

Fitchburg Trail Guide

Detailed Trail Descriptions, May 2019

Prepared by the Fitchburg Trails Vision Committee, a volunteer group working with the City of Fitchburg

Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (1st of 13 trails)

Note: To view a trail map of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary trails, please visit www.massaudubon.org and select Trails/Flat Rock.

Many of these trails connect to trails within the Crocker Conservation Area and within the City's Northern Watershed lands.

TRAIL NAME: **Flat Rock Road Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: North end of paved portion of Flat Rock Road at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk

PARKING: North end of paved portion of Flat Rock Road at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk – There are spaces for approx. 8 cars around this cul de sac.

DISTANCE: 0.75 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Exposed rounded ledges along some portions. Not recommended when wet or icy.

SURFACE: Up to intersection with Pipeline Path, stones and soil. Remainder is flat, glacially eroded rock surface. Hazardous when wet or icy.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: Flat Rock Road Path was an old roadway and leads up to an area known as "the Bald" that dramatically contrasts to the rest of the Sanctuary. Much of the surface there is bare granite rock covered with lichens, mosses, and accumulated pitch pine needles. As soils accumulate, pitch pine is being replaced by white pine seedlings and saplings.

Flat Rock Road Path begins at the trailhead, traversing along the north berm of Overlook Reservoir for 0.2 mi where it passes Pipeline Path exiting right, to the east. At 0.4 mi from the kiosk, the Link Path diverges on the left (to the west) toward the Ashburnham Hill Road parking lot. About 100 yards to the west from that intersection is a highbush blueberry/sphagnum moss swamp lying within a pocket within the otherwise flat granite. Flat Rock Road Path continues in a northerly direction across the high flat area ("the Bald", elev. 951'), then descends gradually and occasionally more steeply into a young white pine and hemlock forest to meet with Scott Road Path after 0.75 mi, where it terminates.

A fine, ~1.5-mi loop walk begins at the trailhead on Flat Rock Road Path, follows Pipeline Path to the north, thence briefly west (left) on Scott Road Path and returns south (left again) via Flat Rock Road Path back to the starting point.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (2nd of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: **Hemlock Hill Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Kiosk at parking lot just north of UMass Health Alliance (Burbank) Hospital's Mechanics Street entrance (275 Nichols Rd., Fitchburg). From that address, bear right to the northern end of the parking lot.

PARKING: Kiosk at above-mentioned parking lot

DISTANCE: 0.55 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not by wheelchair

SURFACE: Compacted forest trails

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: Begin at the kiosk by following the Main Path a short distance. After entering the woods, take the path on the left (west) up the hill, which is the Burbank Connector. Continuing up the hill, bear left at each of two intersections, which are each short cuts that connect to the Hemlock Hill Path further along. At 0.2 mi from the Main Path, and just north of the Highlands Building of UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital, Hemlock Hill Path and Pigpen Path each turn to the right. Although they more or less parallel each other, Pigpen Path continues to the left (west) of Hemlock Hill Path. Turn right (head north) to continue on Hemlock Hill Path. After topping a rise within a pure, mature stand of Eastern Hemlock trees, a short trail exiting to the left provides a connection with Pigpen Path to the west. Continuing straight (generally north), Hemlock Hill Path ends at a tee with Pigpen Path.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (3rd of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Laurel Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Crocker Conservation Area kiosk, at the top (north end) of Flat Rock Road.

PARKING: Flat Rock Road kiosk – There are spaces for approx. 8 cars around this cul de sac.

DISTANCE: 0.55 mi

DIFFICULTY: Easy

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible due to wetness

SURFACE: Compacted broadleaf forest trail

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: Starting from the Crocker Conservation Area kiosk, walk back down the paved road southeast toward the city. After 0.15 mi, turn left onto the Laurel Path, immediately passing an old stone foundation on the right. Laurel Path continues to the north across the headwaters of Punch Brook (a small stream) until after 0.4 mi it ends at its intersection with Pigpen Path. A roughly parallel trail, which is slated for elimination, may be encountered just uphill (NW) of Laurel Path.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (4th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: **Lightning Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Lightning Path runs between the Main Path, Pigpen Path and Pipeline Path.

PARKING: Any of the following: End of Scott Rd. off of Rindge Rd; UMass Health Alliance (Burbank) Hospital parking lot at MassAudubon kiosk; or Flat Rock Rd. parking lot at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk.

DISTANCE: 0.45 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible

SURFACE: Compacted forest soil

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: At the intersection of the Main Path and Scott Road Path near the north end of the Sanctuary, walk a few steps south along the Main Path and the beginning of Lightning Path will be encountered on the right. Its beginning portion goes toward the west, after which it bends sharply to the south/southeast. It is a more varied treadway going to the south until one reaches Pigpen Path on the left. (Only 0.1 mi downhill on Pigpen Path from this point is its intersection with Main Path. A right turn (south) on Main Path leads back to the Flat Rock Rd. kiosk and parking lot.) Continuing on Lightning Path from its intersection with Pigpen Path, Lightning Path zig-zags right up the hill, then left, then right again until it intersects and ends at Pipeline Path. An apparent shortcut part way up is blocked by a downed tree trunk. The zig-zag portion of the Lightning Path is an important connection between the Main Path system of trails and the Flat Rock Road Path trails.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (5th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: **Link Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: MassAudubon kiosk on Ashburnham Rd., approx. 1 mi north of its intersection with West St., Fitchburg.

PARKING: Either of the following: Ashburnham Hill Rd. parking area at MassAudubon's kiosk; or Flat Rock Rd. parking area at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk.

DISTANCE: ~1 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible

SURFACE: Compacted forest soil

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: From the MassAudubon kiosk on Ashburnham Hill Rd., step across the small unnamed brook running through a stone-lined channel, and follow the blue disks, signifying going away from the starting point. The Link Path winds steadily uphill through a mixture of deciduous woods and conifers and boulder moraine towards the east, and at ~0.1 mi. passes the Loop Trail which enters from the north. Continuing east on the Link Path, which rises more steeply at times, the trail crosses a powerline and terminates at Flat Rock Road Path just south of "the Bald". At the intersection of the Link Path and Flat Rock Road Path, Bald Path continues to the east towards Pipeline Path. The Link Path thus provides a connection from the west to the rest of the Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary trail network.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (6th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Loop Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: MassAudubon kiosk on Ashburnham Rd., approx. 1 mi north of its intersection with West St., Fitchburg.

PARKING: Ashburnham Hill Rd. parking area at MassAudubon's kiosk.

DISTANCE: 0.3 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible

SURFACE: Compacted forest soil

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: From the MassAudubon kiosk on Ashburnham Hill Rd., walk over to the small unnamed brook running through a stone-lined channel. Note the stone bench across the brook from the trailhead, on which is inscribed "In Memory of Madeleine Gaylor, Conservationist, 1901-1994." Immediately to the right, the Link Path crosses the brook and leads uphill to the rest of the Sanctuary. Instead, turn left and walk uphill, keeping the small brook to your right. Blue blazes signify going away from the starting point. For the first ~100 yards, an old field rises above the trail on the left. The woods on the right include large sugar and red maples, yellow and black birches, and red oaks. After climbing up ~250 yards, a MassAudubon sign is encountered stating "Private Residence: Please do not enter the private residential area beyond this sign." Note that the portion of the Loop Path that is shown on the older maps as looping to the left through the old field is no longer in evidence. Instead, turn right following blue disks across the small brook, and entering a very different woods with many boulders (a boulder moraine – by contrast the old field had been cleared of stones), northern hardwoods, lots of young beech, mountain laurel and wintergreen. This area is too stony to ever have been cultivated. The trail has a nice surface of hemlock needles – very comfortable underfoot. After ~0.3 mi, the trail arrives at the Link Path, and a tree at the Tee has both a blue and a yellow disk. The Link Path towards the rest of the Sanctuary goes uphill to the left (blue disks), while the lower portion of the Link Path back to the starting point goes downhill to the right (yellow disks.) The Loop Path is a very enjoyable short hike.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (7th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Main Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Kiosk at north end of parking lot beyond UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital's Mechanics Street entrance (275 Nichols Rd., Fitchburg). From that address, bear right to the northern end of the parking lot to find the kiosk.

PARKING: Kiosk parking lot (at hospital).

DISTANCE: 1.1 mi to Northern Watershed property line, and then on to Ashby West Road at 1.5 mi

DIFFICULTY: Easy

ACCESSIBILITY: Trail is relatively flat, but too uneven to be wheelchair accessible

SURFACE: Compacted soil that has been somewhat eroded in places. Stones have been exposed where extensive erosion has occurred. This was an historic carriage trail.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: Main Path, which was built as a carriage path slopes gently to the northwest from the hospital kiosk. After a short distance, the Hemlock-Pigpen Paths exit on the left and lead uphill (west) to eventually diverge as separate paths.

The Main Path continues its gentle slope within a mature white pine forest, and becomes level as it passes the Swamp Path on the right at 0.3 mi, and the Pigpen Path exiting sharp left at 0.6 mi. Shortly afterwards, the Swamp Path returns from the right. At this point, looking uphill to the left one can see how the hillside was sculpted in constructing the carriage path with exposed boulders now covered with mosses and lichens, and an old stone wall within an overstory of white pine and eastern hemlock. Continuing to the north, the Main Path gently rises until reaching its intersection with Scott Road Path, which crosses the Main Path here diagonally. Continuing on the Main Path, as it turns generally toward the northwest through a second-growth forest of broad leaf trees interspersed with white pine, the trail surface has been degraded somewhat due to erosion. At 1.1 mi, the White Birch Path enters from the right within a powerline crossing. Shortly thereafter, the Main Path crosses onto city of Fitchburg Northern Watershed land at an open metal gate, and progresses nearly level through a timber harvesting clearing that took place several years ago, until it reaches Ashby West Road at 1.5 mi. This last portion is also described under the Northern Watershed Trails – Main Path.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (8th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Pigpen Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Intersection of Main Path with Swamp Path; and behind the Highlands Building of UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital

PARKING: Kiosk parking lot, to the right of UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital's Mechanics Street entrance (275 Nichols Rd., Fitchburg). From that address, bear right to the northern end of the parking lot to find the MassAudubon kiosk.

DISTANCE: 0.5 mi

DIFFICULTY: moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible.

SURFACE: Forest soils. Some significant erosion near and within the area known as "the Pigpen".

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: Begin at the kiosk by following the Main Path a short distance. After entering the woods, take the path on the left (west) up the hill, which is the Burbank Connector. Continuing up the hill, bear left at each of two intersections, which are each shortcuts that connect to the Hemlock Hill Path further along. At 0.2 mi from the Main Path, and just north of the Highlands Building of UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital, the Hemlock Hill Path and Pigpen Path each turn to the right. Of these two trails, the trail that is further to the west (left) is the Pigpen Path, which begins by heading to the northwest. In 150 yards, an informal spur trail on the left leads south to the lawn and garden behind the Highlands Building. Pigpen Path bends further northwest and is level, becomes increasingly steeper within the actual "Pigpen", then descends toward the Main Path. The virtual absence of undergrowth under the mature Eastern Hemlocks offers a significantly different experience while traveling this complex of trails. At 0.3 mi, Laurel Path enters left from the southwest and in another 150 yards Hemlock Hill Path returns to the Pigpen Path from the east. At 0.4 mi, Lightning Path leads sharply up to the west, offering a route to the Pipeline Path system of trails and Flat Rock Road Path. Over its final 0.1 mi, Pigpen Path descends to the Main Path.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (9th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Pipeline Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: 0.2 mi on Flat Rock Path from Crocker Conservation Area's Flat Rock Rd. kiosk

PARKING: Crocker Conservation Area's Flat Rock Rd. kiosk

DISTANCE: 0.9 mi

DIFFICULTY: Easy

ACCESSIBILITY: With difficulty especially in wet weather even though level all the way to Scott Road Path.

SURFACE: Compacted forest soils

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: The Pipeline Path route follows a buried drinking water pipeline that runs from Scott Reservoir to Overlook Reservoir. Six-inch square granite markers can be seen projecting up into the treadway that marks the pipeline in several places. From the Flat Rock Road trailhead, walk north 0.2 mi on Flat Rock Road Path, and turn right onto Pipeline Path. At 100 yds, a short informal path bears left for 0.3 mi, avoids what is frequently a wet area on the Pipeline Path, and returns to the Pipeline Path a little further. At 0.4 mi, the Pipeline Path passes the Bald Path on the left, which returns to the Flat Rock Road Path, and shortly after, the Pipeline path passes the Lightning Path on the right (to the east), which leads down to the Pigpen Path. The Pipeline Path itself remains fairly level going northwest and west all the way to its intersection with Scott Road Path. Because when emplaced, the pipeline itself was covered by large boulders in the fill, gaps within them have offered habitat for fox dens and for other animals.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (10th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: Scott Road Path

OWNER: From the East, city right of way along paved Scott Road to gate, then Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATIONS: Once upon a time, Scott Road was a continuous public way across the northern portion of what is now the Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary, but now the entire central portion is closed to traffic, so there are two dead-end roads named Scott Road at either end, with a trailhead at each end.

PARKING: At the west end of the trail, there is space for one car at the end of Scott Rd. on the left (see Northern Watershed Trails – Hartwell Cemetery Loop Trail). Do not block access to the resident's driveway. At the east end of the trail, there is space for one or two cars at the end of Scott Rd. (eastern portion). Do not block access to residents or to Scott Road Path, which provides access for fire/emergency vehicles as well as to the Water Dept. for road repair.

DISTANCE: 0.7 mi

DIFFICULTY: Easy to moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not wheelchair accessible

SURFACE: Rocky surface

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: From the east, past the intersection of White Birch Path, Scott Road Path rises to the west intersecting the Main Path after 0.1 mi. In 0.2 mi, a link goes off to the north past a cellar hole to connect with the Main Path. After another 0.2 mi it crosses Pipeline Path and 0.1 mi later Flat Rock Path enters from the south. There is a dug well just a few feet from the intersection with Flat Rock Path. Scott Road Path continues onto the city's Northern Watershed land up to where it encounters the paved portion of Scott Road at a private residence (west trailhead).

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (11th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: **Swamp Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Kiosk at north end of parking lot beyond UMass HealthAlliance (Burbank) Hospital's Mechanics Street entrance (275 Nichols Rd., Fitchburg). From that address, bear right to the northern end of the parking lot to find the kiosk.

PARKING: Main Path parking lot (at hospital kiosk)

DISTANCE: Almost 0.4 mi from northern end of Swamp Path around to southern terminus of Swamp Path back onto Main Path.

DIFFICULTY: Easy, to moderate along the northern portion.

ACCESSIBILITY: Not accessible

SURFACE: Compacted forest soils

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: From the Trailhead, Swamp Path begins 0.3 mi. up the Main Path. A loop from the hospital kiosk parking lot, right onto Swamp Path, and returning via the Main Path makes a fine ~ 1 mi walk. It progresses from a mature White Pine/Eastern Hemlock forest along the Main Path to a kettle hole shrub and sphagnum moss bog/swamp along Swamp Path, and back along the Main Path to the starting point. Note: A discontinued path may be seen on the right when you reach the swamp. Just north of the bog, at least three short connections go NE and formerly connected with another discontinued path, located a short distance to the east and parallel to the Swamp Path. Please stay on the Swamp Path, as the discontinued paths formerly known as the Crocker Path and the Bigelow Path both lead to Crocker Elementary School, which is off-limits from the Sanctuary.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (12th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: **The Bald Path**

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: North end of paved portion of Flat Rock Road at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk

PARKING: North end of paved portion of Flat Rock Road at Crocker Conservation Area kiosk – There are spaces for approx. 8 cars around this cul de sac.

DISTANCE: 1/4 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not accessible.

SURFACE: Compacted forest soils.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: The Bald Path was formerly known as the Hill Path, for its hilly topography. The Bald Path begins on Flat Rock Road Path, 1/3 mi from the trailhead. Walk up Flat Rock Road Path past the junction with Pipeline Path on the right. The Bald Path exits to the right approx. 0.1 mi beyond Flat Rock Road Path's junction with Pipeline Path. If you arrive at "The Bald" (see Flat Rock Road Path) you will have traveled too far along Flat Rock Road Path. The Bald Path parallels a stone wall as it travels east, crossing the wall several times within a stand of northern hardwoods. After turning abruptly right, the Bald Path comes to what appears to be a tee, but a former path to the right has been abandoned. Instead, turn left at that tee, and continue along the Bald Path to the northeast for the second half of the trail, descending to its end at Pipeline Path.

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Flat Rock Wildlife Sanctuary (13th of 13 trails)

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TRAIL NAME: White Birch Path

OWNER: Massachusetts Audubon Society

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Scott Road (eastern portion)

PARKING: End of Scott Rd. (eastern portion), or Main Path Parking Lot (at hospital kiosk). There is no parking available at the end of Scott Rd. (eastern portion).

DISTANCE: 0.45 mi

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

ACCESSIBILITY: Not accessible, narrow and uphill

SURFACE: Firm natural soil exposed through undergrowth

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: The White Birch Path offers an alternative to the Main Path that is in deciduous habitat in contrast to mature evergreen forest along the Main Path. The White Birch Path starts from just west of the western end of Scott Road and east of Scott Road Path's intersection with the Main Path. After turning right onto the White Birch Path from Scott Road Path for about 200 yards, the Falulah Brook Trail branches off to the right (northeast) and leads downhill, across a power line, and onto the city of Fitchburg's Northern Watershed land to Falulah Brook, where it continues upstream to the north (see trail description under Northern Watershed). The White Birch Path continues past the Falulah Brook Trail to the north and northwest, terminating at the Main Path just east of MassAudubon's boundary with the city's Northern Watershed land.