

York Lake Loop Trail

Sandisfield State Forest



SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

WELCOME to Sandisfield State Forest, a 9,500 acre collection of properties managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, located in the towns of New Marlborough and Sandisfield.

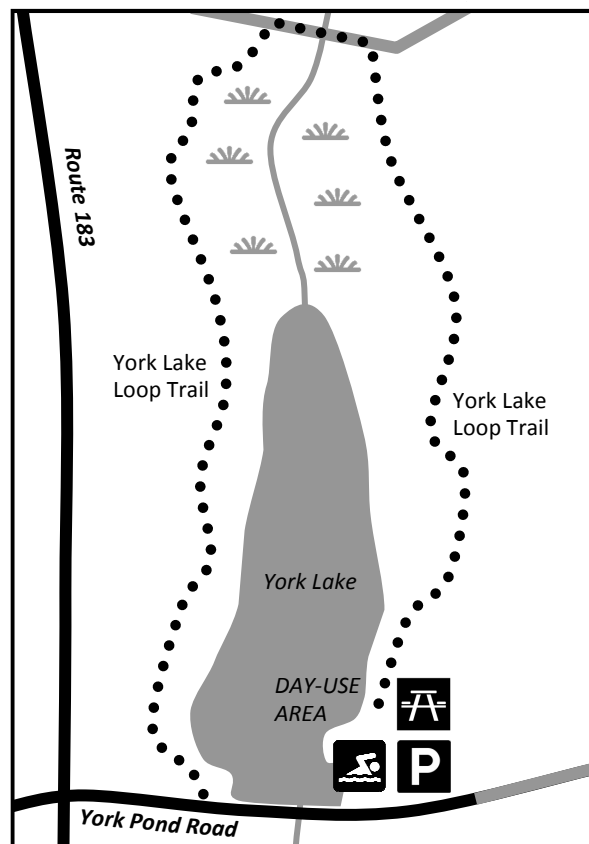
Sandisfield State Forest offers hiking, swimming, picnicking, non-motorized boating, fishing (largemouth bass and stocked trout), hunting (in-season), horseback riding, and in winter snowmobiling, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing (un-groomed). But the day-use area here at York Lake is the most developed area for recreation; a parking fee is charged from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

*Please remember to **carry-in, carry-out** all your belongings, including trash. Please leave no trace of your visit, and leave all that you find in its natural environment for all to enjoy. Thank you.*

YORK LAKE is a shallow (6-16 ft. deep), 35 acre man-made lake at a surface elevation of 1,544 ft. It is fed by Sandy Brook, a tributary of the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers. This water eventually flows a distance of 115 miles where it empties into Long Island Sound. It was named for Samuel A. York, a gentleman farmer of Cummington, who served as Commissioner of the Department of Conservation from 1933-35.

As you walk the York Pond Loop Trail there are no marked stops. Allow this guide to give you some things to think about as you hike and encounter things of interest. The walk is mostly in shaded woods with occasional glimpses of the lake. For general identification the *National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England* is a useful tool. Wildlife you may commonly see include Northern Water Snake (non-venomous), otter, mink, beaver, or belted kingfisher.

Some of the plants you encounter are Partridge Berry,



*York Lake Loop Trail is 2.2 miles long and **easy** for average hiker ability. Footing is uneven and wet in places. Plan about **1 hour 15 minutes** to complete it. The trail is marked with **blue blazes**. At the north end of the loop the trail follows a state forest dirt road briefly.*



low and high-bush blueberry, trillium, star flower, bunchberry, hay-scented fern, Christmas fern, club mosses, Indian pipe and hobble-bush viburnum. Forming the forest canopy there are cool, dark woods of Eastern Hemlock, magnificent white pines, northern hardwoods of beech and birch trees, and remnants of Norway spruce and Scotch pine plantations.

Along the trail you'll see rocks that are very hard and very old. They are *metamorphic*, formed under extreme heat and pressure over hundreds of millions of years. One is grainy, foliated, gray-colored *gneiss*, and the other is milky white to pinkish, smooth and translucent *quartzite* formed during the early Cambrian to Precambrian Periods some 500 million to 4.5 billion years ago.

FARMING PAST, FUTURE FOREST

With a keen eye you may find evidence to show that this was once a mostly cleared and prosperous farming landscape, such as stonewalls. Originally known as Township Number Three, Sandisfield was incorporated as a town in 1762.

Agriculture and wood products provided a living for residents. Fields of rye and flax, potatoes and corn, and orchards covered the landscape, saw-mills dotted the rivers. However, throughout western Massachusetts following the Civil War many farmers left for New York state and the fertile mid-west. Those who remained thought the proposed railroad in 1873 along the nearby Farmington River would boost the town's economy.

The railroad never came. By the early 1900s many farms were abandoned and reclaimed by woods.

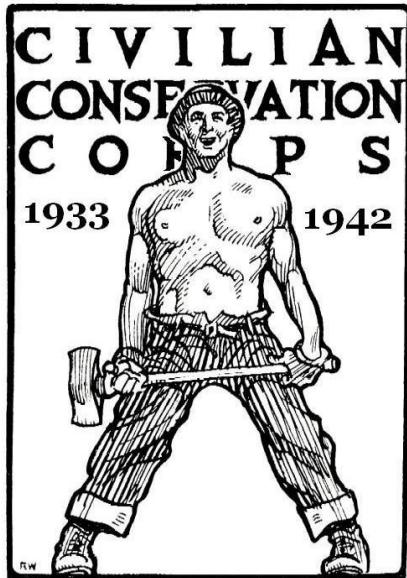


Sandisfield State Forest was created between 1922-26, as like many other early Massachusetts State Forests, through the purchase of abandoned farmlands by the Commonwealth, particularly the Joyner, Willet and Hoyt families. More land was bought from the New England Box Company which had already harvested much of the second growth white pine for wooden boxes and had no more use for it.

Interestingly, the Hoyt Lot was conveyed with express understanding to preserve the water quality from underground springs that have supplied the area with drinking water since early settlement. White sand still roils up in the bottoms of the pools, but the source of the springs is difficult to locate in the thick woods.

ROOSEVELT'S TREE ARMY

Before 1935 York Lake did not exist. It is man-made. It was created out of a swampy wetland, built as part of the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a U.S. Federal Government conservation program. The CCC improved the nation's natural and human resources and created opportunities for



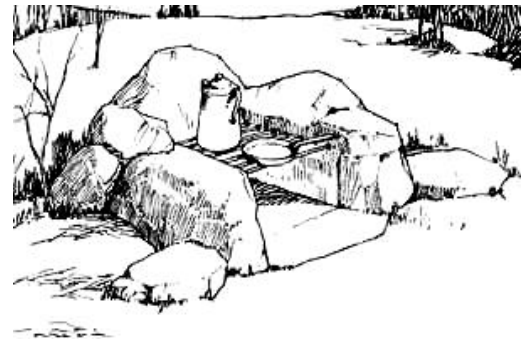
the public to recreate and appreciate a healthy outdoor experience.

From 1933-37 the 196 Company CCC, whose nearby camp site off Route 183 just south of here, once supplied 200 men a season to work in the state forest. Formerly unemployed men then earned a dollar-a-day, were provided food, clothing, shelter and an opportunity for self improvement. The CCC program was a popular success throughout the Great Depression.

CCC projects focused on improving hardwood growth, planting acres of pine and spruce, eliminating gypsy moths pests and White Pine Blister Rust disease, removing fire hazards and fighting forest fires, building forest access roads and creating wildlife refuges. They also created places for public recreation like York Lake, the swimming and picnic area, the foot trail you're hiking on, and former campsites.

The 196 Company built so many dams in nearby state forests they acquired the name *The Sandisfield Beavers*. After its completion York Lake became an extremely popular recreation destination for tourists and local residents.

Later, the dam barely survived the heavy rains of the Great Hurricane of 1938 and required some repair. But it was the Hurricane Diane in 1955 that completely washed out the dam, closing the recreation facility until it was rebuilt in 1959 and continues as-built today.



CCC-built picnic area fireplace

The trail ends back on York Pond Road, return to the day-use area and parking lot via the road and dam. We hope your visit was pleasant and come back to explore Sandisfield State Forest again.

York Pond Loop Trail is a *Healthy Heart Trail* to promote healthy outdoor recreation, also found at many DCR parks state-wide.

SANDISFIELD STATE FOREST
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