

OUTDOORS
IN FRANKLIN

By Michael J. Tougas

Author Michael Tougias has written many area guidebooks including River Days: Exploring the Connecticut River from Source to Sea, Exploring the Hidden Charles: A Guide to Outdoor Activities on Boston's Celebrated River, and New England Wild Places: Journey's Through the Back Country, as well as Until I Have No Country: A Novel of King Philip's War in New England and the non-Fiction King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict.

This guidebook was developed as an initiative of the Franklin Open Space Committee with support from the Department of Community Planning including former director Todd Ford, current Director Daniel Ben Yisrael, Town Ecologist Rich Vacca, and GIS Specialist Nick Alfieri as well as input and support from the Conservation Commission. Special thanks go to the graphic arts class of Mr. Eskay Sriram at Tri-County Regional Vocational School, which provided several excellent candidates for cover illustrations. The illustration selected was created by Corey Gray.

Open Space Committee:
Alan Earls (Chair)
Susan Plume (Vice Chair)
Tonya Price
Mark Scuzzarella
Chris Twomley

Conservation Commission:
Steven Jolie, Chair
Marc Cohen, Vice Chairman
Peter Malacaria
Jay McCreery
Pearce Murphy
Liz Tepper
Andy Tolland

WARNING: Hunting is allowed at the State Forest. A state sign explains that late fall is when hunters are likely to be on the property: “While some species may be taken by licensed hunters on a year round basis, most hunting activity occurs between October 1 and February 29, with the most intense hunting occurring during the deer season between the last Monday of November and the 3rd Saturday in December.”

GENERAL NOTE: Use caution and common sense in all trail and boating areas. Be sure to have the proper equipment. Obey local ordinances. Avoid situations that are beyond your experience. Where trails cross private property, please respect the land and don't take anything or leave trash.

Outdoors In Greater Franklin

Section I: Franklin

- Franklin Town Forest
- Franklin State Forest
- Charles River
- Indian Rock
- DelCarte Conservation Area
- Beaver Pond
- Charles River
- Dacey Farm
- Uncas Pond and Trout Fishing
- SNETT Trail

Section II: Overview of Nearby Hikes

- Foxboro & Wrentham
- Medway/Holliston/Hopkinton
- Medfield/Norfolk/Millis/Dover/Sherborn

Section I: FRANKLIN

Franklin Town Forest

[NOTE: Where trails cross private property, please respect the land and don't take anything or leave trash.]

I've lived in Franklin for 18 years and yet it wasn't until this year that I discovered the great hiking trails at the Town Forest. On my first visit I had the good fortune of joining Andy Tolland, a member of the Franklin Conservation Commission, on a walk through the forest in September. Andy not only knew the network of trails like the back of his hand, but he also could identify almost every one of the many plants, shrubs and trees in the forest. Best of all, he showed me the trails that form a rough loop of the area so that we rarely had to retrace our steps.

When you visit the Town Forest, park in the grassy area on the shoulder of Summer Street across from 373 Summer Street. (Because the trail system is not yet generally marked, the trails can be a bit confusing, so allow extra time for hiking.) The beginning of the trail heads through grass, golden rod, grapes, small cedars and swamp maples. Walk about a hundred feet until you reach the edge of the pine and oak forest at a T intersection. While the more defined trail leads to the right, you should turn left and follow the narrow trail towards the woods. In about a hundred yards the trail turns to the right and you are now heading to the northeast through the woods. Continue to bear right about another hundred feet down the trail where there is an intersection with a fallen tree blocking the path directly ahead. Follow the trail to the right and you will quickly pass through an opening in a stonewall. Look for the green ground cover called partridgeberry with its paired round evergreen leaves. In the spring it has pink or white flowers that develops red berries, which brighten the forest floor. This unusual berry has two blossom ends instead of only one as other plants do.

About four minutes down the path you reach an intersection where you should turn right. Within a hundred yards the trail forks: bear right on a narrow trail heading in a southeast direction. Another trail merges onto the trail you are walking and they form a wider path. As you walk, look through the trees on your right and you will see two old stonewalls indicating that these woods were formerly fields. Andy explained that this land was once the town's Poor Farm, where people without means would work for their room and board. The stonewall has some large boulders in it with only a few smaller stones, indicating that it was probably built to wall in pastures rather than agricultural fields. (Stonewalls made to create agricultural for planting usually contains even the smallest of stones, so the plows could slice better.) I asked Andy why there were two stonewalls close together, and he surmised that perhaps a road went in between them and the walls separated the livestock on either side.

As you continue walking in a southeasterly direction there will be a couple side trails on your left that you should ignore. About five minutes down the path you arrive at a small opening in the woods and on your right, through the trees, you will be able to see the granite walls of a cliff. Take a walk over and inspect the cliff, it has sheer walls rising up about 40 feet at the highest. You can reach the top by going around either side, but before you do be sure to inspect the ferns growing out of the cliff wall. It appears that they grow right out of the rock, but they actually root in pockets in the rock where leaves composted into humus. We also observed Indian Pipe, a flowering plant that does not undergo photosynthesis, growing from the ledge. The drooping flower (the pipe part of the plant) is translucent and waxy, usually tinged white or pink. Later in the summer it turns black. The entire plant is only about four to ten inches high.

To continue your walk around the property, retrace your steps to the last intersection (about a hundred yards back) and go right in a northeasterly direction. This trail climbs a hill that appears to be an esker and then descends the esker on the other side. [An esker is a glacially formed ridge, caused when a stream beneath the glacier deposits stones and

sediments.] Where the trail forks stay right. Follow this trail a short distance to a T-intersection and turn right on this well-defined trail. You will know you are on the correct trail because it passes two metal monitoring pipes sticking up from the ground. The path leads across Uncas Brook. After crossing the brook the trail forks and you should bear right following the trail in a southeasterly direction for about a half-mile. At one bend in the trail Andy and I observed a pile of feathers where a grouse had apparently been killed by a predator such as a coyote, fisher, or fox.

At the next 4-way intersection turn left and in 5 minutes you will pass the cul-de-sac at Russet Hill Road. [NOTE: This is also an excellent access point to the Town Forest.] Along the trail is a plant called sweet fern, which is really not a fern at all, but a shrub which can grow up to two feet even in the most sterile soils. One way to identify this plant is to observe the leaf axle where there is a pair of yellow-green stipules, which look like horns. [Stipules are appendages at the base of leaves or leaf stalks, often in pairs.] The sweet fern scent is more pungent than sweet. When topsoil has been removed from the land, this is one of the first plants to spring up from the barren soil.

From the cul-de-sac it is about a ten-minute walk (staying straight on the trail) to reach a small pond by the Town Well #9. In the pond is Bur Reed, an aquatic plant with a long zigzag fronds bearing with half inch round green spiked fruit. Muskrat eat the entire plant, and waterfowl feed on the seeds. Also note the white water lily, which prefers shallow water and the pickerelweed with its purple flowers and arrow shaped leaves. Look for painted turtles basking on rocks and logs on sunny days. The best way to identify a painted turtle is by the yellow and red stripes on the neck, legs, and tail.

To complete this loop of the Town Forest retrace your steps for about five minutes and turn right on the first trail you arrive at. (A metal "Town Conservation Area" disc is nailed to a pine tree at the beginning of this trail.) This trail also crosses private property in the middle of the town forest.

[NOTE: Where trails cross private property, please respect the land and don't take anything or leave trash.]

This trail winds its way primarily downhill, passing through an opening in a stone wall. At the next intersection, about five minutes down the trail, turn right. The trail crosses back over Uncas Brook, passing by sweet pepper bush and ostrich ferns in the low-lying areas. The fragrant white flowers of the pepperbush bloom in July and its dry fruiting capsules remain into the winter to assist with identification. Large white pines shade the forest floor.

When you reach the next intersection, where the trail bends to the left, you are near the parking area. Pass by the trail coming in on the right and take the next trail on the right just 20 feet farther down. This is the original trail we started on and will lead you uphill and back to your car. Estimated hiking time is about one and a half hours.

Other possible hiking routes include:

- From Russet Hill Road: north on north/south-well #9 trail, then southwest down rocky trail, bear left at 3-way junction, and bear left again at second 3-way junction west on east/west trail, north at 4-way junction on north/south-well #9 trail back to cul-de-sac (estimated time, half-hour);
- From Summer Street, down pine grove trail, right on east/west trail, bear right over Uncas Brook, left at 3-way junction, then bear left again at second 3-way junction to wet ford/crossing over Uncas Brook. At end of that trail, turn left and the original Summer St. trail is 20 feet on your right, back up the hill through the pine grove (estimated time, half-hour);
- After having visited cliff and come back north over the esker trail, turn left on the east/west trail back up to the trail on left up through the pine grove to Summer St. (estimated time, half-hour).

Directions:

From King Street, go south on Summer Street .5 mile. Park on the left hand side of the road at dirt shoulder near opposite 373 Summer Street. [NOTE: Plans to provide signage and trail markings are in the works as of this writing, April, 2002.]

The Town Forest can also be accessed from the cul-de-sac at the end of Russet Hill Road.

Franklin State Forest

[WARNING: Hunting is Allowed at the State Forest. A state sign explains that late fall is when hunters are likely to be on the property: “While some species may be taken by licensed hunters on a year round basis, most hunting activity occurs between October 1 and February 29, with the most intense hunting occurring during the deer season between the last Monday of November and the 3rd Saturday in December.”]

An extensive network of trails and dirt roads awaits the explorer at Franklin State Forest, located in the southwest section of town. The trails are popular with both mountain bikers and hikers, and this review includes one section strictly for hikers and another designated as multi-use.

Multi-Use Dirt Roads and Trails

This two to three mile loop begins at the water tower by the YMCA on Forge Hill Road. Park your car along the Forge Hill Road beyond the Y and begin walking to the west, passing the water tower on the right. As the paved road turns to dirt, woods will be on your left and a commercial building on your right. In about a quarter of a mile you will reach a T-intersection where you should turn left. Mountain biking is difficult in this section as there are many large rocks in the trail.

A gray, lichen covered stonewall parallels the dirt road on the left, indicating this land was once cleared. Judging from the relative small size of the white pines and oaks, the land was probably pasture seventy-five to a hundred years ago. (If you look at old photographs of Franklin and the surrounding towns, you might be surprised to see how much of the town was open fields, with only a few trees, most of which were shade trees along the roadsides.)

The road evens out a bit, but throughout this loop the road alternates between extremely rough and rocky to packed dirt. The trail heads south and along the way you will pass side trails and through a couple intersections, continuing straight toward the south. When I reached the second intersection on my last hike here I surprised two deer, which bolted into the woods, white flags (tails) zigzagging, as they raced away.

After about a mile from the start there will be a trail on the left, which leads to the east and continues the loop. Before taking this left you may want to continue straight a short distance to a field where deer are sometimes seen. Scan the edge of the field not only for deer but also for fox and coyote. In Massachusetts we have both red fox and gray fox, with the red fox being the more predominant species. Both hunt the fields and woods for mice, birds, squirrels and other small mammals. The gray fox is the better climber of the two - it can even climb a tree after a squirrel! Coyotes are present throughout Massachusetts and are larger than fox, looking somewhat like a small German Shepherd.

While their fur is usually various shades of gray, I've seen tan and even rusty brown coyotes. The eastern coyote is a relative newcomer to Massachusetts, having migrated into the state in the 1950's. Although much attention has been given to the occasional coyote that roams through a neighborhood, they usually avoid humans. (In New England, the only coyote attack of which I am aware of occurred on Cape Cod when a coyote attacked a three year old boy.)

After scanning the field, return to the trail that heads east. This trail has so many rocks imbedded in the soil it looks like a cobblestone path, making it difficult for mountain biking. Stay on this easterly trail, ignoring various side trails. After proceeding about a half mile you will see a blue house on the right. (The house is located on Metcalf Road. A side trail leads to this road, and bikers who want to extend their ride on paved roads, may wish to follow Metcalf Road to Grove Street, and head north on Grove Street to Forge Hill Road and return to the water tower.)

Back on the trail heading east, you will soon come to a fork in the trail where you should bear left. The trail snakes through an area of large white pines and their fallen needles soften the path. A granite ledge crosses the trail and bikers should be on the lookout for this, because there is a three-foot drop to the other side of the ledge.

Passing a side trail on the left, you will soon arrive at a T-intersection. Turn left here and within three hundred feet you will pass through two intersections before arriving at Grove Street opposite the YMCA.

Estimated hiking time is about two hours. When I last brought my mountain bike here it took me about an hour because I frequently walked the bike through the rougher sections of the dirt roads and paths.

Hiking Path

The section of the State Forest between Grove Street and the utility corridor is designated for hiking only. The mile and half loop hike described here is a relatively easy 45 minute outing with moderate hills.

From the welcoming sign on Grove Street, follow the wide trail uphill through woods of oak and pine. (The trail is marked by small blue metal triangles nailed to trees.) After ten minutes of walking the trail passes through an opening in a stonewall where houses can be seen on the right. Stonewalls served as both boundary markers and fencing for livestock, and they were built with the aid of stone sleds or "stone boats" which were used to haul the rocks off the bony New England soil before plowing.

Stay straight on this main trail heading west, passing a side path on the left, and through another opening in a stonewall. A bench for resting is located along the side of the trail beneath the pines. This is a good spot to scan the forest floor for lady slippers, which bloom in the month of May. Their pink flower is a veined pouch growing on a stem

about a foot tall with two oval leaves at its base. The lady slipper, a member of the orchid family, can grow in the pine needles because it is an acid loving flower.

Twenty-five minutes of hiking will bring you to the power lines at the utility corridor. Our loop walk continues on the trail heading southeast to the left just before the power lines, but you may want to proceed to the open area beneath the power lines to look for deer, hawks, and other wildlife that visits the edges between wood and field.

Follow the blue triangles on the trail that cuts to the southeast just before the power lines. The beginning of this trail parallels the power lines and then curves deeper into the woods. Beech trees, identified by their smooth gray bark, line the trail as it zigzags through the woods. The leaves of the beech trees are oval-shaped with sharp toothed margins. They turn orange in the fall, then fade to a tan color with the texture of paper. During winter the leaves on the lower branches often remain on the tree, looking especially handsome in a backdrop of white snow. A wide assortment of wildlife feeds on the small beechnuts that fall from the trees. (In the western part of Massachusetts, black bears seek out beech trees for their nuts, and often times the bears will climb the trees. Claw marks in the bark of beech trees indicates which trees the bears climbed.)

The trail winds its way downhill, in an easterly direction. Just stay on this trail for a few minutes and you will arrive at the pull-off of the parking area.

Directions:

From the Franklin/Route 140 Exit off Route 495 take Route 140 toward Bellingham and in approximately 100 feet turn left onto Grove Street.

For the Multi-Use Trail, follow Grove Street to Forge Hill Street and turn left. Follow Forge Hill Street to the YMCA and park just beyond the Y on the shoulder of the road before the water tower.

For the hiking trail, follow Grove Street approximately .7 mile from Route 140 and park on the right shoulder of Grove Street next to the wooden sign for Franklin State Forest.

[WARNING: Hunting is Allowed at the State Forest. A state sign explains that late fall is when hunters are likely to be on the property: “While some species may be taken by licensed hunters on a year round basis, most hunting activity occurs between October 1 and February 29, with the most intense hunting occurring during the deer season between the last Monday of November and the 3rd Saturday in December.”]

The Charles River

Beginning as a spring on Honey Hill in Hopkinton, the Charles River meanders 80 miles before spilling into Boston Harbor. It's a wonderful river to explore, and often overlooked. If you can't get away to the wilds of Northern New England for a paddle, try the Charles and you just might feel the same sense of seclusion and wildness.

The Charles forms much of the boundary between Medway and Franklin, as it flows eastward toward Boston. The river enters Franklin from Bellingham near the Caryville Dam at Pearl Street/Beech Street Bridge by the intersection with Plain Street. It then flows eastward a couple miles and over the West Medway Dam then onward beneath Elm Street. After a flow of an additional mile it passes over the Medway Dam at Sanford Mill and winds another half mile to the Populatic Street/Walker Street Bridge. The river then passes through a mostly wooded one mile flow and spills into Populatic Pond on the Norfolk/Franklin line. The town of Franklin has also secured land on Plain Street where they are currently constructing a formal launch site.

There are two good launch sites in this section. The first is the one mentioned above -- the new launch site on Plain Street. The second is an informal launch site at the Populatic Street/Walker Street Bridge.

Walker Street to Populatic Pond

Perhaps the best canoeing on the Charles in Franklin and Medway begins at the Walker Street/Populatic Street Bridge following the river downstream to Populatic Pond, covering a short distance of about a mile and a half, which can be extended further into Norfolk and Millis. This paddle has its challenges, though, including stretches of quick water, the occasional fallen tree, and narrow passages. While I would not recommend this for first time paddlers, I do encourage those with a sense of adventure to give it try. The rewards are great; good fishing, great wildlife viewing and a secluded ride where few others bother to go. You will feel like you're in on the Amazon in the tropical jungles rather than on the Charles in suburban Boston.

On a July morning my son Brian and I set out to explore this stretch of river in my Old Town Pack canoe, with Brian sitting in the bow in a removable seat, and I in the stern. We negotiated the rapids the beneath the bridge, then let the river sweep us around a bend. Wherever the river slowed, we would cast our fishing lines into the slack water, catching a sunfish and a small bass. Brian commented that a log sticking out of the water looked just like an alligator, and so it did - especially with grape vines draped over the water giving the woods a jungle-like appearance.

In the marshes along the river paddlers will see two purple flowering plants. The one with the arrow shaped leaves and one to two foot flower stalk is the pickerel weed, a

native plant, while the other, taller plant is the purple loosestrife a non-native plant that has invaded our wetlands. Redwing blackbirds live in the wetlands and they can be seen crossing the river as you make your way downstream. I hold the redwing blackbird in high esteem because they are among the first migrant birds to return to New England after the winter, usually in early March.

The river flows beneath high tension wires where there is bank erosion due to the lack of trees and then, about a quarter mile from the start passes the remains of old stone bridge abutment, which was probably someone's favorite swimming hole in days gone by.

Brian was the turtle lookout in our vessel, and we did see several painted turtles sunning themselves on logs. We tried to sneak up on the turtles to catch one with our net but they always managed to slip into the water at the last minute. Painted turtles prefer slow moving rivers like the Charles with soft bottoms, vegetation and half-submerged logs. On a sunny day, up to a dozen turtles can sometimes be seen basking on a log.

The shallow water spots encountered earlier slowly give way to a slower, deeper river (deeper than I could thrust my paddle blade). In many stretches trees overhang the river from both sides giving the illusion that you are floating through a green tunnel. On a hot summer day the shade is relief, and so too the effect of the trees acting as a wind-block. The Charles has some good-sized large mouth bass, as Brian and I found out. I cast a minnow plug near a fallen tree and the water erupted when the bass shot to the surface and leaped a foot out of the river. Brian handled the net while we let the fish tire itself, then brought it gently toward the canoe. With one scoop of the net Brian had the fish in the net - a two pounder! We took a picture then released it to keep the fishing good for the next angler. (Beginning anglers should try fishing with live minnows, imitation minnow plugs or worms first, and then experiment with rubber worms bounced along the river bottom.)

About a half to three-quarter mile down the Charles, the river makes a hairpin turn to the left, very unusual considering the we couldn't see any bedrock forcing this change of direction. At the turn there is a house and dock, one of the few homes we passed on this section of the river. Red maples, oaks and an occasional willow line most of the riverbank. The red maple, also known as a swamp maple, doesn't mind "wet feet", and they can grow in wetlands as well as uplands. In the fall, these are the first trees to show splashes of color, sometimes as early as late August.

The next landmark you pass is a large oak tree on the left that looks like a good place for a rest. Just downstream, however, on the right bank is another good spot to stretch your legs, this one with a picnic bench in a small grassy spot. It was near this picnic spot that we spied a large painted turtle that seemed oblivious to our approaching canoe.

Back on the river, we could see the opening for Populatic Pond ahead of us, and at that moment were treated to the sight of a great blue heron, winging its way toward us, looking prehistoric and exceptionally large. In flight the great blue heron contracts its long neck into a bend and with massive wings and trailing legs it makes an impressive

sight. They nest high up in dead trees often at beaver ponds and feed on fish, snakes, frogs, and even small birds. The Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary in Norfolk leads walks to nearby heron rookeries.

The Populatic Pond shore has sections in Franklin, Norfolk, and Medway. The Charles enters the Populatic Pond in its northwest corner and the river exits from its northern end, just 200 yards away. (Paddlers reach the out flowing river by staying to the left along a marsh. The river is quite deep here and broader than the Franklin stretch.)

If You Go:

Be sure to wear a pair of old sneakers as you may have to portage around a fallen tree or drag the canoe in the summer through a rocky stretch. On my July outing there was enough water and channels around fallen trees so that we did not have to get out of the canoe.

Be sure to have a car or a ride waiting downstream, as the current is too swift to paddle back to the Walker/Populatic Street Bridge. My wife dropped Brian and I off at the bridge and then she met us at the Populatic Pond launch site an hour and a half later, which was just enough time to float the river and do a little fishing.

The Populatic boat launch is concrete and can accommodate trailered boats. To reach the launch follow Leland Street (near the Norfolk Airport) to Priscilla Street on the right. Priscilla Street turns into Lakeshore Street and the boat launch is directly ahead.

Mine Brook-Franklin

Although I've never paddled Mine Brook, a friend has and said intrepid paddlers may want to explore it all the way into the Charles and then continue your paddle upstream on the Charles if the current is not too strong. Mine Brook varies from five feet to ten feet wide with depths of just a few inches to over three feet. The stream flows mostly through marsh with cattails, loosestrife and swamp maples lining its banks. The suggested launch site was Beech Street and when I checked it out last summer I was surprised to find the brook had a strong current. The mouth of Mine Brook is about a mile and half from Beech Street and is backed up by the West Medway Dam forming more of a cove than a brook by the intersection with the old mill pond. Muskrat, herons, and an assortment of birds live in the wetlands along the brook, and pickerel and bass live in the brook.

The Plain Street Launch

The Plain Street launch will allow paddlers to explore the river between the Caryville Dam at Pearl Street and the West Medway Dam, a distance of approximately two miles. The river is narrow and in the summer and fall is quite shallow, so be prepared to drag your canoe over a few areas. About a third of a mile down-river the Charles passes beneath power lines, followed by the confluence of Hopping Brook on the left. Trees shading the river include swamp maple, oak, shagbark hickory, and ash. About a mile

from the launch site the Charles passes beneath the Franklin Street/Pond Street Bridge. A short distance further is the confluence of Mine Brook on the right, which is worth exploring. The river begins to back up in this area and care should be taken as you approach the West Medway Dam, especially in the springtime when the current can be deceptively strong.

There is no public access at the West Medway Dam so you will have to paddle back up-river to your car or back to the Pond Street Bridge if someone is going to pick you up.

Visiting the Sanford Mill Area

Although the Sanford Mill area is not recommended for canoeing it is still a nice spot to visit. Below the dam at the mill the river tumbles through a ravine, flexing its muscle as it courses around boulders. If you go down River Street on the Medway side of the river below the dam there is a trail that leads to the Charles beginning where River Street bends. The trail passes over an old canal and another mill site then onward to an area of rapids on the Charles. Be careful of poison ivy.

The Sanford Mill site is now condominiums. The first dam was built here in 1711 by Nathaniel Whiting and was used to harness water for a grist mill. It also served as the only bridge between Medway and Franklin at that time. Later owners of the dam and the land along the banks operated a cotton mill, named after Philo Sanford and his grandson Milton, who both owned shares of the business.

The Charles Northeast of Franklin (Populatic Pond to Medfield)

The paddle from Populatic Pond downstream and into the Charles is always a treat because there is a touch of mystery as you leave the open waters of the pond and enter the shaded confines of the Charles. The bass fishing is good in the river because the river is quite deep, and there are plenty of fallen trees behind which bass like to hide and stay sheltered from the current. From Populatic Pond to the River Road launch site is about a mile. Mill Brook enters at River Road and curious paddlers can make their way up this brook, which is surprisingly deep in spots.

For those looking for a paddle with a mixture of rocky rapids and long sections of flat water, the 3.5 mile run from the River Road Launch to Forest Road on the Millis/Medfield border is a great ride. Be sure to wear a life jacket and don't attempt to make the run during exceptionally high water unless you are experienced. During low water periods be prepared to drag the canoe through a couple scratchy areas. I've made the trip a few times, and it's always different--one time the river was moving so fast while I was playing a fish it turned my canoe around in a three sixty yet I was lucky enough to avoid a dunking. Other times the river has swept me beneath a low hanging branch and I was lucky to only lose my hat. But on most trips in the summer the quick water is low enough that I'm able to get out of my canoe and pull it over the shallows.

From the River Road Launch the canoeist quickly passes under Myrtle/Himelfarb Street Bridge, past the ice skating arena, through the boulder strewn wooded stretch beyond the large pool behind the arena and arrive at Pleasant Street in a half mile. More rapids await here because on the upstream side of Pleasant Street are the remains of an old dam, creating a hazard that should be scouted out before running. Beyond the bridge are more rapids then a beautiful stretch of flat water carries you through forest and farmland before arriving at the launch site at the Route 115 bridge. There are more rapids beneath and beyond this bridge, then its flat water through quiet woodlands all the way to Forest Street. If you are feeling ambitious continue your paddle a couple more miles through the forest and you will arrive at the headwaters of the great Millis/Medfield Marsh. There are launch sites all along the marsh, such as on Causeway street in Medfield at the Stop River near its entrance into the Charles. Route 109 has a launch site as does the Dover Road/West Street bridge. Southend Pond in Millis has another launch site and it is connected to the Charles via Bogastow Brook, which can be canoed. If you continue following the river past Route 27, you will leave the open marsh and enter a ravine known as Rocky Narrows (Trustees of Reservations owns this property) shaded by hemlocks and granite banks. In my book *Exploring the Hidden Charles*, I describe these few miles of paddling as the best the river has to offer.

In downstream stretches, such as the Great Millis-Medfield Marsh, the wind can come whipping up the river, often blowing your canoe backward. Kayaks slice through the wind better than canoes because they ride low on the water. Many people avoid kayaks, thinking they must be expert paddlers and learn to do an Eskimo roll, but most of the newer recreational kayaks have open cockpits, so that if you were to tip over, you pop right out. No lessons are needed, just wear a life jacket. The paddling comes naturally and you will be surprised at how fast you can glide across the river's surface - two to three times faster than a canoe. Best of all, kayaks come with a backrest, making them more comfortable than a canoe. The big drawback is that they are difficult to fish from!

Indian Rock

The Indian Rock Conservation Area has a network of short trails, but most first time walkers will want to see Indian Rock itself before heading deeper into the woods. To reach the rock simply follow the wide trail from the end of the cul-de-sac forty-five feet into the woods and then turn right on the first side trail. Follow the side trail thirty feet to where it forks and then bear right. This trail, which I'll call Indian Rock Trail, gradually heads uphill through white pine and oak. In about 200 yards you will see an open area of exposed granite ledge and grass, which is Indian Rock. The granite opening is about 50 feet long and 10 to 30 feet wide. Notice a handful of cedar trees that seem to grow directly out of the rock. They can be identified by their needlelike leaves with hard greenish-blue berries, which are eaten by birds such as cedar waxwings. Cedar wood is decay resistant and is used as fence posts, cabinets and cedar chests. There are also a few low-bush blueberry plants growing beneath the cedars and oaks. If you are here in the summer (mid-July to early August) the fruit should be ripe, but be careful not to confuse it with a similar looking plant, which also has berries. The real blueberries will be low to the ground and will be a dull blue color, while the imitators are a bit higher up and have a darker purple shine.

Few visitors to Indian Rock would guess that this was the site of a bloody ambush over 300 years ago as well as the scene of one of Franklin's Fourth of July celebrations at a later date. The rock gets its name from the ambush the colonials launched against an encampment of Native Americans during King Philip's War in 1676. The war, which was the bloodiest on a per capita basis in America's history, was named after a Wampanoag sachem whose English given name was Philip and whose native name was Metacom. Fought between the colonists and a handful of tribes such as the Narragansetts, Wampanoags, and Nipmucks, the war decimated both sides in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

In *King Philip's War: The History and the Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict*, co-author Eric Schultz explains that Franklin was once part of Wrentham which was abandoned before March 30, 1676, in the wake of the destruction at Lancaster and Medfield, and burned shortly after by the natives. Schultz writes that prior to Wrentham's destruction "a man by the name of Rocket, while searching for a lost horse, stumbled upon the camp of forty-two warriors. Returning to Wrentham, he recruited a dozen men who crept back to the camp and attacked shortly after daylight. A nineteenth-century Franklin historian named Mortimer Blake told the story:

The suddenness of the attack so confused the Indians who escaped the first shot that they rushed and leaped down a steep precipice of rock; where they, maimed and lamed by the fall, became speedily victims to the quick and steady aims of the whites. One or two only escaped to tell the fate of their comrades."

You can look off the edge of the rock, which drops down about 30 feet and use your imagination to conjure up images of this ambush. I found it easier to picture the attack

than the later oration and celebration, held here on July 4th, 1823 to commemorate this historic event!

To explore the rest of the Indian Rock Conservation Area, return to the wide trail at the end of the cul-de-sac and head into the woods in a northerly direction. The woods are typical of southern New England with white oak and white pine dominating. The white oak has leaves from 4 to 9 inches long with bluntly rounded lobes and the white pine has long slender needles. Beneath the trees are sassafras with two lobed mitten-shaped leaves or three lobed leaves. There is also poison ivy along the path that can either grow as a low, trailing plant or a climbing vine. It is identified by the three compound leaves with pointed tips.

After walking fifty feet you crest a small hill and follow along the edge of handsome stone wall indicating that at one time, like much of New England, these woods were pastures or agricultural fields. The large boulders in the stone wall and the absence of small rocks are a clue that the land here was probably used for pasture rather than for growing crops. (Farmers who cleared fields for planting would also put small rocks along the stone wall to make the soil better for growing crops and plowing.) The trees are either second or third growth, and none of the trees appear to be older than 150 years.

As you walk down the other side of the hill there is an overgrown field on your left filled with blackberries, ragweed, and a few saplings reclaiming the land. In the center of this opening enough water collects to support a handful of plants that like "wet-feet" such as the cat-tail.

The trail ends at the end of the field, and perhaps someday a Boy Scout or Girl Scout group could connect this trail with the one that led toward Indian Rock.

The final trail is the Forest Trail, which takes about a 20 minute round-trip walk to explore. Return to the intersection of trails near where you parked and follow the narrow trail. Continue straight at the fork where you turned left to Indian Rock. There are a number of American chestnut saplings growing out of old stumps, but unfortunately as soon as they begin to get established and reach twenty feet in height they are killed by the same fungus that destroyed all of New England's grand chestnut trees. This fungus was introduced to America from foreign soil and it strikes the trees at their tops moving downward, killing the tree by inches. You can identify the chestnut saplings by their large green leaves that have sharp teeth at their margins.

On my walk there were an assortment of birds along the Forest Trail including flickers, blue jays and chickadees. Deer tracks, identified by the heart shaped hoof marks, were also in the trail. There is also a vernal pool on the right of the trail. In the spring the pool will have stagnant water in it, but in the summer it will be dry. This means that no fish can live in it, which in turn allows amphibians such as salamanders and tree frogs to breed and live here in the spring without being preyed upon by fish. On the edge of the trail are Bracken Ferns, which can tolerate the rocky soil here. Their fronds are

triangular, about two to three feet long, on stout stems. The leaflets are oblong with blunt tips

Just beyond the damp area of the vernal pool the trail splits, and you should bear right. (The left side trail soon ends near some houses.) By staying on the Forest Trail you continue through the shaded woods on generally flat terrain. The trail ends when it reaches two roads, Concetta Way and Lost Horse Trail. Now that we know the story behind Indian Rock the street names, such as Lost Horse Trail, have new significance. There are also nearby streets with names such as Metacomet Lane, Wampanoag Road, and the street where we parked, King Philip's Road.

Directions:

From Chestnut Street and Jordan Road, follow Jordan Road .4 mile to Indian Lane. Turn left on Indian Lane and then take first left on King Philip Road. Go to the end of King Philip Road and park at cul-de-sac adjacent to woods. The trail starts here.

DelCarte Conservation Area
(Also Known as the Franklin Reservoir)

A few years ago my son Brian and I often stopped at Ernie DelCarte's bait shop located on one of the four ponds known locally as the Franklin Reservoir. Ernie loved kids, and he would always ask Brian how many fish he had caught lately and as we were leaving he would hand out a treat, such as a Twinkie, for Brian to eat. I once suggested to Ernie that he consider donating some of his land to a conservation society, but Ernie only smiled, seemingly uninterested. Imagine my surprise when I later learned that upon Ernie's death in October of 2000 his will instructed that his property be donated to the Franklin Conservation Commission to protect it from development.

Ernie could have sold off parcels of his property years earlier and retired a very rich man. Instead he operated his bait shop and lived modestly, holding onto his land while others sold out to developers. Town officials say the 136 acres of donated land was the most generous gift they have ever received. Franklin Town Administrator Jeff Nutting-- who has been a town official for the past 25 years in various towns-- told the Franklin Gazette "Not in all my years have I ever seen such a generous donation. It's unbelievable."

The small, shallow ponds at Franklin Reservoir have long been a popular fishing spot, but Ernie's will stipulates that fishing will not be allowed. I can recall Ernie telling me several times how some irresponsible anglers left litter along the pond, so this request came as no surprise to me. Walkers, however, will be allowed to explore the property, and there are a short network of trails from which to enjoy the woods and water.

[NOTE: At present writing, (April, 2002), the DelCarte Conservation Area is being mapped and on-site hazards are being mitigated by the Conservation Commission to enable safe public access. It is NOT expected to be open to the public until 2003. Please check with the Department of Community Planning at that time.]

From the parking area on the shoulder of Pleasant Street begin your walk by following the trail that slopes to the pond. White pine, oak and an under story of sassafras shade the pathway. After about five or ten minutes of walking you will reach an earthen dike that holds the water back in one of the southern ponds. The pond was probably created to provide water power for an old mill and as a reservoir that could be used in cranberry growing and irrigation.

I've often stood on the dike and seen osprey circling the pond. Osprey, also known as fish hawks, are best identified by their white underbelly, black markings on either side of their face, and long wings with a crook in the middle. Many people think that bald eagles are superior fish-catchers, but I once saw an osprey catch a fish only to be harassed by a bald eagle until it dropped the fish and the eagle then caught it in mid-air.

Other birds you are likely to see on the pond are Canada Geese and Mute Swan, both of which are causing trouble because of their burgeoning population. Many of the Canada Geese are no longer migrating, and some theorize this is due to interbreeding with geese kept as hunting decoys or from interbreeding with a larger sized subspecies of Canada Geese from the Midwest. When the geese stay in one body of water for too long they can pollute the water with their droppings. The pure white mute swan, while beautiful to look at, is causing it's own set of problems. These swans are not native to America and were introduced here from Europe. Since their introduction their population has increased dramatically, often to the detriment of native birds. Mute Swans are very aggressive and will sometimes drive other waterfowl away from a lake or pond. The swans also churn up the bottom of ponds while feeding on the aquatic vegetation.

The pond before you is quite shallow and is ringed by water lilies, cat-tails, and reeds. Surrounding the shoreline are swamp maples, also known as red maples, which can grow in continually wet soil. They are a hardy tree and can also flourish in relatively dry soil. Their leaves look similar to the sugar maple leaf, only smaller, and the swamp maples rarely grow more than 40-50 feet tall. In the autumn these are the first trees to turn color, sometimes showing brilliant red foliage as early as late August.

From the dike you can walk in one of three directions. First we will head across the dike, cross the stream on rocks, and arrive at a T-intersection where you should turn right, following the shoreline of the pond in a southerly direction. This trail leads to the train tracks about an eighth of a mile from dike. The trail ends here (these tracks are active). Back at the T-intersection, another trail heads to the east and it too ends at the railroad tracks. Perhaps one day the Conservation Commission could work with school groups or Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to make a loop trail.

Crossing the dike back to the Pleasant Street side of the pond, you will see a trail heading to the northeast. Delicate marsh ferns and other fern species line the path. After five minutes of walking you will arrive at a clearing at the northern pond, which provides a good vantage point to scan the water and air above for wildlife. On my last visit I watched two turkey vultures (large black birds) circling in the thermal updrafts above the water. The trail continues a short distance to the north before ending.

Directions:

The DelCarte Property is located on the southeast side of Pleasant Street. Park off the shoulder of the Pleasant Street about a hundred yards north from Flintlock Road.

Beaver Pond

Most Franklin residents know Beaver Pond as a swimming site or for its soccer fields, but there is also a woodland trail along the east and south shores. The pond also offers good fishing for largemouth bass and there is a boat launch just west of the main parking lot. Bass fishing is best at dawn and dusk, but every now and then I've caught good-sized fish in full sunlight at 2 or 3pm. Rubber worms bumped slowly on the bottom near drop-offs, islands and logs almost always catch bass. The trick with fishing a rubber worm is to let the fish fully inhale the worm before setting the hook. The initial pick-up by the bass will feel like a tiny tug or two on your line. When that happens drop your rod tip and let the fish glide off with your rubber worm for a second before lifting your rod to set the hook. Then hang on for a fun fight. I practice catch and release to keep the fishing good for future generations.

The hiking trail at the pond begins to the left of the beach. Follow the sand beach to the left (as you face the pond) and you will soon see a dirt road, which is the start of the trail. A wide variety of trees grow along the trail including white oak, white pine, red oak, and red maple.

The trail is wide and level making it an easy walk for people of all ages, and because it is on a dirt road you don't have to worry too much about the ticks that cause Lyme disease, because they are usually in overgrown grassy areas. (When going through grassy or brushy areas wear long pants and pull your socks up over the end of your pants leg. When a deer tick does bite it often leaves a bulls-eye type rash, and you should see a doctor immediately as that is a sign the tick was transmitting Lyme disease.) A few hundred yards down the trail is an opening in the trees and brush along the pond, offering walkers a good vista over the water. The leaves and flowers of water lilies add color to the blue water and small islands can also be seen. A couple of the islands are actually floating islands of sphagnum moss. One boater recently told me they saw a sundew plant growing at the edge of the pond. Sundew are carnivorous plants that trap insects in their leaves and then digest the insect with their enzymes.

On my last walk here I stopped at the opening in the brush and watched an angler in a canoe cast for bass along the shoreline. It was early morning and wisps of fog hung over the water. Sometimes I could see the fisherman and other times he was obscured by the fog. I also saw several Canada Geese floating in the pond. (From time to time the beach must be closed because too many geese were in the pond, contaminating it with their droppings.) In the late spring this area is a good place to look for snapping turtles that will emerge from the pond and lay their eggs in sandy depressions they dig a short ways from the shoreline. When the turtles are on land they are vulnerable and will defend themselves. The slow-moving snapping turtle can lunge with its neck rather quickly so give it a wide berth. Snappers are beneficial to ponds, eating the dead fish that would otherwise cause pollution. The snappers' enemies are skunks and raccoons that locate their eggs and dig them up and eat them.

Continuing down the trail, you will soon come to a T-intersection where you should turn right. You will also see the wetlands of Mine Brook on your left. After walking about five or ten more minutes you will reach the southern end of the pond and another trail intersection where you should turn right. On your left is Route 495. Proceed farther on the path and you will come to a nice stand of beech trees, identified by their smooth gray bark. Even during the winter time the tan papery leaves of the beech tree will still cling to lower branches.

The trail ends near Route 495 and you should retrace your steps to return to the parking area. Total walking time is about 40 minutes.

Directions:

From Route 140 and Beaver Street, follow Beaver Street .4 mile to the parking lot on the right.

Swimming:

The swimming area is known as the J. Walter Chilson Memorial Beach, and is usually open from July 1st to Labor Day from 9a.m. to 7p.m. There is a bathhouse with restrooms and snack bar. A T-shaped dock has been placed in deep water for swimmers. Lifeguards are on duty during summer months. Check with the town for current information. Because of the number of water fowl residing in the pond, it is sometimes closed to swimmers and even boaters in the later summer. Contact the Recreation Department for current information at 508- 520-4984.

Dacey Farm

In 1996 the town of Franklin bought the former Dacey Farm for approximately a million dollars. Originally the land was considered for a school site and ball fields, but today it is conservation land. In my opinion the purchase of the farm was a wonderful investment. Almost all the old farms in town have been developed into housing lots but the 100 acres of the old Dacey Farm will remain open space for future generations to enjoy.

On my first visit to the Dacey Farm I was accompanied by Conservation Commissioner Richard Vacca and Nick Alfieri who works in the town Department of Community Planning. We parked at the end of the dirt road where the Dacey farmhouse once stood. First time visitors should spend a moment here because the land slopes away to the northwest providing good views of the former pasture reverting to woodland. This is also a good spot to brush up on your tree identification skills because the few trees growing here stand alone rather than mixed in a forest.

Rich, Nick and I identified several different species of trees scattered around the old farmhouse, starting with the grand old white oak closest to where the home's foundation can be seen. The white oak has smooth leaf edges whereas the red oak has points on the lobes of its leaves. Just beyond the farm foundation to is a shagbark hickory easily identified by the shaggy layers of bark that hang loosely from the tree's trunk. Next to that is a large conifer, with small green needles and drooping branches. This is a Norway spruce, probably planted here over a hundred years ago. On the west side of the entrance road are a handful of remaining apple trees from the orchard and a couple grape vines.

Our visit occurred in late October and several bluebirds were perched in the brush around the white oak tree, occasionally swooping down to grab an insect from the grass below. Bluebirds flock together in the fall and while most migrate to warmer climates a few hardy ones winter over. The fields around the access road at the Dacey Farm would make a great place to erect a "bluebird nesting trail." Bluebird nesting boxes should be erected on poles, about head high, in sunny areas. Other small birds will use the boxes, such as house wrens and tree swallows, so several boxes are not needed to increase the odds of attracting bluebirds.

The start of the main trail through the property begins to the right where mounds of soil have been dumped. You will see one trail directly ahead but the main trail is to the right leading downhill through the overgrown trees toward some white pines. Rich and Nick explained that the trail we were walking was the northern end of the Trans Franklin Trail. "Plans are in the works," said Rich, "to mark the trails here at the Dacey Farm. Our overall goal is to continue to acquire land so that someday this trail will continue all the way to the Charles River."

As we headed down into the lowlands alder trees lined the path, indicating that the ground below us was moist. In several areas where small patches of grass grew we noted where deer had bedded down. In another spot where a wild crab apple grew in an open

area we saw where the deer had circled the tree to get the fruit. A short distance down the path another trail branches off to the left, but the Trans Franklin Trail continues straight ahead. Soon the trail passes over Shepard Brook on an earthen bridge covering two culverts. On the right side the brook opens up a bit where cattails line the banks. (Cattails have edible roots.) Nick said that on his summer walk he often sees a turtle sunning on a log here.

After crossing the stream you will see a side trail to the left but the Trans Franklin Trail continues straight ahead. (Later in this review we will discuss this side trail.) Another side trail goes off to the right heading towards some large white pines. Because these trees stand taller than the rest above the meadow of alders, hawks often perch here to survey the land below. Owls, such as great horned owls, will often spend the days resting near the tops of the trees before they venture out on their nocturnal hunts. While rabbits, mice and voles are the great horned owls primary prey, they also will swoop down and kill skunks!

Continuing on the main Trans Franklin Trail, the alders and small trees are replaced by oaks and pines. Some wooden boards have been laid across a wet area that the trail crosses. In the spring there is a vernal pool here. Because vernal pools are seasonal they are devoid of fish, which means that amphibians such as tree frogs and salamanders can hatch without the threat of being eaten by fish. The trail then climbs a small hill. A side trail goes off to the right and another to the left, and both should be ignored. A home can be seen through the woods on the right and the trail forks here. The true Trans Franklin Trail goes off to the left just this intersection, but as of this writing the trail is overgrown. If you bushwhack a little ways to the left you would arrive at Cranberry Drive. The Trans Franklin Trail intersects Cranberry Drive at house #9, and plans are underway to mark the trail on both sides of the road so that hikers can continue southward toward the trails next street crossing at Bridal Path (see the section in this book reviewing the Trans Franklin Trail.)

If you wish to return to your car at the Dacey Farm you might want to make a loop walk on the roadways by walking east on Cranberry Drive to its intersection with Winterberry Drive where you should turn left to reach Lincoln Street. At Lincoln Street turn left and head back to the Dacey Farm. If you wish to stay on wooded trails you will have to retrace your steps on the Trans Franklin Trail. To add a little variety to return route you might want to make a detour on a side trail that loops back to the Trans Franklin Trail. Be warned, however, that you will either have to take your shoes off or get your feet wet where the trail crosses Shepard Brook. To reach this side trail, retrace your steps down through the woods. Just after you pass the trail on the left that leads toward the large white pines and just before you reach Sheppard Brook, there will be a trail on your right. This trail first winds through small white pines then begins to head southward through larger stands of pines before it reaches Sheppard Brooks and crosses then eventually reconnects with the Trans Franklin Trail near the parking area.

The Dacey Farm has become one of my favorite properties because of its open vistas and mixture of fields, wetlands, and upland woods of pine and oaks.

The total round trip walk from the parking lot to Cranberry Drive and back again takes about 50 minutes. We are fortunate to have the Dacey Farm open to the public and I'm convinced that with each passing year our appreciation for preserving the open space will increase.

Directions:

From the merge of Maple and Lincoln Streets near Saint Mary's Church and the town Common, follow Lincoln Street 2.1 mile until you see a green steel gate and dirt road on the left. Turn down the dirt road and park at its end.

Uncas Pond and Trout Fishing

The Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Department stocks trout in the following Franklin ponds and streams each spring: Uncas Pond, Miscue Brook and Dix Brook. Nearby Lake Pearl in Wrentham is also stocked. The amount and species of trout that are stocked varies from year to year. Usually the stocking begins in mid-March. The public can call the Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Department for stocking information at 978-263-4347 for the latest stocking schedule or find the information on their web-site at www.masswildlife.org.

Uncas Pond:

Uncas Pond is a small pond with a boat launch for canoes, kayaks and small boats. Part of the pond abuts the golf course. A few homes as well as the Franklin Rod and Gun Club also overlook the pond. Because there really isn't any foot access along the pond, your best bet would be to launch a canoe.

Directions:

From the intersection of Summer and King Streets, follow Summer Street 1.2 miles to Florence Street on the left. Take Florence Street to its end and there is a large parking area on the left with a dirt road leading to the launch site. The unpaved parking area is on the left **before** the end of the street. The access road is in far Northwest corner of the parking area, It is not well marked. [NOTE. The access road is steep and rough.]

Southern New England Trunkline Trail **(SNETT)**

One of Franklin's lesser-known recreation paths is actually one of the longest trails in southeastern Massachusetts. Officially known as the Southern New England Trunkline Trail, but commonly referred to as the SNETT, this pathway begins in Franklin on Grove Street and heads westward. The SNETT is still a work in progress, but already it is 18 miles long. The goal is to have a continuous trail running 23 miles from Franklin to the State Forest in Douglas, Mass. (From Douglas the trail continues into Connecticut, adding an additional 25 miles.)

The trail is actually the site of a former railroad bed, which is one reason why it is relatively flat and straight. It's a good trail for walking, especially for those who want to avoid steep hills. Mountain bikers may also want to try the trail, but be warned that some sections are quite rocky and others have a series of two foot dips. (Off Road Vehicles are prohibited but have contributed to erosion here in the past.) Most of the Franklin portion of the trail passes through woods of red and white oak, white pine, swamp maple, and staghorn sumac.

The beginning of the trail is marked by a large wooden sign on Grove Street, about a half mile north of King Street and about 2 miles south of Route 140. There is parking along the shoulder of Grove Street. The SNETT heads westward along the southern border of the Franklin State Forest. After a few minutes of walking, you will see a trail going off to the right. This connects with the Franklin State Forest. After a length of about three fourths of a mile the SNETT crosses Spring Street just south of Wadsworth Farm, and then after another three quarters of a mile it crosses Prospect Street – at least on the map. In fact, this section is difficult to get through since the former railroad underpass was filled in years ago meaning that you must climb a steep embankment, cross Prospect, and then make a matching descent on the other side. State planners hope to eventually repair this “gap” in the trail.. The trail then forks, and walkers and bikers should stay to the right, heading down a small hill. You will know you are on the SNETT because a large granite block retaining wall parallels the trail on the left, reminding you that this was once a railroad bed. This stretch of the trail is my favorite because it lies in a mini-valley with forty foot slopes on either side, providing total shade in the summertime. From here, the SNETT passes into Bellingham where it crosses Lake Street about a half mile from Prospect Street.

The potential for the SNETT trail is enormous, but a grass roots effort is needed to initiate funding for improvements. Ron Clough, of the state Department of Environmental Management, has been instrumental in raising awareness about the trail's existence, and now wants to see the public help push the state for funding to rehabilitate the SNETT. There is currently no one regional advocacy group dedicated to the SNETT, but those interested should call Clough at 508-543-5840 or contact the Town of Franklin Open Space Committee.

There are many strategies to improve the trail, but the first step is for people to get out and enjoy it, and recognize the recreational potential that the SNETT offers. The next steps would be to acquire the missing links in the trail, which are in Bellingham and Blackstone, while also seeking funding for maintenance and improvements. My personal dream for the trail is to make it a paved bike path, similar to the Cape Cod Rail Trail and the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway. Imagine being able to ride your bicycle from Franklin to Connecticut without worrying about traffic!

Directions:

From the intersection of Route 140 and Grove Street follow Grove Street south past the Franklin State Forest Sign to the SNETT sign on the right hand side of the road. The SNETT sign is approximately 2 miles from Route 140, or if you are coming from King Street follow Grove Street North for half a mile until you see the SNETT sign on the left. (If you decide to leave a second car on Prospect Street, the SNETT intersects Prospect Street about one mile north of its intersection with Washington Street.)

Section II: OVERVIEW OF NEARBY HIKES

-- Foxboro and Wrentham

-- Medway, Holliston and Hopkinton

-- Medfield, Norfolk, Millis, Dover, Sherborn

Foxboro and Wrentham

Harold B. Clark Town Forest

Foxboro

This town forest includes a loop trail around a pond. There is also an earthen dike, and a small stream. Approximate walking time is 40 minutes. The pond is a man-made mill pond and is approximately 170 years old. The trail is part of the Warner Trail which runs from Canton MA to Cumberland RI. It's possible to drag a canoe down to the pond. Bass and pickerel inhabit this shallow body of water. There is a small deer herd on the property.

Directions:

From Route 95 take exit 7 and follow the signs along Route 140 North to Foxboro. Go about 4 miles from the exit ramp (passing through Foxboro Center) and look for Lakeview Street on your left. Turn left on Lakeview Street and travel a half mile to Forest Street on your right. Turn right into Forest and park at its end (just .2 miles down Forest Street).

Joe's Rock/Birchold Farm

Wrentham

These two properties, both owned by the Wrentham Conservation Commission are adjacent to one another on West Street. Joe's Rock features a trail to a cliff overlooking a pond with side trails along the pond itself. The walk to the cliff is an easy one, and children will enjoy the feeling of accomplishment when they reach the top and enjoy the vista. Birchold Farm has trails that skirt meadows where there is great birding and one trail that heads into the woods. Along the woodland path are boulders known as glacial erratics because of the way they haphazardly fell off retreating glaciers some 12,000 to 15,000 years ago. Be on the lookout for a strange bulge, measuring two feet by three feet, growing from an oak tree. The proper name for this growth is a burl, and this is one of the bigger ones I've seen.

Directions:

From Route 495, take the King Street/Franklin Exit. Head toward Woonsocket (southwest) and just a hundred feet from the highway exit, turn left onto Upper Union Street. Follow Upper Union Street (it will turn into Arnold Street) 2.9 miles to its end at West Street/Route 121. Turn right onto West Street/Route 121 and proceed .8 mile to the parking lot on the right. (Joe's Rock is on the north side of West Street and Birchwold Farm is across the street.)

F. Gilbert Hills State Forest
Wrentham/Foxboro

With over 900 acres to explore F. Gilbert Hills State Forest provides hikers with miles of trails to discover. In the 1930's The Civilian Conservation Corps was active here, digging water holes to fight fires and constructing dirt roads that crisscross the property. Part of the twenty-five mile Warner Trail also passes through the Forest, as it connects Canton, Massachusetts to Cumberland Rhode Island.

Children will enjoy the Blue Triangle Loop Trail, which winds for about a mile and a half through woodlands of spruce, pine, hemlocks, oak and a scattering of large glacial boulders. Ruffed grouse and ring-necked pheasant live in the woods as well as coyote, deer, raccoon, fox, skunk and opossum. For adults interested in a hike of four and half miles, try the High Rock Road/Acorn Trail Loop. (At the parking area and administration building there are maps available and restrooms.)

[NOTE: If you are going to walk the property in November and December it is safer to do so on Sundays when hunting is not allowed.]

Directions:

From I-95 take Exit 7 and follow Route 140 north about 1.7 miles to Foxboro Center. At Foxboro Center go almost all the way around the rotary and take South Street (which will be on your right after you go around the rotary) for a mile and a half, then turn right onto Mill Street. Go 0.5 mile on Mill Street to the entrance. Parking is across the street from the Forest Fire Station and the forest administration building.

Medway, Holliston and Hopkinton

Waseeka Wildlife Sanctuary

Hopkinton

This Audubon property has a loop trail around a shallow pond, which is excellent for birding (great blue heron, goshawk, ducks, great horned owl). Approximate walking time is one hour. This is a good walk for kids: an easy trail with a chance to see frogs, mink, painted turtles and snapping turtles in the late spring. At the back end of the pond there are some massive white pines.

Directions:

Take Route 495 to Exit 21A (West Main St., Hopkinton) then follow to Hopkinton Center. Merge with Route 135. Take first right after Weston Nurseries onto Clinton Street. Sanctuary is 2.1 miles on the left.

Choate Park

Medway

Choate Park is a good choice for a brief outing with children. The park features a pond, stream, playground, ball fields, basketball and tennis courts and a trail through the woods that has fitness stations erected at various intervals. In the summer, Medway residents, use the pond for swimming.

Directions:

At the intersection of Route 109 and Franklin Street follow Route 109 east to Mechanic Street on the left which leads to the park.

Medfield, Norfolk, Millis, Dover, Sherborn

Shattuck Reservation

Medfield

Shattuck Reservation is a 225-acre wooded property featuring a walk down to the Charles River where you might see muskrat, otter, mink and fox. Approximate round trip walking time is one hour. This is a lesser-known property so you usually will have it all to yourself. There are three different path from Causeway Street. The forest is mostly white pine and oak with red maple growing near the river. Look for pink lady slippers growing beneath the pines. Be sure to head north on Causeway Street before leaving to check out the bridge over the Stop River. This is a good canoe launch site, and the Stop River leads into the Charles.

Directions:

From the intersection of Routes 27 and Route 109 in Medfield take Route 109 west .1 mile then go left on Causeway Street. The Reservation is on the right .2 mile beyond the wooden bridge over the Stop River.

Medfield Rhododendrons

Medfield

Hidden in the 196 acre reservation known as the Medfield Rhododendrons, are clusters of wild rhododendrons, which grow near the floodplain for the Stop River drainage. The classification of rhododendrons growing here are known as Rosebay, one of only 3 evergreen species native to eastern North America. These plants are relatively rare and this is their northern most range. Efforts have been made to revive the colony, which have been damaged by browsing deer. A barrier fence had been erected, a few small hemlocks have been cut to reduce shading, and dead stems from the rhododendrons have been removed to invigorate new growth.

The trail leading to the rhododendrons first parallels a private driveway and winds through a forest of hemlocks and pines.

Directions:

The parking area is located at the intersection of Route 27 and Woodbridge Road (south of the center of Medfield, adjacent to a church)

Noon Hill Reservation

Medfield

Noon Hill Reservation offers the nature lover a one hour hike through ash, oak, and white pine on a gradual climb to the top of Noon Hill which has partial view. The property also has a small pond, called Holt Pond, which was once a mill pond but now is home to a variety of wildlife.

Directions:

From the intersection of Routes 27 and 109 in Medfield take Route 109 west .1 mile. Then take Causeway Street on your left for 1.3 miles before turning left on Noon Hill Street. A small parking area is located at the .2 mile mark.

Chase Woodlands & Peters Reservation

Dover

The Chase Woodlands and the Peters Reservation are adjacent to one another in Dover. Both have loop trails that take about 45 minutes to complete.

The Peters Reservation principal features are the path along the Charles River, and impressive stand of red pine and several Dexter rhododendron bushes that bloom in late spring. Muskrat, otter, raccoon, weasel, deer, kingfishers, hawks, great blue herons, ruffed grouse, and a wide assortment of waterfowl can be seen.

Chase Woodlands is a relatively new property managed by the Trustees of Reservations and it features a beautiful hemlock grove The needles of the hemlock are quite acidic, and because they litter the under story, few other trees are able to sprout. Although the hemlock trees look healthy, there is cause for concern due to the arrival of the woolly adelgid, a tiny insect accidentally brought to the United States from Asia. Some places in Connecticut have seen hemlocks dying by the hundreds due to this infestation.

Chase Woodlands also has an impressive stand of large white pines. Although people refer to these as "Cathedral Pines", they are not old growth. In the late 1700's and early 1800's Chase Woodlands was all farm land as evidenced by the stonewalls that criss-cross the property. The forest here now is all second and third growth, with dominant tree being oak, red maple and white pine.

Directions:

Parking for Chase Woodlands and the Peters Reservation is located on Farm Street in Dover, just .3 mile north of the intersection of Farm Street and Bridge Street near the Charles River. Dogs are not allowed.

King Philip Overlook & Rocky Narrows
Sherborn

Rocky Narrows is a reservation along the Charles River in Sherborn that has a wild, north-country feel to it, making it popular with outdoor lovers from metro-west. At one time access was only via canoe but now walkers can reach the reservation from Route 27 in Sherborn. The highlight of the walk is the King Philip Overlook, which offers a fantastic view of the Charles River. (Some walkers may want to continue farther down the trail for the partial view offered at the Rocky Narrows overlook.) Be forewarned that this reservation has many unmarked trails and more than once I've been lost here--so allow plenty of time before dark! The walk takes about an hour and half.

The reservation has a nice stand of hemlocks and many granite outcroppings. Canoeing on the Charles through Rocky Narrows is a great trip, and provides a nice contrast with the open marsh just upstream in Millis and Medfield.

Directions:

From the intersection of Route 115 and 27, take route 27 north for .3 mile to parking area on the right.

Oak Grove Farm

Millis

Many of the former farm fields at Oak Grove Farm are reverting back to woodlands, with the opportunistic white pine and cedars among the first trees to get established. The fields and woods are home to a wide assortment of wildlife, particularly birds and hawks such as kestrels and red-tailed hawks. The property features an impressive row of oaks and the open fields are a great place to fly a kite.

Directions:

From the intersection of Route 109 and Route 115 go north on Route 115. Follow Route 115 for 1.1 mile and look for the Oak Grove Farm sign and parking lot on the right.

Stony Brook Reservation

Norfolk

This is another recommended nature walk for children. A long boardwalk over a marsh is perfect for children to lie down and peer into the water below. I've done this with my kids and we've seen sunfish, minnows and a very large snapping turtle. A butterfly garden is always a big hit with the children, and nearby at the base of a small waterfall, I've often seen a great blue heron stalking the stream for fish. Inside the Nature Center are wildlife displays and educational information that are of interest to children and adults alike. With the aid of an assistant, the trail to the boardwalk and the boardwalk itself can be navigated by wheelchair.

Each season has opportunities for wildlife watching such as the gathering of wood ducks in the fall before the migration, winter watching of deer without foliage on the trees to block the view, snapping turtles emerging from the mud in the springtime as they prepare to lay their eggs, and butterflies and bluebirds in the fields during the summer.

Besides the circular walk around the pond there are lesser-known trails on the opposite side of North Street from the parking lot.

Stony Brook offers a variety of educational programs, including guided hikes for children and adult field trips.

Directions:

From Norfolk Center follow North Street and Stony Brook will be on your left.

Campbell Forest
Norfolk

A short walk from Norfolk Center, Campbell Forest provides an oasis of green with easy access. The property features many beech trees identified by their smooth gray bark and pointed leaves which turn gold in the early fall and tan in the late fall. Even during winter the beech tree provides color as most of the leaves on the lower branches stay on the tree. There are a few boulders on the property, a small vernal pool and a camping area used by the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

On one of my visits to Campbell Forest I had the good fortune to meet Matt Carr who was building and cutting trails for his Eagle Scout project. Prior to Matt's work, there was only one narrow trail that led to the camping area, but Matt had widened that trail and created a new one that allows walkers to make a loop. When I asked Matt what kind of wildlife he'd seen on the property he told me an interesting story. "I was working on the trail alone one morning when I felt something watching me. I looked up and I saw a dark brown animal, about the size of a large cat, staring at me from the woods. It quickly disappeared into the brush but then it dashed across the trail. I thought that was the end of it but it later reappeared behind me. It started circling me, keeping about thirty feet away, but the each circle was getting a bit closer. Finally it moved silently off, deeper into the forest."

As Matt described the animal's behavior and appearance I thought it might be a fisher, a large member of the weasel family. I asked him if its legs were short and did it move low to the ground. He confirmed that it did, so I described the face of fisher (not nearly as pointed as a mink or weasel, but more rounded with intense dark eyes. The more we talked the more I became convinced that what he saw was indeed a fisher, which are usually nocturnal and secretive. Perhaps, I said to Matt, its den was nearby and it was investigating you.

Directions:

From Norfolk Center head south on North Street. A parking area is on the left

Lind Farm Conservation Land
Norfolk

The 64 acres of the Lind Farm are adjacent to another property encompassing 25 acres known as Pondville Conservation Property, together forming one of Norfolk's largest tracks of open space. Open space advocate Maryann Magner told me that she considers these reservations "keystone properties because they anchor other nearby natural areas." She also pointed out that the Lind Farm fields, forest of softwoods and hardwoods, glacial erratics, and wildlife ranging from fox to deer to migrating warblers and butterflies. The property features a vernal pool, which acts as a nursery for salamanders and wood frogs in the spring, and also yields bright red cranberries in the fall.

Directions:

The Lind Farm is located in Norfolk near the Wrentham line. From the intersection of North Street and Shears Street, follow North Street south to the first dirt road on your left, which is the entrance to the conservation land.