

## TRAIL MIX: WINTER HIKES FOR SENIORS

(by Jeanne and Hardy Ballantine, Amherst, MA)

Cooped up? Looking for a diversion? Need a little movement to maximize health? The following descriptions give information on trails in the Pioneer Valley area that are easy to negotiate in winter, with descriptions of hike locations and surrounding area, trail surface, parking, and recommended equipment to be prepared for hiking conditions. Directions to hikes are from Northampton, Amherst, Hadley, South Hadley, Belchertown, and other communities in the area. Hope this helps make “getting out” appealing and possible. And please send ideas for hikes you recommend to add to our lists.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** Getting out for a walk on a cold winter day takes some planning. Let’s consider this:

1. **Length of walks:** most of the walks describe here can be a very short distance to a couple of miles on the trail. If this is a new adventure you can start with short walks to and from your car or house, and add distance as you feel comfortable and energy levels allow.
2. **Dress appropriately:** layering clothes and wearing a mask are actually not so bad as a way to keep cheeks, nose, mouth and body a little warmer.
3. **Wear good waterproof shoes or boots,** warm wool socks, and cleats if there is any snow or ice where you are going. This allows you to get a grip in any uneven or icy places. (Note: We have tried several brands of cleats and prefer Kahtoola NanoSpikes—easy to put on and walk in.)
4. **Carry a cell phone** in case of emergencies; most places have reception and getting help is possible. Also, there are several apps that can be very useful for information like “where am I”, distances, and trail maps. (See *All Trails* and *Strava* for examples).
5. **Hiking poles** or a walking stick give one an extra “leg” for balance. These are especially useful if there are uneven places or patches of snow or ice.
6. **Water and snack** IF you are going for a long hike. (We usually keep a bottle of water in the car as we are going a couple of miles at most.)
7. **Transportation:** All trails listed are accessible by car. Some are on or near bus routes, noted where information is available. **Check bus line information and schedules as these are limited and change due to Covid and winter. (see PVTA for information)**
8. **Dogs!** Most trails are dog friendly and some say “on leash”. Use your judgment! Remember to carry a doggie bag!

### ACCESSIBLE WINTER HIKES

The following are a few of the good winter walks we have discovered. Most are relatively flat with few obstacles. Rating: 1= easy and flat (wheelchair accessible); 2= generally easy, but may be a couple of muddy spots or fallen trees to get around or roots that stick up on the trail; 3=

some ups and downs in trail and/or some uneven places in trail from roots or rocks or some small climbs to bridges or over obstacles. None of the hikes are technically difficult.

PLEASE LET US KNOW OF OTHER HIKES WE MIGHT ADD TO THIS LIST!

## **SOME FAVORITE WINTER HIKES IN AND AROUND THE PIONEER VALLEY (in alphabetical order)**

**Amethyst Brook Conservation Area** (Towns of Amherst, Pelham, and Kestrel Land Trust), Pelham Road and Thayer Street.

Description: Amethyst Brook features extensive trails, mostly along the brook, with beautiful scenery—a favorite for families, dogs (off leash before 10am), and an easy walk for most (Level 1-2). The paths are dirt, mostly packed down and not muddy. There are some roots, but easy to get around. The trails are extensive, with a couple of bridges to cross; one bridge requires a climb up several steps and down the other side. However, it is a lovely walk just to the bridge and back. On the walk into the woods one passes farms on the left and community gardens off the right fork in the trail. At the fork, either way will take you to the river. This is an out and back trail from Pelham Road. A good place for cross country skiing when there is snow on the ground. If you feel adventurous, use a trail map to follow some of the side trails.

Directions and Parking: From Southeast Street in Amherst, continue out Pelham Road about a mile. The parking lot for Amethyst is on the left—you'll probably see a number of cars there—it's a popular trail! It is easiest to park in the lot off Pelham Road (on the left going away from Amherst toward Pelham).

Transportation: Bus #45 (stop near Amethyst, but check PVRTA schedule as buses infrequent.)

Trail Maps: [alltrails.com/parks/us/Massachusetts/amethyst-brook-conservation-area](https://alltrails.com/parks/us/Massachusetts/amethyst-brook-conservation-area) OR [kestreltrust.org/places/amethyst-brook-conservation-area/](https://kestreltrust.org/places/amethyst-brook-conservation-area/)

Facilities: Only a doggie bag station and trash can!

Dogs: Pooches love this place, and often have meet-greet-play-splash sessions before 10am when dogs can be off leash. Great place to get puppy energy out!

Be Prepared! Path can be icy in spots. Cleats are recommended, along with poles.

**Amherst Historical Walk** (Begin at the Emily Dickinson houses and walk to West Cemetery, about ¼ mile one way, ¾ mile if return through downtown Amherst on sidewalks.)

Description: We suggest starting at the famous poet Emily Dickinson’s family houses at 280 Main Street, about 2 blocks from downtown Amherst. Although the houses are not currently open for tours, view the houses and gardens from outside. Begin walk by turning left out of the Main Street entrance to house, and cross at Main at corner of Triangle Street. Turn left and follow the sidewalk past The Women’s Club (35 Triangle Street). This club began in 1893, and through the years has served the community with hot lunches, milk funds, dental clinics for children and other services for children and families; provided scholarships for promising students; and sponsored other community activities.

From there you pass the middle and high schools on the right, with playing fields near the sidewalk. Go down the slight hill on Triangle Street; on the left you will see the West Cemetery. Cross at a cross walk and wander through the cemetery that has graves of many Dickinson family members, including Emily, and other notable town citizens. It also includes graves of early African Americans from Amherst and the headstone for an African American soldier who fought in the civil war. And here’s a challenge: What is the oldest grave stone you can find? We found one from 1767—any earlier? Note the spectacular 10’ by 150’ mural on the west side of the building along the cemetery. (For more information Google “West Cemetery, Amherst”.) From the cemetery you can exit via the gate that leads to Pleasant Street and downtown Amherst (on left side of mural); going left on Pleasant Street will take you through town on your way back to the Dickinson houses.

Directions: Dickinson houses are located at 280 Main Street, Amherst, MA.

Parking and Transportation: Some is available on Main Street outside Dickinson houses, or park in downtown parking lots. Mostly metered parking. Bus #30 goes through downtown.

Accessibility: The sidewalks are good, with accessible curbs at corners. Walk goes slightly downhill from the house to cemetery, and slightly uphill through town. (Level 1)

Facilities: Some downtown restaurants and coffee shops have restrooms—and hot drinks!

Dogs: On leash, but not in shops.

Be Prepared! If conditions are icy, use cleats and walking poles.

### **Amherst Pump Station Road (off South East Street) to Robert Frost Trail**

Description: Walk is on a paved Amherst town road for service vehicles with a gate across the road to prevent cars (Level 1). Walkers, dogs (and horse riders!) are allowed. Road is flat and about 1 1/2 mile to the pump house at end of road. It traverses meadow and swamp on both sides, then enters a lovely forest. The road dead ends at the pump house, with the Robert Frost Trail going off to the right on wide dirt path. The wide trail to the left goes past a lake.

Directions: Take South East Street, Amherst, toward Bay Road. For the road to the head of the pump house trail, turn left off South East Street at sign post with numbers 1456, 1458, and 1460. Small road winds down hill past several houses.

Parking: There is no “official” parking by the town gated entrance to the walk, but on the left side there is a conservation sign where some people have parked. Note that the ground on the left side of the road may be soft! Be careful to avoid your car getting stuck! There is also designated parking for Mt. Pollux off to the right side of South East Street, with a small sign pointing up a hill. Parking up the hill will add about ½ a mile each way to your walk and is a somewhat steep climb. This is also the parking area for a lovely walk around Mt. Pollux, a Town of Amherst/Kestrel Land Trust area that starts at the parking lot (Level 1-2).

Dogs: very dog friendly

Be Prepared! Cleats helpful if ice or snow for Pump Station and Andrew’s hikes

### **Andrew’s Greenhouse Outback (Town of Amherst, off 1184 South East Street)**

Description: A long wide paved road winds down a slight hill from Andrew’s Greenhouse through fields and into woods. From woods, trails go in several directions—have a map, compass, or remember where you’ve been and where you’re going! Robert Frost trail criss-crosses the paths in several places. If snow, a wonderful place for cross-country skiers. Out the gravel road to a shed with farm equipment and back is about 1 mile—but one can go much farther! This trail meets others, including the Pump House trail.

Directions: Southeast Street toward Bay Road, turn left into Andrews and park.

Parking: Andrew’s Greenhouse kindly allows trail walkers to use their lot for parking.

Dogs: very dog friendly

Be Prepared: If snow, cleats and poles helpful.

## **Chesterfield Gorge Trail: West Chesterfield, MA.**

Description: This Trustees of Reservations nature reserve “is a 4 mile out and back trail”...featuring stunning views of the gorge, and good for most skill levels. Starting from the parking lot, hikers take the road that parallels the river, often close enough for beautiful views, or smaller, more rugged, side trails that go next to a fence along the gorge for the most spectacular views. Near the beginning of the trail hikers are high above the gorge, and road or trail descends to river level. This trail is beautiful year round.

Accessibility: Road slopes slowly down along the gorge, and goes back up on return. Most of the road is wide and flat, Level 2 in our judgment because of the slope and it can be slippery with ice and snow. Cleats are very helpful.

Directions and Parking: Take Rt. 9 toward Williamsburg/Pittsfield, turn left on Rt. 143 in Williamsburg toward Chesterfield. Sign for the gorge on Rt. 143 at River Road (just over a bridge), turn left and see signs for parking in Trustees parking lot on left.

Facilities: Appear to be closed in winter. Note Chesterfield General Store and Café, located on Rt. 143 at 432 Main Road (you’ll pass it), has drinks, sandwiches, and a restroom.

Dogs: On leash.

Be Prepared! Poles and cleats recommended if road is snowy/icy. Take cell phone in case of emergency.

**Katherine Cole Trail:** Town of Amherst, junction of Rt. 116 and Sunderland Road, Amherst.

Description: “The trail passes by wetlands and rises up into a stand of young pines, comes to a small bridge, then splits...” Go around circle to left or right—either ends up back at the bridge. Walk goes by a stream, stand of hemlocks, and wetlands. Yellow blazes on trees mark the way.

Trail begins with a wide rutted dirt road that parallels the highway for a short distance before turning right into woods and no highway noise. Yellow markings (blazes) on trees mark trail direction. The road is dry (with some muddy areas after rain or snow), with several interesting swamps along sides of path and a stream at the far end of the circular path. At far end of loop trail, a small path leads to a meadow if you want to go a bit further. During the spring there is a fine display of fiddlehead ferns and skunk cabbage. Whole loop trail is about 1.3 miles.

Directions: Turn left off of Rt. 116 (toward Sunderland and Deerfield) where Sunderland Road intersects with Rt. 116. A short one-lane gravel road goes between trees off Rt. 116 and Sunderland Road intersection. Small sign on Rt. 116 by entrance says “Trustees Property”. PVTA Route 31 to Sunderland stops at Rt. 116 and Sunderland Road.

Accessibility: (Levels 2-3 depending on snow and ice.) Most of trail is easily accessible, but with a few potential obstacles. There are some small rises along the dirt road, and depending on snow or rainfall, a couple of places that are muddy (icy). Some have planks that one can choose to use. At the end of the dirt road, a plank bridge high above a shallow stream; it is about 20 inches wide and 20 feet long. Easy crossing unless icy. Big step up to get on bridge.

Circle trail is narrower and has some roots on path. Lovely walk to a stream, walk along stream and head back around, returning to bridge across first stream. Then back on same wide path to trail head and parking. Yellow blazes on trail make sure you follow the path, though trail is pretty clear.

Trail map: Google Town of Amherst or Kestrel Trails for map.)

Parking: Turn left off short gravel entrance road, with short rutted road to parking area. Park anyplace near red barn and entrance to trail. (If you turn right at entrance, opposite Cole trail, you will see Podick trail. We do not recommend this for winter hikes.)

Facilities: none

Dogs: no listed restrictions, but best to keep on leash because of swamp areas.

Be Prepared! If there is snow and/or ice, recommend cleats and hiking poles or walking stick. Good to have a cell phone along, and apps like All Trails or Strava are helpful for location and distance.

**COLLEGE WALKS: BE SURE TO CHECK CAMPUS POLICIES ON COVID! SOME AREAS CLOSED!**

**Amherst, Hampshire, Mt. Holyoke, Smith, and UMass (all hikes open to the public).** (Note: Each college has multiple walks; we've picked a few examples to feature here.)

**AMHERST COLLEGE walks: Amherst College Sanctuary Trails.**

Description: Amherst College has a network of trails near the campus. These can be entered from the Norwottuck Rail Trail, South East Street, College Street, South Pleasant Street, and the rail trail. Off of the rail/trail, signs point to a number of trails, some behind the college, with beautiful views of the surrounding countryside and Pelham Hills.

Trail Maps: Included on the website is a detailed map of Amherst College Sanctuary Trails. Points of interest along the trails are listed on the website. (Check Amherst College Trail Maps at: [Amherst.edu/campuslife/town-life/wildlife-sanctuary/recreation](http://Amherst.edu/campuslife/town-life/wildlife-sanctuary/recreation))

Directions and Parking: Campus borders on the rail/trail path. Can enter from Rt. 116 or near tennis courts on campus. Campus parking is limited during Covid, but one can use town parking.

Transportation: Bus #31, 36, and 38 stop at Amherst College and along Rt. 116.

**HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE walks (South Amherst off Rt. 116):**

**Hampshire College Conservation Loop Trail. (and other trails)**

Description: Hampshire College has a number of trails to explore, most fairly easy, but some trails are narrow through woods. The Conservation Loop is a fairly "easy 1.1 mile loop trail located in Hadley, MA at the base of the Mt. Holyoke Range on 46 acres of protected forest owned by Hampshire College." Hampshire pond is on this trail.

Trail Maps: For more trail details at Hampshire College see: [myhikes.org/trails/Hampshire-college-conservation-loop-trail](http://myhikes.org/trails/Hampshire-college-conservation-loop-trail)).

Parking: There are parking places by the indoor tennis courts on Hampshire College campus. Park and then walk along a dirt road toward Bay Road (you can see it), and *carefully* cross Bay Road with wide path into woods.

Transportation: Bus # 36 and 38 (check schedules!)

**Yiddish Book Center at Hampshire College, The Yiddish Book Center Memorial Trail (Level 1)** runs behind the Book Center; it is landscaped and has benches. There is a short walk on a paved path from the Center past the solar array (Bay Road) to Atkins Farm Market.

Directions and Parking: Enter the Hampshire College campus off Rt. 116 and follow signs to Yiddish Book Center. There is a large lot in front of the Yiddish Book Center. Buses #36 and 38.

**Hitchcock Center for the Environment:** 845 West Street, Amherst. (Located off Rt. 116 on Hampshire College Campus)

Description: Hitchcock Center has a number of trails, all open to the public, in the woods and fields behind the Center. A kiosk features a map of the trails. A one mile loop trail goes through woods, past meadows (and a snow city created by children in outdoor winter programs at Hitchcock). Trails are flat; snow shoes and skis have been on them! (Level 1, or 2 if lots of snow!) An outdoor play/exploration area for children, next to the parking lot, is great place for grandparents (and others) to take little ones. Also note Hitchcock winter programs on their website. And do visit the building itself, a model green building with displays about energy efficiency, recycling, and other aspects of this unique building.

Directions and Parking: Located off #116 by Hampshire College, follow the signs up the hill to the Hitchcock Center. Trails are on the back side of the building. There is a parking lot for visitors in front of the Center.

Transportation: Bus #36 and 38 (check schedules!)

Facilities: Bathrooms are open limited hours during the week when classes are held outside.

Dogs: On leash.

Be prepared: Be prepared for snow on the trails—cleats, walking poles.

**MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE walks: (South Hadley)**

**Upper Lake Loop** (50 College Street) (Check access during Covid restrictions.)

Description: This one mile walk around the Upper Lake Loop is a flat gravel path, fairly wide, past a dam and waterfall. The walk around the lake goes past wetlands (marsh, scrub, and small stands of forested wetlands), and hardwood forest. You'll go past the Restoration Ecology Program's research site. Be sure to walk through the Restoration Ecology Program's wetland restoration project on a boardwalk; information kiosk and signs explain the site. (Level 1)

Directions and Parking: To enter campus coming from Amherst, turn left at first traffic light off Rt. 116 in S. Hadley. Drive a short distance to bridge crossing river. Just before bridge turn right and park along lake. Cross the road to the path that parallels the river and lake, located near Kendal Sports and Dance Complex. (NOTE: Check parking options during Covid.)

Transportation: Bus #38 stops at Mt. Holyoke College campus, a short walk to the hiking path.

Facilities: None on trail. South Hadley Commons nearby has restaurants.

Dogs: On leash.

Be Prepared! No special equipment needed unless cleats for ice/snow.

**Mt. Holyoke College Connecticut River Walk** (Mt. Holyoke Boathouse, 240 Ferry Street.)

Description: This 1 mile loop trail is paved and accessible for mobility impaired, wheelchairs, strollers and walkers. "The trail loops around the outer edges of a field with views of the Connecticut River, through a forested section overlooking the floodplain of Bachelor Brook." There are benches and interpretive signs along the route. This is an interesting and beautiful walk through varying scenery (Level 1).

Directions and Parking: From downtown South Hadley Commons, take Rt. 47 to Ferry Street on the left. Continue to 240 Ferry Street (the boathouse). Parking lot is just off Ferry Street on the right; signage is clear. The path begins and ends at the designated parking lot. No buses.

Facilities: none, The Boathouse Restaurant (Alvord Street) is located very close to walk on the river; nice stop for coffee, lunch, restrooms, and views of the river.

Dogs: on leash

Be Prepared! When snow or ice, wise to wear cleats and carry poll(s).

**SMITH COLLEGE walks: (Northampton)**

### **The “Hidden Mill River” historic walk (off Paradise Pond)**

Description: This tour “explores the path of the Mill River before it was diverted away from the city center. At each stop along the way, read a bit of history about the particular location and view an image or map from the past. (See map on Smith College website and history of each point on path (Level 1-2).

Trail Map:

[smithcollege.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Mapjournal/index.html?appid=971987054f0044439d053c6671163b17](http://smithcollege.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Mapjournal/index.html?appid=971987054f0044439d053c6671163b17))

Directions: Begins near corner of College Lane and Rt. 9. Walking tour starts at Smith College President’s house. Bus #43 stops nearby on Rt. 9. (See below for parking directions.)

Directions, Parking, and Buses: There is metered parking along Rt. 9 near College Street, plus there are a couple of spaces in front of the Lyman Plant House (botanical gardens) building. There may also be weekend parking in faculty parking lot or near the playing fields--follow College Street (off Rt. 9), past the Lyman Plant House to the split in the road. Stay right and park near playing fields—but it’s a bit of a walk back to the trail.

Bus #B43 goes down Rt. 9 to Northampton and terminates very near College Street for a short walk to the path (on your right off College Street).

### **Mill River Trail (off Paradise Pond), Smith College**

Description: This popular path descends on a gentle paved path to Paradise Pond. Trail goes along pond (from right side of College Street off Rt. 9) where it turns into a dirt path. Note: It can be muddy after rain or snow. This is a flat trail along the Mill River, mostly wide and without obstacles. River is on one side and steep wooded banks on other, with houses perched above. It seems to be a favorite with dog owners, and dogs have a great time greeting other dogs and walkers! (Note: Those “in the know” tell us that the other side of the river is unofficially known as “the dog park”.) (Same information/directions as “Hidden Mill River” walk applies here.)

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST walks:**

Descriptions: There are many hikes on and near the UMass campus; we list two Level 1 Hikes:

Hike #1 is through the center of campus. Start at the Fine Arts Building. Walk through or around that building and circle the pond. The paths are paved and generally plowed. Some slope down to the lake and can be slippery; if icy cleats are advisable. The geese and mallard ducks on the lake are fun to watch, and there are benches along the path. This can be a short walk—about 1/4 mile, or longer if you choose to explore the campus. (Tip! Coffee Shop at Campus Center on other side of library.)

Hike #2 is near the UMass stadium and playing fields, with woods behind them. The paved road circles the athletic complex, goes through woods and around other athletic fields. This can be a circle route or out and back (which many people do). Distance depends on how far you wish to go and the route you choose.

Directions: These hikes are all on the UMass campus.

Parking and Transportation: Metered parking is often available for the center of campus and lake walk on the circle in front of the Fine Arts Building. For the playing fields and woods walk, there is free parking off Amity Street by the astronomy stone circle, near the inflated indoor practice stadium (tent) and near the playing fields. If UMass is not in session, there is parking in the lots off University Drive. PVRTA Bus #33, 34, 35, 45, and 46 stop on campus at the Fine Arts Center or Mullins Center. #33 and 35 and terminate near football stadium. Check routes and schedules online.

Dogs: The stadium walk is dog friendly (most dogs on leash, though some run on the fields when no teams are practicing).

Facilities: none during Covid. At other times dining center for lunch, snack, and restrooms is available. Campus Center (just beyond Library) has a coffee shop.

Be Prepared: No equipment needed unless cleats for snow and ice.

## **CONNECTICUT RIVER WALKS**

**Dawson Conservation Area (River Levy):** (Several points of entry—two mentioned here)

Description: Levy 1 has beautiful views of the Connecticut River, especially interesting in winter and spring with the ice flows. (Level 1) Beginning of the Dawson Conservation Area levy/dike trail in Hadley is located on North Lane. There is a short incline up to the levy; from there the path is a flat, fairly wide dirt trail and follows the river for over ½ mile. Levy turns inland and connects with the rail-trail between Amherst and Northampton, just before the walking/biking bridge across the Connecticut River (parallels Rt. 9).

Directions and Parking: There is parking for 4 to 5 cars in a small lot on North Lane across from #9 North Lane (house). People park along the street on the levy side if the lot is full.

Levy 2: (Level 1) Another walk is along the levy off Cemetery Road. Walking to the right goes toward river; path to the left links with rail/trail bike path toward Hadley/Amherst (left) or Northampton (right). Note: If you park by the levy on Cemetery Road, you will pass the Old Hadley Cemetery; it is very interesting to walk through.

Directions and Parking: Turn off Middle Street onto Cemetery Road and go to end of paved road where it turns sharply to left over levy, going toward Rt. 9. Park along the side of road near the levy on Cemetery Road, just before the rise in the road crosses the levy.

Accessibility and Facilities: All Connecticut River paths are very accessible except for a short slight rise—a few steps—to the trail; the trail is flat, sometimes a bit muddy or some ice. Winter: no facilities.

Dogs: Lots of doggies on this trail, on leash!

Be Prepared! If any snow or ice, have cleats and poles to get up and down embankment.

**Connecticut River Greenway State Park/Conservation area** (446 Damon Road, Northampton)  
**River Biking and Walking Path** (also part of Norwottuck Rail Trail)

Description: This walk is on part of the rail trail that goes over the Connecticut River and toward Hadley and Amherst. It is a wide paved path, and you will usually find others who are enjoying this walk (meaning it is more populated than most of the other paths). This is an out and return on same path walk unless you have a car parked at each end of your walk. Go as far as you like—remembering that you have to return! If you are fortunate you may see eagles flitting from branch to branch above the river. Cross over the interesting old bridge and walk as far as you like! It's a beautiful walk over the river!

Directions and Parking: From the traffic circle on Rt. 9 (that goes onto I-91, coming from Amherst, take the first exit onto Damon Road. Immediately enter parking area on right. The walking/biking bridge is just off the parking area and is your destination. It's very visible! Plenty of free parking. Facilities, dogs, and Be Prepared! (see above walk) : none open now.

**Silvio O. Conte Trail** (National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, Fort River Division): 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley, MA 01035.

Description: A one-mile loop, “universally accessible,” much of the walk is raised boardwalk, and the remainder is a level gravel walk with boards along the edges and with many lookout points and benches. It’s a favorite with bird watchers, especially early mornings.

At the entrance to walk are signs introducing the pollinator garden and pollinators that frequent the area. Also see some signage along the path. Diverse landscape—river, wetlands, meadows, forest, “boasting a variety of habitat types, including hardwood forest, floodplain forest, and grasslands; attracting a diversity of resident and migratory wildlife.” Path goes clockwise, one way during Covid.

Directions and Parking: Located on Moody Bridge Road. Note that access from Moody Bridge Rd. off S. Maple Street is closed, so you must enter Moody Bridge Road from Bay Road. (Note also that Moody Bridge is a small side street off Bay Road, so watch carefully for street sign. Sign on left off Moody Bridge Road leads to large parking area at start of trail. You can see it from Moody Bridge Road.

Accessible for wheel chairs, strollers, small children. The trail is easy Level 1, smooth most of the time. Small rises in several places. Exception can be snow and ice when boards can be icy; boot cleats are helpful.

Facilities: frequent benches and lookouts; no bathrooms.

Dogs: “On leash”

Be Prepared! When ice or snow on path, wise to wear cleats and carry poles, though there are railings on the boardwalks to help.

**DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) State Forest** (78 Cape Street, Goshen, MA).

Description: Established in 1927 by the Civilian Conservation Corp, this very accessible trail goes along the lake, through a campground, and on around the lake. One can go as far as one likes, but we generally turn around when we reach the road to the campground. The trail is wide, level, and meanders through lovely forest with views of the lake. In winter you can see people ice fishing, playing hockey, skating, and skiing on the lake. In total, there are 15 miles of trails; the lake trail is easy and flat. Key is to turn around when you think you've used half of your walking time and energy!

Directions: Take State Route 9 through Florence toward Goshen. Turn right off Rt. 9 at sign for DAR State Forest, and after a short distance turn right at signs for park.

[Dar.forest@state.ma.us](mailto:Dar.forest@state.ma.us); 413-268-7098.

Trail map: Available on line at D.A.R. State Forest Trail Map or AllTrails.

Parking: There is a large parking lot that is free in winter. The trail is just off the parking lot, with a slight rise to reach the trail and see the lake. Walk to the right at top of rise and you are on the trail. Signage is very helpful.

Accessibility: (Level 1—most accessible) Slight incline from parking lot to trail. Main trail (Highland Lake Trail) is wide and mostly flat. You can go for a short walk (out and return), or around lake (a long walk!). Benches and gazebos are located along the walk. Wheelchair/walker/stroller accessible (depending on depth of snow).

Facilities: Some signs with information/maps and port-a-potty at parking lot, but other facilities closed in winter (and during Covid).

Dogs: Officially "on leash"

Be Prepared! If there is snow and/or ice, recommend cleats, spikes, or other grips AND hiking poles or walking stick. Good to have a cell phone along, and apps like All Trails or Strava have map of trails, your location, and distance features.

**Elf Meadow** (off Hulst Road, Amherst, MA).

Description: A Town of Amherst conservation area, this lovely walk features Elf Meadow (though we didn't see any elves) and wooded trails. After crossing the meadow one enters a forest with vernal pools. The dirt path is fairly level and winds through the forest. At a major junction with a sign, right leads down a path that becomes Level 2-3, and one returns on the same path. Or one can stay straight ahead, angle off to the left for a circle loop back out to Hulst Road. However, one needs to walk along the road to return to the parking area. Good to have a trail map on phone or paper—it can be a bit confusing in the woods! Walk can be half a mile to one mile plus, depending on how far and what route one takes. Easy to go out to fork in trail, and back same way. This area is close to several other hiking areas such as Topping Farm Conservation Area on the other side of Hulst Road, also worth exploring.

Directions and Parking: From Atkins Farm Market in South Amherst, take Bay Road east toward Belchertown. Hulst Road angles off on the left side (see sign for Brookfield Farm). Pass the farm and go about a quarter mile. There's a small sign on the left for Elf Meadow, and several parking spaces (not paved).

Trail map: Map of loop trail at [myhikes.org/trails/elf-meadow-loop-trail](http://myhikes.org/trails/elf-meadow-loop-trail).

Accessibility: Level 1-2, depending on which trail you take. Trails are windy but not difficult.

Facilities: None.

Dogs: They love this place, but keep an eye on them. Lots of tempting smells and off-trail adventures.

Be prepared: Good to have a map! We did get turned around and had a rather long walk finding our way back!

### **Mill River Trail at Puffer's Pond, Mill Street, North Amherst.**

Description: Mill River trail, a Level 1 Town of Amherst property, is wide at beginning and located between the river and a wooded hillside—beautiful scenery! Cross a bridge and continue on trail. Soon the trail splits, with left fork going up a hill by railroad tracks. The right fork goes up a gentle hill and becomes a bit more rugged as one progresses. IF one continues up the right fork, another split. If you stay to the left, it comes out on the street near Cushman's Market—cup of tea anyone? One can also stay on fairly level ground and circle around back to the bridge and parking lot, less than one mile total. This part of Mill River is a more frequented trail, so you'll probably pass other walkers.

There is also a trail around Puffer Pond, but it is more challenging with roots and climbs, and narrow in places. It then circles 2 sides of the pond on one-way roads with safe walking along the sides (and a lovely waterfall). One can also walk along the Mill River trail just off the bridge near the waterfall on the one-way road at far end of Puffer's Pond; this path is fairly flat and goes along the river. Walk as far as you're comfortable, knowing you must turn around and return to the bridge—and then to your car along the one-way road past Puffer's Pond.

Directions: North Pleasant Street, Amherst dead ends into Pine Street. Turn left and immediately angle right onto Sand Hill Road. At bottom of hill, turn right on the one way road with Puffer Pond on left. Maps available at [www.amherst.gov](http://www.amherst.gov), AllTrails, or Kestrel Land Trust site.

Parking and transportation: Just past Puffer Pond there are many parking places on the left side of road. Walk across the road to the marked entrance to Mill River trail.

PVTA Bus #33 goes from downtown Amherst to Puffer's Pond (check PVTA Route Schedules for details).

Facilities: none in winter

Dogs: On leash

Be Prepared! When snow or ice on path, wise to wear cleats and carry polls.

**The Notch at Mt. Holyoke Range State Park** (1500 West Street, Rt. 116 between Atkins Farm Store and Amherst Road to Granby on left, over the notch).

Description: This is a popular hiking area as you will see from the number of cars on a nice day or weekend. Trails up the mountain are challenging, but there are some easy (Level 1-2) trails as well. We mention two here.

Trail 1: Follow trail past the visitors' center (currently closed); after walking through some woods, you will come to a gravel road; take the left fork that goes gradually downhill. You will end up near Atkins Farm Market. Buses come by that can return you up the hill, but check schedules carefully. (If two cars are available, best to park one at Atkins for your return.)

Trail 2: This wide trail is along the old trolley line, is fairly level through woods, though slight incline. Walk ½ mile (part slightly uphill) to quarry, take a look at the quarry, then return down the same trail--or explore the many trails going off the main trail, some of which are more challenging. This active quarry is an interesting site to see. (have a map if you go off main trail!)

Directions and Parking: There are two hikes described here at the Notch.

Trail 1: Notch Visitors' Center: From Atkins Farm Market at Bay Road and Rt. 116, continue up hill toward Granby and South Hadley on Rt. 116. Near the highest point there is parking on a road going to the right and in a large parking lot on the left, near the Visitors' Center (Visitor's Center currently closed—no facilities).

Trail 2: Old Trolley Trail to Aguilera Quarry: Continue beyond the Visitors Center lot on Rt. 116 toward South Hadley. Pass the highest point (quarry entrance on left). There is a parking area on left as you head downhill BEFORE Amherst Street—no signage. Pull in and park. Enter at gate and take trail to left, slightly uphill, but levels off. Walk ½ mile to quarry—an interesting view. Return ½ mile, or explore a side trail off the mail trail.

Transportation to Notch Visitors' Center: Hampshire College to South Hadley/ Mt. Holyoke College Bus #38 stops at Atkins and at The Notch. Check schedules!

Trail Map: [www.mas.gov/dcr/parks/central/hksp.htm](http://www.mas.gov/dcr/parks/central/hksp.htm), or Google The Notch at Mt. Holyoke Range State Park.

Dogs: On leash.

Be Prepared! Depending on trail conditions (ice or snow), good to have hiking boots with cleats and hiking poles.

### **Norwottuck Rail/Trail Bikepath:**

Description: The Level 1 bikepath extends from Belchertown through Amherst, Hadley, and Northampton, to Florence and beyond. It is a wonderful flat, wide, paved path with some amazing scenery. There are MANY trails off the path, too many to describe here. It's worth a "gamble" onto a couple of these—often around fields with bird houses or meadows with tall grasses or wooded landscape—sometimes uneven. You can usually tell what kind of trail goes off the rail trail within a short distance and can return to the main trail if it is a bit too rugged. The trail is popular and can have many bikes, strollers, wheelchairs, slow and fast walkers or runners, especially on a nice day or weekend.

Directions: There are many places to enter the trail. A couple of suggestions are Mill Lane off South East Street, Amherst (under the second overpass going toward Bay Road). The small parking lot holds about 6 cars, plus a couple on the road. Park and walk a short distance to the bike path. There are also parking spaces at Belchertown entrance to bike path off Station Road and by Amherst College athletic fields (Note: no parking on campus during Covid), near Swift Way off Rt. 9, and behind the shopping center with Whole Foods off Rt. 9. All of these have entry points to the trail.

Near the Mill Lane parking, you can turn right to take the Bluebird meadow trail off of the path, or left to take a hike around a meadow, about 1.6 miles. Many other paths go off the main trail along the bike path.

Facilities: port-a-potties at Belchertown parking area off Station Road. That's about it!

Dogs: on leash only.

Be Prepared! Unless lots of snow and ice, no special recommendations.

**Swift River Boat Launch Trail (Herman Covy Wildlife Management Area): 195 River Street, Belchertown.**

Description: This easy walk on a dirt road (no vehicles) takes you along the Swift River with lovely views, even some bird sightings (we saw eagles and hawks). The trail is fairly straight and flat, Level 1. There was a fallen tree blocking the path 1+ miles along. Swift River is a favorite for kayaks and canoes “in season”, and is the primary water source for the Quabbin Reservoir. (We went kayaking on Thanksgiving weekend, but river has ice in December through winter). There is a shooting club nearby, so you may hear gunshots—not dangerous! Trail is about 3.7 miles out and back, but you can turn around at any point! On the road to the Swift River, you will pass The UMass Cold Springs Orchard Research and Education Center to the left off Rt. 181 at 391 Sabin Street, Belchertown. Variety of apples in season. Check times open.

Directions: Take Rt. 202 from Amherst toward Belchertown. Turn onto Rt. 181 to boat launch, or take Rt. 9 East to Cold Springs Road (angles off to left) and follow to boat launch. (Trail Map at AllTrails)

Parking: Park on the far side of the boat launch parking lot near the end where the trail begins.

Facilities: none

Dogs: Good place for doggies!

Be Prepared! If snowy or icy, recommend cleats and hiking poles.

## **Terrace Trails, Pomeroy Terrace, Northampton (behind College Church)**

Description: This neighborhood gems features mostly level walking through a recovering flood plain forest that was once athletic fields for the Northampton School for Girls before it merged with Williston in Easthampton. It has a gravel inner loop and a wide outer loop that has wood chips on much of it, and other trails off of these. As the map shows (terracerailsmap617upgrade.jpg), this level 1 hike is mostly woods, with the entire trail being just over one mile. The main trail sign is next to College Church's back parking lot and has the history of the trails and "The Meadows". There is also a self-guided walking tour and a butterfly garden next to a large field. Adjacent to the woods is a dike, also a nice walk out and back. When snow is on the ground, kids slide down the hillside of the dike on all sorts of slip and slide contraptions—fun to watch! (Thanks to Joe Bender, a trail steward, for help with information!)

Trail Map: At terracerailsmap617upgrade.jpg.

Directions and Parking: From the traffic circle on Rt. 9, continue on Rt. 9 toward Northampton. Pass the cemetery and school on the right, and at the bend in the road to the right, take a left onto Pomeroy Terrace Road. On left, see College Church and turn left into large parking area behind the church.

Transportation: PVRTA Bus R43 goes down Rt. 9 and will stop near Bridge Street School which is about a quarter mile from the trails.

Facilities: Trail sign kiosk, doggy bag dispensers, trash cans, volleyball and gagaball courts, 4 benches and picnic tables by the church.

Be Prepared: Good to have hiking poles or cleats if it is snowy. Trail is well-kept.

**Wentworth Farm Conservation Area (Town of Amherst):** (GPS address is 135 Stanley Street, but parking and start of walk is easier from Old Farm Road off Rt. 9—see below)

Description: This is a mostly flat set of trails (Level 1), a favorite place for hikers, cross-country skiers, and especially dog walkers. The “main” trail goes most of the way around a lovely lake. In winter you may see some ice skaters or hockey players on the lake. One can walk to the far side of the lake and back, and/or around a couple of fields on each side of the lake, depending on how far you wish to walk. There is also a path through a small forest. Wentworth is not usually crowded, but you are likely to pass other hikers and dog walkers. (BTW: Dogs love this place—lots of lovely smells!) About 2/3 of a mile will get you around part of the lake and back. Distance is approximately 1.5 miles if you walk around the fields on either sides of the lake.

Trail Map: At Kestrel Land Trust site or Town of Amherst. (Kestreltrust.org)

Directions and Parking: From Amherst downtown, take Rt. 9 past Amherst College toward Belchertown. At light going into Echo Hill and Hampshire Athletic Club on left, take a right turn onto Old Farm Road, with parking shortly thereafter on the right. You’ll see part of the trail that goes along the road on the right. There is a parking area for about 4 cars, and other cars park along the road if parking spaces are full.

Transportation: PVTA Bus #30 North Amherst/Belchertown Road stops at Old Farm Road. Check schedules!

Facilities: none (unless you count the doggie bag holder and trash can!)

Be Prepared: If it is snowy or icy, recommend cleats and hiking poles. The path is usually pretty well tramped down, but icy in places.

**Wildwood Cemetery (and surroundings paths), Town of Amherst, 70 Strong Street, Amherst:**

Description: As you enter, you are in the cemetery, and a very interesting one with some names you will recognize. Might take a walk down the road you came in on and look at some of the stones. However, this woodland hike starts to the right of the cemetery with a gravel road that goes gradually downhill and eventually becomes a dirt wooded trail. The loop trail is a mile plus, but there are side trails that can add miles to your walk if you're feeling ambitious!

Trail starts as a downhill sloping road (not too steep), and narrows to a path after two fallen trees. You guessed it—climb over the trunks, but they are pretty low to the ground. The main path is circular; when you come to the split you can go either right or left. Both will take you where the path parallels the railroad tracks; if you're lucky or time it right, you might see a train go by a couple hundred yards from the path. As you continue you will come to a trail off to the right (if you take the right hand trail at the fork above, or left if you went left). This trail leads to a field with a number of trails off of that—it's a lovely warren back there! We have walked across the meadow and into the woods on the other side; after a few steps there is a small trail to the right that connects with yellow trail signs. Follow around to the right and you'll come out at the original trail, but adding almost a mile to your walk. So, if you're up for exploring—that little detour will take you to a number of trails, many of them wide, though some with ups and downs.

Directions and Parking: Enter the cemetery off of Strong Street, second exit from N. Pleasant Street and across from Wildwood School. Parking immediately to right after entering.

Obstacles: (Level 2-3) There are 3 fallen tree trunks to climb over; two are low to ground and one is about a 12 inch leg-lift to get over. There are some tree roots along the path, but it is mostly clear and slants downward. Keep in mind that what goes down must come up, but it is gentle both ways!

Facilities: none

Dogs: allowed, technically on leash.

Be Prepared: If it is snowy or icy there are some places where you will welcome having cleats and poles.

**Also see** "Trails in Hadley, MA." ([myhikes.org/us/Massachusetts/Hadley](http://myhikes.org/us/Massachusetts/Hadley)) with 19 trails (42 miles) to explore, Town of Amherst hiking trails, South Hadley trails, Kestrel Land Trust hikes, college hikes, and many other town hiking trails!

We welcome ideas for other trails to explore and add to the list! Thanks!

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