

Princeton Hikes Series

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Princeton Hikes Series

Introduction

There are many hiking areas in Princeton and neighboring towns. We are fortunate to have many trails in Wachusett State Reservation, Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadow Sanctuary, and Leominster State Forest. The Midstate Trail transits the town across the north side of the town, and there are three state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in town. In addition to these, there are many other parts of town with great walking, and the town is working to expand the connections between hiking areas.

This guide has been developed by the Princeton Open Space Committee, to highlight a series of great HIKES in our area. A hike is a specific route within a trail area. For example there are some really nice loop hikes that get to some really interesting views or historical destinations. As such, the list presented here is not a complete list, but only a sample!

The Hikes documented in this guide have all been offered to the public through the Princeton Hikes! program...a series of guided hikes that was developed to showcase some of the great walks available in Princeton and surrounding towns. The hikes were presented as a way to learn the trails, but also as an opportunity for exercise and as a way to get to build community.

We encourage you to get out and try the trails. When you are hiking in a new or remote area, we recommend that you bring along a map or a GPS device with an app such as View Ranger, Gaia, or MyTrails. Some of the trails have a lot of branching and it is very possible to get lost in trail-rich areas like Wachusett Mountain or Leominster State Forest.

In terms of hike difficulty we use the following scale:

Difficult: The most difficult hike is to climb Mt. Wachusett from the North. This involves about 1000 feet of elevation, with rocky trails and five miles or more of distance.

Moderate: Moderate generally means half the elevation of Mt. Wachsett (300-500 feet) with perhaps less distance or easier footpaths.

Easy: Generally under three miles with under 300 feet of elevation, and pretty smooth pathways.

Enjoy the trails!!

West Side Wachusett Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. For this hike we met at the Maches Pond parking area, which is about one mile up Westminster Road from Mountain Road. There are also three parking areas on the west side of the Mountain that can be used for this hike.

Distance and Difficulty: Four Mile Moderate hike. This loop goes about halfway up the mountain on gradually inclined, mostly gravel, roads.

From the parking area on Westminster Road proceed up Administration Road to Jack Frost Trail. This section of the trail goes through close laurel bushes which can be pretty in June.

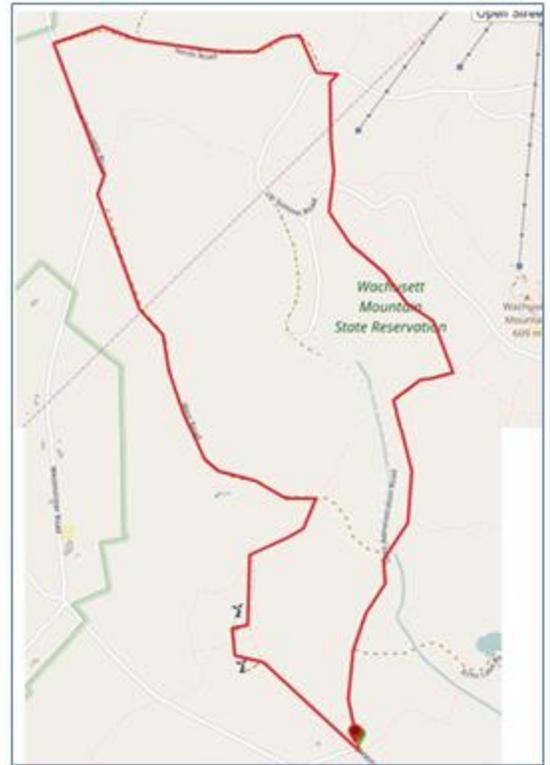
Shortly after starting on Jack Frost, take a left onto Lower Link, and then a right when it intersects with Harrington Trail. This is the MidState trail.

At the top of the second little hill, take a left on Semuhenna Trail and follow it past West Side trail and down past the ski trails, then out to the road, near North Road. Go to the left on the paved 'up road' of the mountain, and then turn right onto North Road.

Take North Road down to a vista (great place for photos and a snack stop!) and continue on North Road to the East Princeton Rd (Westminster). North Road is a pretty gravel road with some areas of pine needles. There is a kiosk where the North Road hits East Princeton Road.

Take a left on East Princeton Road and then left on West Road. West Road has some ups and downs but is a pleasant gravel road. There is a small 'siplas pool' a hundred feet or so off the trail. Also on north side of the west road, shortly after leaving East Princeton Road there are some nice Ledges about 200 yards up the (steep) embankment. These have lovely icicles in the winter and are worth a bushwack!

After close to a mile, turn right onto the Harrington trail and then take Stagecoach trail up past the windmills and back to the parking area. There is a nice view from the huge windmills area...this is a spot to check out!!



The Stagecoach trail goes right past the Princeton Windmills...worth a side-trip!

North Side Wachusett Loop

Trail Head: Westminster. Park by the Bolton Pond Trail Head, which is on Bolton Road, a hundred yards or so from the entrance to the Ski Area (on the north side).

Difficulty and Distance: Difficult 5 mile hike. This is about the greatest elevation gain for a hike in the region, going up 1000 feet to the summit.

Head up Bolton Pond Trail to Bolton Pond, keep to the right at the first trail junction. Bolton Pond is a pretty spot, especially in the winter.



Bolton Pond is a pretty spot in spring, fall, or winter. It can be a little wet in this area!

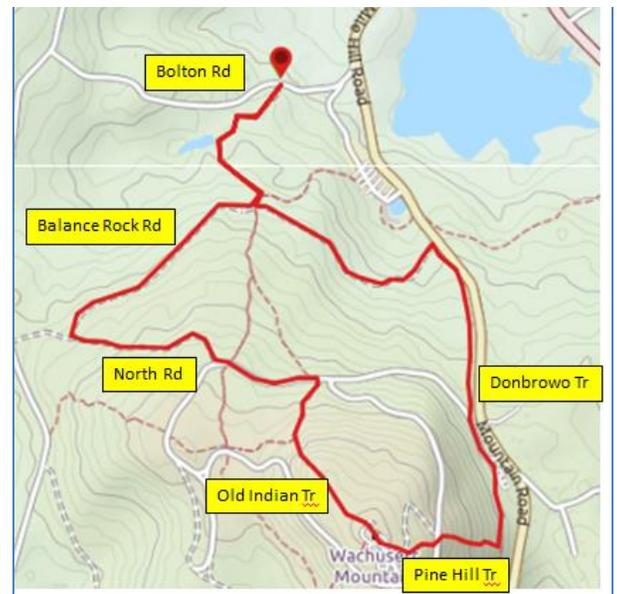
Continue past Bolton Pond and up the hill following the blue blazes. The trail passes by Balance Rock, another interesting feature.

Shortly past Balance Rock, turn right onto Balance Rock Road. This road inclines gradually up to North Road. Turn left on North Road and climb up to the North Road lookout, with great views to the north.

Continue up North Road and turn left on the paved access road, following it across several ski trails (with great views) to intersect with Old Indian Trail.

Turn right onto Old Indian Trail and climb to the summit. This path is steep and rocky in places, eventually leveling out just before the top of the mountain. Enjoy the view from the summit.

To return, walk down the summit road to the Pine Hill Trail and descend steeply to the visitor center. There are steps along much of this trail. At the visitor center, head right along the paved road to the small parking lot and gate, about a hundred yards from the visitor center entrance. Find the Donbrowo Trail on the right of this small parking lot, and follow it down to the gravel road that cuts across the ski trails. Return to the Balance Rock Trail and then Bolton Pond Trail.



There are many options for this route. In the winter, you will not be able to cut across ski trails...so Take Semuhenna Trail up from North Road and perhaps go down the paved 'up' road. If you are in a hurry you can bypass the pretty west and north roads and just go straight up Old Indian trail.

South Side Wachusett Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Westminster Road / Admin Road Trail Head at the Gate (about one mile up Westminster Road from Mountain Road)

Difficulty and Distance: Difficult 3 Miles with some steep climbing.

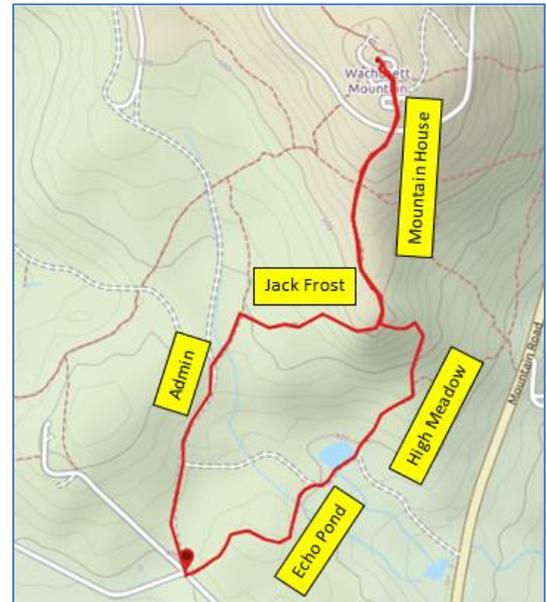
From the Westminster Road Parking area on Westminster Road, go past the gate and hike up the unpaved Admin Road to the Jack Frost Trail sign (on the right).



Hike Jack Frost Trail through a nice stand of Mountain Laurel (can be beautiful in June) and then ascend the steep rocks to get to the top of the ridge and the intersection with High Meadow Trail. This can be a challenging climb with multiple possible ways through the rocks. Follow the blazes to stay on track.

Continue on Jack Frost, to the left, along the Wachusett ridge and through a nice stand of pine trees, until the intersection with the Mountain House Trail. Turn left and follow Mountain house to the Summit. Enjoy the view and kiosks at the summit.

Return down Mountain House Trail and then take a right on Jack Frost Trail. At the intersection with High Meadow Trail, turn left onto High Meadow and descend sharply down from the ridge and to the High Meadow, which is a nice open field with views and a bench.



Continue down High Meadow to Echo Pond, another pretty spot with a picnic table and a nice view of the pond and the ridge. Walk on the road past the pond, and a little beyond take a left onto Echo Pond Trail. This will return you to the parking area.

Several alternatives can be considered to lengthen or shorten the hike. By taking Harrington Trail up, or Mountain House Trail to Bicentennial down, the loop can be expanded by a half mile or so. Also, from the trail head you can take a short (but uphill) walk up to the Princeton Windmills.

East Side Wachusett Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Mountain House Trail Head, which is on Mountain Road at the top of Gregory Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate-Difficult 3.5 mile loop

This is a hike up to the Wachusett Mountain Summit and back around the East side of the mountain. Highlights of the hike are the summit area, the Harlow Outlook, and the Visitor's Center.

From the parking area, cross the road and hike up the Mountain House Trail. This is a moderate hike from the highest trail head on the mountain. The elevation gain is a little over 700 feet and the trail is somewhat rocky.

The Mountain House trail crosses the Bi-Centennial Trail, the Loop Trail, and the Link Trail before reaching the mountain summit. Enjoy the views and the kiosks from the summit.

We started down Pine Hill trail but took an abandoned road the the left and then an old ski trail (Ropers Road) back to the 'down road'. We turned left on the paved 'Down' Road and on the way down we stopped at the Harlow Outlook, a stone shelter with nice views.

We continued down the road, turning right at the intersection with the 'Up' Road. There are some nice views at that point, down the ski trails.

We stopped in at the mountain Visitor's center, where there is a lot of information about the mountain, geological history, and wildlife. Wachusett ountain also offers many educational programs, often presented at the Visitor's Center.

From the Center, we took Pine Hill/ Bicentennial Trail and continued on Bicentennial trail back to Mountain House Trail, then a left turn to the parking lot.

In the winter, the 'down' route is not used because crossing of the ski trails is not allowed. Instead, you can descend using the Pine Hill Trail. Pine Hill Trail offers a shorter loop. It is a steep trail but steps have been added to simplify the hike.



Harlow Outlook

Leominster State Forest - Wolf Rock Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Start at the Rocky Pond parking area at the intersection of Rocky Pond Road and Route 31.

Distance and Difficulty: Easy/flat 4 mile hike.

This is a pretty walk down the Paradise Alley Trail in back of Paradise Pond, to the Dam on the south side of the pond. The return is via the Wolf Den rocky outcrop.

Start by following the main road out to the Paradise Alley trail. This trail is really pretty when the mountain laurel is out in June. Follow the trail along the east shore of Paradise Pond and then up to join with King Tut Highway.

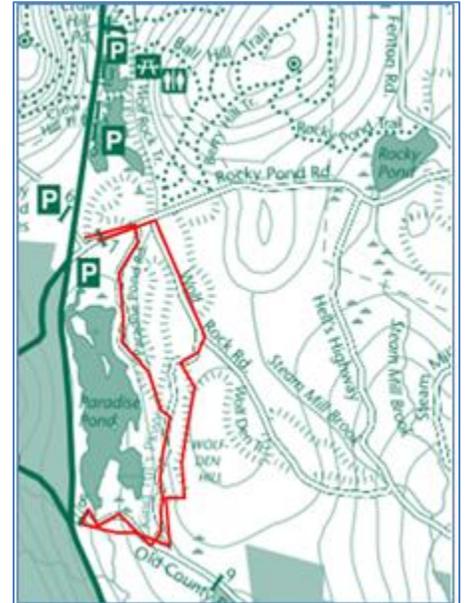
King Tut Highway is a gravel road that leads to the south end of Paradise Pond. There is a right turn onto Old Country Road (another gravel road). Once down near the dam area there is a trail that cuts into the woods on the right and goes around and over the dam. This dam is a pretty spot with nice views up the lake, and often wildlife nearby.

From the dam, cycle around counter-clockwise to a parking spot near the junction of routes 140 and 31, and then back to Old County Road and King Tut Highway.

Watch carefully for a trail to the right shortly after joining King Tut highway. This trail leads east to the Wolf Den. This can be tricky to find without a map or GPS tracker. Trails lead to the right (south) when you get to the outcrop, and then cycle over the top of the ricks and back down on the north side.

This trail joins Wolf Rock Road, a wide gravel road, which returns to Rocky Pond Road and then to the parking area.

Leominster State Forest has MANY trails and many great loop hikes. The trails are not always well marked, and a map or GPS app are very useful.



Leominster State Forest – Ball Hill Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Rocky pond Parking area, which is off Route 31 just past Paradise Pond.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate 5 miles loop

This moderate loop starts at the Rocky Pond Trail head and went out past the swimming area, up and over Ball Hill and back via Rocky Pond.

We started off on the Sawyer's Run trail, which loops through the forest and along the Crw Hill Ponds through pine stands. We then went left on the Wolf Rock Trail alongside Crow Hill Ponds and over to the swimming area.

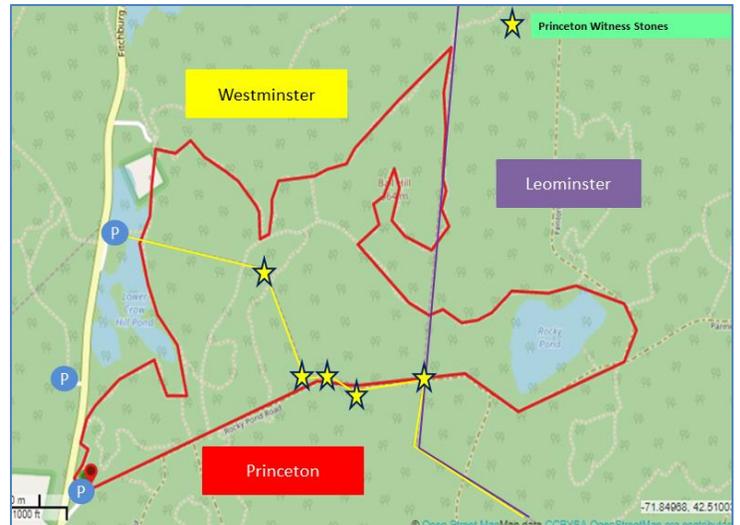
From the swimming area parking lot, the Ball Hill Trail heads to the East. This goes up hill for about a quarter-mile (the most arduous part of the hike), and then crosses a stone wall.

We were looking for witness stones on this hike, and there are five of them in Leominster State Park. These stones mark the boundary and turning points in town lines. The location is shown on the map. At the intersection with the Red Oak Trail we walked south a few hundred feet to the first of our stones, along the stone wall. We then returned and went left at the Red Oak Trail, following it down to the Ball Hill Trail. This is a nice trail through the woods, mostly pine forests.

The Ball Hill Trail follows the Leominster-Westminster line south and then curves around to near the top of Ball Hill. Passing by Ball Hill, we found the Rocky Pond Trail and followed it down to Rocky Pond. We took a right onto a gravel road that went around Rocky Pond, and then connected to Rocky Pond Road.

On the way back we stopped at four additional witness stones. The easy hike back along the gravel Rocky pond Road took us back to the parking lot..

The trail names are not well marked in Leominster State Forest, and so bringing a Leominster State Forest map or a GPS along is a good idea!!



Leominster State Forest - Crow Hill North Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Rocky pond Parking area, which is off Route 31 just past Paradise Pond.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate-Difficult 4 mile

This loop starts out flat along the Crow Hill Ponds and then heads up over the Crow Hills ridge on the Midstate trail, then down on the North side, and back via the swimming area.

Start off on the Sawyer's Run trail running north, and then before getting to the ponds we veered left on a small trail and crossed Route 31 to the west side near the crow hill gravel parking lot. From there we followed the main path up to Crow Hill. At the bottom of Crow Hill it is worth spending a few minutes to walk around to the bottom of the cliffs.

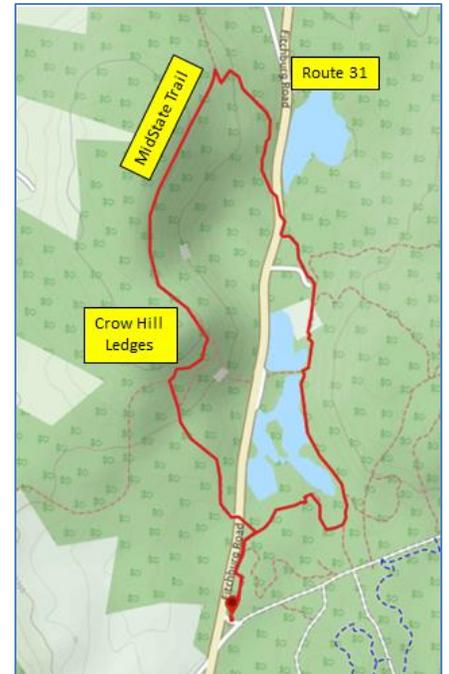


We continued around to the south end of the cliffs and then followed the MidState trail up to the north. The trail up to the ridge is rocky and steep but fortunately it is also very short. Once up on the ridge, there are two lovely views with nice ledges for a rest stop.

The MidState Trail continues for a mile or so along the Crow Hills Ridge and then descends steeply on the north side. This descent can be hazardous in icy conditions or after the oak leaves have fallen in the late fall.

After descending from the ridge, we found a small trail that branches right and leads back down to Route 31 (keep right at the fork on this trail), and we crossed Route 31, went over the guardrail and down a small path that took us to the swimming park.

Keeping to the left of the parking lot, we found the Wolf Rocks Trail and followed that past the pretty Crow Hill Ponds, then back to Sawyer's Run and the parking lot.



Wachusett Meadow - South Trails

Trail Head: Princeton. Mass Audubon Wachusett Meadow parking lot at the end of Goodnow Road.

Difficulty/Distance: Four mile easy-moderate hike.

Start at the main sanctuary parking lot at the end of Goodnow Road. Take the Beaver Bend trail to the Pasture trail, exploring the wetland viewing areas.

Take a left on Pasture Trail. This is a wide cart path which is easy walking, and it goes through three open old pastures before hitting the Fern Forest Trail

Continue on the Fern Forest trail down toward Hubbardston Road. This is an upland trail that goes through some dense fern and pine forest.

At times of low water and no ice, take the Brook Loop trail to the west. This crosses West Wachusett brook over some large stones and requires caution. The trail then follows the brook for some distance before looping up and over a small hill, back to the brook crossing. Continue back along the Brook Loop Trail to the junction with the Fern Forest Trail.

Take a left on the Fern Forest Trail and another left on the Pasture Trail to get to the Hemlock Seep Trail. This goes through a small stand of Hemlock and over a short wet area, and then comes out in an old pasture. Follow the trail through the pasture and keep left to rejoin the discontinued portion of Goodnow Road, turning right to return to the parking area.

There are several alternate routes that can be taken to complete the loop. One option is to go left at Goodnow Road at the end and hike a quarter mile down to the beaver pond. Another option is to cut the loop shorter by taking Fern Forest or Pasture trail to change the nature of the loop.



Wachusett Meadow - North Trails

Trail Head: Princeton. Mass Audubon Wachusett Meadow parking lot at the end of Goodnow Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-Moderate 3.5 mile

This hike explores the trails on the north side of Goodnow Road. Hike on nice well-groomed trails around the west boundary, swing around the glacial boulder, and hike to the summit of Brown Hill.



From the parking area, head left down Goodnow Road past the fence to Chapman Trail and take that up to the intersection with the West Boundary Trail. This trail follows the west boundary along stone walls, and goes through some pretty pine forests. After turning the back corner, it ascends gradually to link back up with Chapman Trail (MidState Trail). The hike proceeds then to the right (if you take the left you will head toward Thompson Road and Mt. Wachusett which is another three miles from the junction).

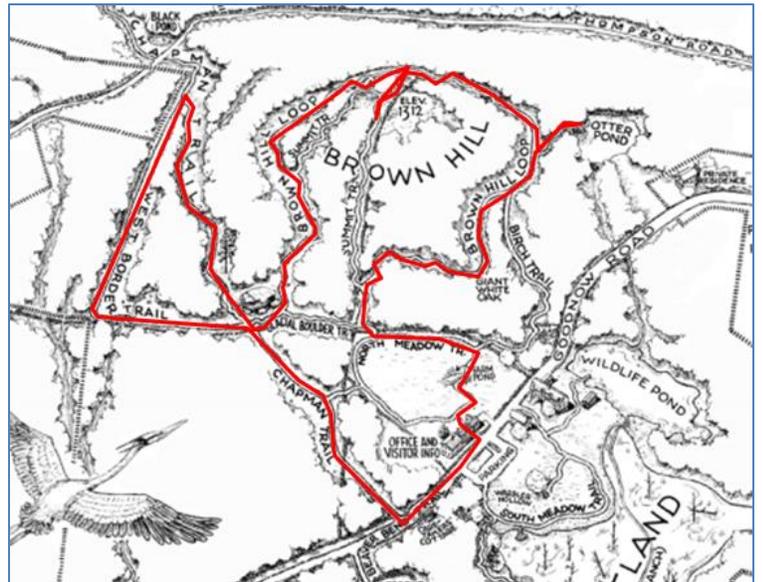
Chapman Trail heads back to the south, and intersects with the Glacial Boulder Trail. The glacial boulder is a point of interest, a great place for a photo!

Take the Brown Summit Loop to the left at that point. The trail heads east to Brown Hill, and then wraps to the left around Brown Hill to a point where the summit trail goes right to the top of Brown Hill. This is the easiest way to climb up Brown Hill. Proceed to the end of this trail and enjoy some limited views of Mt. Wachusett and the Princeton windmills.

Reverse direction and descend back to the Brown Hill Loop Trail and follow that around to the southeast side of Brown Hill. Optionally you may want to descend the Otter Pond Trail and check for Wildlife around this beaver pond.

Follow the Brown Hill Loop back to the north meadow and take a left to follow the North Meadow Trail along the stone wall and then across the Farm Pond area and back to the visitor center. Stop for Souvenirs!! And you are back to the parking lot.

There are many options for this hike. You can shorten it by taking the Summit Trail to the top instead of winding around Brown Hill. You can also take the South Summit Trail down on the southwest side of the hill. Both of these are a bit steeper than the route indicated above. The Birch Trail is also a good alternative way to return to Goodnow Road.



Princeton Land Trust Properties, from Krashes Field

Trail Head: Princeton The trails start and end at Krashes Field parking lot off Route 31. There is also parking off Bullock Road and off the south side of Route 62 if a shorter loop is desired.

Distance and Difficulty: 3.2 mile Easy-Moderate

This double loop started at Krashes field in the Southwest corner and headed up the hill to Bullock Lane on a blue-blazed trail. At Bullock Lane there is a kiosk and small parking area.

Walk down Bullock Lane to Route 62 and go to the left about 100 yards to the Princeton Land Trust sign. There is another small parking lot at this point. Proceed into the woods and then branch right and follow the blue blazes clockwise around the loop. The trail goes gradually down to a large beaver pond.

At the pond, there is a trail that leads down close to the water and then east over to the Dam. During our last guided hike we sighted a golden eagle and a heron on the pond, but no beavers.

We returned by completing the loop on the south side of the route 62 and then returning to the Kiosk and back to Krashes field taking then right hand trail. This goes over a high esker just before ending at the fields. The highlights were views of Mt. Wachusett from the end of Bullock Lane, the Beaver Pond, and the Esker.



Note: For our hike we took the left route heading down from Krashes Field (see map to right) going out, and the right route back to Krashes field.

Four Corners Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. The loop starts and ends just south of the four corner intersection between Gate and Old Colony/Thompson Road there is a small parking area and kiosk for the Midstate Trail.

Distance and Difficulty: 2.5 Miles, Easy walk

The first of our Princeton Hikes series took place on April 8, 2017, and went from the Midstate Kiosk on Gates Road, up Gates Road to Old Colony, and left on Old Colony Road down to the bridge over the West Branch of the Ware River.



The bridge is at a lovely spot over the West Branch of the Ware River, with an extensive wetland to the north and a smaller pond to the south. At this point the Midstate trail continues over the bridge with nice walks over to Savage Hill WMA. But we stopped at the bridge.

We turned back and took a right, following the MidState trail through the woods. This emerges into the agricultural fields, where there is a nice view to the east of Mt. Wachusett and the town windmills. The trail follows the edge of the field back to the Gates Road parking area and kiosk.

This land was preserved a few years ago by a project initiated by neighbors and supported by the Princeton Land Trust and Mass Audubon. As a result of that effort, the area is great for hiking!

Highlights are the bridge and marsh around the West Branch of the river, and the views when returning into the Four Corners fields. The weather was cold, and we trudged through the snowy trail up from the river.



Redemption Rock Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Park at Wachusett Ski Area. Alternately the loop can be done from Redemption Rock off Route 140.

Distance and Difficulty: 4 Miles, Moderate

Start at the pond at Wachusett Ski Area. Hike up the Donbrowo trail (parallel to Mile High Road), about halfway to the Wachusett visitors center.

Go left through the gate and then across the road, and follow the wood trail down through the woods. Stay to the left most trails until intersecting with the Midstate trail, and then take a right to Redemption Rock.

Redemption Rock is the site of the ransom of Mary Rowlandson during King Phillip's War in 1676. This site is maintained by the Trustees of the Reservation, and there is a small sign describing the history around this event. The large rock is a great place to climb, and maybe sit upon for a snack!

The return hike is along the MidState trail back to the ski area.

An alternative hike would be to follow the MidState trail in and out from the Ski Area (or from redemption Rock). The route described above can be wet (particularly the beginning of the trail down from Donbrowo). In addition, a longer hike can be taken by following the MidState trail over to Crow Hill in Leominster State Forest.



Savage Hill Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Small parking area at the end of Bigelow Road (off Wheeler Road) in Western Princeton.

Difficulty/Distance: Moderate-Difficult, about six miles.

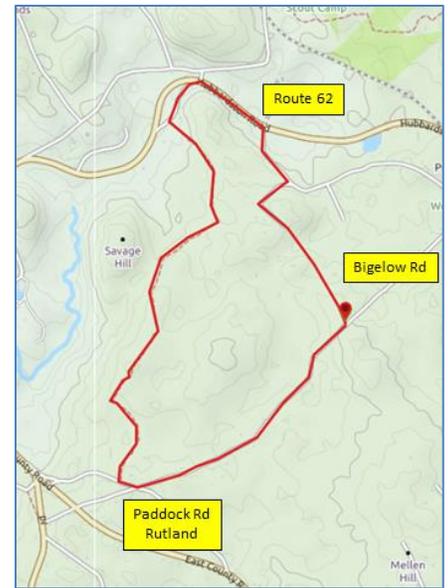
This hike goes through Savage Hill WMA and follows the Midstate trail back. For the Princeton Hike, we chose to bushwhack over to Lyons Road, which takes a mile off the total distance. This write-up assumes no bushwhack.

Follow the cart path extending from Bigelow Rd up through Savage Hill WMA. This track goes through the woods and past a nice beaver pond ending as Bushy Lane in Rutland.

Turn right on Paddock Road and then take a second right onto the Midstate trail. The first half of this trail winds through the woods going up and down small hills. The second part is a nice wide gravel road.

Just before Route 62, take a right onto Old Colony Road, and then walk along Route 62 to Wheeler Road.

From Wheeler Road take a right onto Lyons Road. This turns left at the top of the hill and then proceeds past a barrier to a cart path which returns to the parking area.



Little Wachusett Loop (Minns Wildlife Management Area)

Trail Head: Princeton. Park at the Admin Road gate off Westminster Road, about one mile up Westminster Road from Mountain Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate 4 mile hike with a steep 300 foot ascent up the hill near the start of the hike.

This is a lovely hike up through Minns Wildlife Area, which encompasses Little Wachusett Mountain. There are no views from the top but there is good blueberry picking in season.

Walk back on Westminster Road toward Mountain Road for about a half mile. About 200 feet before hitting Mountain Road, the Little Wachusett Trail starts on the south side of the road. This trail is steep for about a quarter mile, ascending Little Wachusett for about 300 vertical feet. The trail then winds through an semi-open area, crosses a stone wall and heads to the right. Follow the trail out to some rock ledges and low-bush blueberry bushes. This is a good spot to stop for a while!

The descent is via a fine little path that winds through the pine forest. The trail can be difficult to find, but head down off the ledges to the west (you should find a red arrow showing the way). Then descent through the woods to Thompson Road.

Take a right on Thompson Road, which is a gravel road. This goes out through a large beaver pond, and descend a hill to the Midstate Trail (yellow triangular blazes). The MidState Trail goes left to Wachusett Meadow Audubon Sanctuary, but you will take it to the right, toward Mt. Wachusett.



The MidState starts as the Chapman Trail and turns into the Dickens Trail when it leaves Audubon property. The trail runs for about a mile and hits Westminster Road. A right will take you back to the parking area in about a half mile.

There are many options for this hike. It is possible to park on the side of Westminster Road where the trail heads up the mountain. You could go left at Thompson Road for a shorter walk back via Mountain Road. Or you could tack on a trip across Westminster Road near the end up to the Windmill farm.



Poutwater Pond from Thomas Prince School

Trail Head: Princeton. Thomas Prince School

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate, 6 Miles.

Poutwater Pond WMA can be accessed from Mason Road, Sterling Road, or Esty Road. The route taken for our hike started at Thomas Prince School, and made an interesting 6 mile loop, requiring a bushwhack from the back of TPS property.

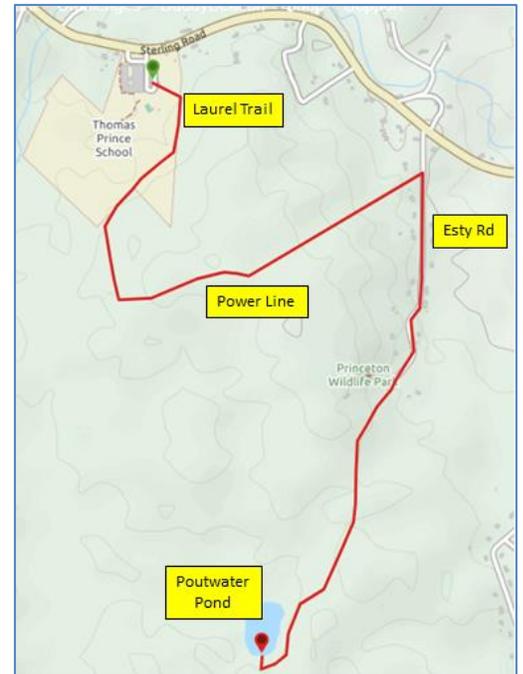
From the Thomas Prince School parking lot take the Laurel Trail in the TPS Nature Trail network trail. This is located at the back southeast corner of the ball field. Follow this to the back boundary of TPS property, near a second stone wall. Bushwhack south from there (following the wall) and then cut right to find a cart path.

Take the cart path to the left, and after the left turn keep to the right to get to the power lines. Follow the power line road down to Esty Road, and then take a right on Esty Road and hike to the end.

At the end of Esty Road there are two wood roads heading south toward Poutwater Pond. Take the road to the right. This is a nice pine-footed trail. Keep to the left at the first junction and this leads to Poutwater Pond.

Poutwater Pond WMA is an isolated spot, and the pond is rich with wildlife and vegetation. This is a good spot for bird watchers. There is a trail leading down to the edge of the pond, and skirting the edge for a few dozen feet. During wet weather, much of this may be under water.

Because of the bushwhack and the network of dirt roads through this area, a GPS is recommended for this hike. An easier way to get to Poutwater Pond exists from Mason Road (from the west) or Sterling Road (from the south). The Mason Road trail is the shortest and there is a small parking area for Poutwater Pond but often it is inaccessible due to water levels (this can be determined in the first hundred feet of the hike).



Crow Hill to Redemption Rock Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Rocky Pond Trail Head is located on Route 31, about a mile north of the branch with Route 140. The Parking area is on the right.

Difficulty and Distance: Difficult 4 mile hike.

From the Rocky Pond Parking lot take Sawyer Run Trail parallel to Route 140 to the north. This goes through a pine forest and merges onto Wolf Rocks Trail heading along the Crow Hill Ponds.

Go left at the causeway over the parking area and then cross Route 31 and go up the Crow Hill Trail. This climb is steep but fairly short (less than a half mile) and is the quickest way to get to the foot of the cliffs.



The Crow Hill Cliffs are awesome when viewed from the bottom!

Walk back to the south (left) along the foot of the cliffs, and head west to meet the MidState Trail. For a good view, you can scramble up the Midstate trail on the right and follow it for about a hundred feet to the best of the Crow Hill lookouts. Return down the trail and take the Midstate trail right (south/west).

The Midstate Trail then follows along stone walls and the Leominster/Princeton/Westminster town lines, passing by two nice views, and hits Route 140 and then Redemption Rock.

After resting on top of Redemption Rock, walk briefly south (right) on Route 140 and then take the cart path on the other side of the road. This merges with old County Road, and hits Rocky Pond Road. This is a quiet road and a pleasant walk back to the parking area.

There are several options for this hike. It is a fine 'out and back' from either the Crow Hill Cliff Parking Lot or the hikers parking lot (which is on the west side of Route 140 a couple hundred yards before the trail used above from the main paved parking lot). The ascent from this parking lot to the cliffs is more gradual.



Also, if a longer hike is desired, it is an additional two miles beyond Redemption Rock to the Wachusett Ski Area.

Bickford Pond Loop

Trail Head: Princeton. Park at the dcorner of Rhodes and Green Road in Northwest Princeton

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-Moderate 3.5 Mile hike

Bickford Pond is a lovely spot in the northwest corner of Princeton. This walk takes you out the Green Road extension (discontinued road) and back along Rhodes Road (gravel). When water is high in the spring or after heavy rains, the stream at the north end of the pond will be too wide to cross, and it is better to walk down Rhodes Road and out and back through Zins Conservation Area (rather than trying the loop).



Start at the corner of Rhodes and Green Roads in Princeton. Walk out Green Road (discontinued dirt road) into Hubbardston. This is a rough road, and the beavers have build up the dam on the right side and destroyed the colvert. As a result this section will likely have some flowing water that needs to be crossed. Once past the water it is a nice woods walk.

Just before crossing the Westminster line (onto Lanes Road) there is a gate on the left. Go through the gate and down the hill to the stream that connects Bickford Pond to Mare Meadow. This stream can be broad and deep at times of high water. Cross the stream and continue on the paved road until you see an open berm heading to the left, on the West side of the pond.

Cross the berm (beautiful view of Mt Wachusett) and bear to the right to take an ATV track up and over the hill to the dam (steep descent at the end). Again, this is a pretty viewing spot with views to the East and Mt. Wachusett, and allso down the spillway to the West Branch of the Ware River.

Cross the dam and continue along the road for less the 100 feet until you see the AT+T line trail heading back along the south side of Bickford Pond. Follow the AT+T trail through the woods. There are three wetland bypass trails (yellow ribbons, first right, then left, then right), and after the last one the Zinns Conservation trail heads off to the right. Follow that to a gate and turn left on Rhodes Road to walk to the starting point.



Lovers Lane to Overlook Road

Trail Head: Princeton. There is a small parking area at the gate at the end of Lover Lane in western Princeton (off Brooks Station Road).

Distance and Difficulty: Easy-Moderate 3.5 Miles

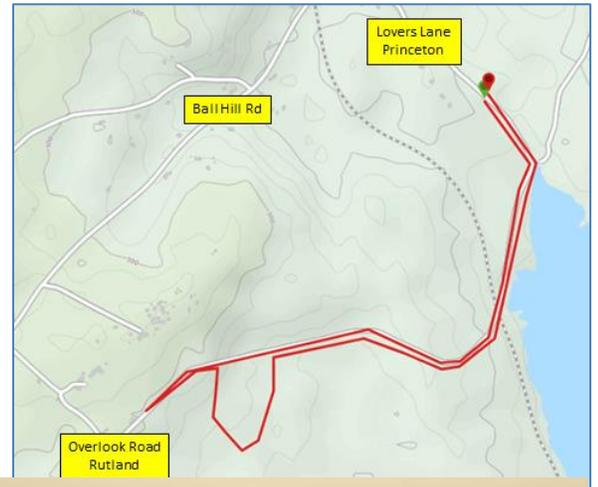
Lovers Lane is in the Western part of Princeton, off Ball Hill Road. This hike is an easy walk over to Overlook Road in Rutland, and optionally can include a walk through the woods on the Rutland side of the gravel roads.

Passing through the gate, the road turns to gravel and runs down to the intersection with Old Mill Road. Old Mill Road originally ran from Ball Hill Road across South Wachusett Brook and into the Quinapoxit Reservoir. The bridge has long since been removed.

At this intersection there is a nice view to the right of the reservoir, the bridge abutment, and some of the residue of the mill that was originally on this site.

This road continues to the right through the forest, and over the train tracks, with a few small hills, before emerging into large fields on Overlook Road in Rutland. At this point the hike reverses direction and returns to the start.

There is an optional small loop woodland trail on the south side shortly after re-entering the woods on the way back. This is a pretty loop which is about a half mile in length. It was originally a Woodland Walk for the Heifer Project Overlook Farm. A second link for the woodland walk can be found off the north side (left on the way back) but this goes up to the Overlook Farm buildings.



Cat Rocks and Behind the Onion Patch

Trail Head: Sterling. Small Parking area at the north corner of Lucas Road (Hobbs Road) and Justice Hill Road. This is a gate to Leominster State Forest) to Bartlett Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate, 4.5 Miles.

This is an out-and-back hike from Lucas Road in Sterling to East Princeton with a side trip to the Cat Rocks ledges.

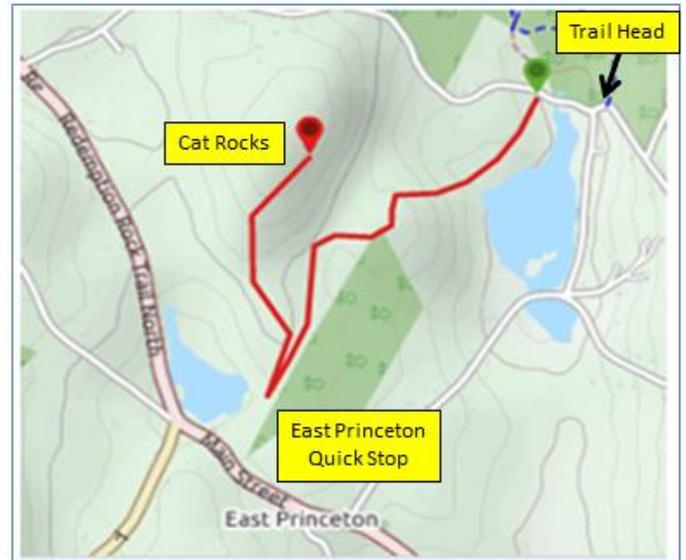
Hike to the right out of the parking area, then down Lucas Rd and up the hill towards Hobbs Rd, and then take a left through the DCR gate. A trail runs around the north side of Stuart pond. The trail tapers out near a small brook, but it is easy to push through to the cart path beyond the pond.

Follow the gravel cart path to the right up a steep hill. A set of ledges on the left can be climbed. This is called Squaw Cap, and contains a Witness stone (town boundary between Princeton and Sterling).

The cart path can then be followed to East Princeton and the pond called 'the onion patch'. There is an old bridge over Keys brook that can be crossed to stop in at the Quick Stop store.

Reversing direction, follow the cart path back about a quarter mile and take a large well defined path to the right. This leads through the woods and climbs a hill. At the top of the hill just past a large stone wall you can leave the path to the right and bushwhack to the Cat Rocks ledges and a nice view across the valley. This is an area frequented by Bobcats and Porcupines.

Return to the start by retracing the path to the main cart road. Once at the Cart Path turn left to return to the pond and the slight trail to the left to get to the road.



Trout Brook Conservation Area (Holden)

Trail Head: Holden. Use the small parking area just east of the intersection of Sterling and Mason Roads.

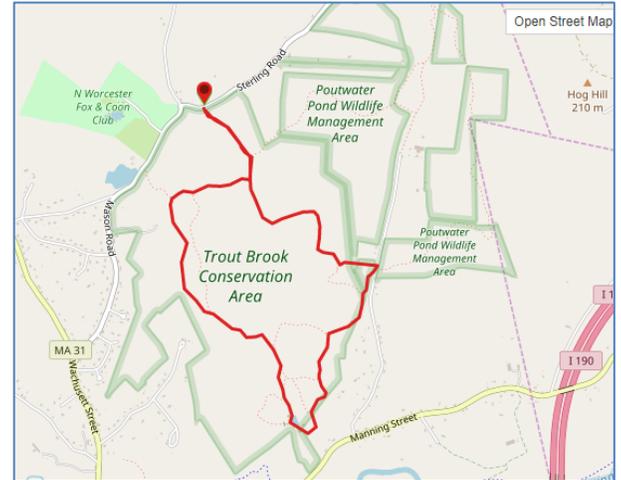
Difficulty and Distance: Easy 4 mile loop.

From the parking area, proceed down Blue Dot Trail to North Street. From North Street, continue to follow Blue Dot down to the X-Mas tree Trail and take a left. A second left will lead down to the parking area off Manning Street.

Walking back up the main trail will take you through the recreation area at Trout Brook and along the brook. Follow the White Dot Trail (or the Red Dot Trail) at this point to head north. This follows Trout Brook and has pretty views. turn right (east) onto the Blue Dot trail.

The next left leads back to the parking lot.

There are many options for extending or shortening the hike. Trout Brook also connects to the Central Mass Rail Trail system, which is across Manning Street and slightly west. On the east side, the White Oak trail makes a much longer loop, and there is a side trail that heads over to Hogg hill in Sterling.



Heywood Reservoir (Sterling)

Trail Head: Sterling. Park in the Heywood Reservoir lot, which is on Upper North Row Road, about 1.2 miles from Justice Hill Road in Sterling.

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate 4-5 Miles. The Kiosk shows the trail with annotation.

Follow Heywood Road, an abandoned paved road, straight from the Kiosk down to a spot where a trail goes off to the left, marked with a trail sign #175. Turn Left and proceed up the hill to trail signs #155 and #145.

There is an optional out and back trail that heads left at this point to a large painted rock known as Devils pulpit. The trail is weakly marked.

We then followed the trail out to the north on a small trail until we hit point #140, then joining the blue-blazed Monoosnoc trail (which goes about seven miles up to West Road in Leominster). When we hit the

Monoosnoc Trail we turned right and proceeded down by the Fall Brook Reservoir.

From there (point #160 we went over the berm and entered a trail to the right that continued around Heywood Reservoir. This takes you out to a field, which must be crossed, and the path then heads down to the reservoir. We went over a fairly steep hill (which I am told can be avoided by circling through the field a little further!) and took the trail to the Dam.

A bit south of the dam there is a path down to the brook, which can be crossed in most seasons (but was not crossable for our hike! We bushwhacked back to the road and walked to the car). After crossing the brook the trail leads back to the Heywood Road trail and the parking area.



Maps from the Leominster Trail Stewards show the portion of the trail that is in Leominster.



Hog Hill (Sterling)

Trail Head: Sterling. Take 140 South from Princeton, and turn right on Merrill Street (shortly before Sterling Greenery). Parking is located at the end of the road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy 3 mile loop.

Hog Hill is a DCR property with a gate at the end of Merrill Street in Sterling. The property includes woodlands, forest and open fields along with some ruins of the Kristoff Pig Farm.

From the end of Merrill Rd. follow walk around the gate and to the top of the hill. At the top of Hog hill you will see the cookers from the Kristoff Pig Farm. Just past the 'cookers' a road proceeds straight ahead and another goes to the right. Take the road to the right, which is indicated by the blue line on the map.

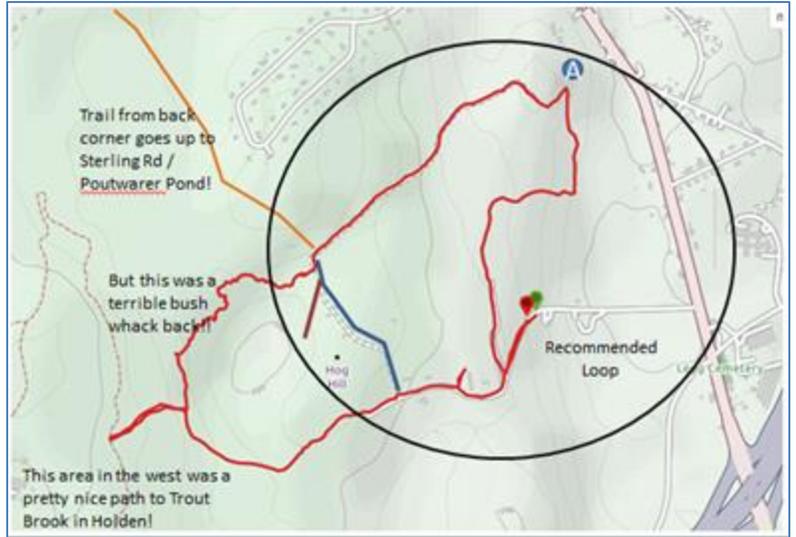
There is a right turn that can be taken to walk out to a small marsh with some pretty views. This is shown on the map with a purple line.

On return from the marsh, the main trail (red line) continues down through the woods and fields to an abandoned foundation. Proceed down and around the hill to a road heading south.

There are two ways to get back to the start of the loop. Just before hitting the open fields, there is a flagged trail leading to the rights up through the woods. This is the easier path. A second options, which is a little shorter but more difficult, is to go to the open fields and walk around the edge back of the parking area.

There are a couple of interesting connections from the main loop. One is to continue straight past the 'cookers' on a rough road, and follow the stone wall to its end. There is a small trail that links through to Trout Brook hiking trails (the White Dot Trail).

A second option is to continue straight at the right turn on the main trail, which is shown as an orange line in the map. This trail heads up to Sterling Road and connects to Poutwater Pond.



The 3 mile loop is shown on the right side of the map, and includes the blue line. The red line to the left is a hike that was taken to find the link to Trout Brook park, and includes a difficult bushwhack back into the main loop.



Clinton Dam and Tunnel (Sterling/Clinton)

Trail Head: Sterling/Clinton. The parking area is on route 110 in Sterling, about a quarter mile north of Chace Hill Road. Parking is available on both sides of the road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-Moderate 3-7 miles

We did this hike with two levels of difficulty. Some hikers parked cars at the Dam end and simply walked the 3 miles to the dam. Others did a round-trip, which was more like 7 miles.

We started in very western Sterling, at the Trail head on Route 110 near the North Dike of the Wachusett Reservoir. The start of the hike was along the north dike, which runs right along the water and is a wide grassy walk in the open with very pretty views out to Wachusett Reservoir. This path goes past the high school, through a railway cut, and out to the Clinton Dam by the sluiceway...an impressive sight!

At that point we split into two groups. The more difficult way forward was down the 200 steps to the bottom of the dam and then back up the 200 steps to the east side. However there is an easier path to the bottom, and we had cars waiting at the bottom to ferry those people back up to the east side.

From the east side of the dam, on Route 72, we walked down the hill on the sidewalk for less than a quarter mile to the railroad tunnel on the east side of Route 72. We walked up the embankment to the tunnel and through the tunnel (using headlamps) to the other side. A very interesting walk!!



We then split again, with one group stopping here and riding back to the start, and a second group walking back.

This is a really nice walk in good weather. It is all exposed so it will be a bit less fun in a wet or windy day. The trail is flat...like a rail trail...with one on slight climb through a woody area halfway between the trail head and the dam.



Stillwater Basin Trail (Sterling)

Trail Head: Sterling. Park at the soccer fields on Griffin Road. Griffin Road is off Muddy Pond Rad, just east of the Sterling Senior Center and behind Chocksett/Houghton schools. Parking is allowed on both sides of the road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-to-moderate 3.5 mile hike in and out. Less than 150 feet of elevation change.

This is a nice walk, mostly along good and fairly level footing in pine forests. The trail is up high on the east bank of the Stillwater River, and at two points the track veers off the main trail to go down to the riverside. A short walk along the shore of the Stillwater arm of the Wachusett Reservoir is included.

From the parking lot, go to the northeast corner of the overflow lot, and ascend quickly to the top of the pine esker. The trail goes to the left at the top of the esker and then curves to the right at a small out building, leaving the row of houses along Griffin Road.

There are several small trails to the right leading directly down to an area with smaller soccer fields. A bit beyond that there is another trail to the right that leads to a fine view over the peat bogs to Mt. Wachusett. This is a worthwhile diversion.

Return to the main trail and continue to the south. The trail leads through the woods, and past a rough side road which can be explored but is blocked by trees in many spots. Beyond that (on the main trail) there is a cleaner road to the right which leads down to the Stillwater River. This is a pretty spot to get to. Continue past this on a smaller trail that goes to the left and gradually up the hill.

Rejoin the main trail and hike right through the pine forest and won to Prescott Street in West Boylston (Oakdale). In this stretch, there is a trail to the right that leads down to the area where the Stillwater runs into Wachusett Reservoir, and there is a nice walk along the shore of this basin. From there it is possible to bushwhack through the woods and back to the main path, or you can re-trace your steps back to the main trail.

At the end of the main trail there is a gate by Prescott Street. This is the end of the hike, so return via the main path to the parking lot. On the way back, you may want to avoid the side trip down to the river...it is quicker to just continue down the main trail.

The hike can be extended by two miles by going right and across the trail tracks at Prescott Street. There is a cleared gravel road to the right that goes over to Route 140 in Oakdale, which is very close to the Mass Central Rail Trail near the Quinapoxit River.



Lynde Reservoir (Sterling)

Trail Head: Sterling. Small parking lot on Heywood Road, just south of North Row Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy 3 Mile hike through mixed forest with little elevation change.

Lynde Reservoir is located in the Wekepeke Wildlife Conservation Area in northwest Sterling. The hike offers a loop around the property and out through the town forest, with pretty views of the water, and a side walk out to a small cow field.

Starting from the parking area, proceed through the gate and go past the dam and spillway on the east side of the water system. The trail leads down through mixed forest to a second small pond with the remains of water works and mills.

After the second pond, the trail heads through the woods and loops around through the town forest, then going up a gradual hill. After climbing the hill, there is a road off to the left and then a right to get to the view over the cow field.

Returning to the main loop, the trail then passes by the Lynde Reservoir through a pine forest. There is a higher trail and a lower trail at this point. Both return to the main trail before reaching the east side dam and the parking lot.

There are several smaller trails in this area, including a spur that goes out to the northwest side of the reservoir (shown on the map just above the main water body).

While some sections of the hike can be a little wet during wet periods, most of the trail is high and dry and easy walking.



Pine Hill Esker Trail (Sterling)

Trail Head: Princeton. Driving North on 140, Take Oakdale Cutoff Road to Beaman Road in Sterling. Drive about 0.4 miles past the 8 Point Sportsman's Club and park on the right, near the sign for Rocky Brook Conservation Area.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-Moderate 3.5 Miles

Rocky Brook Conservation is a town-owned lot that follows Rocky Brook toward its junction with the Stillwater River. This hike goes through the conservation area and DCR wetland property to a clearing at an abandoned gravel quarry, and then out to the wetland pond that is formed by the river junctions.

Walk south from the road across the old rock bridge on a small trail. The trail goes over a stone wall and through a small section of woods before joining with a larger wood road. The crossing bridge can be quite interesting on both sides of Beaman Road.

The road passes through a small open field and proceeds through the woods, past a fork to the right and out to an open area which used to be a gravel quarry. From here you can catch a view of the houses along Route 62, but the area beyond the trail is wetland.

Just after turning back, there is a trail off to the west, and this is a pretty trail worth taking, but it just loops around over high ground and around a kettle pond and returns to its starting point.

On the way back, take the left turn to the west and follow the trail out to the pond where the brook and river converge. The swift current of the Stillwater River can be seen out in the middle of the pond. The trail continues around the bend and out to Rocky Brook, but then stops at the brook edge. At that point, turn and retrace steps to Beaman Road.

The hike can be extended by parking closer to the 8-Point Sportsman's Club. We had permission to do so for the Princeton Hike. There are one or two trails that head off to the East toward the house on Wilder Road.



North Monoosnoc to Rocky Pond Road (Leominster)

Trail Head: Leominster. West end of West Road (near Route 2)

Difficulty and Distance: Moderate 6.5 Miles.

This is a one way hike from northwest Leominster to Rocky Pond trail parking lot in Princeton. We dropped cars in Princeton and drove to Leominster to start the hike.

The first half mile of this hike is all up hill, to climb North Monoosnoc Hill. In the winter it is also icy or wet as it runs along a stream bed. There is a fine view to the east from near the top.

The hike goes over the top of Monoosnoc and then on gravel roads and trails past the power lines to Notown Reservoir to Leominster Trail Stewards trail marker #50.

Turn right at that point to exit the Monoosnoc system and proceed down near the south end of Notown Reservoir, which is a pretty spot.

Follow the main trail through to Parmenter Road in Leominster State Forest, and turn right to follow the road to Rocky Pond. At that point the road turns to Rocky Pond Road and proceeds to the parking area by Route 31.

There are several options on this route, both on the Monoosnoc ridge and in Leominster State Forest. A GPS tracking device is recommended to avoid getting off the track.



Monoosnoc to Sholan Farms (Leominster)

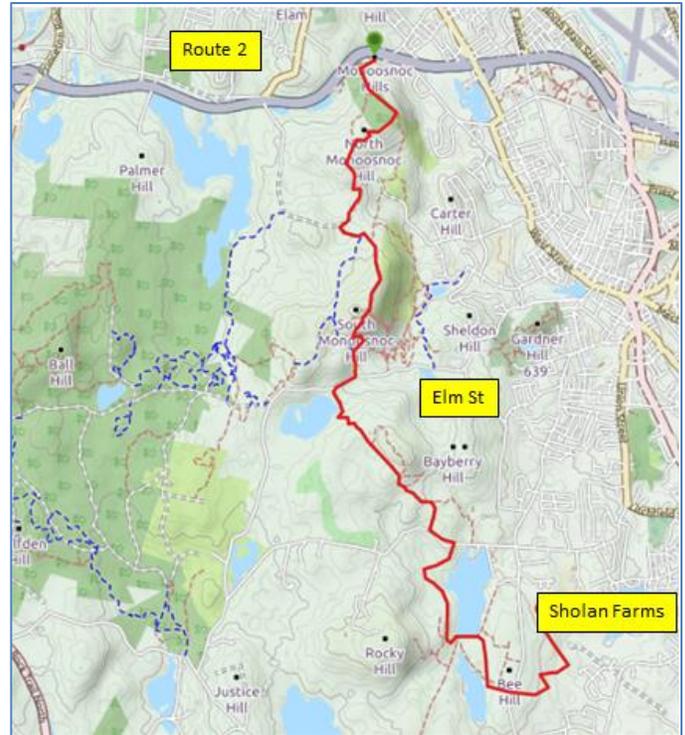
Trail Head: Leominster. End of West Road. Take Merriam or Abbot Road off of Route 2, then to Liddell Ave, and then to West Road. There is a parking lot and kiosk at the end.

Difficult and Distance: Moderate-Difficult Trail with 1200 feet of total elevation gain and 7 Mile length.

Hiking the Length of the Monoosnoc Trail from North to South is a longer hike but a really nice trail over the Monoosnoc Ridge, with two nice lookouts along the way. It starts up by Route 2 and goes through Leominster, ending by the Fall Brook Reservoir at Sholan Farms...a great destination during apple-picking season!

We met at Sholan Farms and dropped cars, then car pooled through Leominster to the West Road Trailhead.

The trail starts uphill for the first half mile. This is the most difficult part of the hike, and can be quite icy in the winter (we did the hike in January and it was VERY icy!). After walking around the water tower and up the hill we reached the first viewpoint, which was a wide ledge looking to the east over Leominster and along route 2. Best view of the day!



The trail proceeds over North Monoosnoc Hill and along the ridge to South Monoosnoc. There is a small side trail to the right that goes over to South Monoosnoc (not shown on the map), and this is definitely worth the diversion as there is a second pretty view out to the west and Mt. Wachusett. This is a short loop that reconnects with the main trail.

Continue along the trail, descending off the ridge and crossing Elm Street and Wachusett Street and then entering the Fall Brook reservoir area. The trail then goes around Fall Brook Reservoir and through an open field, then around an apple orchard and back to the Sholan Farms parking lot.

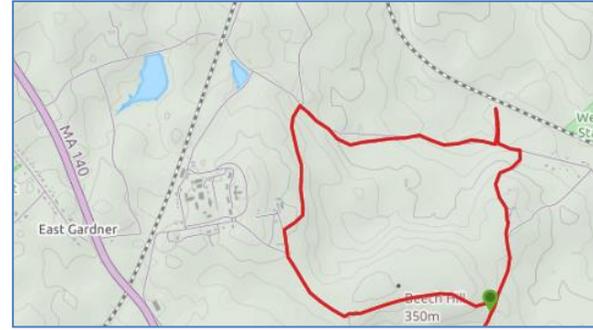
There are many side trails around Fall Brook Reservoir and slightly south to the Heywood reservoir area. The Monoosnoc Trail is maintained by the Leominster Trail Stewards, and the trails are well marked. The Trail Steward website has some excellent maps and background information.

High Ridge WMA (Westminster)

Trail Head: **Westminster**. There is a parking area at the end of Overlook Road.

Difficulty and Distance: Easy-Moderate 3 mile

High Ridge is a Wildlife Management Area in north Westminster, near the Gardner line (up by the prison). While some of the trails are actually paved roads, the route goes through some pretty fields and nice forest, and there is a fine walk down to a large pond and dam.



To get to High Ridge, drive to Westminster Center and take Bacon Rd to Overlook Road. Drive to the end of Overlook Road and there is a parking lot on the left.

We chose to walk counter clockwise around the loop. It follows an old paved road through fields, and then curves down through the woods and along a brook. There are bluebird nests along the way through the fields. There is a trail to the right that is worth walking out and back....it goes down to a dam and a large pond.

The paved road then loops up a hill through a pretty forest, and at the top opens up into a field. The gravel road continues straight, but to make the loop you must turn left on a narrow trail through a small field. This wood trail skirts the Gardner prison grounds, and proceeds for about a half mile before reaching a gravel road where the route turns left again.



From there the gravel road is lovely, going through large open fields with bluebird nests and chestnut trees, to return to the parking area.

There are some other options at the far corner, where the path goes left...if you continue on there is another loop to the right that can be walked to add a couple of miles to the hike. Also if you follow the main road straight and then bear left you can view the prison cemetery.