Welcome to the Walking Trails of Plymouth!

Pictured is Center Hill Preserve
Special Thanks and Acknowledgements

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The artwork throughout the book was drawn by artist Heidi Mayo, and provided by SEMPBA.

Trail descriptions written by Diane Griffiths Peck amended from the Take a Hike column in the Old Colony Memorial. Guide compiled by Andrea Dickinson in collaboration with the Open Space Committee.
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As the largest municipality in Massachusetts by area, Plymouth currently has approximately 28% of our 65,000 acres designated as protected open space. Plymouth contains the third highest per square mile occurrence of rare, threatened and endangered species of any community in Massachusetts, 36 miles of coastline and 365+ inland ponds including 32 globally rare coastal plain ponds. The town also sits on the second largest sole-source aquifer in the state.

Plymouth’s abundance of open space presents both a threat and an opportunity. Substantial development of currently vacant lands would strain the Town’s ability to provide services, maintain rural character, and protect natural resources. Successful open space planning will facilitate Plymouth’s efforts to control sprawl, maintain water quality, and protect natural resources. Open space preservation is also a key component of Plymouth’s efforts to attract tourism and provide recreational opportunities.

PLYMOUTH’S OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Plymouth’s Open Space Committee was established in 2002 with a mission to advocate for the preservation and maintenance of open space for current residents as well as for future generations in order to protect our aquifer, our environment, and the character of our town.

The Committee carries out its mission by seeking opportunities to conserve natural and recreational open space, as well as working with partner groups to promote educational efforts and recreational outings on conserved land.

The Committee meets twice monthly with meeting dates, times, agendas and meeting minutes posted on the Town website. Members of the public are always welcome whether they are generally interested in open space or concerned about a specific piece of land.

Since 2002, the Open Space Committee has helped to conserve more than 360 acres.

ABOUT PLYMOUTH OPEN SPACE

HOW CAN I HELP?

• Explore, appreciate and help advocate for Plymouth’s extraordinary open space.
• Pick up trash when you see it!
• Call (508) 747-1620 ext. 10127 to report trail issues.
• Volunteer for trash cleanups and trail maintenance projects.
• Consider donating land to conservation.
• Forgo single use plastics when you can to help reduce litter.
• Get involved with local sustainability initiatives.

Town Forest
EARTH, WIND, FIRE AND WATER!

- The interaction of fresh and saltwater, sand, vegetation and fire differentiate these Coastal Pine Barrens from all other ecoregions.
- In places hundreds of feet beneath and filtered by a mantle of sand left by the glaciers, immense, priceless reservoirs of water have accumulated.
- Above the sand, fire has always been a critical element, and many plants and animals have evolved to withstand, and even thrive after each conflagration.
- And unique to Coastal Pine Barrens is the ocean: both buffer and border.

AN IRREPLACEABLE ECOREGION!

The second largest remaining ecoregion of its kind in the world, providing coastal and inland habitat for over 220 of Massachusetts’ rarest species, including the Northern Red-bellied Cooter, Barrens Tiger Beetle, Piping Plover, and Plymouth Gentian.

THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Equally unique are the smaller ‘natural communities’ that comprise this ecoregion, including one of only three Maritime Grasslands in the nation, primordial Atlantic White Cedar Bogs, Sandplain Grasslands, Coastal Plain Ponds and – the signature community of the ecoregion – the globally rare savannahs of the Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak Community.

From Duxbury and Plymouth in the north, Marion and Mattapoisett to the south, across Cape Cod and the islands of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, the Massachusetts Coastal Pine Barrens stand apart, a legacy from our past that speaks urgently to the future.

Information provided by the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance
Dogs are allowed on all conservation lands and preserves but they should be leashed in accordance with the town’s leash by-law.
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Prepared for the Plymouth Open Space Committee
January 28, 2021
Plymouth Office of Planning & Development
The Beaver Dam Conservation Area is one of the town’s older trail systems. As such, it is showing the wear and tear of age. Still, it is a satisfying loop of rolling terrain with lots of water views, which your kids or your dog will love. These are challenging and fun paths for mountain bikers, too.

Look for the parking turn off area at the two empty upright posts. Enter through the grove of mature pines onto wide paths carpeted with pine needles. These trails generally have less side growth and no grass, making it harder for ticks to catch a ride onto your clothes. The trail is well marked into the woods, but with the many cut-throughs, dirtbike and game trails, it can be confusing. Stick to following the trail markers where the forest wardens are trying to establish a logical route. One hundred yards into the forest, the path divides with a short leg left, down to the shore of Little Island Pond. Below a sandy incline is a small beach area which affords a long southerly view of the length of the pond. The water is clear and the bottom is pebbly, firm sand; good for wading for dogs or children.

Return to the main path and turn left down a gentle hill to the first of eleven signboards, informational kiosks which follow a 2.4 mile loop from this point. If you are one to eat dessert before dinner, turn left here, keeping the pond on your left. Otherwise go right, counterclockwise into the uplands and save the pond side stretch for last. If you turn left, note the short boardwalk into the pond on the left a bit beyond kiosk #1. Soon thereafter is another tiny beach. Pass the other numbered kiosks, some vandalized or missing, most faded but legible. Note the large sentinel white pines at the pond’s edge alongside the skeletons of tall dead trees, on which raptors love to perch.

Back to the main trail through the uplands which are the classic knob and kettle pattern of Plymouth’s glacial outwash plain: where the glacier ground to a halt, melted down and dumped all the debris it was carrying into steep, untidy hills and deep hollows. Huge chunks of ice crumbled off the glacier and formed bowls which can be seasonally wet vernal pools, bogs or ponds. Fourteen thousand years later, you are climbing these hills, through stands of pine that send their roots across the path like stair risers. Here again, the trail shows its age, as you cross patches of “ancient” plastic litter, demonstrating that, like perverse diamonds, plastics are forever.

On the left, through this seemingly remote forest, you will note the backside of the landfill hill covered in grass and hear sounds from the transfer station. Look to the right for peek-a-boo views of the pond. At our feet, the “undead” plants thrive in this area with all manner of mushrooms, lichen, and Indian Pipes. After a curving, twisty course, you finally return down to pond level near Beaver Dam Road. Follow the trail markers around to the right and close the 2.4 mile loop back at the first numbered kiosk. Head left, or due north, about a tenth of a mile back to the parking area.

The sinuous water-side path continues up and down and in and out of piney groves with little undergrowth, alternating with mixed hardwood thickets. The path levels out but degrades into the undulations caused by ATV traffic which make it tiresome for bipeds. Having reached the end of the pond, the path turns west, through a ferny lowland and comes to a T. The marked trail turns right here; the trail to the left continues through the Town owned land out of the preserve. Follow the marked trail to the right until there is another sharp right.

Northern Bayberry
Location: Beaver Dam Road, just northeast of the transfer station, no sign
Activity Level: Some easy stretches with moderate hills
Parking: Limited to two or three vehicles, and alongside the road
Distance: Just under 3 miles
Duration: 1.5 to 2 hours
Features: Pond views, glacial terrain
Black Cat Preserve features two abandoned cranberry bogs and a winding route through variable uplands. The trail system is shaped roughly like a jagged letter U with a strip of private property in the middle, formed when the two parcels of land obtained by the Town were joined to form this preserve.

The trail starts toward the left out of the parking lot. Pass by the front bog and then cross a wooden foot bridge over a small stream. Follow the Loop Trail signs right up onto the hill, with water views of the Briggs Reservoir on your left. Passing through a forest of mixed hardwoods and pines, this is the most difficult part of the Black Cat trail system.

You are on top of what appears to be an esker, made by a river of melt water that flowed under the glacial sheet, paradoxically creating a long, snaky, raised rock and gravel bed. On the right is the sandy cliff of a borrow pit, from where sand was excavated to be spread on the cranberry vines every year. After about a half mile, there is a T-shaped intersection. Turn left here, for a short in-and-out trail which ends at a small dock on the pond. There are a lot of No Trespassing signs and numerous cross trails in this area, some with wooden gates, as we skirt private property for a while. Do keep to the well-marked walking trail so as not to aggravate the abutters. Retrace back to the T and carry on left, following the Loop Trail, passing into more open forest. Look for an enormous pitch pine towering above on the left. Descend toward a vernal pond at the bottom of a kettle on your left where amphibians breed in the spring. Because these ponds are temporary, fish cannot live in them and consume the eggs. The tadpoles hatch out and grow legs to become toads and frogs before the wet area dries out for the summer.

About a mile into your hike, you come to the intersection of the Rear Bog Trail. Here, you can stay on the Loop by going straight and by following the marked trail you will be back to the esker trail, which returns to the Front Bog. Or, turn left to follow the signs to the Rear Bogs, a meandering there-and-back-again path. The trail climbs knobs and descends into kettles before turning right onto a cart path. The Rear Bog trail takes a left off the cart path at the trail marker. As always, stick to the marked trail so as to not wander into someone’s backyard.

This trail leads downhill to one of two cranberry bogs, which are in the process of returning to the wild. There is a flat path circling this first bog. To continue, keep to the right about halfway around and do a sharp hairpin turn to the right, which brings you to the second Rear Bog. Circle this area, crossing a second wooden bridge. Return to the Loop Trail by retracing your steps. Turn left off the Loop, back up the esker trail and to the parking lot.
**Location:** Black Cat Road, just west of Briggs Reservoir, opposite #164

**Parking:** 4 cars

**Activity Level:** Nearest Black Cat Road is a flat, easy circle around the bog. Once into the uplands, the going is moderate.

**Distance:** 3 miles

**Duration:** Approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes, shorter depending on the route.

**Features:** Waterviews, rewilding bogs, esker
The Center Hill Preserve is a 98-acre property fronting on Cape Cod Bay. The Preserve is divided into two areas separated by Center Hill Road: Center Hill West and Center Hill East. On the east side are 28 acres of coastal land with 1/2 mile of accessible coastline. The ocean beach is undeveloped and unspoiled, with a large coastal pond and marsh. On the west side, there is a meandering trail system through upland forest and a decommissioned cranberry bog. Depending on your goals, go east, go west or do both! Any season of the year is a good time to go.

The public is invited to visit The Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance (SEMPBA) Discovery Center at the Center Hill Preserve. Here you will find information on the globally rare Coastal Pine Barrens Ecoregion, nature education programs and how to become involved in any of several citizen science programs offered by SEMPBA. Visit SEMPBA.org for hours and information.

**OCEAN SIDE**

Center Hill East beach is an easy 6-minute walk down the woods path from the south eastern parking lot. You will cross a little boardwalk over the marsh, then sink into soft, deep sand, bordered by seagrass, until you clamber over a mound of rocks like bowling balls. The beach here is a narrow strip of sand above the high tide line, with wide swaths of boulders and gravel at the shoreline. At any time of year you are likely to see Harbor and Gray Seals surfacing and dipping below the water or see them lounging on some of the larger rocks. Please do not disturb them, and per the Marine Mammal Protection Act, ensure you stay at least 150 ft away at all times. Seal waters mean shark waters, so take extra precautions with children and dogs at higher tides.

During the powerful storms of recent years, the ocean shoved a wide tongue of sand into the salt pond marsh, bisecting it. The Town built up a sand dune planted with eel grass to stave off further incursion. Cross this dune at the north end being very careful not to tread on these grasses.

This beachfront at lower tides is perfect for children with pails and water shoes to hunt for all manner of crabs, periwinkles and seaweed. Walk the entire half mile of beach but please respect the neighbors’ boundary signs.

**WOODS SIDE**

Enter Center Hill West from the northwest parking lot, follow the path down onto the “Old Back Road,” and take a left. Or cross from the Center Hill East parking lot and turn left at the split rail fence. Almost immediately, there is a marked trail option up to the right, where narrow winding trails loop through a rolling topography of thickly wooded upland habitat. If you stay on Old Back Road you will reach a former cranberry bog which frequently becomes inundated with water. Numerous species of waterfowl can be seen here during the wet events. Follow this road straight to the end at State Road, then turn back. Or bear right into a circuit of the bog. Stay on the circuit around the bog to the north east side. Look for two unmarked access points to the upland trail system, the first behind some piles of sand.

Once in the woods, the path is well marked, meandering up and down, short stretches of which are moderately difficult. Stick to the marked trail, avoiding the dirt bike cross cuts. These woods are unusual for the large number of sassafras trees. This tree is easy to identify because every branch can have three different shapes of leaves. Sassafras was important to the 17th century settlers just as it had always been to the Native Americans. All of the tree—bark, leaves, roots and wood--were valuable commodities to both peoples. The English believed that tea made from sassafras could cure many ailments from fever to syphilis! The demand was so high, second only to tobacco from the English New World, that the forests were depleted of sassafras within about 25 years of the first commercial harvest in the 1620’s. Centuries later, this species thrives undisturbed here in the Center Hill Preserve. Following the marked trails will bring you back to Old Back Road, so turn left to return to the parking lot.
Location: Center Hill Road, off State Road just north of Ellisville State Park
Parking: Plenty of parking in two lots
Activity Level: West side: mostly easy, with short stretches of moderate hilly terrain. Beach: easy, can be rougher over the rocks.
Distance: Variable, from 1/5th mile to about 3 miles
Duration: Variable, from 6 minutes to two hours
Features: Ocean beach, rewilding cranberry bog, upland woods
Clear Pond is a small body of water, pretty to look at, but with a dark history. A battle took place here, between the pond and a rocky ridge, in pre-colonial time. A Narragansett war party was defeated by the local Pockonokets of the Wampanoag nation. Water offers a quick resolution to the problem of disposing of the enemy dead and, it is said, “large numbers of Narragansetts” were thrown into this pond. Clear Pond was once named Narragansett Pond and drains southwesterly into a boggy wetland still called Narragansett Pond.

From the gate to the Clear Pond conservation area, follow the path down to the water’s edge. After looking at the pond, and maybe giving a thought to what lies beneath, turn right. You are passing through an easement over private property, so head directly for the metal swing gate back onto Town property. The path circles a large fresh water meadow which was once a working cranberry bog, so turn either left or right at the concrete platform over a drainage channel. All manner of grasses, wildflowers and trees have colonized the old bog, including milkweed, bayberry bushes, cattails, high and low bush blueberries, and wild raspberries. The path itself is flat, wide and grassy, and gets mowed occasionally, so the tick risk is lower. A special treat might be the “train tunnel” formed by densely situated white pines whose branches meet above the path to form a ceiling. This runs along nearly half of the circuit.

Silence. Although there are roads and streets all around, it is surprisingly free of modern noise. The best time to visit is at dusk when the air is full of natural sounds: bullfrogs croaking at each other, the buzz of insects, the singing and chattering of many birds, the cheeping of tree frogs, the plops of amphibians leaping into the water. As still as it may look, this bog is teeming with life at every level: high above in the air the hawks are “keering,” in the treetops birds flit; dragon flies zip around, too. Rabbits and muskrats skitter in the grasses; on the edges of ditches sit countless frogs; the water strider insects skate across the surface; and there are shapes moving under the dark water.

Complete the circle at the concrete bridge and head back out.

*Don’t miss the steps on the left leading back to Surrey Drive!*
**Location:** West Plymouth; Carver Road (old Rt 44) to Surrey Drive to intersection with Candlewood Drive. Opening through a wooden fence on the left. No signs, but a map kiosk.

**Parking:** Parallel parking for 2-3 cars

**Activity Level:** Easy, flat terrain

**Distance:** 1.25 miles

**Duration:** 30 minutes or longer

**Features:** Water view, decommissioned cranberry bog
The Crawley Woodlands Preserve, once owned by the family of Elaine and David Crawley, is a hike with variety and interest. Begin at the trail sign just west of the parking lot. The first third of this hike is through a classic glacial knob and kettle landscape, with towering white pines, deep hollows, hills, old cart roads and winding paths.

The paths mostly rim the bowls, but there are some ups and downs, too. There are good views of Billington Sea are on the left, especially in winter when leaves are down. As the forest changes to mixed hardwoods, the trail flattens out. Here you are entering an area of cranberry bogs abandoned long ago, now forested with mature trees, but with watergates and ditches still in place. Contrast this with the Headwaters of the Eel River and the Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary where such structures were removed to restore the bogs to their natural states. The trail comes to a T right after a water channel connecting Lout Pond with Billington Sea. Turn left to reach a small open area on Billington Sea, which has the ruins of a pump house and a sluice gate. Up a short set of stone steps are three granite benches, nice for sitting while gazing at the water.

Returning back to the T, you can retrace your steps to the parking lot by turning right. Another option is to follow the path east to another T, which is Lout Pond Rd. Go left to reach the boundary of the preserve, marked by three small granite pillars. Or you can turn right to follow the road south, with lovely views of Lout Pond on your left. Look deep into the forest to see more old channels and cranberry infrastructure on the right. Walk past some private homes and a cranberry bog on the left to return to the start.
Location: 331 Billington Street
Parking: 4-6 spaces available
Activity Level: Moderate to easy
Distance: Approximately 2 miles
Duration: 30-60 minutes depending on your pace and any detours
Features: Abandoned cranberry bogs, glacial terrain, pondside benches
The David E. Alper Nature Preserve offers highly contrasting experiences. You can enjoy a pleasant woods walk or, with a little effort, you can put in a kayak or canoe and have a delightful one or two hours on Little Herring Pond and Carter’s Brook. This is the public’s only access to Little Herring Pond. The 43.6 acre preserve was acquired by the Town in 2015 and is a quirky juxtaposition of rough, unimproved tracks and nicely prepared walking trails.

Park at the Alper Preserve sign. The woods road runs straight along a ridge between Triangle Pond and Little Herring Pond. There is a pleasant loop off of this ridge road at its beginning which swings down to the outlet of Little Herring Pond, at a disused dam, and back up again, about one third of a mile in length. The unique Plant ID Trail along the ridge road is a learning experience, with trees, shrubs and groundcover tagged with informative labels. The path continues through open mixed hardwood and softwood forest to a fork. Bearing right will lead to the end of the Plant Trail and out of the preserve. Bearing left at the fork, and left again will bring you down into a grassy meadow bordering the small, quiet Triangle Pond. At this point, you have left the preserve, so return to your start.

For kayakers, drive straight down the woods road from the traffic circle for about 90 yards. Pull off to the right at the top of the hill to unload and carry the kayaks down a steep hill, bearing left. You will come to a short, very steep incline where you can push the kayak down into a dirt slide, then continue to the put-in. Remember that returning from the trip, you will have to carry the kayak back up this hill!

Little Herring Pond is a 90 acre, shallow, clear water pond with a mostly sandy bottom. Although only 3 feet in average depth, the water is quite chilly, originating from hundreds of “little springs” on the pond bottom, called “colander springs,” especially at the north end. They form tiny “volcanoes” in the sandy bottom, puffing away endlessly, and are a delight to watch. There are always lots of waterfowl on this pond, and the clear water makes for interesting fish watching, too.

At the south end of the pond, you can glide right on through the old dam into the sweetest stretch of kayaking in Plymouth. This is Carter’s Brook, which connects to Great Herring Pond after about a mile of luxurious, leisurely floating. You ride the shallow, clear water on a snappy current, over a sandy bottom, through a tunnel of green branches. There are swampy stretches with lily pads and shoreline thickets, and while some lengths are bushy, the channel is fully passable.

About 15 minutes from the dam, there is a dilapidated culvert which is an easy run downstream, but will take more work to get through on the upstream return. Thirty minutes from the dam, you reach the real obstacle of the Carters Bridge Road. It would have been no problem had the workmen not hung a large sewer pipe below the span of the bridge. Here, you can get out of the kayak, shove it through the tunnel, cross the road on foot and catch it on the other side. Short or limber people can scrunch down in the kayak and “walk” under the pipe. Or portage. Or turn around and head back.

Just a few yards beyond the bridge, the brook pours out into Great Herring Pond, where the chilly water blends in with the warmer water of the big pond. This pond is “fully recreational” meaning there are motor water sports. Plus, there are often stiff winds barreling up the length of this huge pond. A very different scene here, so head back upstream.

The trip back up Carter’s Brook is much less leisurely, but thirty minutes or so of steady paddling will get you back to Little Herring Pond. Once beyond the dam and back onto the pond, bear to the left until you find the put in. Isn’t it remarkable how much heavier the kayak is at the end of a trip!

Little Herring Pond is a 90 acre, shallow, clear water pond with a mostly sandy bottom. Although only 3 feet in average depth, the water is quite chilly, originating from hundreds of “little springs” on the pond bottom, called “colander springs,” especially at the north end. They form tiny “volcanoes” in the sandy bottom, puffing away endlessly, and are a delight to watch. There are always lots of waterfowl on this pond, and the clear water makes for interesting fish watching, too.

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About 15 minutes from the dam, there is a dilapidated culvert which is an easy run downstream, but will take more work to get through on the upstream return. Thirty minutes from the dam, you reach the real obstacle of the Carters Bridge Road. It would have been no problem had the workmen not hung a large sewer pipe below the span of the bridge. Here, you can get out of the kayak, shove it through the tunnel, cross the road on foot and catch it on the other side. Short or limber people can scrunch down in the kayak and “walk” under the pipe. Or portage. Or turn around and head back.

Just a few yards beyond the bridge, the brook pours out into Great Herring Pond, where the chilly water blends in with the warmer water of the big pond. This pond is “fully recreational” meaning there are motor water sports. Plus, there are often stiff winds barreling up the length of this huge pond. A very different scene here, so head back upstream.

The trip back up Carter’s Brook is much less leisurely, but thirty minutes or so of steady paddling will get you back to Little Herring Pond. Once beyond the dam and back onto the pond, bear to the left until you find the put in. Isn’t it remarkable how much heavier the kayak is at the end of a trip!

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Location: At the end of Little Herring Pond Road, off Carter’s Bridge Road

Parking: Plentiful, at the traffic circle and in three separate areas within the preserve

Activity Level: Hiking is generally easy, kayaking is easy, except for one of the two boat landing areas

Duration: Hiking about one hour, kayaking around the pond about one hour, kayaking down Carter’s Brook to Great Herring Pond and back, about one hour.

Distance: Walking paths 1.5 to 2 miles, paddling length of the pond about 1mi

Features: Water views, excellent kayaking
The Dixon Preserve at Hio Hill is a relatively short loop. It has a killer view of Cape Cod Bay at the top of a gradual hill. Along the way, there is a jumble of elephantine boulders that school age kids will love to climb. This newer nature preserve has trailhead signage, roadside parking, and benches for taking in the vista. There is a big pay-off to be had here for a little effort.

The 88-acre property was purchased by the Town using Community Preservation Funds in 2018, and supposedly derives its name from a contraction of “Ohio.” Hio Hill is one of the tallest hills in town. The single entrance trail makes its way up undulating terrain. The first landmark is a clearing in the woods, anchored by a very large pitch pine tree. From here, a loop begins and ends. Head up toward the right or left. Coming back down be careful to watch for the trail marker at the north end of the hill as ATV tracks cut into the preserve’s trail and lead off into private properties, confusing people walking the loop.

The trees are the white and pitch pines, oaks, beeches and hollies common to Plymouth forests, with a thick understory of shrubs. Seasonally, there is a great deal of bird song in the air. As you ascend the hill, you will pass through a boulder field of glacial erratics half buried in the forest floor. These megaliths dropped down out of the melting glacier over 13,000 years ago. They are all rounded, suggesting that they tumbled along inside the ice shield for long distances from the bedrock off of which they cracked. Torrents of melt water washed away smaller rocks, leaving only these enormous stone masses strewn about like a toddler’s blocks. The boulders are coated with various types of lichen, some smooth and sea green in color (Medallion lichen) and some have big gray scales like alligator hide (Toadskin lichen.)

Near the top of the hill the wide horizon of the ocean comes into view, from the power plant on the Cape Cod Canal in the south, all along the inner arm of the Cape to Provincetown, and finally deep out to Massachusetts Bay to the north. The view is not unobstructed; there are lots of trees. With the leaves out, the breadth of this vista is somewhat reduced. Still at any time of year, given clear weather, it is beautiful.

Follow the trail down through more glacial erratics, back to the lone pine in the clearing, on out to Old Sandwich Road.
Dixon Preserve at Hio Hill

**Location:** Old Sandwich Road, south of the intersection with east Ship Pond Road, near #1190

**Parking:** Parallel parking for three cars. Trail map kiosk and a wooden fence

**Activity Level:** Moderate, hill of 204 ft. above sea level, about 180 feet elevation from the trailhead.

**Distance:** About one mile

**Duration:** Less than one hour

**Features:** Ocean view, glacial erratic boulders
The cranberry bogs that were acquired by the Town in 2003 are the core of this, the first bog restoration project in the Commonwealth. The goal was to re-establish an Atlantic white cedar swamp, which were once common in our area and had been essentially logged out by the middle of the 20th century. In 2010, the cranberry infrastructure of ditches, dams and culverts were pulled out to allow the shaping of a new riverbed, and the forming of hummocks of soil and multiple small pools to encourage a diverse population of plant growth. A huge deer fence was erected to prevent the deer from browsing the cedar trees. Much was learned from this experiment and applied to later projects, such as the Tidmarsh bog restoration. In the 11 years since this was completed the irrational exuberance of Mother Nature has reclaimed her wetlands, as demonstrated recently by the first river herring seen west of Long Pond Road in over 100 years.

The trail begins in the parking lot adjacent to Boot Pond and Long Pond Roads and follows a short path through the woods to the bogside trail. Turn right at the storyboard and follow the edge of the bogs in a complete circle. This open trail is particularly good for horseback riders, dog walkers and even bicycles. It is also outstanding for snow shoeing or cross country skiing in winter, as the squishier surfaces are frozen and one can get close to the Eel River. The trail is mowed occasionally in summer time, reducing the risk of ticks. It is muddy in places, due to seeping springs, but passage is generally not difficult.

The first bog is carpeted with indigenous cattails, pussy willows, pitch pines, mosses and all manner of grasses. This area was mostly left for the shrubs and trees that thrive in wet soil to repopulate on their own. In the second bog we see the results of planting some 17,000 Atlantic white cedars, about 12 to 18 inches tall when first put in. Some saplings died off in the areas too wet or too dry, or were eaten by voles. The drifts of cedars planted in just the right areas have reached well over 20 feet in height in 11 years, and are spreading naturally now through self-seeding.

Note the variety of bird life: ducks, geese, redwing blackbirds, and red-tailed hawks. In the springtime evening hours, there is a wonderful cacophony of peepers and frogs. The farthest back bog is filled with well established white cedars interspersed with volunteer white pines, birches, pitch pines and shrubs. You will pass a small, round, very deep pond, where the icy cold water indicates large springs below. In the far corner, 1.25 miles from the parking lot, a well marked off-shoot trail leads up through upland forest and loops back to the bog. Hoyt’s Pond is back here, too, but the area is not open to the public. Farther along the bogside trail, there is still evidence of cranberry cultivation: borrow pits in the hillsides from which the sand was extracted to layer onto the cranberry plants every year. Also here are an old foundation, and small doors behind which were the well heads for flooding the bogs. As you approach Long Pond Road again, the path takes a sharp left along a low fence, by the former cranberry screen house which is private property.

Follow the trail over the new culvert through which the Eel River runs under Long Pond Road and complete the circuit by rejoining the path to the parking lot, near the story board.
**Location:** At intersection of Boot Pond Road and Long Pond Road

**Activity Level:** Easy, some hills on connecting trails

**Parking:** Plentiful parking, picnic table

**Distance:** 2.8 miles round trip

**Duration:** Very variable, about one hour

**Features:** Restored Atlantic white cedar swamp, ponds, brook views
The Hedges Pond Recreation and Conservation Area is unique for offering great facilities for active recreation in addition to ample woodland tract for passive recreation. “Active” refers to structured activities like sports and games, and “passive” means enjoying the forest with minimal infrastructure, for experiencing nature in a low impact way. There is a wide, sandy beach near a pine grove and swimming in the clear, shallow water of this 26-acre pond. Additionally, there are many picnic tables, tennis and basketball courts, playing fields, restrooms, horseshoe pits, toddlers’ sand box, and playground structures. Access is free at all times off season, but during the summer (third week in June through the third week in August) a Town of Plymouth beach sticker or a $20 fee is required. The park is open to the public Monday-Friday from 12:30 PM to 5 PM, all day (9:00 AM to 5 PM) Saturday and Sunday in season.

The trail enters the woods from either end of the beach area and circumnavigates the pond; just walk keeping the pond on the same side. Kayaks are allowed but no motorized water craft.

The trails are generally well marked, but take care not to head down an ATV track. There are two or three secondary trails, narrower and less well marked and maintained, one closer to the shore and one along the highway fence. The shore trail starts at the very far southeast end of the beach area, keeping the pond on your right and the composting area up on the left. It soon forks and both ends join the main trail. Another spur leads down to a tiny beach. The fence trail is noisy and unmaintained, blocked by tree falls. The main trail is almost entirely flat and wide, with just a few bushier parts on those secondary trails.

The width of a trail matters. First, because ticks are always a concern. Imagine the little buggers holding onto the tips of branches with three legs, waving the other three in the air waiting to snag a sleeve or a pant leg – or dog fur. Unlike fleas, they do not jump.

The forest is the familiar Plymouth mélange of tall white pines, pitch pines, scrub oaks, birches, beeches and woodland shrubs. At certain times of year, especially in the early morning or at dusk, the woods are alive with birdsong and peepers. Unfortunately, it is also alive with highway traffic sounds, bordering this preserve. When the leaves are out, this noise pollution may diminish. However, it does strike a discordant note when you are trying to lose yourself in nature.

Of interest is a rhododendron grove planted ages ago by some forest gardener. There are no foundations or cellar holes nearby, so one can only speculate why they are here. Also, a path through these rhodies leads down into a kettle hole at the bottom of which is a black water wetland. Here and there can be seen remnants of ditches, started and then abandoned. Very mysterious.

At the south end of the pond, there is a four way intersection. A primary path leads down to a small sliver of a sand beach, much wider in late summer, one expects. At this point, the path heading west, only one tenth of a mile long, leads to the Long Pond Road access. This access is intentionally unimproved in order to discourage overuse.

The Hedges Pond Recreational and Conservation Area offers a great deal to every family constellation: come for a simple soul nourishing walk, or bring a picnic and spend the whole day.

**Please note that this facility requires a sticker or parking fee for access during the summer months.**
Location: 158 Hedges Pond Road, Cedarville. Additional access on Long Pond Road, on the left near street number 1001, 0.7 mile past the intersection with Hedges Pond Road.

Parking: 2 parking lots accommodating 30 to 40 cars, ample parking off season. At the Long Pond Road entrance, up to 4 cars depending on how people park. No signs, no trail markers there.

Activity Level: Mostly easy, some low hills

Distance: Variable, 1.5 - 2 mile circuit of pond, or as much as 3.75 miles

Duration: Variable, about 30 minutes to 90 minutes

Features: Pond views, swimming, recreation facilities, kayaking
Morton Park is the oldest and one of the most heavily used conservation areas in the town of Plymouth. While the public beach area on Little Pond is well known to most people, the western half of this park is less well known. Park at the beach called “Red Springs.” Despite research and inquiries, the origin of this name remains a mystery. Presumably it refers to the rusty reddish mud seen in many wetlands in this area, from which bog iron was once smelted. Yet looking down into the swamp behind the beach area, you see not only no springs, but no red - the water is as black as coffee, stained by tannic acid in leaves.

The western half of the park is encircled by a circuit road, within which are more loops of trails. It is confusing, but you won’t get lost if you recognize which body of water is which, Little Pond or Billington Sea. The woods throughout this park are mature forest: white pines, birches, oaks, beech. The silence under this canopy of trees is profound – it is hard to believe that this park is so close to the bustling highways and downtown. The wetlands are a thicket of shrubbery but in winter, you can see the full extent of the black water swamp.

We will start by going southwest along a forest road, through a swing gate, keeping Little Pond on the left. This wide, easy road follows the shore of one of Plymouth’s finest spring fed, clear water ponds. As it has no outlet and no inlet, it is a classic kettle pond. As the road pulls away from the shore, on the right there is a path, somewhat obscured by tree falls. There’s fun to be had in there, but we will get to that later.

Less than one half mile from the Red Springs beach, a boulder on the right marks another woods path option. Taking this will connect you across a neck of land to the western end of Billington Sea. Go down that path or continue straight until, through the trees, you can see Seymour Island out in Billington Sea. A large grove of beech trees is here.

There are options: stay on the road or find the pond side path, knobbly with tree roots, which parallels the road. Or you can circle Little Pond on the circuit road by turning left. Turning right will keep you in the western end of the park, leaving Little Pond behind. If you turn right, there will appear a four - way intersection in a level clearing. For a shorter walk, take a right here. To extend the walk, go straight. This is a wind sheltered cove named Hospital Cove or Hospital Landing, named for a quarantine hospital in the 1770s. In the early days of small pox vaccinations, those being inoculated had to be isolated for about three weeks and this was where people were quarantined. No trace remains of what happened here except for the name.

The road and the shore path converge at Hathaway’s Point, a thin finger of land extending out into Billington Sea, edged by a wide fan of sand under the shallow water. Both lobes of the large Billington Sea can be seen from this spot. The distance from the start of the hike to the Point is a little more than one mile.

From this point head back, following the circuit road, or taking the interesting ups and downs of the path along the Billington shore. Soon after that path rejoins the road, there is a cable threaded through a PVC pipe to form a gate. This is the western end of the path you saw earlier, near Little Pond. One option is to take this narrower path for about 100 yards, where another path takes off to the left for a cool little swamp tour along a sinuous low ridge line. This path is fun as it climbs a number of small mounds of glacial till, and crosses over standing black water on short boardwalks. It comes out onto the outermost circuit road near the western boundary of the park land. Take a right to head north to Red Springs.

A second option at the PVC pipe gate is to stay on the circuit road with Billington Sea on the left, running atop a low dyke. Note the culvert which is the only drainage of the large wetland to the right which you have been circling this whole time. The road forks to the right and leaves the Billington shore. The left fork leads into private property, so don’t go there. This stretch of road is another “cathedral of the pines” experience, with thick pine needles forming a coppery carpet down the “aisle” framed by huge white pines. On the right, easy to miss despite the logs lined up, is the entrance to the boardwalk swamp path.

Continuing on the road will bring you to a swing gate where the circuit road terminates at the end of Little Pond Road. Red Springs beach is visible to the right and you are back.
**Location:** Red Springs public beach at the end of Little Pond Road in Morton Park

**Parking:** During off season, plenty of spaces. Beach sticker or fee required in season.

**Activity Level:** Generally easy, open dirt roads, short hills, waterside paths have roots

**Duration:** Variable, maximum 1.50 hours

**Distance:** Variable, maximum 2.75 miles

**Features:** Water views, boardwalks, beech groves
This property was converted to recreational use at the same time as the Headwaters of the Eel River Preserve. There was a small cranberry bog, from which agricultural structures and ditches were removed. The area is now naturalizing by a combination of self-seeded volunteers, and planted trees and shrubs, such as pitch pines, white pines, birches, maples, and cedars. A narrow channel was excavated to attempt to replicate the obliterated riverbed. The surface of this bog area was left intentionally quite lumpy, with vernal pools in the low spots. While this knobby terrain creates pockets of favorable conditions for various types of plants, it does make for rough walking. There is a path along the eastern edge, with trails off toward Tall Pines Road. The original source of the Eel River was out of South Pond and the river ran through this area. Herring, shad and eels migrated up the river until twentieth century diversions closed it off.

Walking down the driveway into a woodscape very different from the rewilding bogs. The pine trees tower high and the path is well upholstered with pine needles. Here is the site of the 19th and early 20th century sawmill, once powered by the water impounded by a dam across the Eel River. Note the granite building blocks which are remnants of mill structures and raceways. The mill manufactured wooden boxes and barrels, and later made “shoddy” fabric. Most of the dam was removed during the restoration, which caused the mill pond to drain down and allowed the ancient river bed to slough off two hundred years of accumulated sediment. A modern foot bridge spans this dam site, from which you can watch the clear, roiling water tumble down over boulders and around tree stumps.

Follow the well-marked trail eastward, under the high tension wires, near where the brook opens out into a delta of marshland at the western edge of Russell Mill Pond. There is excellent birding in this area. Here there is a great deal of torn-up ground caused by trail bike traffic, but pass over that to where the trail divides. To the right, the woods road follows an easy course for about a half mile to where it terminates at Kingfisher Lane. Turn around here and walk back about 1.3 miles to your car.

Another option is the pond-side trail to the left, which is a narrow but well-marked footpath snaking along the side of a steep hill. This can be icy and muddy at times, but it has water views the whole way. About one mile from the start of this hike is a long abandoned fishing camp much abused by vandals, near a sandy little spit where you can admire the length of Russell Mill Pond. On the top of the hill are foundations and clearings suggesting other fishing camps, all long gone. This trail follows the conservation land to the boundary, then loops right to join the woods road near the curve of Kingfisher Lane. Return south westerly, to the right, to head back. You will pass some small grassy meadows under large cedars which are another special feature of this hike.
**Location:** 204 Long Pond Rd. opposite Headwaters of the Eel River

**Parking:** Plentiful, at end of driveway to the Southeastern Mass Pine Barrens Alliance property. One can also park at the Eel River Preserve parking lot and walk to the south and east across Long Pond Road.

**Activity Level:** Easy, some hills on connecting trails

**Distance:** 2 to 2.4 miles, round trip

**Duration:** Variable, likely 45-60 minutes

**Features:** River and pond views, mill ruins
The Russell and Sawmill Ponds Conservation Area is a 64-acre retreat in the densely populated neighborhood of North Plymouth. Unfortunately, there is confusion about this area and other ponds elsewhere in Plymouth also named Hedge, Russell, and Sawmill, plus some maps labeling Sawmill Pond as Stone Pond. This preserve makes for a pleasant, not overly ambitious walk, especially good with children and small dogs. It is popular with young people and demonstrates heavy usage, not always benign, as evidenced by spray painted tree trunks, missing trail markers, camping debris and litter. It is also clear that other good citizens are valiantly trying to stay ahead of the vandals. So it is a very accessible hike with a lot of variation: tall stands of mature pines, beech groves, upland scrub oak forest, ponds, a long meadow and a brook.

The two ponds are formed by a dam near the entrance where one assumes the namesake sawmill was located, although no trace of 19th century mill works remains. These ponds are stocked with fish, and there is much fishing activity in season. The source of Russell Pond is at its west end, a wetland spongy with multiple mucky springs. Sawmill/Stone Pond is fed by a clear running brook which arises in the wetlands southwest of Cherry Street and Squanto Road.

Begin the hike at the swing gate. The hiking route is a long looping circle, with two offshoots, in-and-out paths. Despite the criss-crossing and back looping trails, it would take some effort to become lost as the preserve boundaries are quite evident. Bear left beyond the gate, walking on the causeway between the two ponds and follow a cart path up into the woods. About a third of a mile in, the trail marker suggests a turn to the right. You can proceed straight on the cart path for an in-and-out side trail, which follows the brook, to the end of the preserve at some one’s well marked back yard. Walk back to the trail marker and turn up into the pine grove, following a soft, pine needle strewn path. This stately grove draws the teen-aged night life and vandals defacing tree trunks. After about an eighth of a mile another offshoot trail on the left, with intermittent trail markers, leads up between dry kettle holes and scrub oaks to another terminus of the park, at the upper end of Durigan Street, parallel to the Route 3 highway. Back to the central pine grove, keep bearing left/west and join the old cart paths. It is always interesting how really old roads become deeper over time, just as many Civil War battlefields have a “Sunken Road.” About a third of a mile in, you will reach the point where the construction of Route 3 cut off the cart path. Turn right here, making a U-turn east toward the ponds, under the electric power lines, in a long, golden, grassy meadow. Keeping the woods on your right, follow the hilly meadow until the overgrown brush suggests a left (unmarked) turn into the woods, paralleling the back fences of houses on Tanglewood Drive. This path skirts Russell Pond, through a lovely beech grove, on a gently undulating, root bound path. The loop closes as you approach the causeway and the gate.

If you followed the two off-shoot paths, you will have walked about 2.80 miles.
Location: At the western end of Bourne Street, off Standish Avenue, in North Plymouth

Parking: Lots of space for many cars

Activity Level: Mostly easy, a few low hills

Distance: Varies depending on route, about 1 to 3 miles

Duration: Varies depending on route, about 1 to 2 hrs

Features: Brook, two ponds, meadow, pine grove
This in-town hike follows the ancient native path along Town Brook, once known as the Namassakeeset Trail, meaning “at the fishing place.” Town Brook flows out of Billington Sea and less than two miles downstream it empties into Plymouth Bay, with the path running alongside for most of the distance. This trail can be done in a number of segments, from many starting points. The Patuxet Preserve, a pocket park at 88 Billington St., is a good place because it is at the halfway point and parking is easy. Patuxet is the Wampanoag name of the village which, having been depopulated in the 1610’s by a series of horrific plagues, was resettled by the Pilgrims in 1620. Patuxet means “at the little falls,” which is descriptive of this brook as it descends from its source down 80 feet to sea level in frequent short steps.

Patuxet Preserve is the site of the first “water privilege” where the brook was impounded behind a dam and its water channeled through raceways to run the machinery of the mill. The high and dry dock in front of what was the mill owner’s mansion illustrates the big change that took place when the mill pond was released. Be sure to read the information kiosks all along the trail to learn about the factories which operated here for about 150 years. Despite a series of fish ladders over the years, the passage of fish was impeded and thousands would pile up at each of 5 dams along the Town Brook during the spring. Now it is a mostly clear shot to their goal, Billington Sea, where various types of fish migrate to spawn each April, May and June. These include blueback herring, alewives, and smelts. Juvenile eels make this trip, also, but not to spawn. They migrate to the fresh water ponds to mature, after which the eels head back out to sea to begin their reproductive cycle.

From Patuxet, you can walk upstream to the start of Town Brook at Billington Sea or walk downstream to the sea. Billington Sea is reached by walking a quarter of a mile west along the street to the back entrance of Morton Park. Follow the dirt road to just before the old stone bridge over Town Brook, where there is a path down to the left which follows the brook to the wooden footbridge at the outlet.

Alternatively, stay on the road over the stone bridge, bearing left at the fork to find the second path, on the left. This way takes you through a remnant of an Atlantic white cedar swamp, with a few very old, very tall cedars.

Another option is to walk from Patuxet northeast along Billington St until you reach the new stone bridge to the right, and the start of Town Brook path. This was the second water privilege where more factories were located. Note the stone retaining walls of another mill pond, and traces of factory foundations. Just beyond this is the site of yet another dam, which in 2002 was the first to be removed from Town Brook, and the first coastal dam deconstruction in Massachusetts. Farther on at the covered footbridge, view the newly restored riverbed. Until the removal of the Holmes Dam in 2018 - 2019, a large mill pond backed up nearly to this point. Walking on, you can appreciate the large number of new trees and shrubs planted by the Town to reforest this vale. The site of the Holmes dam, the most recent dam to be removed, is a pinch point between high sandy hills, and a logical place for the long sequence of factories. How thrilling it is now to see the schools of herring, smelt and shad work their way upstream under open skies once more.

The Holmes Park, on the left across the brook, is a new, state of the art recreational park that seems continuously busy. There is off street parking for 8 cars at Newfield Street. You are 0.6 mile from the Patuxet Preserve and another 0.6 mile from the bay. Follow the ramping walkway toward Jenny Pond, and pass over the arching wooden foot bridge. The pond has had many names, including Poorhouse Pond when the Town’s alms house was here. At the Jenny Grist Mill are the last remaining dam and fish ladder, where there is a project underway to engineer free passage for the migratory fishes, eliminating the fish ladder and yet preserving the flow for the water wheel.

The path continues under Market St and Main St Extension bridges, both of which have cheerful murals painted recently by the high schools’ art students. Pass by the pumping fresh water springs on the right and left of the brook, which were one of the reasons the native people and the Pilgrims chose this place to live.

At Brewster Garden, one of the 1920-21 restoration projects built to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the arrival of the English, the brook empties into Plymouth harbor.
**Location:** From Water Street to Billington Sea, multiple access points along the length of the trail

**Parking:** Water Street: minimal parking; Jenny Pond: ample parking; Patuxet pocket park at 88 Billington St: 4 cars; Morton Park: ample parking

**Duration:** Variable, 40 minutes to about two hours

**Distance:** Variable, maximum four miles

**Activity Level:** Easy, gentle inclines

**Features:** Brookside path, history, archeology
The Town Forest is over three hundred acres in size, some of which have seen some rough treatment, and some of which are as lovely as anything in Plymouth.

Start at the Town Forest sign and trail head, at the intersection of Drew Road and Long Pond Road. There is a short spur to the right with more room for parking. The trail begins just behind the sign on a path paralleling Drew Road. Farther along, there is a gate and more parking as the trail bears right into the woods, through a tall stand of mature white pines. After a short walk, there is a confusing intersection. Follow the trail markers to the right! In this area is one of the red pine plantations that were established all over town in the middle of the last century. Those non-native trees suffered an insect infestation and then died off all at once in the last ten years. That would be sad, except that the understory is a riot of white pine and other native young trees bursting out now that there is no competition for light.

Following the trail north, we pass trash and construction debris dumped illegally. Town workers have striven to block access to these back trails, so there is less of this activity recently. Still, this isn’t what we want to see walking in the woods.

Further on, the landscape is filled with old pines and mixed hardwoods, on gently undulating terrain. The trail is wide, making it harder for ticks to hitchhike onto your clothes. You will see the Plymouth Community Intermediate School on the right, and at a five way intersection (follow the trail markers!) make a sharp left. After grazing Cook's Pond Road, the pine needle carpeted trail veers to the southwest, through the Wildlife Management Area. Be sure to wear blaze orange if it is hunting season.

Soon flashes of blue through the trees reveal Cook’s Pond, and you can turn down either of two spur paths to the edge of the pond. It is worth walking down to enjoy the view and the peace.

The trails lead to a grassy clearing under the high tension wires and pylons. Follow the trail marker to the right. Motorized bikes and ATVs have churned up the sandy soil, making it a bit of a slog for a short distance. These open meadows contrast with shadowy forest and are much appreciated by hawks and owls hunting rodents. You will pass by cranberry bogs down below on the right and the left.

Halfway up the slope to the left the marked trail enters the woods again. These oaks and pines are shorter: either younger than the other side of the forest, or stunted by winds and thin soil up on this hill. There is more illegal dumping in this area. Some of the junk is so old that it has a thick green carpet of moss over it, making it almost pretty in an exasperating way.

After crossing Drew Road, pick up the trail again. It soon forks, with the right path descending down to the edge of Little South Pond. On a sunny day, this is an exquisite little glen with a copper colored pine needle floor and a tiny beach of the whitest crystalline sand. The sparkling water is colored the full spectrum of Caribbean blues. These ponds of the Town Forest are coastal plain ponds, whose water levels fluctuate widely from season to season. The sandy apron of the pond widens as the water level drops in summer.

At some time decades ago, a had been dug between the two ponds so that Great South Pond could flow into Little South Pond. We follow the marked trail along this channel, brimming with seasonal high water. It is a stunningly beautiful little passage. The trail opens onto Great South, with a wide arc of beach. Crystal clear water covers a broad floor of rippled white sand. The marked Town Forest trail loops back to the left at this point, but ambitious hikers are able to follow another trail to the right.

Not pictured on the map but .75 more miles (one way) is Pinnacle Hill. Cross over a concrete bridge, west across DCR land, keeping to the left at a fork, and head into the Cortelli Preserve, a Wildlands Trust property. Climb to the top of Pinnacle Hill, a dramatically high cone of glacial till with an awesome view - the third highest point in Plymouth! The Town Forest trail leaves the Great South Pond shore heading northeast, skirting the flank of another dramatic hill. Clearly the glaciers went nuts in this particular neighborhood, with massive bergs forming the ponds and kettles, and enormous depositions of rock and sand forming the knobs.

Soon you are back on Drew Road, taking note of the long line of “No Parking” signs, meant to discourage summertime misuse of these exquisite pond shores. Apparently, there has been a great deal of bad behavior in the past. Non-motorized boating is allowed on the South Ponds, but swimming is not. It is legal to park in only two spaces at the brick pump house near the intersection of Drew and Rocky Pond Roads.

Following the trail back, retrace your steps until, soon after re-entering the woods beyond the utility lines, the road forks. Bear right here to come along side the dead red pine plantation again. The trail markers will guide you to the right at an intersection, leading back to the start.
**Location:** Drew Road, off of Long Pond Road, south of PCIS

**Parking:** 2 to 4 cars in one location near the sign, 4 cars at gate farther along Drew Road. Don’t block the swing gate.

**Distance:** Variable, maximum 4.5 miles

**Duration:** Variable, maximum 2.5 hours

**Activity Level:** Easy, some inclines, loose sand stretches

**Features:** Pond views, glacial terrain and meadows
WHEEL FRIENDLY TRAILS

The Town of Plymouth has two locations that can meet the needs of those whose mobility depends on wheels. These “hikes” offer open space experiences with paved paths and no barriers such as curbstones or steps.

THE SEASIDE RAIL TRAIL

Probably the most popular trail in all of Plymouth is this one running along the bay shore from Nelson Park at the end of Water St, just north of the downtown, and extending to the Cordage Park complex. Originally a little more than one mile, ending at Hedge Road, the Seaside Trail has recently been connected with Cordage Park and is now about 1.5 miles, one way. Future plans include a southern extension to Lothrop Street.

There are a number of food and beverage options at both ends, in season, including an open-air beer garden right next to the big Cordage chimney, with million dollar ocean views. The trail varies from woody tunnels to wide open meadows, and offers views of the salt marsh with its well known osprey nest, a flower garden alongside the track, and the expansive vista of Plymouth Bay.

The surface varies also, from asphalt paving to gravel, with stretches of crushed stone (very fine gravel.) It is totally flat. Far from busy Route 3A, the silence is blissful and serene. There is parking at Nelson Beach, at the Cordage, and at the former terminus of the trail at the end of Hedge Road.

While there are no barriers or curbs, there are some problems: some of the transitions between surfaces are a few inches high, and rain storm erosion has resulted in an uneven surface in places. A possible issue is the “Grace Trail,” the stones painted with “inspirational” words and phrases. Some people love this, others see it as a form of graffiti detracting from the natural environment. The signage is incomplete: the public trail ends at Hedge Road, but the extension into Cordage Park is along Sandri Drive which says “Private Property.” How would anyone know? One knows from the Cordage end: near the train station, there is a wooden gate which says “Seaside Rail Trail” and a fun, too short boardwalk.

FORGES FIELD

There are few places in Plymouth better than Forges Field for parents to take their school aged children to practice rollerblading, scooter and bicycle riding. The trail is protected from parking lots by a wooden fence and is completely separated from any vehicular traffic. There is plentiful parking in three large lots. If the group includes little ones, the best place to park is in the central lot, near the playground. There are chemical toilets nearby. Two miles of wide paved trails wind around and through the playing fields, in the woods but not too far, and the trails are all circular. The terrain is undulating with only one or two real hills. The paved riding surface is generally smooth. The whole family can enjoy the leafy woodland forest while wheeling along. Another feature of this location is the large number of glacial erratics; massive boulders that melted out of the ice field millennia ago. Some were probably bulldozed to the sides of the ball fields during construction and now they seem as intentional as furniture. They make for some good climbing.

OTHER OPTIONS

There are three other options that are not Town of Plymouth properties.

One option is the bike paths in Myles Standish State Forest, where there are over 15 miles of paved surface for walking & wheeling. These two lane paths are entirely in the woods and far separated from automobile traffic. They are in generally good condition, not overly hilly, and have a pleasant sinuosity about them. There are sections with raised tree roots, or drifts of pine needles covering the asphalt. The only caveat is that spandex-wearing bike racers sometimes speed past slower travelers, but generally they keep to the automotive roads for their sprints. The Camping Pond Loop,
starting at the Forest headquarters on East Head Pond on the southern edge of the state park, is a relatively easy route that circles two beautiful ponds, Fearing and Charge. This route is a combination of dedicated bike trails and some very lightly trafficked roads. The most strenuous route is Rocky Pond Path. Parking at the East Entrance at Long Pond Road and using the Frost Pocket Path is not recommended because it is very long (5.4 miles one way,) tends to be busier and is a less interesting route, especially for someone on foot.

Another option is the walking trails in the Pine Hills. While this is private property outside of the very public Village Green area, no one will stop you and demand your papers. There is a large network of paved, five foot wide paths, generally very smooth and not bumpy. The paths do follow the roadways, but are not sidewalks - they are set apart from the road with a woodsy buffer. The roads are graded to accommodate automobiles and trucks, but the paths follow the natural knob and kettle contour of the land. The hills can be hard work in places, so this network is best for athletic stroller pushers and only older children on wheels. Two caveats: be careful where you park; around the Market is probably best. And stick to the signed walking paths and do not wander onto the golf cart paths.

Lastly, the Cape Cod Canal service roads in Bourne are very well known and extremely popular and wheel - friendly. This area is certified ADA accessible. No barriers, no curbs. There are 7.5 miles of paved path on the north and 6.5 miles on the south, in very good condition. It is readily accessible at a number of points, with ample public parking. On the northern side, one can park at Scusset Beach (entrance fee in season,) under the Sagamore Bridge, at the Herring Run or in downtown Buzzard’s Bay near the railroad bridge. On the southern side, there is parking under the Bourne Bridge, at the Aptucxet Trading Post Museum, and at the Cape Cod Canal Visitor’s Center near the electric power plant. Additionally, there are many other informal parking spots on both sides. This wheeling walkway is not a forest experience, but it is a highly entertaining waterside scene of people on the move, fishermen, restaurants, boats, bird life and migrating herring in season. The stunning views make it one of the most beautiful walks anywhere. The only issue is the wind, which can be fierce. Nice to have at your back, a killer trudging into a headwind.
TRAILS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The following trails are under construction. Please refer to the Plymouth town website for the most up to date information.

INDIAN BROOK CONSERVATION AREA

Plymouth is continually working to open up new trails for the public and there are a number of projects underway which are not fully ready at the time of this publication. One such work in progress is at the Indian Brook Conservation Area, attached to the Manomet Recreation Area, just south of the Indian Brook School on State Road. There is ample paved parking.

The 210 acre area offers active recreation in the form of four baseball/softball fields and a children’s playground. Additionally, there will be passive recreation in a mile long trail through a mature white pine forest to near the shores of Shallow Pond. There is also a separate trail loop into the woods starting at the back of the Indian Brook Elementary School.

FOOTHILLS PRESERVE

The Foothills Preserve is a 126 acre preserve that includes a large retired cranberry bog located at 81 Beaver Dam Road. It is currently host to a river and wetland restoration project slated to be completed in the spring of 2021. This project will restore approximately 1 mile of brook that flows into Beaver Dam Brook in the Massachusetts Audubon’s Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary across the street, and will feature several open water ponds specifically constructed to promote duck and waterfowl habitat. Upon completion, the Preserve will be open for passive recreational use with pedestrians able to enjoy approximately 1.5 miles of flat trails, multiple boardwalks and bridges, and it will be a wonderful location to nature watch.
TIPS FOR REDUCING LITTER

Plastic waste contaminates all major ecosystems on the planet. Concern is increasing about its potential impacts on wildlife and human health, as smaller and more widespread plastic particles are identified in both the natural and built environment. *(Science Advances, 2020)*

Get the facts at [www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/the-facts](http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/the-facts)

Visit [www.sustainableplymouth.org](http://www.sustainableplymouth.org) for more ideas on reducing waste, preventing litter, and more.

- Carry a litter bag with you
- Take your dog’s waste bags out with you
- Carry a reusable water bottle
- Skip the straw or keep a reusable straw with you
- Forgo single use items when possible
- Keep reusable bags in your vehicle
- Smokers, throw butts in the trash
- Avoid excess packaging
- Recycle
- Secure trash can lids
- Join town wide cleanups
- Join a sustainability group
- Spread the word
ADDITIONAL TRAIL RESOURCES

WILDLANDS TRUST
https://wildlandstrust.org/

MASS AUDUBON
Hundreds of trails to explore at more than 60 Mass Audubon wildlife sanctuaries across the state. All trails are open to the public.
https://www.massaudubon.org/

THE TRUSTEES
The nation's first preservation and conservation organization, with 120 natural and cultural sites that welcome millions of visitors every year.
https://thetrustees.org/

SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS PINE BARRENS ALLIANCE
Coastal Pine Barrens Nature and Climate Research Center located at the Center Hill Preserve, Plymouth. Open to the public.
sempba@pinebarrensalliance.org 774-773-9982
https://pinebarrensalliance.org/

NORTHEAST WILDERNESS TRUST
Muddy Pond Wilderness Preserve, Kingston
Hiking trails within the 322-acre preserve.
newildernesstrust.org/muddypond

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
Hiking trails within 8 preserves in Massachusetts.
www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/massachusetts/

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
DCR oversees more than 450,000 acres throughout Massachusetts, containing hundreds of miles of hiking trails. Download trail maps, find accessible hiking and a link to Coast Guide Online to locate 1,900 beaches, trails and other public access sites.
www.mass.gov/guides/guide-to-recreation-in-state-parks#-trails