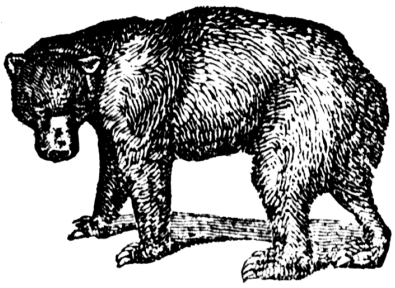
Benedict Pond Loop Trail

Beartown State Forest



SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

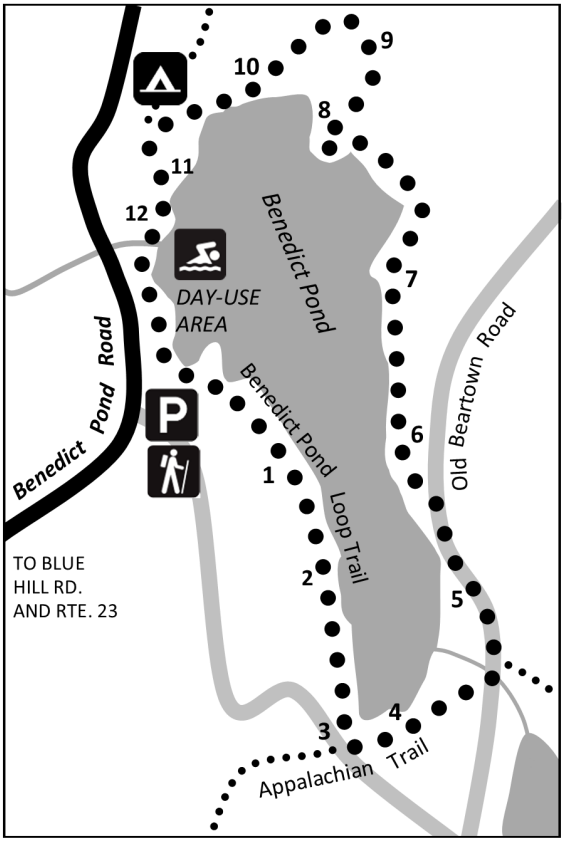
Welcome

These tranquil woodlands may seem like they have always been like this, but change is a constant. In the early-1800s this forest was cleared for farming and livestock grazing. The curious "Bear Town" name refers to that time when farmers considered wildlife a threat. They hunted the last black bear from this area. By the late-1800s the remaining forest was further stripped for charcoal and lumber.

Today, DCR's Beartown State Forest conserves 12,000-acres on a mountainous plateau within the towns of Great Barrington, Monterey, Lee, Tyringham and Stockbridge. The farmers are now long gone, and black bear has returned, not as a threat, but an essential player in the health of this ecosystem. You may just see one! Normally shy of humans, still, respect a bear's space and enjoy watching quietly from a distance.

About the Trail

Use the Blue Hill Road entrance in Monterey to access Benedict Pond Road. The trailhead begins at the boat launch area and just beyond the kiosk. There may be a parking fee from late-May through Labor Day. Trail length is **1.7 miles**. Hike ability is **easy to moderate** with little elevation change. Footing may be wet and uneven in places. Plan on **60 minutes** hiking at a moderate pace. Follow the **blue blazes** and trail signs, and **white blazes** where the trail overlaps with the Appalachian Trail. The trail is open year-round, be prepared for the weather.



Interpretive stops on numbered posts along the trail correspond with this guide. If you hike beyond this trail pick up a **Beartown State Forest Trail Map** at a park kiosk, park headquarters, or click this **link** for a downloadable trail map.

- **For foot and ski traffic only.**
- Please stay on designated trails.
- Remember to carry-in, carry-out all your belongings, including trash. For the benefit of all Leave No Trace of your visit.
- Be aware of hunting seasons. Wear blaze orange.
- **Winter-use:** when hiking or snowshoeing please keep off any cross-country ski tracks. Please hike off to the side.

BENEDICT POND is a shallow (5-8 ft. deep), 35-acre man-made pond. This water eventually feeds into the Housatonic River which flows to Long Island Sound.

Dairy farmer, Fred Benedict (1866-1930), for whom Benedict Pond is named, once owned the surrounding area, part of his Blue Hill Farm. In winter, before electric refrigeration, he cut ice from what was then a much smaller pond. The ice was hauled to his barn and insulated with hay. The ice would last into summer and keep his dairy products cool and ready for market. Later, millionaire electric traction engineer, Fred Pearson, bought this land for his private hunting grounds. Pearson tragically died in the famous sinking of the *RMS Lusitania* in 1915. Lumberman, Warren H. Davis then purchased it, and in 1920 Massachusetts began acquiring this land for state forest.

The beginning of the loop trail enters the woods, beyond the kiosk as you approach the pond.

1) Hiding in Plain Sight

Wildlife is all around, but it will take a keen eye to see it. Along the trail look for evidence, holes dug by small mammals: 1" diameter—mouse, 3" diameter—chipmunk. You may catch sight of red and gray squirrel, and eastern mole. Also look for larger tracks, ideal in winter snow, or scat from white-tailed deer, eastern cottontail rabbit, coyote, bobcat, black bear, fisher, raccoon, and red or grey fox.

2) A Showy Evergreen

Look nearby for mountain laurel *(Kalmia latifolia),* a shrub with waxy evergreen leaves. During June it has fragrant white to pinkish flowers, giving the pond shoreline a magical snow-covered appearance. The flowers are very delicate, the slightest touch by an insect forces the stamen to spring, spreading the pollen. The plant is inedible, even to most animals.



Mountain laurel

3) A Long, Long Trail

The loop trail you're hiking briefly merges with a longer trail. Look for white paint blazes on trees, these mark the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.). In 1921, forester and planner Benton MacKaye, conceived the idea of a walking trail that followed the Appalachian Mountain chain. He envisioned this back-to-the-land movement might relieve the growing ills of urban living. MacKaye likely walked and was inspired by these hills. He and brother Percy visited their sister Hazel at Gould Farm in Monterey, several times in the late-1920s.

By 1936 this pioneer long trail was mostly completed through the cooperation of Federal, state, and local agencies, the Appalachian Trail Conference, clubs, and volunteers. Those same partnerships continue to keep the trail open to hikers today! Presently, the A.T. travels 2,180 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mount Katahdin, Maine; 90 miles of A.T. passes through Massachusetts.

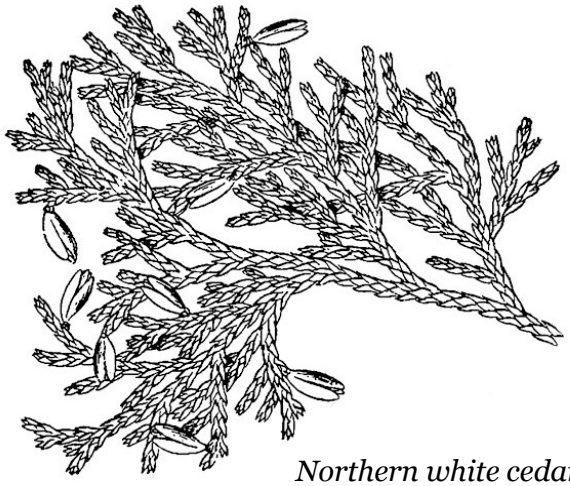
4) Lone Specimens

Some lonely northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) grow near the shoreline. This species grows in wet forests throughout western and northern New England. Scale-like leaves form fan-like clusters. Distinctive cones look like a reddish-brown woody flower. Bark is gray to red and in thin shreds.

Native Americans valued this lightweight wood for building canoe frames. European explorers used it to brew a Vitamin C-rich tea, to cure scurvy. Today, it is used for ornamental planting, posts, lum-

ber, and medicinal cedar oil distilled from the twigs.

*When you reach the dirt road **turn left,** continue to follow the road and blue blazes. The Appalachian Trail (white blazes) diverts here and continues its journey north.*



Northern white cedar

5) Opened Up to Recreation

During the Great Depression, between 1933-42, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a New Deal federal government program. Its purpose was to relieve widespread unemployment while performing valuable conservation work on public lands—like planting trees. Most notably, the CCC built places for visitors to recreate and appreciate healthy outdoor experiences. At Beartown, 200 CCC enrollees, or 'Pinecone Johnnies,' worked on forest roads and bridges, foot trails—including the Appalachian Trail, a campground, swimming beach, and picnic areas, resources still enjoyed by visitors today! The Old Beartown Road you are walking was also improved by the CCC. Look for their rustic stonework drainage culverts. Later, visit the former site of their camp further along Benedict Pond Road.

The trail soon diverts to the left, off the dirt road. Follow signs and blue blazes.

6) Hard to Miss

Around you is a northern hardwood forest: American beech, white ash, birches, black cherry, and maples—famous for colorful fall foliage. Also mixed in are some evergreen softwoods, eastern hemlock, and white pine. This forest was last harvested of its hardwoods in the early-1900s, to make charcoal to fuel local iron furnaces, and lumber. Today this forest is mostly 90-100 years-old, considered middle-aged. It is also an actively managed forest by DCR. Harvesting and thinning projects occur periodically to promote better forest growth and health.

7) Scoured Landscape

Use your imagination to travel back some 15,000 years to the Pleistocene Period, the end of the last Ice Age, when melting glaciers retreated north. They crawled across the land scraping up rocks and debris, exposing more ancient layers of earth like this quartzite and granite outcrop. As the climate warmed over thousands of years, what was first a grassland grew into forests. The cool, shaded understory became a perfect habitat for moisture-loving plants, mosses and ferns found here today.

8) A Gnawing Habit

Beaver, the largest rodents in North America, are second only to humans, in their ability to alter their physical environment to suit their survival needs. They have special incisor teeth to gnaw and fell trees, preferably deciduous! They need water deep enough to provide protection from predators, allowing underwater access to their lodge. To do this beaver use trees not only as a food source, but also instinctively as dam building material to create deep ponds. Walking around the pond keep an eye out for a chewed tree, lodge in the water, or even a swimming beaver!

9) Fine Green Forest Hair

Several ferns are found here year-round, including maidenhair fern (*Asplenium trichomanes*). This delicate looking fern is found in rocky habitats rich in alkaline mineral lime. Roots grow horizontally

so the fern lives as an interconnected group. Its common name “maidenhair” refers to an aromatic oil derived from it, used in shampoo. Native Americans used maidenhair ferns as poultices to stop bleeding wounds.



Maidenhair fern

10) At Home in the Pond

Fish living here include perch, pumpkinseed, golden shiner, pickerel, and largemouth bass. Fish are masters at sensing their environment with keen smell and eyesight. Lateral lines, located along their sides, detect changes in sounds and pressure. Some, like brown bullhead, even have sensory ‘whiskers’ called barbells to explore their habitat.

11) Like a Sponge

Despite their sparce appearance, wetlands are valuable. They support a rich and diverse community of plants and animals. Wetlands purify water through a natural filtering system of plants. They absorb nutrients and cycle it through the food chain while allowing storm silt to settle out. Wetlands are natural buffers to prevent downstream flooding and erosion. Many animals depend on wetlands for breeding, shelter, food, and a place to winter. Preserving wetland function is a good thing!

12) Holding Back the Waters

Benedict Pond was previously a red maple swamp. In 1934-35, the CCC cleared the trees and built a concrete dam. This was a planned recreation area (swimming, canoeing, camping, and hiking) and wildlife habitat (freshwater fishery and waterfowl). Look for the dam’s construction date preserved in the wall, restored in 2012. If the water level is ever low enough you may see the sawed-off stumps of the former swamp!

Continue through the beach area to the parking lot and end of the Benedict Pond Loop Trail.

Although constant and slow change is part of this landscape, it is forever preserved a state forest that you may visit and enjoy again and again. We hope you come back to explore Beartown State Forest!

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dcr Healthy Trail

Benedict Pond Loop Trail is a **Healthy Heart Trail.** These trails promote easy and healthy outdoor recreation opportunities. Other Healthy Heart Trails are found at many DCR parks state-wide.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR’s mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.*

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Massachusetts

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