Ten Trails in Dummerston

(Compiled from the Dummerston Conservation Commission's Monthly Newsletter)

1. PROSPECT HILL

Prospect Hill is a mid-length but steep hike up near the town center. After passing through a wooded area, you emerge into a sunlit open space with a variety of plants, a bench under a tree to rest on, and a view out across three states! You should be able to see Mount Monadnock, New Hampshire, to the east and Mount Snow, Vermont, to the west, as well as closer landmarks like Black Mountain to the south. The bench honors John Evans, an avid

Dummerston conservationist.



History and landscape: This hill was a cow pasture until 1943 (in 1974, the Bradley family donated the land to the town). So, a lot of the trees you see on the way up, like white pine, are about 65 years old and are early colonizers of abandoned pastures. The Prospect Hill Board of Trustees, the Conservation Commission, and others have worked hard to try to keep back buckthorn, honeysuckle, and other invasives and to maintain the hilltop as a meadow with a view. Prospect Hill is also called Blueberry Hill because there is an abundance of blueberry

bushes in the meadow. Visit in the fall for the colorful view and again in the summer for the blueberries! In 2017, the 5th grade class at Dummerston School made a poetic trail guide to Prospect Hill, which you can read here:

https://www.dummerstonconservation.com/s/Trail-Guide-2017-1.pdf

Directions: To reach the trailhead, park at the Dummerston Town Office parking lot at 1523 Middle Road, at the town center next to the Congregational Church. Walk north on Bunker Road and then take the left fork, which is Park Laughton Road. Walk 4/10 mile just past the house at 133 Park Laughton Road. There is a post marked "Trail."

Follow the mowed path down the side of the field and across the little board bridge, then follow the yellow blazes up the hill. After enjoying the view at the top, you can either come straight back down or loop around the crown of the hill first, eventually rejoining the original trail. If you take the loop, you may notice a break in the stone wall with another trail leading off north. This is part of an exciting recent project to extend and link an extended trail system along the Putney Mountain/Windmill Hill Ridge: the "Missing Link" trail.

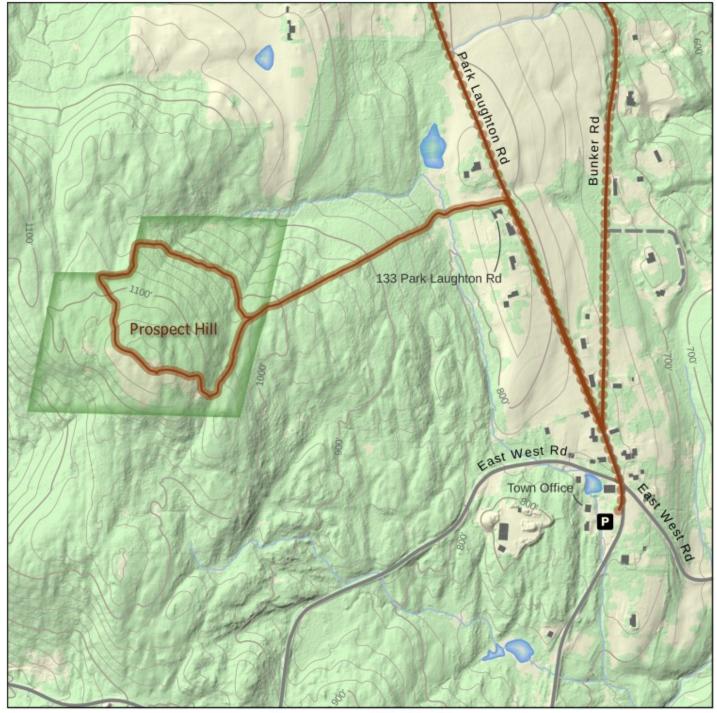
After returning to the trailhead at Park Laughton Road, if you'd like to extend your hike, you can add on a pleasant five-mile circular walk on the town roads. Instead of turning right,

toward the town center, turn left and continue north on Park Laughton Road, then circle back on Bunker Road to return the town center parking lot.



Park Laughton Road in early winter

All maps are courtesy of DCC member and mapmaster David Greenewalt.

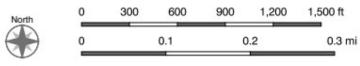


Prospect Hill Trail

Directions: Park at the Dummerston Town parking lot at 1523 Middle Road. Walk north on Bunker Road about 350 feet and take left fork then continue on another 1/4 mile. Trail entrance is just past house at 133 Park Laughton Road.

Difficulty: **Strenuous**Total round trip: **2 miles**





Prospect Hill Trial
Park Laughton - Bunker Road 5 mile loop

The land was donated to the Town in 1974. It is also known as "Blueberry Hill". To the east, there is a view of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. To the west, you can see Mount Snow.

2. Dutton Pines

You've driven by Dutton Pines on Route 5 and seen the sign, but what's really there? Dutton Pines is a lovely little state park, with a loop trail and the option for a longer walk down to the Connecticut River.

History and landscape: This parcel of land reminds us of a time when having a car was an exciting thing and families would take day trips up Route 5 to see the scenic Vermont portion of "roadside America." Part of Dutton Farm in the late 1800s, the land was planted with trees by



the family and maintained by the Duttons for public use before transferring to state ownership. A pavilion with a picnic table was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1938-40—and they must have done an excellent job because the building remains in surprisingly good condition! The park was staffed by a ranger until the late 1970s, but a drop in use after Interstate 91 was opened resulted in it being decommissioned as an active park in 1983. In recent times, a resurgence of interest and assistance from citizens of Dummerston has resulted in improvements to the property and trail, new signage, and an interpretive kiosk. Judging by the dog tracks, this is a popular spot to exercise the family pup.

Unique Features: Dutton Pines State Park hosts a rare natural community: a white pine/red oak/black oak forest. While its current ecological condition is not ideal, it is important due to the rarity of the community type. Invasive shrubs and tree seedlings are

present but in low numbers.

Directions: Dutton Pines is located on Route 5, between Walker Farm and the DMV, and is clearly signposted. Parking is a half-circle loop directly off the road. From the parking lot, you will see the interpretive kiosk and blue blazes leading past the CCC log pavilion with a picnic table. You can take the loop around and return to the parking lot, or detour onto Station Road to walk down to the Connecticut River and back (as shown on the map below). Although short, the park loop has a couple of slopes, so best to wear boots with good treads in wet or snowy weather.

If you choose to walk down Station Road, you will see many sumac bushes before you reach a tunnel that passes under I-91. The sight of cars passing overhead provides a moment for contemplation of your closeness to the earth, both figurative and literal, as you walk under the people in speeding cars. Children will love seeing the highway from this unusual vantage point! The path terminates at the edge of the river next to a small building owned by the Putney Rowing Club. Keep an eye out for bald eagles and other birds.



Dutton Pines State Park Trail

Difficulty: Easy
Total round trip: 1/2 mile







Dutton Pines State Park Trail

Dummerston Station Road - extended walk

Directions: Parking is right on VT Route 5. 1.4 miles north of Middle road and 0.7 miles south of East-West road. For an extended walk, take Dummerston Station Road 3/4 of a mile for views of the Connecticut River.

3. Old Jelly Mill Falls

Although a popular summer cooling-off spot, Old Jelly Mill Falls is at its most impressive during the peak of snow melt season in the spring, with the stream spreading out to cover the entire breadth of the broad rock shelves. Avoid the summer crowds and visit early spring! We recommend you park in West Dummerston and climb the hill to the south before descending to the falls. This is a fascinating geologic rock formation, as explained below.



History and landscape: As the name suggests, the falls were once the site of a jelly mill. The remnants of the old mill can still be seen on the opposite bank of the brook. The waterfall consists of a series of stepped falls and miniature cascades that mark the last hurrah of Stickney Brook before it terminates in the West River downstream. This scenic spot just off Route 30 is a popular local spot for wading and hanging out during the hot summer months.

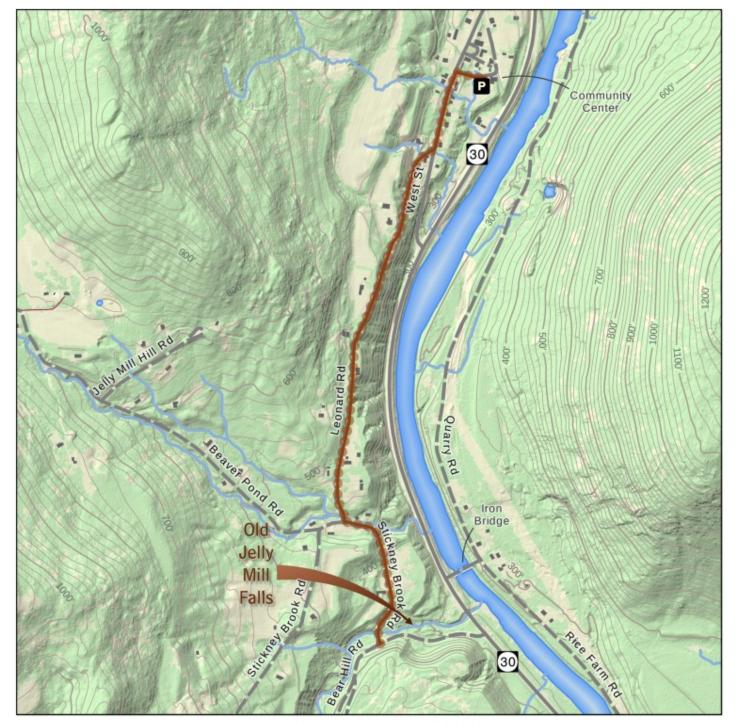
Unique Features (From our geologist friend John Warren): "When we think of granite in Dummerston, we immediately think of Black Mountain. Rightly so, as granite is the basis for that iconic feature. That same granite is the basis for the falls—Jelly Mill Falls—at the bottom of Stickney Brook. There, the water hops from one level to the next in a series of stairsteps, down to the West River. Those steps are the result of the same cracks that are so prominent in the old quarry across the river, and that were exploited in the quarrying work. These cracks are parallel to the land surface and are thus almost horizontal at the falls. They are called "joints" by

geologists. There are lots of kinds of joints; these formed as the rocks covering the granite were eroded away, and the release of pressure allowed the granite to expand, popping into sheets bounded by joints.

And now, the water of the brook has smoothed them off and made steps, and perhaps carved them out at the same time, as water seeping into the joints freezes and pops pieces off. Here on this side of the river, we are near the edge of the granite body; the contact with the surrounding schisty metamorphic rocks can be seen at some times of the year, upstream from the bridge on Stickney Brook Road. You can also see the abutments of an old bridge just upstream from the current bridge."

Directions: You can see Old Jelly Mill Falls at any time by pulling off Route 30 on Stickney Brook Road and looking to your right. But we recommend that you spend a little time in lovely West Dummerston by parking at the Dummerston Community Center/Lydia Pratt Library at 166 West Street. Turn left out of the parking lot and continue south on West Street. Then, take a right onto Leonard Road, which climbs upward. During mud season, it might be easier to walk this hill than to drive it! Take a breather at the top of the hill and enjoy the view out over the West River and Black Mountain on the other side. Then, bear left as Leonard Road merges into Stickney Brook Road. Turn left again to stay on Stickney Brook Road (the other way is Bear Hill Road). You will see the Falls on your left just before you reach Route 30.

Safety Note: To get the best view of the Falls you will be tempted to clamber down through the narrow band of trees that separates Stickney Brook Road and the Falls. In the winter, use common sense when you can't see what's underneath the ice and snow and maybe stay a little further up the bank.

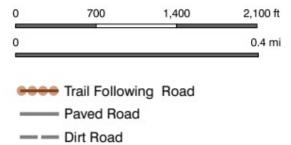


Old Jelly Mill Falls Trail

Difficulty: Easy
Total round trip: 2.2 miles



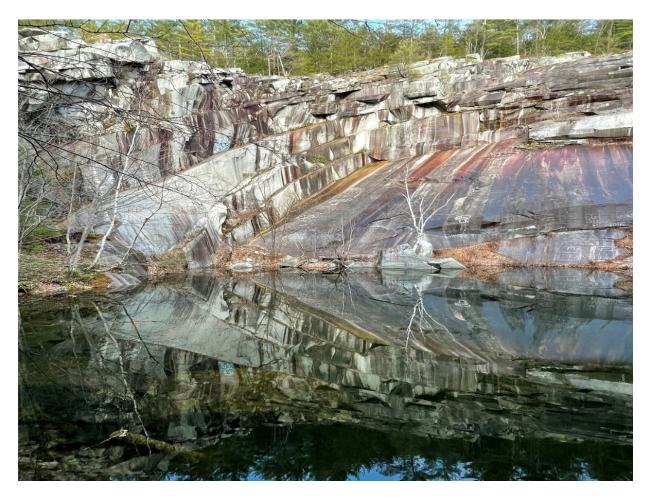




Directions: From Route 30, turn west onto West Street and drive 1/3 mile to the Community Center for parking.

4. Dummerston Quarry

Dummerston Quarry, with its dramatic rock formations mirrored in a dark, still pool, lies at the end of a scenic—and level—walk down Quarry Road overlooking the West River. Bring your camera!



History and landscape: We are lucky to have not one but TWO knowledgeable perspectives on this spot, one from geologist John Warren and one from stone art builder Dan Snow.

John Warren says: "Black Mountain has been poked and prodded to give up its granite for some 150 years, or maybe more. If you bushwhack around the Nature Conservancy property, you may find several small "prospects," where some granite was taken, apparently with some serious intent, as there are drill holes in some of them. The biggest and longest-lasting operations were at the bottom of the mountain, where transportation didn't present such a difficulty. The largest and last to give up was the Presbrey-Leland quarry, first opened in 1887, closed for a time and reopened in 1921; closed permanently in the 1930s. This is the quarry you see right along Quarry Road, with the big face so visible, even, in winter, from across the West River.

The granite, known as "Dummerston White," in the old quarry terminology, is made mainly of the minerals feldspar (white), quartz (glassy, sometimes clear and sometimes smoky), and mica (little thin flakes). One intriguing aspect of the granite is that there are two types of mica:

muscovite, which is light-colored, and biotite, which is dark-colored. This is unusual; usually, there is only one type. In the quarry walls, the rock is divided into "sheets" by fractures that are tilted so that they are parallel to the hill surface; the lower ones are thicker, and the ones near the top are thin. This made for easier quarrying.

What is this granite doing in Dummerston, among all the slates and schists here? Well, it is an igneous rock, meaning that it solidified from a molten state. Sharp contacts with the surrounding rocks, cutting across the layering in them, shows that the granite was intruded into the surrounding rocks, as a molten body. At low levels of the West River, at the base of the pillar of the old railroad bridge, the nature of that process can be guessed. There, granite surrounds and engulfs the layered rocks, cutting across the layers but not disturbing their position: the layering can be traced across the granite to the next band of layered rock This suggests that the molten rock (called "magma") was pretty darn "gooey" and viscous, oozing its way up through the rocks above, dissolving and melting them without displacing them. Any such magma, moving so slowly, is unlikely to get to the surface and become a volcano. This happened toward the end of the several plate-tectonic events that shaped the local rocks, dated at about 380 million years ago. Of course, since this granite intruded into some surrounding rocks, those rocks are even older.

Among the famous places to find examples of Dummerston granite is the posh Plaza Hotel in New York City. If that is too rich for your taste, you can study the pillars of the Brooks House on Main Street in Brattleboro."

Dan Snow says: "Black Mountain's surface is cracked and crazed. Mammoth slabs of loose rock, some hundreds of tons apiece, litter its slopes. The hardness of the great dome would seem undefaceable by any actions short of glacial, but human intervention has left its mark. In the early 20th century, a quarrying operation extracted stone from a pit cut into the base of the mountain's western flank. The fifty-man crew cut stone for many monumental constructions including the dam across the Connecticut River at Holyoke, Massachusetts. Up close, the quarry cavity is huge, but viewed from my home on the hillside above West Dummerston village the abandoned excavation looks like little more than a small bite taken from a big apple.

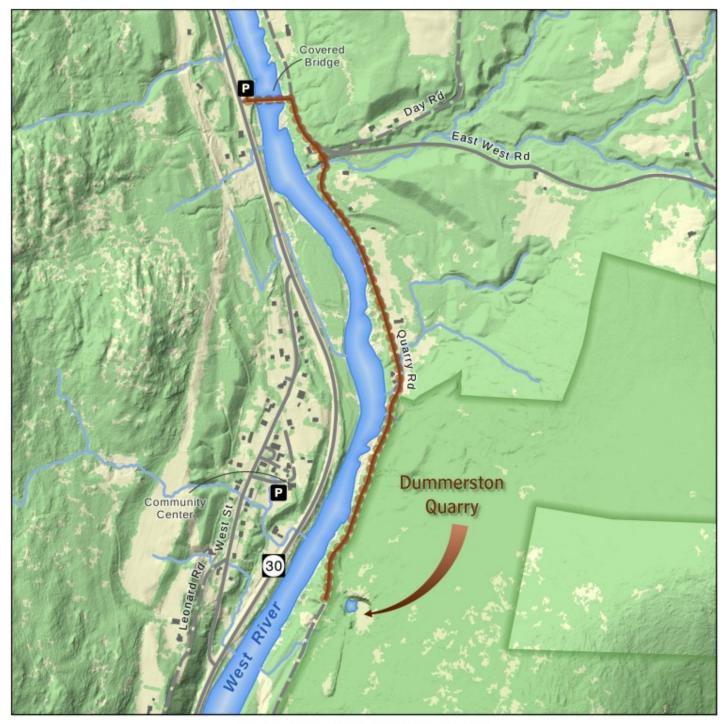
The village of West Dummerston grew out of a need to house quarry workers and their families. Two churches were established and a railroad station built. A wood and steel bridge at the north end of the village crossed the river on tall granite piers. Granite workers walked the railroad trestle on their way to the quarry. Throughout the work day, compressed-air drills hummed. The din of industry was amplified by the hard rock face of the quarry and projected across the valley; a level of sound probably not that different from what I hear today from the cars and trucks traveling the valley floor along State Route 30."

The railroad bridge Dan mentions was cut apart for its steel during WWII. The remaining bridge on the West River, other than the Covered Bridge to the north, is the "iron bridge" or Rice Farm Road Bridge, which was built in 1892 to provide access to another quarry, belonging to George E. Lyon. Because of the heavy stone loads, it was built using a truss (the Hilton or quadruple-intersection truss) more commonly seen on railroad bridges. There's your truss fact of the day!

Directions: There are two parking options for this trail. You can park next to the Covered Bridge, walk across it, and then turn right to go a few hundred yards on East-West Road before taking another left onto Quarry Road. Be careful--the shoulder is narrow. Or, drive onto Quarry Road and you will see a pull-off to your right, next to a utilities installation. Then, it's a simple

matter of walking south on Quarry Road (the river will be on your right) until you see the Quarry off to your left. On the way, you'll see the remains of the old railroad bridge that at one point brought trains over the West River to the station in West Dummerston village.

Safety Note: The quarry cliffs can be dangerous to climb. Stay at lower levels to avoid becoming tomorrow's headline.

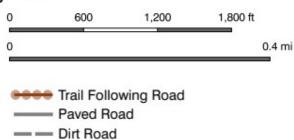


Dummerston Quarry Trail

Difficulty: Easy
Total round trip: 2 miles



North



Directions: From the Route 30 parking lot, cross the covered bridge and walk south on East West road then on to Quarry road for about 3/4 miles. The quarry will be on your left.

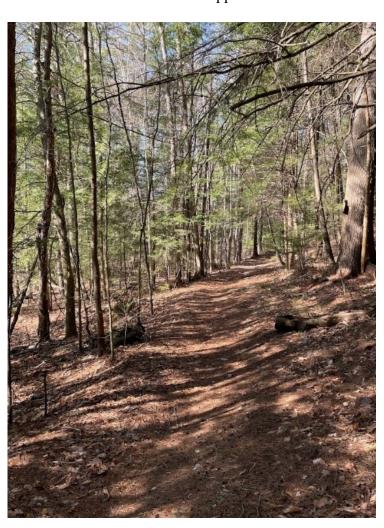
This quarry is known as the Black Mountain Quarry, the largest of the many quarries in Dummerston. It was opened in 1877.

5. Scott Farm



You know it as a great place to buy apples (and squash, and quince, and cider, and...), but did you know that Scott Farm has a trail loop out back? Grab an apple and enjoy munching while strolling through the woods and circling the wetland to come back to the impressive stonework park.

History and landscape: Scott Farm has been in active cultivation since 1791, and grows over 130 heirloom and unusual apple varieties. This Landmark Trust location was used for the



filming of the Academy Awardwinning movie The Cider House Rules, based on the John Irving novel of the same name, and has two Air BnB accommodations on the premises: Dutton Farmhouse (a meticulously restored Greek Revival farmhouse from around 1840) and the Sugarhouse (a former sugarhouse).

Directions: The 1.25-mile trail starts right in the parking lot next to the Apple Barn and Farm Store. Walk out to Kipling Road and turn right. After a brief stroll on the road, you will see the trailhead on your right (it is not marked but is well traveled and easy to see).

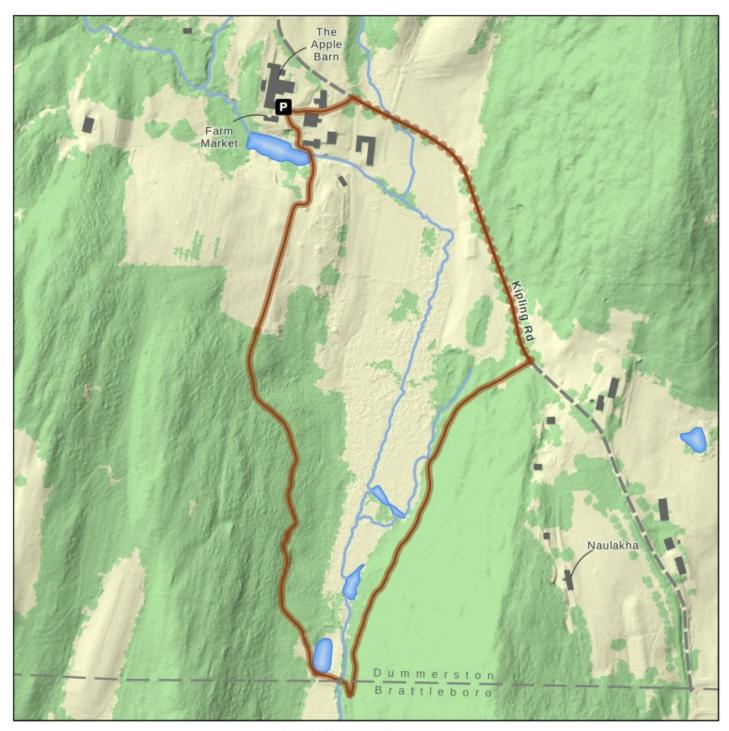
The trail loops around a wetland, including a small pond teeming with peepers, ducks, and other wildlife. You'll also see the School for International Training (SIT)'s sports field off to your left. This area is a valuable wildlife corridor. These connecting lands allow wildlife to travel safely across the larger landscape, disperse into

new territories, find mates, and shift their ranges to adjust to climate change. On the way back,

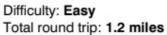
keep an eye out along the trail for blue cohosh, smooth Solomon's seal, and Canadian mayflower.

When you get back to the Farm, you will pass through The Stone Trust's Masters Feature Park where you'll see the incredible stonework created by master craftsmen and their students:



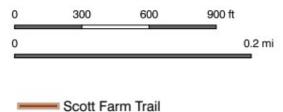


Scott Farm Trail









Kipling Road segment

— Dirt Road

Directions: From Middle Road, turn south on Kipling Road and go 1.1 miles to the Farm. Park at the main lot by the Apple Barn.

6. The Missing Link Trail

History and landscape: (By Carolyn Mayo-Brown) "Five miles of new trail are now open! The Dummerston Missing Link trail is one of the most scenic of the Putney Mountain trail system. The route moves along the ridgeline north from Prospect Hill with its stellar vista of Mt. Monadnock. It continues through private land along woods roads then enters into a 55-acre forest. The forest was purchased with grants and contributions from over 200 individuals, conserving an important wildlife corridor. Abundant wildlife signs abound.

The trail then rises through an old sugarbush with a vast understory of ferns. It passes beneath 175-year-old hemlock giants, over folded rock ledges, and past layered cliffs. There are sweeping views to Black Mountain and another cliff-top view of the West River valley. The trail temporarily ends at the third largest ash tree (5 feet diameter) in the State of Vermont.

The work continues as we dream about conserving land and completing the Missing Links trail between Prospect Hill and Black Mountain. If you would like to be a part of this community effort to make this long-held vision a reality let us know. Or come join the fun of building the next section of trail by contacting trail crew chief Richard Fletcher at rafletch5@gmail.com."

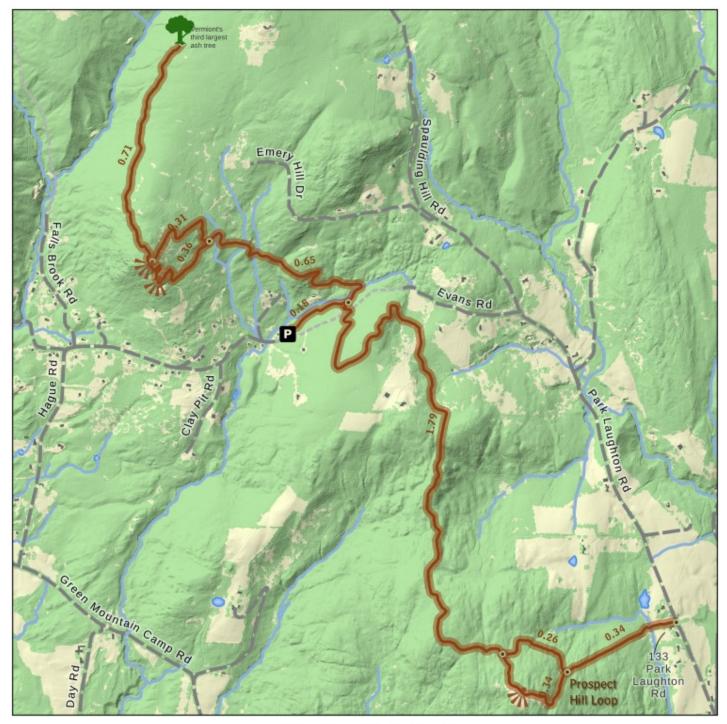
Directions: You can access the southern end of the trail from the loop at the top of Prospect Hill, but we recommend parking at the end of Hague Road and heading north from there with the giant ash tree as your destination.

DCC member Jesse Wagner recently hiked the trail with his young daughter and noted, "The things that stuck out to me about this trail are the high concentrations of Hop-hornbeam and Moosewood, large and quite old Yellow Birch Trees growing on rocky outcroppings, vast ridge top fields of ferns and the perfect Southeasterly Vista view down the West River past Black Mountain. Of note today were constant ovenbird calls. I managed to ID common yellowthroat and black-throated blue warblers higher up the ridge with my binoculars and there were lovely spring flowers like trillium, jack in the pulpit and trout lilies, as well as a host of others that I could not ID."

Here are some lovely photos from Jesse's hike:







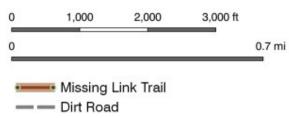
Missing Link Trail

Difficulty: **Strenuous**Total round trip: **To Ash tree: 3.7 miles. To Prospect**

Loop: 4 miles







Directions: From Green Mountain Camp Road, take Hague Road to the end. There is parking at #645 Hague Road

Completed in 2020, the Missing Links trails offer new vistas, incredible scenery, connects to Prospect Hill Trail and will eventually serve to link the Putney Mountain and Windmill Hill Trail system.

7. Deer Run Nature Preserve

The Deer Run Nature Preserve trail is a relatively new treasure in Dummerston and a Big Deal in local conservation. It's a bit of a commitment—a vigorous 4-5 mile total trip depending on which route you take. We wouldn't take a very young child along, but your (leashed) dog will love it!

History and landscape: The Nature Preserve is a testament to the vision and tenacity of Mary Ellen Copeland and Ed Anthes of the Green Mountain Conservancy, as well as the many generous people who supported the project in one way or another. In 2019, the Green Mountain Conservancy purchased and conserved a 287-acre forested parcel, and then, in 2021, added a contiguous 626-acre parcel (including 2.5 miles of undeveloped frontage along the West River). These two parcels now make up the 913-acre Deer Run Nature Preserve (yes, the math checks out). You can read more at their website, https://greenmountainconservancy.org/deer-run-nature-preserve/.

Roger Haydock designed and built the trails to pass through varied terrain, crossing several streams and hemlock-filled ravines, old stone walls, and areas of red pine and tall hardwoods. Most of the trail is forest, but there are two bright sunny meadows full of butterflies, blueberries, and wildflowers where the trail crosses two powerline corridors. There is a new trail spur, the Shoulder Trail, leading off into the new parcel and ending with a view over the West River.



The trail summits at a stone monument on a lovely peak carpeted with pine needles, with a serene feeling and a beautiful view.

Directions: The trailhead off Green Mountain Camp Road is clearly marked and there is a gated parking area. After parking, follow the blue trail markers.

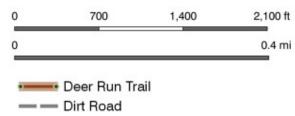


Deer Run Nature Preserve Trail

Difficulty: **Strenuous** Total round trip: **4 miles**







Directions: From the east end of the Dummerston Covered Bridge, turn left onto Camp Arden Road. Follow the road 1.9 miles. The trailhead is clearly marked and there is a gated parking area. After parking, look for the blue trail markers.

This trail takes you to waterfalls, babbling brooks, ancient trees, stone walls, hardwood savannas, spectacular views and the 'monument'.

8. Black Mountain Short Loop

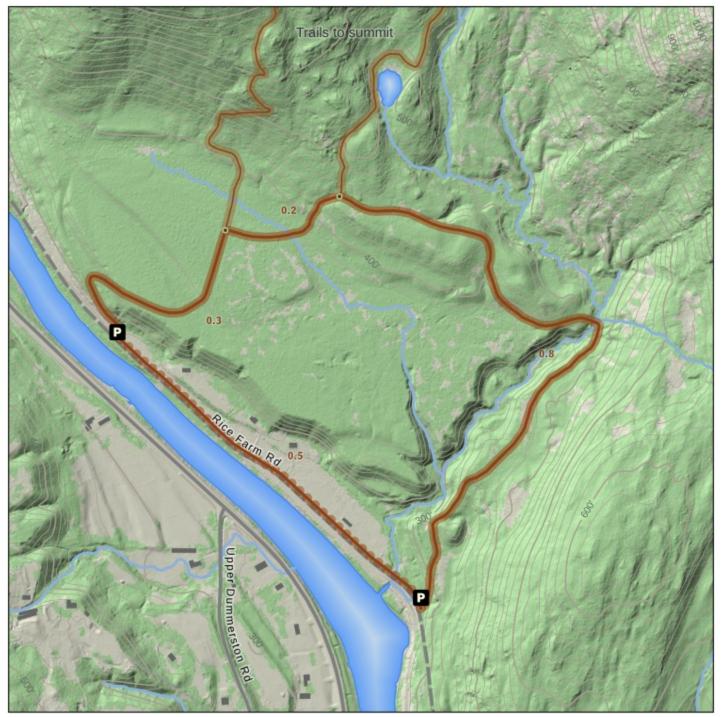
A low-commitment trail, the lower part of the Black Mountain Trail is perfect for after work or if you have an hour to entertain the kids before dinner and the cook wants you all out of the house. Simply park at one of the two well-marked trail heads along Rice Farm Road and walk to the other trailhead. Then, follow the road along the beautiful West River back to your car. This is a lovely, mostly shaded walk, with deep ravines, scenic footbridges, interesting huge rock





formations, and lots of wildlife for the careful observer. Hiking doesn't have to be a major undertaking. Grab a walking stick and enjoy!

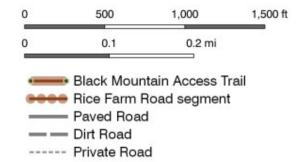
Directions: Both trailheads are clearly marked and visible from Rice Farm Road. The trail is blazed and well-worn. Keep right at the "Summit" sign—save that for another day!



Black Mountain Access Trail



Directions: From the covered bridge, drive south on Rice Farm Road to either parking area - 2 or 2 1/2 miles.



From either parking area 1.3 miles takes you back to the road. Then 1/2 mile along the West River returns you to your car.

9. Black Mountain Summit

When you're ready for a longer hike, go all the way...to Black Mountain summit! This is a vigorous 3.5-mile hike with amazing views and varied terrain, including a beaver pond.

History and landscape: The 952-acre Black Mountain Natural Area is owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy, a global environmental nonprofit. Local hikers benefit from the Nature Conservancy's interpretive signage at each of the two trailheads and signs and blazes along the length of the trail. The trailheads are easily visible from Rice Farm Road, where there is limited parking at each trailhead and additional parking along the road. The trail rises quickly up and away from the West River sparkling below you, to a horseshoe ridge with a summit of 1,280 feet. The mountain is mostly granite--you may see occasional glimpses of suspiciously

angular rocks along the trail, revealing the mining operations of long ago.

operations of long ago.

Directions: To get to the summit, just follow the signs saying "To Summit."

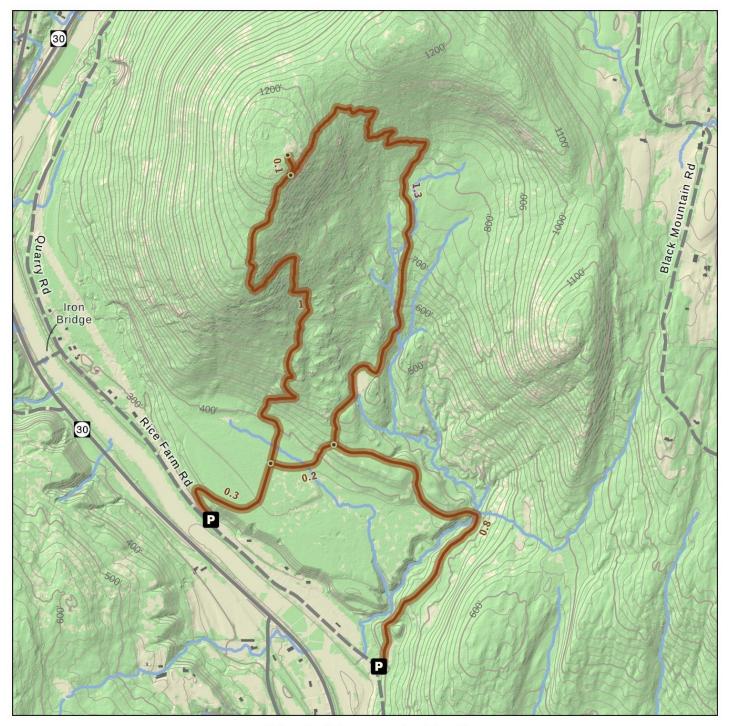
At the top is a little hut and a view of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire and landscapes to the south. There are good rocks for sitting on and





having a thermos of tea and your snack of choice!

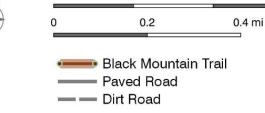
The path down the back of the summit (continuing the loop) is considerably more rugged and in the fall you can't see where the rocks and roots are because of the fallen leaves. Therefore, in this season only, we recommend going to the beaver pond by going back down the way you came, taking a left at the lower loop, and then left again to reach the pond (see map below). However, the treacherous leaves are beautiful in their infinite variety. If you want to look smart for your kids, tell them that the ones with round lobes are white oak and the pointy ones are red oak. Also keep an eye out for the much rarer scrub oak!



Black Mountain Trail

Difficulty: Strenuous Total trails: 3.6 miles Summit loop: 2.5 miles





900

1,800

2,700 ft

Directions: From the Covered Bridge, drive south on Quarry Road 1.5 miles. Continue on Rice Farm Road 1/2 mile past the Iron Bridge to the parking area, or another 1/2 mile to the south trailhead.

The Nature Conservancy has been working for decades to protect Black Mountain and its surrounding landscape. Recently, they have focused on public experience on the 900 acre natural area, improving the trail system and points of access.

10. Elysian Hills Tree Farm

The trails at Elysian Hills tree farm are a two-for-one opportunity and the perfect embodiment of yin and yang. To the west is a quiet, solitary stroll through shaded woods, with barely a trace of human activity--the yin side. To the east is an open, sunny stroll by Christmas tree fields, with a view of distant hills and stone "trees" by renowned stone worker Jared Flynn, embodying yang. Both are worth a visit.

History and landscape: Long owned and operated by Bill and Mary Lou Schmidt, Elysian Hills tree farm was purchased by Walker Farm in 2014 (Bill still lives in the historic 1791 cape house. Mary Lou, who named the farm, passed peacefully in 2021).

Directions: To walk the **western loop:** Park by the pond on Middle Road (the one that's for sale at press time) and, facing the pond, start walking up the driveway on the right-hand side of the pond. Almost immediately you will see the trailhead, identified by a chain hung between two



trees (special thanks to nearby residents Rick and Stacy for helping me find the trailhead). Step over it, and you're on the well-marked, easy-to-follow trail. There is one steep slope but it's otherwise very walkable.

To walk the **eastern loop:** Park just off to the left as you turn onto Knapp Road (marked Trail Parking). Walk straight ahead past the shop and house, then take an immediate right up the "Ridge Access Trail." Follow the loop around, stopping for photo opportunities at the scenic overlook and stone trees.

There are a number of side loops and trails at Elysian Hills that you may wish to explore. Some (the Hemlock Loop for example) may not be passable due to fallen trees. We recommend starting with the two main loops outlined here, or take a longer "figure-eight" walk that encompasses both trails.





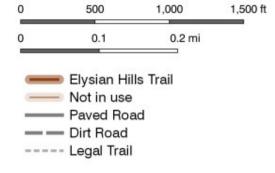


Elysian Hills Trails

Difficulty: Moderate Total trails: 7.7 miles







Directions: From Middle Road, turn north onto Tucker Reed Road and go 0.4 miles. Turn left onto Knapp Road East and park at the trail parking area to your immediate left.