

Winter Woods & Water Exploration

DCR Blue Hills Reservation



TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE

Welcome

Explore the Winter Woods & Waters of Blue Hills Reservation this winter. This DCR Trip-Tip self guided adventure features sections of the DCR Blue Hills Reservation that are located within this 7,000-acre park which stretches from Dedham to Quincy, Milton to Randolph, providing the largest open space withing 35 miles of Boston. This winter woodland and wetland adventure features:

Scenic Winter Hike & Scavenger Hunt at Houghton's Pond Recreation Area

Parade Around Ponkapoag Pond & Sensory Hike Challenge

St. Moritz Winter Wonderland Walk & Winter Wildlife Safari

Trip-Tips give families information and some fun ideas to explore the great outdoors at DCR Massachusetts State Park and Watersheds. With a little preparation and a sense of adventure, people of all ages can safely enjoy our outdoor spaces during our coldest months.

Look through this guide to help plan your outing. Choose one adventure, two adventures, or make it a multi-day adventure. Visit them in any order, you decide. Challenge yourself to visit all the locations with your family during February Vacation Week, or anytime this winter. We hope you enjoy this Trip-Tip tour.

Share Your Adventure!

Share your Trip-Tip adventure with others through word of mouth, or on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtriptip**.

Things To Know, Before You Go

Remember, at all DCR parks:

- Carry-in, carry-out all of your belongings, including trash.
- All pets on 10-foot maximum leash, attended to at all times. Clean-up after your pet and dispose of waste off-site.
- Stay on designated trails. Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate.

Scenic Winter Hike & Scavenger Hunt at Houghton's Pond

Blue Hills Reservation, Houghton's Pond

840 Hillside Street, MA 02186

Phone: 617-698-1802, events line #4

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/houghtons-pond-recreation-area>

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

Parking Fees: No parking fee.

Restrooms: Chemical toilets are available next to the Houghton's Pond Visitor Center.

A winter visit to Houghton's Pond offers a perfect family adventure which can include endless hours of fun at the playground for younger children, a walk along the edge of Marigold Marsh to look for signs of animal activity, a scenic hike around the pond or a longer trek to Tucker Hill or Buck Hill for a more strenuous challenge.

When you arrive at the main parking lot at 840 Hillside Street in Milton, the playground will be in view. Houghton's Pond main parking lot is a popular starting point for hikers. On weekends and holidays the lot can fill before 11 am. There is one additional parking lot on the west side of Houghton's Pond on Blue Hill River Road. If you take Exit 3 off Route 93, the additional parking lot will be ahead on the right.

Scenic Winter Hike

Stretch your legs on a scenic hike! Three recommended color-coded hikes begin at the bulletin board at the main lot at 840 Hillside Street. Choose a hike to suit your interest and ability. Note that many trail intersections are numbered in the field with a 4-digit marking system (four black numbers on a small white marker. Ex: 1141). These numbers are shown on the DCR trail map to assist with orientation.



Houghton's Pond Loop 0.75 miles (45 minutes)
Easy Terrain; Follow yellow dots

A short scenic hike around popular Houghton's Pond. This walk is picturesque during every season. Walk from the bulletin board at the main parking area and head down to the pond; circle the pond using the paths and stone dust roadway. Yellow circles on trees guide the way. This trail can be followed in either direction by keeping the pond on your right or left.



Dark Hollow Loop 2 miles (1.5 hours)
Moderate Terrain; Follow green dots

This rolling forested loop trail takes you through oak-pine woodlands. From the Houghton's Pond bulletin board, follow the stone dust path bearing left toward the beach and bathhouse. Follow the green dots past the bathhouse and head up the paved hill. At intersection #2071, bear right to loop around the base of Tucker Hill for a pleasant forest stroll following green dots. On your return, retrace your steps downhill, when you again reach intersection #2071.



Buck Hill Loop 3.5 miles (2 to 3 hours)
Strenuous, with steep, rocky climb; Follow red dots

The rocky summit of Buck Hill offers a panoramic view of the surrounding region and is an invigorating climb. Be aware the rocky slopes may be slippery when wet or icy. Proper footwear and

traction devices may be recommended, or save this hike for a warmer and drier day! From the Houghton's Pond bulletin board, follow red dots toward the beach and past the bathhouse. Follow the red dots over Breeze Hill to intersection #2071 of the red dot and green dot trails. Here you have the option of following the red dot loop either direction. To begin with a more rigorous climb, follow the red dot trail headed north over Tucker Hill, where red dots overlap the blue blazed Skyline trail. For the more leisurely approach to Buck Hill, follow the red dot trail east via Doe Hollow and finish with the more rugged terrain as your return route. Either direction will loop over Buck Hill and back to the red and green dot intersection #2071. Then follow red dots back to the parking lot.

Winter Wonders Scavenger Hunt around Houghton's Pond

Enjoy a 3/4-mile stroll around the pond on the yellow dot trail. Wander through pine woods and wetland edges. Bring along the Winter Wonders Scavenger Hunt list and see what you can find. Remember, collecting plants or animals is not allowed. Take only photos and leave only footprints.

Birdwatching at Marigold Marsh

Wetlands and ponds are great places to observe birds. Be on the lookout for winter waterfowl and songbirds. Stop for a moment and watch their behavior. What are they doing?

Birdwatcher Challenge: Find a bird...

- *swimming or floating on the water*
- *flying overhead*
- *eating or searching for food*
- *perched in a tree*
- *walking. Can you find bird tracks in the sand, mud, or snow along the water's edge?*

Parade around Ponkapoag Pond Ponkapoag Pond Golf Course

2167 Washington Street, Canton, MA 02021

Phone: 617-698-1802, events line #4

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/ponkapoag-golf-course>

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

Parking Fees: No parking fees.

Restrooms: No public restrooms at this location.

Parade around Ponkapoag Pond

For a peaceful retreat, head to Ponkapoag Pond. The Ponkapoag golf course borders this 230-acre pond on the western edge. This is a 4-mile moderate hike.

Winter Wonders Scavenger Hunt

1. The home of a mammal
2. Bird's home 
3. Insect eggs
4. A berry on a shrub
5. Tree holes made by a woodpecker 
6. Signs of insect feeding
7. A feather
8. Seeds of a pine tree
9. Tracks in the snow or mud 
10. Something warm to touch
11. Something red in nature
12. A sign of humans 
13. A tunnel or hole in the snow
14. Brown leaves still on a tree
15. Leafless tree
16. Squirrel home 
17. A leaf that stays green all winter
18. Remains of an animal's meal
19. An icicle 
20. The sound of a bird 

- Start your visit from the bulletin board to the right of the Ponkapoag Golf Course Clubhouse, closed for winter. Stroll along Maple Avenue, the paved path that leads through the golf course. Admire the sugar maple trees, many well over 100 years old, lining this scenic walk. The sap from sugar maple trees can be collected and boiled to make sweet maple syrup, a spring tradition in New England.
- Continue straight through the metal gate and follow the green dot trail around scenic Ponkapoag Pond. This trail is popular among hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders so please be courteous, keep to the right and share the trail. At the bulletin board at intersection 5321, take a side trip down the slope to Fisherman's Beach. This is a great spot to take a great family photo with the scenic pond and Great Blue Hill in the background. After enjoying the view, head back up the trail and turn left at the bulletin board to continue exploring the green dot trail.
- You may smell wood smoke as the trail leads you near the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) Camp Ponkapoag. This secluded family camp hosts 20 rustic cabins and two campsites available for rent to the public.
- Descend down a short hill and continue on the green dot trail. At intersection #5370, the trail turns left onto a narrow footpath. This trail will lead you past a wetland and across a wooden footbridge. Beware the bridge may be slippery.
- At the metal gate at intersection #5241, the green dots head left and right. Turn left and continue on the dirt road toward the YMCA camp and the golf course. In a few minutes you will see signs for the YMCA Ponkapoag Outdoor Center, a popular summer camp.
- End your hike with a walk across the Ponkapoag golf course. At intersection #5175, turn right onto Maple Avenue once again and follow the paved road back to the parking lot.

Come to Your Senses on the Sensory Hike Challenge

Take the Sensory Hike Challenge and use all your senses to experience nature fully as you parade around Ponkapoag Pond.

Sensory Hike



Get outdoors and come to your senses. Remember, take only photos & leave only footprints. No collecting please.

1. Find something older than you
2. Camouflaged animal
3. Something with three or more colors
4. An animal's home
5. Something that smells good
6. Something fuzzy
7. Animal Tracks
8. Sign of bird life
9. Sign of an animal's meal
10. Frog's home
11. Seed from an oak tree
12. Sign of new growth
13. Something minty
14. Plant smaller than your thumb
15. Something that makes noise
16. A sound made by an animal
17. A colorful berry
18. A brightly colored animal
19. The feel of the wind
20. Something cold



Ponkapoag Photo Fun!

Enjoy a family photo opportunity at Fisherman's Beach. Take some photos of interesting things you see along the 4-mile trail. Capture the beauty of the day and share some smiles! Post your photos on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtriptip**.

Explore a Winter Wonderland at St. Moritz

Shea Rink Parking Lot

651 Willard Street, Quincy, MA

Phone: 617-698-1802, events line #4

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

Parking Fees: No parking fee. Please park along the wooded edge of the lot, if possible.

Restrooms: No public restrooms at this location.

St. Moritz serves as the eastern gateway to the Blue Hills Reservation. Located in West Quincy, the area is named for a large annual winter carnival that was hosted by the City of Quincy from 1929 until 1937. At its height, the carnival attracted 50,000 people and lasted for three days.

St. Moritz Winter Wonderland Walk

Explore the site of the historic 1930's Quincy Winter Carnival on this 1-mile wander. Start on the green dot trail from the bulletin board at intersection #4234 on the south side of the parking lot. Cross over a wooden bridge as you skirt the southern edge of St. Moritz Pond. The City of Quincy dammed a brook to create these two shallow ponds for skating events hosted at the carnival, including speed skating, figure skating and barrel jumping.

As you follow the green dot trail up a short slope at intersection #4205, look up at the steep hillside before you. The steep slope was part of a 100-foot ski jumping hill constructed in 1929, complete with a wooden launch platform at the top (see photo).

Follow the green dots to intersection #4202. Here turn right, stepping off the green dot trail. Follow the unmarked Murphy Path for about a half mile to intersection #4220 and look for green dots and blue rectangular blazes going to your right. Follow the color-coded markings as you pass between the two St. Moritz Ponds. Take a moment to stop and scan the ponds for waterfowl. You may see black and white bufflehead and mallards, two common winter water birds in the Blue Hills.

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Winter Wildlife Safari

Can you observe the signs of wildlife below on your winter wildlife safari?

Tracks of 4 different animals

Five food sources and who eats them

Stop, look and listen—identify animal activity

Homes and shelters for 5 animals

Three signs that animals have been eating

Pick an animal. What makes today's weather conditions easy or difficult for that animal?



Thank you for joining us for this Winter Woodlands & Water Exploration Trip-Tip!

Winter offers a quiet opportunity to slow down and notice the amazing details and hidden secrets of the woods and wetlands of the Blue Hills Reservation. DCR maintains this living green museum for the use and enjoyment of the public, but it is a fragile resource under heavy use. Please remember to always tread lightly on the land and respect and protect your parks. We hope you enjoy your time exploring the world of nature and history in our Massachusetts State Parks.

During your next Trip-Tip, perhaps you'll visit a park that you didn't know about before. Maybe you'll meet a new bird or try a new sport. Winter wanderings bring you opportunities to experiment with ways you can embrace winter. We hope that you will be invigorated to take even more Trip-Tip outdoor adventures all year long!

Image Credits: St. Moritz photos, DCR Archives.

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.* For more information visit: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-conservation-recreation>.

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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION