a large glacial lake. Other features of the glacial period include the sand plains and eskers throughout the central part of town. It was during this period as well that a retreating glacier deposited a dam in the Bristol area, forcing the Farmington River to bend back and flow north through Simsbury. The present floodplain reflects the river's activity over the past 10,000 years.

The Western Highlands



THE WESTERN HIGHLANDS

may be of interest.

The eastern ridge of West Mountain, largely undisturbed, provides the hiker with a rich and varied look into the natural history of a unique section of town. Trails here include the Hedgehog Trail, the Simsbury Land Trust's Cathles property, the McLean Game Refuge, and the Town's trails on and around Onion Mountain. These trails are typically two to three miles long. They involve some climbing but are generally appropriate for all age groups. Several of these provide excellent views of the town. Although each is described in greater detail in the following pages, a few general comments at this point

Each of these locations provides at least some exposure to traprock ridge habitat. As noted, traprock ridges consist of hard, gray-green basalt rock created as volcanic extrusions along geologic fault lines. This fault line can be most easily seen at the Cathles property, where a steep ravine separates the very old metamorphic bedrock of West Mountain from the much newer igneous rock of the mountain's eastern ridge.

Typically these traprock ridges have a steep, nearly vertical western face with a steep but somewhat more gradual eastern slope that garners more exposure to the sun. The ridgeline is rocky and windblown and the western face is cool and moist. These distinctive features, along with the characteristic chemistry of the igneous soil, contribute to an unusual mix of several distinct habitats within close proximity to one another.

In pre-colonial days Native Americans may have traveled an ancient trail along the lower ridge of West Mountain. The soil and terrain of these hills was poorly suited for crops. As trees were removed from the more fertile flatlands and river bottoms, settlers harvested the ridges first for firewood and then, in the early 1700s to mid 1800s, for charcoal for local industry. Charcoal pits and early cart paths can still be seen from that period. Eventually this area was stripped of trees, and by the 1800s and into the 1900s sheep and cattle grazed on the open hillsides. Over the past 50 years the hills have become reforested. Today isolated stone fences and bits of barbed wire remain to point the way to the past.

NOTES

HEDGEHOG TRAIL

Location

Starts at The Master's School and runs through land owned and protected by the Simsbury Land Trust. Enter school grounds via long driveway off Westledge Road (Route 309) just west of Hedgehog Lane. Park in the large lot and walk north along the dirt road continuing straight along the wood road as it branches.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy, with a few steep grades







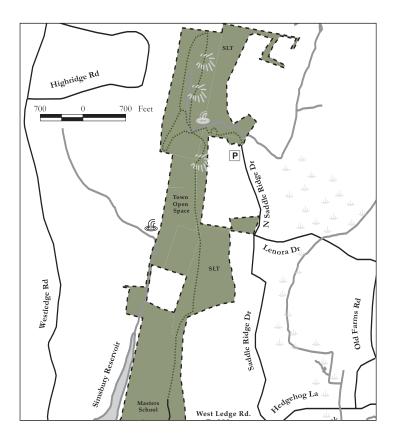


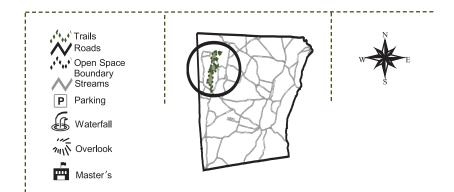


Features

Follow the blue blazes along the gently sloping wood road, with the ridge on the right, for about 0.5 miles until the trail turns abruptly right and climbs through a talus field. Simsbury Land Trust property begins at the top of the ridge. The trail passes through thickets of mountain laurel and some wild blueberry bushes under a canopy mainly of oak. At 1.3 miles the trail emerges onto a rock outcrop owned by the Town of Simsbury.

The peak offers a 360-degree panorama. To the north are the Barndoor Hills, McLean Game Refuge, and Mt. Tom in Massachusetts. To the east and southeast across the valley are Bradley Airport, Penwood State Park, Talcott Mountain, and the Heublein Tower. Great Pond State Forest and a large wetland are visible in the valley. Back to the south and west are the Simsbury Reservoir and the hills of Canton. Sometimes Canada geese can be heard in the reservoir. It is common to see red-tailed hawks floating on the thermals and in the fall to see large flocks of cedar waxwings feeding on juniper berries along the cliffs.





THE CATHLES TRAIL

Location

Adjacent to McLean Game Refuge on the north and Town Open Space on the east and south. Enter from cul-de-sac at the end of North Saddle Ridge Road. Follow trail through stone markers and up around a 30-foot waterfall at the end of town property. Or continue north from the end of the Hedgehog trail.

Distance

4 miles of trails

Terrain

Moderate to difficult





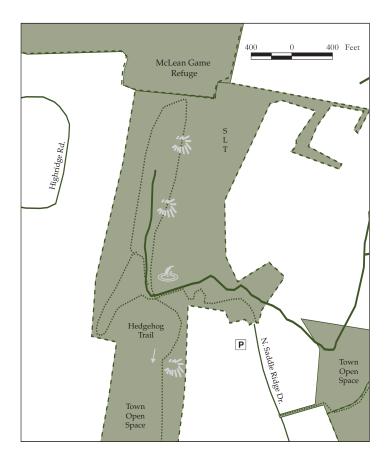


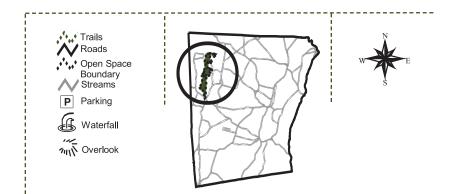




Features

The Simsbury Land Trust's remarkably wild and tranquil Cathles property covers 47 acres. The land consists of a "hidden valley" running northsouth along a fault line. Two streams originate just above the waterfall; these collect water runoff from West Mountain. One stream drains south to the reservoir; the other cuts through the ridge at the waterfall and flows east and north to Bissell Brook. The southern section of the Hidden Valley Trail offers a fine view of one of the town's most magnificent talus fields as well as charcoal pits, cart trails, and bits of barbed wire from the days when this was open pasture. The blue-blazed trail runs north-south along the eastern ridgeline. It affords beautiful views of West Simsbury and beyond. Note the stunted growth of the cedar trees and other vegetation along the ridge top, the result of marginal soil and exposure to winter wind. From the fault to the ridge the trail passes through several different habitat zones typical of traprock ridges.





MCLEAN GAME REFUGE

Location

Straddles the towns of Simsbury, Granby, and Canton. Enter either from the west side of Route 10 near the Simsbury-Granby line or from Barndoor Hills Road. The latter entrance offers a picnic area.

Distance

Numerous trails totaling about 20 miles





Terrain

Easy to difficult









Features

The McLean Game Refuge is a diverse ecological and geologic area comprising 4,300 acres of forests and meadows.

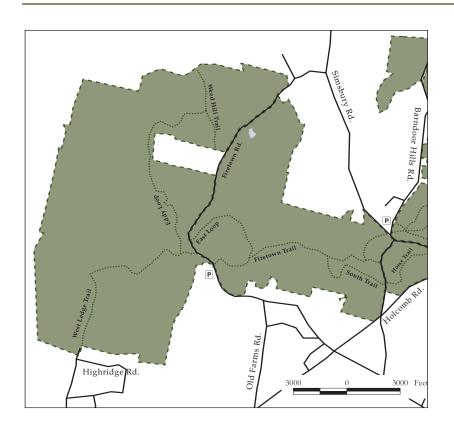
The refuge was established in 1933 under the terms of the will of George P. McLean, the former Governor and U.S. Senator, for the protection and preservation of indigenous plants and wildlife. Governor McLean grew up locally and part of the refuge includes his family land. Today the refuge's Board of Trustees encourages passive recreation and nature study in portions of the site.

The McLean Game refuge offers a wealth of diverse opportunities for observing nature. It contains distinct examples of three major types of geologic terrain: The western highland section contains Paleozoic metamorphic rock; the bedrock (traprock) ridges to the east (Barndoor Hills) are from the Triassic; and the surrounding sandy plains were left behind by the retreating Pleistocene glaciers.

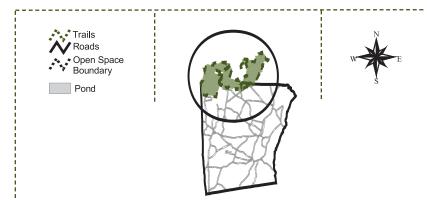
The sandy plain contains a number of wide, flat trails that are very pleasant to hike. Trout Pond and Spring Pond are gorgeous artificial lakes with floating masses of vegetation. The trails lead hikers through an enormously varied selection of plant life influenced not only by topography but by previous land uses such as farming and pasturing. The trail between Bissell Brook and Spring Pond runs atop a very large esker — the result of gravel being deposited by a glacial meltwater stream. Also formed by glaciation are the densely vegetated kettle ponds. These steep depressions

were formed by large blocks of melting glacial ice and hold varying levels of water throughout the year.

Centrally, Barndoor Hills is reached by a steeper yet very manageable trail and offers a terrific vista, especially in the fall. The western portion of the refuge is wilder and the trails steeper and rockier. The Westledge Trail, beginning off of Westledge Road, partially follows a 1700s stagecoach route from Hartford to Albany (along the "Garrett Stairs"). A walk on this trail is all the explanation necessary for the name. Along the way you will pass stone foundations, all that remains of the once thriving village of Pilfershire and once the site of up to 50 homes. Access to the western portion can also be found along Firetown Road. The loop trails here are secluded and challenging. The vegetation at the summit is predominantly chestnut oak with lower brush of huckleberry and blueberry. Farther down the slopes, see mixed oak and other hardwoods, including beech, birch, maple, and hemlock. In large areas mountain laurel is dense enough to confine hikers to the trails. Many of the hardwoods of this area are "sprout hardwoods," meaning that they have arisen from the root systems of trees long ago cut to provide charcoal.







ONION MOUNTAIN PARK

Location

Town-owned West Simsbury park comprising 190 acres of wooded, rocky mountainside. Enter parking lot on the west side of West Mountain Road just south of Shingle Mill Road.

Distance

3 miles of trails

Terrain

Relatively easy on the flat but significantly more difficult on the hillside. The ground can be very wet after rains.





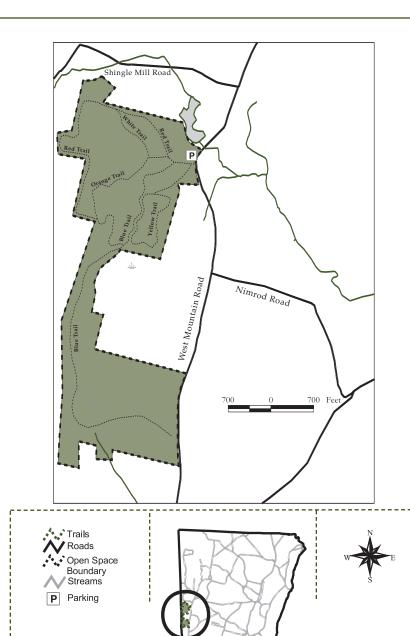




Features

The yellow and blue trails at the base of the mountain run north-south over gently rolling, formerly agricultural land. Most trees in this area are 40 to 50 years old and are a mixture of hardwoods and evergreens, including white pine, hemlock, oak, and beech. Part-way up the mountain are several small wetlands and seasonal brooks as well as a Town-owned pond on the north side.

The 100 acres on the northern end of the mountain's east slope were cut to open the area for improved wildlife habitat and hiking trails. The orange trail winds diagonally up the mountain on old logging roads. The trees here are 80 to 120 years old, mostly oak and hemlock, with small hemlock, low growing viburnum, witch hazel, and sugar maple in the understory. The red trail in this area is used to check boundaries and is not well cleared. The white trail at the north end of the property joins the orange and red trails. Birds of interest include the winter wren, solitary vireo, and the black-throated green- and black-throated blue warblers, all northern species.



Wetlands



Wetlands are among our most important types of open space, providing the essential functions of water retention and purification. They also harbor the largest amount and variety of life of any habitat in Simsbury. As would be expected in a river valley bounded by ridges, wetlands can be found in every part of town, from the floodplain itself to vernal or seasonal pools and seasonal streams high in the hills. However, they have become badly partitioned over the years, as residential development has spread into private nooks and crannies and into more marginally developable areas. As wetlands are divided into smaller and more isolated parcels, migration patterns are altered, wildlife with minimum range requirements disappears, and the plants and animals that remain live under additional stress from nearby chemicals, family pets, and changes in water levels.

There are several types of wetlands in Simsbury, defined primarily by the distinctive plants and animals each supports. Among these are the river and its tributary streams, year-round ponds, red maple or brush swamps, bogs, wet meadows, and vernal ponds. The loss of any one of these wetland types would diminish the rich variety of plants, insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals that share this part of the earth with us.

The Simsbury Land Trust protects a 40-acre bog, a 29-acre red maple swamp, a 10-acre wet meadow, and various other ponds, streams, swamps, and vernal ponds that exist on its property. The Town and the State own large sections of the riverfront along with nearby tributary streams, marshes, and swamps. Great Pond, owned by the State, is another wonderful wetland resource.

A long stretch of wetlands runs along the base of West Mountain. Here, the Simsbury Land Trust protects a 40-acre bog, bordered by a sizable esker stretching from the end of North Saddle Ridge and Elcy Way, and an extensive swamp fronting Hedgehog Lane.

In addition to being an interesting glacial feature in itself, the esker also serves as a highpoint, with water to the north running into Bissell Brook and water to the south becoming Hop Brook. The 30-foot bank of gravel left by a retreating glacier drops steeply to the south and somewhat less steeply to the north. A mountain stream from the ridge to the west feeds the red maple swamp and Bissell Brook just north of the esker.

A mile to the south, just north of Hedgehog Lane, the Simsbury Land Trust owns a 29-acre swamp that is periodically flooded by beaver activity. The best way to view this spot is to park at Meadow Pond (on the south side of Hedgehog Lane, just east of the Saddle Ridge intersection) then walk a short distance east to a spot just before the brook runs under Hedgehog Lane. From that point, there is an open bank a short walk down the slope from the north side of the road. In the spring, listen for duck and goose calls when you first see the painted turtles from the road. It is not uncommon to see beavers, muskrats, snapping turtles, ducks, and other birds busy in the marsh. You can see yellow pond lilies and floating duckweed (the smallest of flowering plants) from shore.

Location

Start at two stone pillars 0.25 miles down North Saddle Ridge on the right.

Distance

1 mile round trip

Terrain

Flat, with a steep downhill path to the 150-foot wooden boardwalk over the bog.







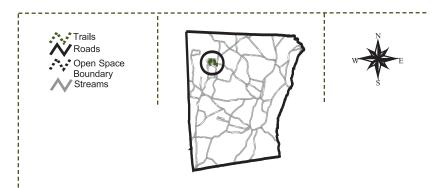




Features

This hike takes you out on a wide, flat trail along an esker (large deposit of glacial gravel left by the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago) to a boardwalk that stretches out into the bog. The Simsbury Land Trust constructed the short, elevated walkway to enable people to view the habitat up close. You will see a series of educational signs touching on the unique ecosystem found here. Watch for signs marking the entrance to the bog walk on the right side. Although common in northern New England and Canada, bogs are far less so in Connecticut, and this is the only sizeable bog habitat in Simsbury. The water supply for this 40-acre bog comes only from rainwater and underground springs and is poor in oxygen and nutrients. The high acidity of bog water interferes with a plant's ability to absorb both water and nutrients. This creates a habitat very different from that of the swamp to the north of the esker. Best known for their sphagnum moss, which "floats" on the water, bogs are also home to a number of plants and animals seldom found in the more common red maple swamps. Characteristic leatherleaf plants contribute to the mat while highbush blueberries and swamp azaleas are specially adapted for this environment and thrive on the edges. Small maples are even seen growing on the mat of moss. Other plants found in this bog include red chokeberry, common bog cotton, and three-way sedge. Few animals live in the bog, although many pass through it in search of food or shelter. Permanent residents include insect-eating birds, garter snakes, frogs, and turtles that feed on large insects. While relaxing on the boardwalk, enjoy a fine view of West Mountain.





RIVERWALK NATURE TRAIL

Location

Town-owned property in Simsbury Center, also known as Great Meadow. The trail is easily accessible and adjacent to ample parking off Iron Horse Boulevard. The best entrance is from the foot of Mall Way via a small set of steps leading east off the bike trail (marked by a town sign).

Distance

2.2 miles (loop)

Terrain

Flat, regularly mowed, well-marked; short stretches can be seasonally wet.









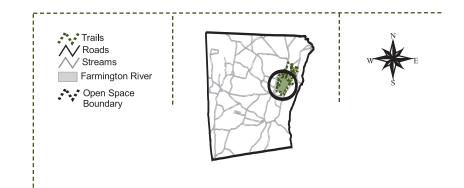


Features

The trail leads down a lovely pine colonnade, past corn fields, then through an open forest along the river. It next passes through meadows close to an ox-bow of the river, past a swampy area and over ancient farm drainage systems now clogged by beavers. The trail ends at the Simscroft parking lot.

The Great Meadow offers a rich habitat for flora and fauna. A profusion of wildflowers is on exhibit throughout the warm weather, especially in spring. Birds use the area heavily as a stopover point during migration. (A recent survey identified over 100 species of birds, with at least 40 percent nesting in the area.) Great horned owls have been observed raising their offspring while killdeer nest in the cornfields. You can frequently see redtailed hawks, wild turkeys, and deer. Oftentimes snapping turtles can be seen moving between the marsh and the river. The views of the river and Talcott Ridge to the east are idyllic, generating a feeling of peace and tranquility difficult to match elsewhere in the Hartford area. This is truly a resource to preserve and treasure.





Location

Access this area from Route 10 in the Tower Business Park. Cross the Greenway blacktop, take a right down the dirt road then take either fork at the bottom of the hill and park.

Distance

Hake your own trail

Terrain

Easy, level







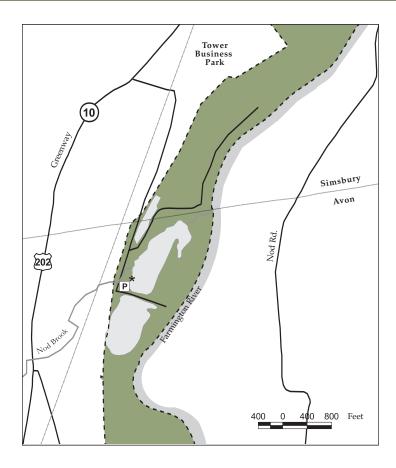


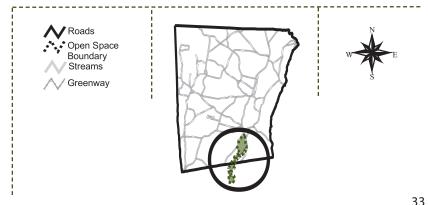
Features

Nod Brook is a beautiful and easily accessible spot that incorporates open fields, two ponds, and the Farmington River.

This area is one of four State hunting dog training and field trial areas. Be aware that hunting is allowed during field dog trials and during hunting season. Public use is prohibited by law when a field dog trial is being held since live ammunition is used. Please read the signs upon entering the area.

The northern half of Nod Brook is an open, flat meadow with a dirt road running along the Farmington River. The southern half contains two ponds bordered by dirt roads. You can hike on the level roads and enjoy the view of Talcott Mountain and the surrounding hills and woods along the river. Because of the rich and varied habitat, this is a tremendous place to bird watch, especially during spring and fall migrations. There is also an area to launch canoes into the river at the northern end of the pond.





Sand Plain Forests



SAND PLAIN FORESTS

NOTES

Several sizable and more or less contiguous Town, State, and private lands in the central part of town provide a variety of walking opportunities in a sand plain forest setting. The walks are relatively flat with some modest knolls, and include Great Pond State Forest, Stratton Brook State Park, Still Brook Open Space, Town Open Space at the southwest corner of Bushy Hill and Stratton Brook roads, Ethel Walker School, and Belden Forest.

Sand plain forests are home to a rich variety of birds and animals that prefer this environment to wetlands or nearby hills for foraging and raising their young. The forests are characterized by thick layers of sand and gravel under topsoil. The soil, deposited by retreating glaciers, tends to be well drained and can become quite dry in places. This creates variations in the patterns of vegetation relative to the nearby ridges and wetlands. Influences such as fire in pre-colonial days, followed later by logging, plowing, and pasturing, have profoundly shaped present sand plain vegetation. For example, nonpalatable plant species such as cedar and juniper, able to thrive under heavy grazing conditions, have relatively recently been forced into decline under the canopy of oak, maple, hickory, and black cherry. Fire sensitive conifers are the most recent large trees to join the canopy.

GREAT POND STATE FOREST

Location

Access parking lot via dirt road off Great Pond Road, between Laurel Lane and Old Farms Road.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy, flat, well-marked. Trails on northern side of pond can become very muddy after rains.









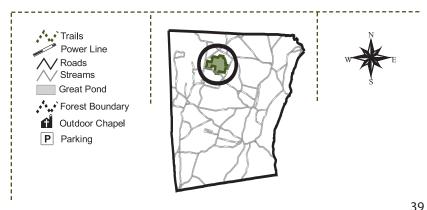


Features

The coniferous 280-acre Great Pond State Forest is unusually peaceful throughout the year. One of its most beautiful features is the shallow 30-acre pond near the center. It attracts a variety of wildlife including deer, beaver, and many migrating waterfowl. The trails around the pond offer a number of scenic outlooks. The pond is particularly lovely when the water lilies bloom in summer. In winter it can be a good place for ice skating.

A large stand of rhododendron surrounds a section of the trail along the northeastern edge of the pond, its height creating a virtual canopy. West of the pond are tall pines and hemlocks, creating a cool and quiet atmosphere. Because of the pond and the conifer-based sand plain environment, the park attracts a large variety of nesting birds. Over 100 species are thought to nest here, including green-backed heron, common merganser, great horned owl, broad-winged hawk, and pine warbler.





STRATTON BROOK STATE PARK

Location

Access the park through the main gate on Farms Village Road (Route 309) two miles west of Route 10 or across from the iunction of Stratton Brook Road and Town Forest Road.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy











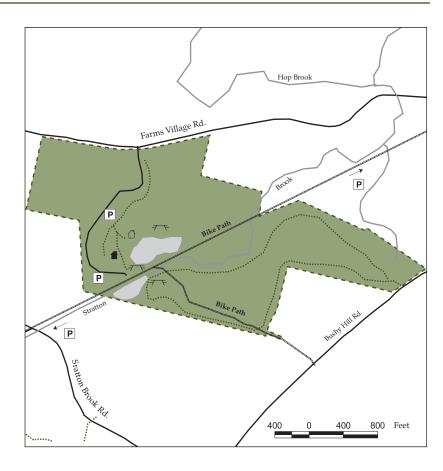


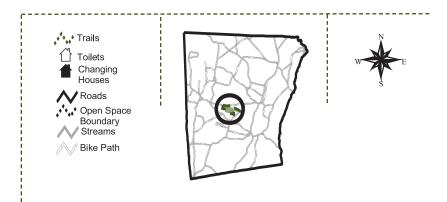
Features

This 148-acre state park includes a pond and brook for fishing, a separate swimming pond, and a picnic shelter as well as trails for hiking and biking.

The park was acquired in 1908 as part of Massacoe State Forest for the purpose of demonstrating forest fire control techniques in areas adjacent to railroad lines. The Town of Simsbury built the bike path on the former Central New England Railroad bed; it extends through Simsbury Town Forest Park to West Mountain Road. Massacoe Pond, the small fishing pond, resulted from a dam built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933.

Replete with a large numbers of white pines with mixed hardwoods, this park is a fine example of a sand plain forest. Spring brings wildflowers such as rue anemone, white and birdfoot violets, fringed polygala (gaywings), and lady slippers. Along the edges of the park's open spaces are good spots to see a wide variety of warblers, brown thrashers, cedar waxwings, woodpeckers, and other interesting birds. [Note that groves of red pines were harvested in 1990 after they were damaged by insects (Red Pine Scale).]





STILL BROOK OPEN SPACE

Location

Between Stratton Brook and Sand Hill roads. The surrounding roads offer several access points, all marked with the standard town open space stone pillars on either side.

Distance

Various; total 2.5 miles

Terrain

Various











Features

The Town-owned Still Brook Open Space consists of 47.5 acres of mixed coniferous and deciduous forest and contains about 1.1 miles of a seasonal stream called Still Brook.

The trails provide a variety of walking experiences and surfaces. All of the trails as they leave the streets are paved for varying distances with stone dust or asphalt, and then continue as unimproved trails. The open space is generally lower than the surrounding neighborhoods, with steeper paths on entering that level out as they parallel the brook. Despite their close proximity to the residential neighborhoods, the trails are refreshingly quiet and private. Six wooden footbridges cross Still Brook and three boardwalks supplement the trail over wet terrain. Distinct belts of vegetation border the brook; skunk cabbage edges the stream with a belt of cinnamon fern above it. The wetland also contains a variety of tall grasses. This area is home to deer, raccoons, chipmunks, and grouse.





TOWN FOREST

Location

Access through the lot on Bushy Hill Road just south of Stratton Brook Road; from St. Albans Church; or from the Ethel Walker trails.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy, flat











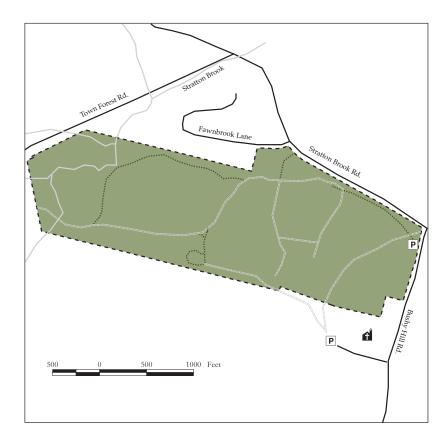


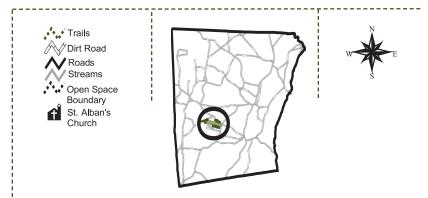
Features

This 110-acre Town-owned parcel contains both woodland and open field habitats. It is one of the few open fields accessible in town, and a series of trails is usually kept mowed to ease walking.

The mixed forest near the Bushy Hill parking lot has been harvested recently to enhance forest health and improve the wildlife habitat.

Adjacent to this is a well-cleared open field whose grasses harbor a wide variety of birds, plants, and small animals. Further to the west the trails continue through the woods and connect to the extensive Ethel Walker School trail system, also open to the public.





ETHEL WALKER SCHOOL TRAILS

Location

East and west of Bushy Hill Road (Route 167). Access the western trails from several places: from Town Forest Park at the end of Town Forest Road; from town land off Stratton Brook Road just east of Fawnbrook Lane; from the bike path connecting West Mountain Road to Town Forest Park, and via a woods road off Woodhaven Drive. The Ethel Walker School specifically asks that visitors not access its land from the Bushy Hill Road side, as those areas are heavily used by school vehicles, students, and horses.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy













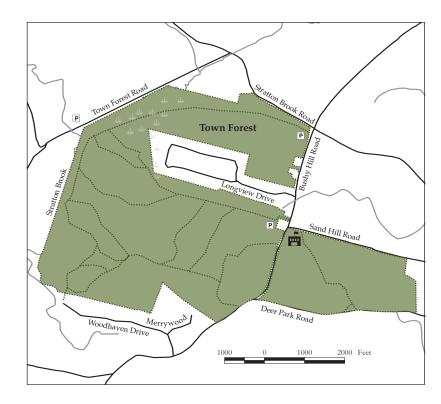


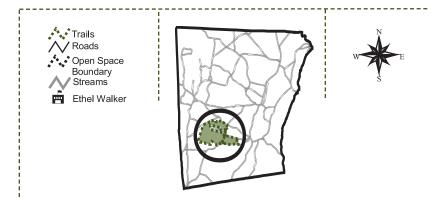
Features

These several hundred acres feature beautiful stands of white pine, hemlock, and oak, some open fields, a beautiful trail-side stream, many valuable wetlands, and a wonderful view of the Ethel Walker horse pastures and Heublein Tower. The school maintains a number of trails for its horseback riding program and invites the public to hike, trail bike, snowshoe, and cross-country ski them. Winter sports are especially spectacular with fresh snow clinging to the hemlock boughs.

West of Bushy Hill is an extensive network of interconnected trails. Here visitors can customize the length of a hiking or skiing outing. These trails also access Town Forest Park. Although the trails are not well marked, it's easy to find the main Ethel Walker horseshoe-shaped trail and access the connecting trails from there.

East of Bushy Hill Road, behind the school's main buildings, lie the athletic fields, community gardens, and a small parking lot. Just south of these fields are several trails connecting Sand Hill Road and Deer Park Road. One of these trails traverses the edge of a small pond.





BELDEN FOREST

Location

Access from the east side of Beldenwood Road approximately 500 feet east of the intersection with Firetown Road (well marked by a white Town Open Space marker). It can also be reached from the Boy Scout Hall off Route 10, but this approach requires a long climb up a steep hill.

Distance

Various; park length 0.8 miles

Terrain

Easy



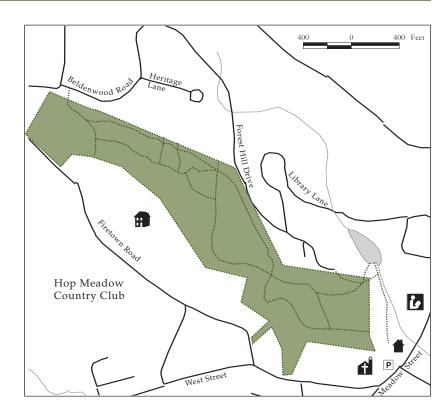


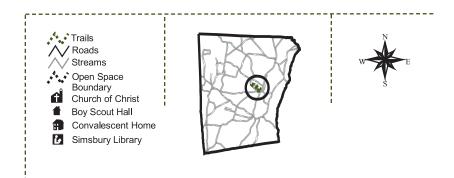


Features

The 42-acre, Town-owned property consists of a loop of secluded trails dominated by 100-foot-tall white pines. To make a loop, follow the yellow-marked trail out and the blue-marked trail back. The trails are very well marked. Walks here are relaxing as visitors pass beneath the cathedral-like pines mixed with hemlock, beech, and oak.

Through much of the 1800s and early 1900s this property was part of the Eno Wood estate, and at that time the pond was used to harvest ice for iceboxes. The adjacent Simsbury 1820 House was the home of Amos R. Eno and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nearby Boy Scout Hall was built in 1839 as the town hall, and served as such until 1932.





SIMSBURY FARMS FAMILY FITNESS TRAILS

Location

Enter Simsbury Farms Complex off Old Farms Road north of Route 309.
The trail begins on the right before the parking lot and follows the perimeter of a golf course that was once an apple orchard.

Distance

2.5 miles

Terrain

Easy walk or run through series of 20 exercise stations





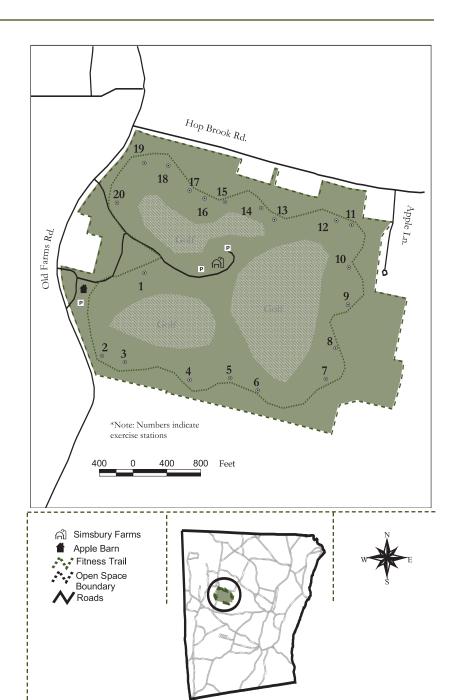




Features

Each station encourages a type of exercise, including warm-up, stretching, muscle strengthening, cardiovascular conditioning, and cool down, combined with walking or running between stations. The President's Council on Fitness and Sports designed the Fitness Trail exercises for both children and adults. Each station provides guidelines and recommended repetitions for beginner and advanced exercisers.

Many apple and pear trees on the grounds still blossom in the spring. To the west there is a stunning view of the Hedgehog ridge. The fields across Old Farms Road from the Apple Barn are town owned. A trail in the grass to the north of that field connects to Meadow Pond Park, another lovely spot to walk.



THE FARMINGTON VALLEY GREENWAY

Location

Trail spans five towns and follows the old right-of-way of the Farmington Canal Railroad (which replaced the historic Farmington Canal in 1848)

Distance

25 miles

Terrain

Paved; flat









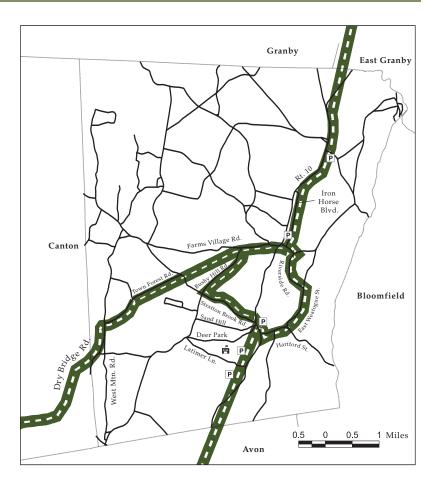


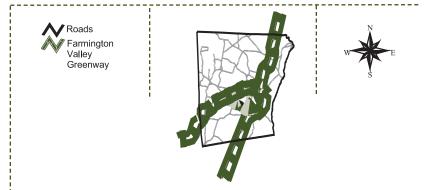
Features

An exciting addition to Simsbury and its environs, this trail is ideal for walkers, joggers, bikers, and skaters, as well as those who require wheelchair access. The Greenway offers many points of access with ample parking along the trail, several with wheelchair access.

The Simsbury portion of the Greenway offers a wealth of lovely spots. At the Avon town line, behind the Riverdale Farms mall, the trail skirts the Nod Brook Wildlife Area. Here visitors will find both ponds and the Farmington River. Above to the east is a fine view of Talcott Mountain. A short side trip into Canal Place reveals a restored section of the original canal.

In downtown Simsbury, the Greenway merges with Iron Horse Boulevard. At the southern end, across from Drake Hill Mall, is a short paved walkway that leads to a one-lane bridge built in 1892. Listed on the National Historic Register, the bridge provides a magnificent view of the Farmington River. As the trail moves north it passes the river floodplain and the entrances to the River Walk Trail. In the spring and summer wildflowers abound, and it is not unusual to see beaver, deer, mallard ducks, and ring-necked pheasants. Several benches line this section, so visitors can take in the sights at their leisure. Concluding this part of the trail is a short side trail that leads to State wildlife land; here you may see ducks and geese nesting in the spring.





The Terry's Plain Area



THE TERRY'S PLAIN AREA

NOTES

The northeast quadrant of town, east of the river, consists of varied terrain and a pattern of narrow, winding roads, historic buildings, and agricultural uses that create a pleasing texture of scenic vistas. Resting on an ancient and fertile glacial terrace, Terry's Plain is tucked between the basaltic ridge that forms the town's eastern boundary and the Farmington River, the latter having spent the past 10,000 years cutting the present-day floodplain out of the terrace.

For most of this period, Native Americans lived in permanent villages along the river and created agricultural fields. From his nearby flower farm, the late Leslie Dewey assembled an extensive collection of pre-Columbian artifacts, some of which are on permanent display at the Simsbury Public Library.

Named after one of the town's early farmers, John Terry, Terry's Plain was the early gateway to Simsbury. In 1648 the first colonials, John Griffen and Michael Humphry, followed pine trees for their tar and pitch business up the river from Bloomfield. From then until well into the 20th century, Terry's Plain remained farmland, producing food crops and tobacco. As with many early communities, residents built their farm buildings on the terrace, grew crops there and along the floodplain, and gathered wood and pastured livestock on the hillsides. At the base of the hill, one farm also quarried stone on its land.

As with most areas in town, Terry's Plain has changed in recent years. Residential development and new roads have nearly tripled the population over the past three decades. Virtually all of the hillside and portions of the terrace and floodplain have been allowed to grow back into brush and woods. Nonetheless, several sizable parcels remain as open fields, invaluable as rich farmland and providing, along with the woods and wetlands, delightfully diverse wildlife habitats.

Over the years the natural and historic features of Terry's Plain have been recognized in several ways. In 1991 East Weatogue Street and Terry's Plain Road were designated Simsbury's first official Scenic Road. In 1993 the National Register of Historic Places recognized the area encompassing the glacial terrace and the early structures making up the agricultural area (from Pharos Farm on the north to Hall's farm on the south) as historic working farmscape.

COLONIAL TRAINEBAND FIELD - Wegner Property

Location

Terry's Plain Road at Goodrich Road. Park along the west side of Goodrich Road where the soil is firm.

Distance

Various

Terrain

Easy















Features

Beginning in 1685, the field had been a training ground for the town militia. Be sure to read the inscription on the marker at the corner of Terry's Plain and Goodrich roads explaining the use of the field for militia training. The field has been continuously farmed at least since the 1650s.

Gaze from the hills on the west to the floodplain and picture the scene as it was over three centuries ago. From this location the geological boundaries where the ridge meets the glacial terrace and the terrace drops to the current floodplain can be readily seen. The terrace/floodplain boundary drops 20 to 30 feet along the western edge of the long, narrow hayfield that runs along the western side of Goodrich Road. The handful of trees, brush, and tall weeds here and on the other side of the road provide shelter and nesting sites for birds and small mammals that use the field for food.

Although walking in the field during the summer growing season is discouraged, a dead-end path runs from Goodrich along the tree line on the southern edge of the field. Along this path the field borders a row of pine trees and an alder swamp, an ideal place to watch birds and small mammals. To see the steep drop to the floodplain up close, cross Goodrich Road and the long, narrow hayfield to the west. From this vantage point you will see a brush swamp that leads directly to the river. This land is a state wildlife management area and is stocked with pheasants for hunting from October to mid-winter. We do not advise people to walk in this area during those months.

CASE PROPERTY/WET MEADOW

Location

Continue down Goodrich Road to Ferry Lane. Note two markers, one describing the Pent Road Ferry.

Distance

Various, short

Terrain

Easy











Features

In the 1600s Ferry Road continued to the center of town and connected the town's two militia fields. There was no bridge at the time; people crossed the river by ferry. Also state wildlife land, this is a great place to observe hawks and a myriad of other wildlife.

Further down Ferry Lane toward Terry's Plain Road lies the Land Trust's 11-acre Case Property. Part of the Simsbury Land Trust's management plan for this property was restoring approximately six acres at the center of the site to a natural wet meadow habitat. There is a network of walking paths throughout the site, and these provide great views of the meadow and the tremendous variety of plant life, insects, birds, and small mammals that abound there. Hikers will pass through a section with a cattail swamp, alder thickets, and saplings of evergreen and hardwood, a sharp contrast to the more open stretches.

Penwood Brook, which runs through the property along the north boundary on its way to the river, adds another wildlife corridor to the site. The "duck pond" at the northeast corner is actually a manmade fire pond leased and maintained by the volunteer fire department. As with the Wegner property, we ask that hikers respect the signs that indicate points where the paths enter neighboring private property.

Location

On the east side of Quarry Road just north of Pharos Farm, park on the expanded shoulder of the road (marked by Simsbury Land Trust sign). Walk 30 feet up to a narrow landing to view the vertical stone ledges outlining the quarried area. Do not proceed into the quarry or attempt to climb the walls because of the danger of poor footing, vertical drops, and rock slides.

Distance

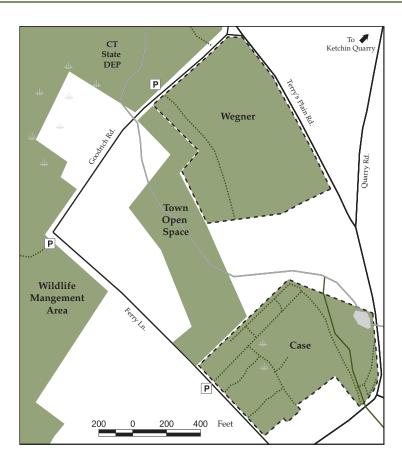
0.25 miles





Description

Dating back at least to the early 1800s, this quarry was part of a nearby farm and provided stone for various small projects such as foundations, wells, and fences. In the early 1890s William Ketchin and his father, two of the area's best known masons, purchased the quarry and made it into a sizable commercial venture. Over the next 25 years, stone from this quarry was used to build many of the Ensign Bickford buildings as well as the current Webster Bank, the Methodist Church, Central School, The Belden School (current Town Hall) and the Tariffville Fire Station, among others. Today the Simsbury Land Trust owns the quarry. Watch for informational signs along the way.





Eastern Ridge



EASTERN RIDGE NOTES

Metacomet Ridge, which serves as Simsbury's eastern border, is notable not only for its imposing presence but for its unique geology and ecology. The extensive Metacomet Trail runs the length of the ridge and Penwood and Talcott Mountain state parks are situated there. The panoramic Tower Trail is doubtless the most heavily hiked trail in the valley. Hikers will find these trails well cared for and bursting with beautiful scenery and awesome vistas.

The ridge was formed 200 million years ago when volcanic basalt extruded up between north-south running faultlines in surface geologic plates. The basalt cooled while still underground, and when the surface above it eroded, stunning columns of traprock remained. Because of the unique weathering characteristics of columnar basalt, the western edge of the ridge is fractured and heavy with rock debris called tallus. Along with the effects of west-to-east weather patterns, this has created specialized microenvironments. The windswept and exposed summit is another environment not seen elsewhere in Simsbury. When hiking here carry a plant identification guide and pay particular attention to the smaller species you find. In the spring depressions along the ridge fill with water, forming numerous vernal pools, which are vital for the survival of local toads, frogs, salamanders, and turtles. In the fall hawks and other birds of prey ride the thermals and follow the ridge during their migration.

METACOMET TRAIL

Location

Trail extends along the Metacomet Ridge from Meriden to Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire. Access Simsbury portion from several points, including Talcott Mountain and Penwood state parks.

Distance

7 miles (Simsbury portion)

Terrain

Ranges from smooth and easy to rough and treacherous











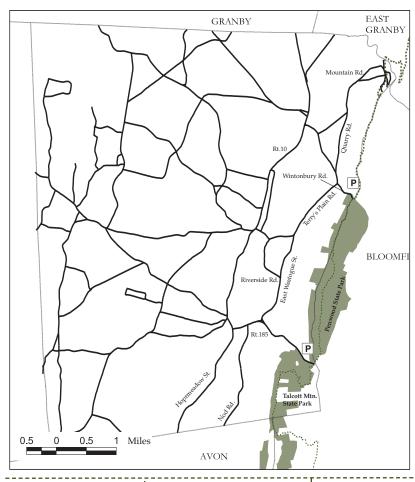


Features

The traprock ridge here is formed from three layers of volcanic basalt sandwiching layers of sedimentary rock, with their angled edges facing west. It offers views that are unequaled in the valley.

The entire trail is marked with blue blazes; be wary of numerous unmarked side trails and access roads. The northern section of the trail begins 0.25 miles up Mountain Road (off Route 189 in Tariffville). On the right, stone pillars and the remains of a cast iron gate mark the road that led to Bartlett's Tower. Built in 1889 as a pavilion and bowling alley, Bartlett's Tower originally attracted picnicking day trippers from Hartford. Traveling by train to the Tariffville station, and then by carriage to the 70-foot tower, visitors enjoyed varied recreation and the famous panoramic view. Today, a chimney sits at the top of the slope — all that remains of the tower, which burned down on May 24, 1936. Just north of the chimney is a good viewpoint.

Continue following the blue blazes along the ridge. Just past the second power line you'll find an interesting side trail to the right along the cliff; this leads to yet another scenic viewpoint. Down an incline the trail rejoins the blue-blazed trail, and nearby you can see a kettle pond and an open ledge with a view of the Farmington Valley. This portion of the trail ends after 2.5 miles on Wintonbury Road. The trail continues in Penwood State Park.









PENWOOD STATE PARK

Location

Access park from the north by Wintonbury Road and the Metacomet Trail or from the south by a clearly marked entrance off the north side of Route 185, roughly across from the entrance to Heublein Tower Trail.

Distance

Park from end to end is just over 3 miles.

Terrain

Various









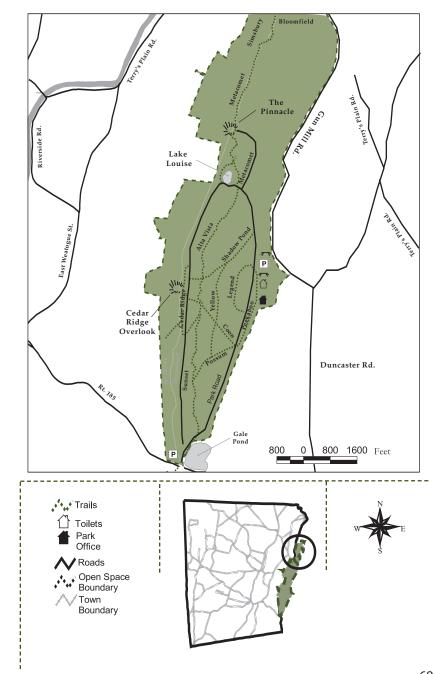




Features

The 800 acres of Penwood were donated to the state in 1944 by Connecticut industrialist Curtis Veeder. Penwood is a versatile destination, offering a series of interconnected trails traversing varied terrain, some with wonderful views. A section of Metacomet Trail runs north-south the length of the park as well. In the warmer months you can reach the picnic area by car along the main route.

The western trails offer great views of the valley and access to Lake Louise. The white-marked trail around the lake is a nature walk complete with a boardwalk through the marsh. Though there is minimal access to the water, the thickets of trees surrounding the lake teem with wildlife. To the north, along the blue-blazed Metacomet Trail, is the "Pinnacle," a ledge with a spectacular view of Simsbury.



TALCOTT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

Location

Access park from south side of Route 185, roughly across from the entrance to Penwood State Park. The Tower Trail begins on the left, clearly marked halfway up the access road.

Distance

1.5 miles

Terrain

Steep for first 1,000 feet, then fairly flat. Most of the hike is easy, but be extremely careful near the cliff edges.















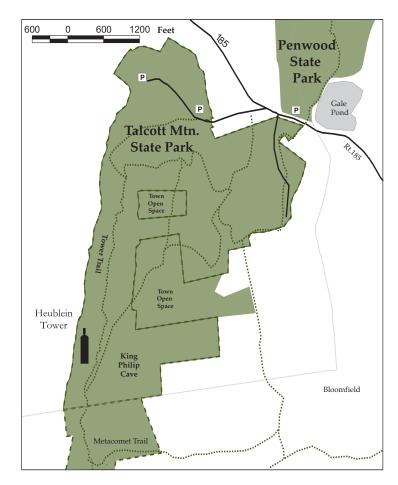
Features

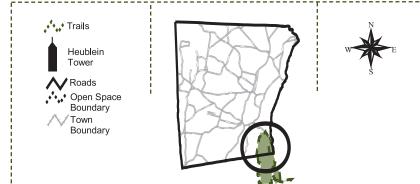
Talcott Mountain is the most dominant natural feature of the Farmington Valley and it showcases the most notable manmade landmark: The Heublein Tower. In addition to the tower, Talcott Mountain State Park includes King Philip's Cave, another important local landmark.

Upon reaching the edge of the cliff, you are treated to a stunning view of the river valley and beyond. This ridge is a popular spot to view fall foliage as well as the migration of hawks and other birds as they ride the thermals. You may also see hang-gliders taking off from the ridge and riding those thermals! Just below is King Philip's Cave. Some say King Philip may have taken refuge there as his troops burned the settlement of Simsbury. Resist the temptation to take the trail down to the cave as it is very dangerous. Further along on the right is a small pond formed from rainwater trapped by the underlying rock.

The Heublein Tower is the most recent of five towers built here and was completed as a country retreat in 1914 by Gilbert F. Heublein. The State now owns the tower, and with the help of the Friends of Heublein Tower the building is open to the public.

For a loop trail, continue east from the tower to a junction with the blue-blazed Metacomet Trail. At the junction a left turn returns to Route 185 and a right turn leads to MDC Reservoir No. 6 off Albany Avenue (Route 44) in West Hartford.





Short Walks



THE FARMINGTON CANAL

Locations

In Simsbury, enter Canal Place across from The Hartford on Route 10. Follow Old Canal Way to a small parking lot on the right and walk the cinder path to a nicely preserved section of the canal. Use the benches here to sit and enjoy this pleasant spot.

Distance

Various



Features

The Farmington Canal remains one of the most interesting historical features in the valley. Conceived to provide commercial access to the interior of the state, the canal was an engineering feat and a monumental construction project involving all the communities it passed through. The canal was typically 36 feet wide at the top, 20 feet wide at the bottom and four feet deep. Canal boats were pulled by horses walking alongside on towpaths. At the Farmington location, a 12-foot-wide, six-foot-deep trough with walkway spanned 280 feet to remain level and cross the river. The aqueduct stood on six 34-foot-high stone piers and was the longest on the canal.

OWENS BROOK TRAIL

Location

Off Owens Brook Boulevard

Distance

Short





Features

This red-blazed, wooded trail to the south of Owens Brook Boulevard runs through Town Open Space. A trail sign is located west and across the street from Owens Brook Circle. Access here or midway between Musket Trail and Winterset Lane or at the corner of Route 10 and Owens Brook Boulevard.

TOWN FOREST ROAD

West Mountain Road Bike Path

Location

This is a continuation of the bike path through Stratton Brook State Park. Continue west along Town Forest Road for about a mile.

Distance

0.75 miles





Features

The land on either side of the road is a combination of forest and wetlands. At the end of the road you'll find a swimming pond and athletic fields. Continue up the dirt road until it meets a former railroad bed. The trail ends at West Mountain Road.

FARMINGTON RIVER

Tariffville Walk

Location

Park at Tariffville Park and walk past the field to the river.

Distance

1 mile





Features

This is an interesting and beautiful walk along the Tariffville section of the Farmington River. The trail starts as a narrow dirt road before it turns to bluestone. Vegetation along the path is indigenous to a floodplain with a unique mix of shrubs, grasses, and woody trees. Along the way you will spot old railroad river piers from the days when the Central New England Railroad used this route.

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