

# Walden Pond State Reservation



## Welcome to Walden Pond State Reservation

Walden Pond was once home to the renowned author, Henry David Thoreau. Now part of the Massachusetts Forests and Parks system, Walden Pond State Reservation includes 462 acres of protected open space so that visitors from near and far may come to experience the pond that inspired Thoreau, as well as to hike, swim, fish, canoe and cross country ski.

A replica of Thoreau's house and the location of his modest home are available for viewing by the public. Year round interpretive programs and guided walks are offered as well as a gift shop, bookstore and the Tsongas gallery.

**Specialized Equipment** includes portable FM listening systems for park programs and a beach wheel chair for access to the beach and water. Parking for vehicles with an HP placard is available at the boat ramp.

## Henry David Thoreau

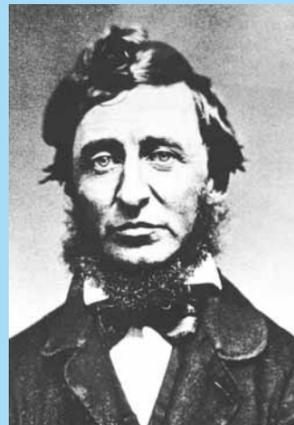
In 1845, Henry David Thoreau went to live and work at Walden Pond. He stayed for two years, keeping a journal of his thoughts and his encounters with nature and society. He continued to collect and revise these observations during the next seven years and published them in the book, *Walden*, in 1854.



Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817 in the village of Concord, Massachusetts. Under the influence of his brother John, an amateur ornithologist, he developed an early interest in nature and spent much of his youth exploring the town's ponds and woods.

He began his formal education at Concord Academy and continued his studies at Harvard College. An avid reader and note taker, Thoreau was interested in subjects as diverse as Greek mythology and English ballads. During this time, Ralph Waldo Emerson moved to Concord to begin his career as a writer and lecturer. Thoreau admired Emerson's 1836 essay, *Nature*, which advanced the then unique idea that each individual should seek a spiritually fulfilling relationship with the natural world.

After graduating from Harvard in 1837, Thoreau returned to Concord, where he taught school, improved and expanded his family's pencil-making business and engaged in carpentry, stonemasonry and gardening. He began his lifelong friendship and association with Emerson, who introduced him to other writers and non-conformist thinkers who were making Concord the center of new ideas. Among them



*"...my friends ask what I will do when I get there. Will it not be employment enough to watch the progress of the seasons?"*

Henry David Thoreau



**Thoreau's House:** copied by Charles H. Overly from a drawing done by Thoreau's sister, Sophia.

were Bronson Alcott, Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Emerson, who valued Thoreau's practical talent and companionship, invited him to live in the Emerson household. Grief brought them closer together. The Emersons' first son died just two weeks after the death of Thoreau's beloved brother, John. Three years later, Thoreau, still suffering from his loss, wanted to live in the woods and embark on a career as a writer. When Emerson offered him the use of a newly purchased woodlot at Walden Pond, Thoreau gladly accepted.

Walden Pond was surrounded by one of the few remaining woodlands in a heavily farmed area. In March of 1845, Thoreau began planning and building his one room house. On July 4 of that year, he took up residence. He studied natural history, gardened, wrote in his journal, read and drafted his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, a story of a trip taken with his brother in 1839. He also made the first accurate survey of the pond. By no means a hermit, he frequently walked to the village, entertained visitors at his house and hired himself out as a surveyor.

In September of 1847, Thoreau completed his experiment in simplicity and became a sojourner in civilized life again. Emerson then sold the house to his gardener. Two years later two farmers bought it and moved it to the other side of Concord where they used it to store grain. In 1868, they dismantled it for scrap lumber and put the roof on an outbuilding.

After his Walden experience, Thoreau applied his skills as a surveyor and pencil-maker to earn what little money he needed for the things that he could not grow or make do without. He spent his free time walking, studying, writing and lecturing at the Concord Lyceum and elsewhere in New England.

Thoreau became increasingly involved with the social and political issues of this time. He often spoke out against economic injustice and slavery. With other members of his family, Thoreau helped runaway slaves escape to freedom in Canada. His 1849 essay, *Civil Disobedience*, eventually brought him international recognition.

On May 6, 1862 at the age of 44, the self-appointed inspector of snowstorms and rainstorms and author renowned for motivating the world to value our natural environment, died after a prolonged struggle with tuberculosis. He is buried on Authors' Ridge at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.

## Visitor Information

915 Walden Street (Rte. 126), Concord, MA 01742  
978-369-3254

Visitors are welcome to swim, picnic, hike, use canoes and rowboats, fish, cross-country ski and snowshoe. Please help control erosion of Walden's shoreline by staying on the paths and using established access areas. The reservation is open year round. Certain services and hours of operation may vary with the season. All organized groups must call in advance to make a reservation. There are no trash barrels on the beach. Please carry out what you carry in.

There is a year round parking fee of \$5.00 per vehicle. Parking is only permitted in the lot off Rte. 126. When the park reaches capacity it will close. In order to avoid disappointment, call 978-369-3254, particularly on hot summer days. Annual park passes are available.

## Please No:

Dogs	Alcoholic beverages
Fires	Gasoline engines
Camping	Wind powered sail craft
Bikes on trails	Novelty inflation devices

## Get Involved

The Thoreau Society Friends of Walden Pond works for the betterment of the reservation. For more information or to become involved visit [www.thoreausociety.org](http://www.thoreausociety.org)

Donations are gratefully accepted and are used to fund park enhancement projects. Please make checks payable to DCR/Conservation Trust and write Walden Pond State Reservation in the memo section. Mail to DCR Conservation Trust, 251 Causeway Street, Boston, MA 02114 or leave with park staff.

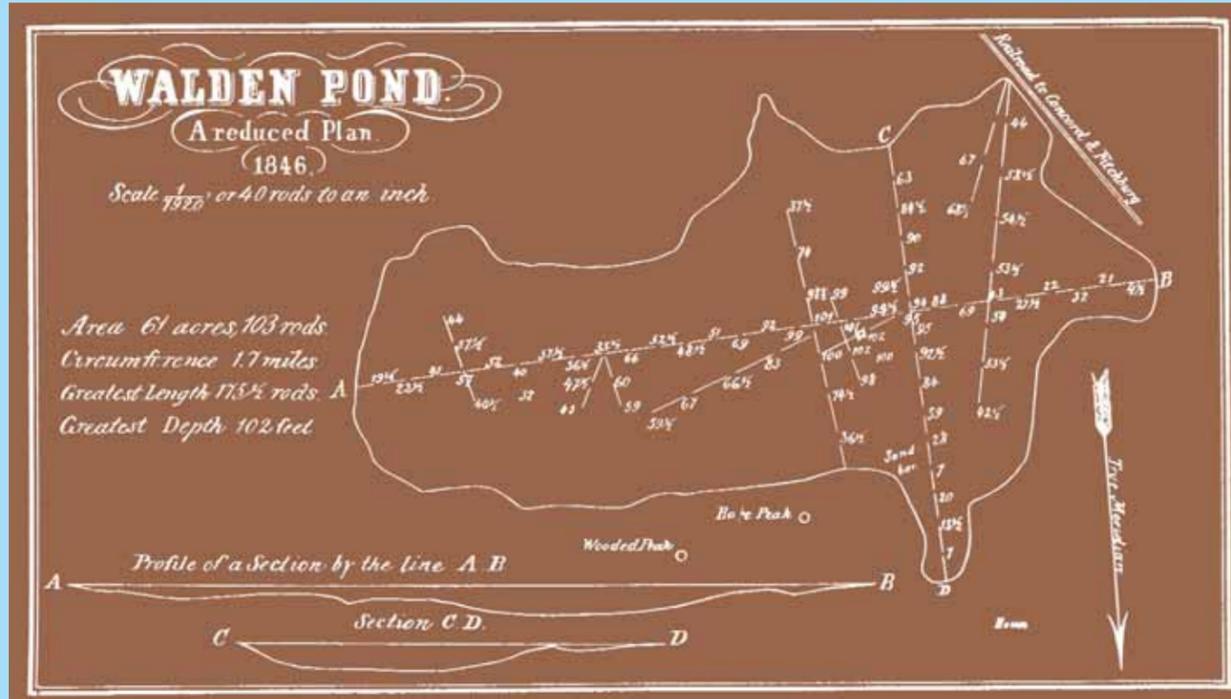
For more information on the Massachusetts State Park system and to receive a free Guide to Swimming, Camping, Hiking and Biking write, call, or visit: DCR, 251 Causeway Street, Boston, MA, 02114  
617-626-1250  
[www.masssparks.org](http://www.masssparks.org)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy and Environment  
Department of Conservation and Recreation



**The Fitchburg Railroad built an excursion park at Walden in 1866. It was a popular attraction until it burned down in 1902.**  
Thoreau Society archives, Concord Free Library.

**Thoreau made the first accurate survey of Walden Pond. This map of depth soundings taken in 1846 appeared in the first edition of Walden.**



## History of the Reservation

Henry David Thoreau's sojourn at Walden started a long tradition of people coming to the pond and its surrounding woods for recreation and inspiration. The emergence of Walden as a public park was in keeping with the belief that nature is meant to be enjoyed by people. "I think that each town should have a park...a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation," he wrote in a 1859 journal entry lamenting the deforestation that had taken place around Walden. "All Walden wood might have been preserved for our park forever, with Walden in its midst."

In the latter part of the 19th century, numerous projects were undertaken to make Walden Pond a public destination for recreation. The Fitchburg Railroad, which had laid tracks past Walden the year before Thoreau took up residence there, built an excursion park on the shore at Ice Fort Cove in 1866. The facilities were mainly used for fund-raisers, festivals and groups. The park included concessions, swings, bathhouses, boats, baseball diamond, a hall for dining, dancing and public speaking and a cinder track for runners and bicyclists. The park burned down in 1902 and was never rebuilt.

The automobile brought increasing numbers of visitors to Walden Pond. The Town of Concord began offering swimming lessons in 1913 and bathhouses were built in 1917. Summer visitation had risen to 2,000 visitors a day even before the bathhouses were built.

In 1922, the Emerson, Forbes and Heywood families granted approximately 80 acres surrounding the pond to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with the stipulation of "preserving the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau,



**Junior Ranger Adventure Program**

its shores and nearby woodlands for the public who wish to enjoy the pond, the woods and nature, including bathing, boating, fishing and picnicking." Middlesex County was given the responsibility for management of the reservation. In the summer of 1935, some 485,000 people visited Walden Pond, with Sunday crowds numbering as high as 25,000 visitors.

In November of 1945, the centennial of Thoreau's move to Walden, Roland Wells Robbins, an amateur historian and Thoreau enthusiast discovered and excavated the foundation of Thoreau's chimney. In July of 1947, the Thoreau Society dedicated the inscribed fieldstone that marks the hearth site today. In 1965, the National Park Service designated Walden Pond as a Registered National Historic Landmark.

In 1975, it became part of the Massachusetts State Parks system that currently consists of over 450,000 acres of protected land throughout the state.

Today, it is estimated that approximately 600,000 people visit the reservation each year. In an effort to balance public recreation with protection of the resource, the Department of Conservation and Recreation has established a 'people capacity' at the park to ensure a positive

visitor experience and to maintain the integrity of the resources. Trail activities are limited to foot traffic. Land bank erosion is controlled by redirecting access points to the pond and embedding natural stabilizing materials. It is this quality of stewardship that will keep Walden, in the words of Thoreau, "preserved for our park forever."

## Natural History

By the time the Commonwealth acquired the property in 1922, much of Walden's forest had been cut down. The



woods have since grown back so that the vegetation resembles the hard and soft wood mix of Thoreau's day and includes mostly berry bushes, sumac, pitch pine, hickory and oak. Above Thoreau's house site are stumps of some of the 400 white pines planted by Thoreau and leveled by the great hurricane of 1938.

Much of the wildlife of Thoreau's time can still be found. Gray squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits are common. Skunks, raccoons and red foxes are active at night, but can occasionally be seen shortly before sunset or after sunrise. Kingfishers, blackbirds, chickadees and red-tailed hawks can often be seen flying among the trees or over the water. In the spring and fall, migratory ducks and geese pass overhead and land in nearby marshes for food and rest. As noted by Thoreau, the pond "is not very fertile in fish. Its pickerel, though not very abundant, are its chief boast." The pickerel disappeared around the turn of the century and the pond is now stocked annually. In addition, sunfish, perch and smallmouth bass compete for crayfish.

Walden Pond is a kettle hole, a deep (103 foot) pond formed over 12,000 years ago when the last glacier to cover New England slowly melted away. As it did, large chunks of ice broke off and became surrounded and covered by vast amounts of sand and gravel carried by streams flowing from the glacier. As these blocks melted, they left behind depressions that eventually filled with water. Because of this geological history, most kettle holes like Walden Pond have no streams flowing into or out of them.



**The Junior Ranger Bears find a frog.** Photo by Brian Doak.



Photos by Jon Crispin.



Photo by Jon Crispin

**"Ah, the beautiful tree, the hemlock, with its green canopy, under which little grows..."**

**I think of some memorable ones worth walking many miles to see..."**

Henry David Thoreau



**Jim Perry enjoys kayaking.**  
Photo by Brian Doak

## Interpretive Programs

The interpretive staff at the reservation offers a wide array of programs for visitors. Children's seasonal programs include nature crafts, story time, and the Junior Ranger series. Adult and family activities include poetry reading, tracking programs and Thoreau walks. Accessible hiking and boating programs are scheduled in the spring and summer. School and group tours are available when scheduled in advance. Tour themes focus on the natural history of Walden Pond and Thoreau's life and his impact on society. Reservations may be made by calling 978-369-3254.

