Frost Pocket Loop

Myles Standish State Forest

SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

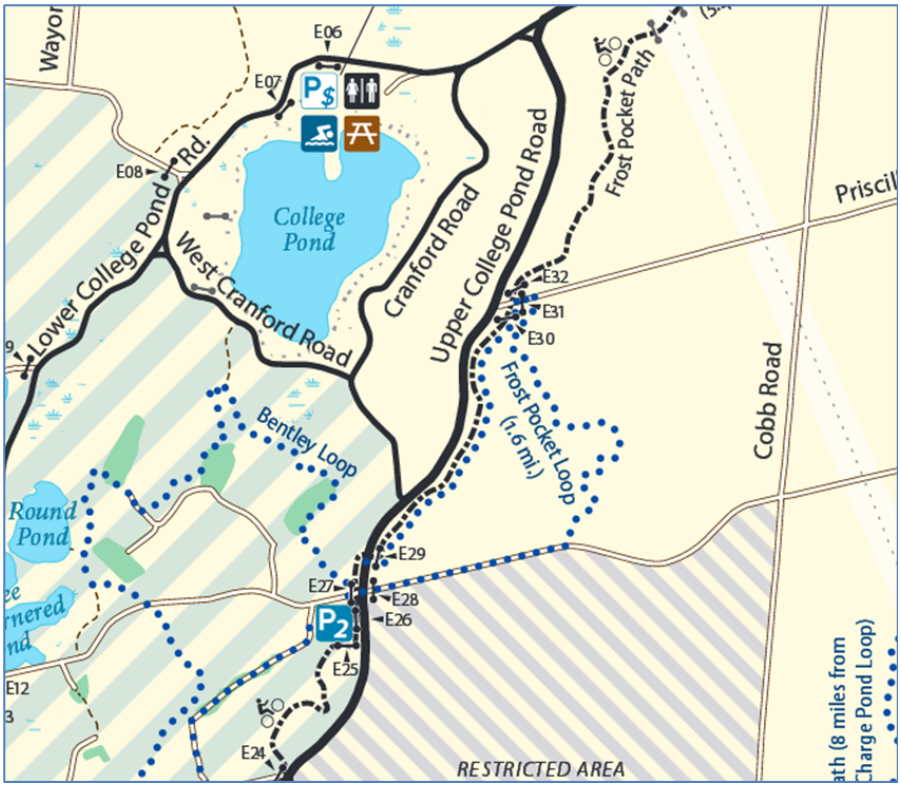
Welcome

Welcome to Myles Standish State Forest in Southeastern Massachusetts. This is a place born of fire and ice, shaped by the human hand. The area's landscape was formed over 10,000 years ago when the glaciers of our last ice age retreated, dropping their load of sand and stone. The sandy soil of these glacial deposits retains little rainwater and the vegetation is prone to forest fires during dry spells in the summer. The natural forest community that is found throughout much of the forest, the pitch pine/scrub oak association or "pine barrens," is uniquely adapted to these conditions and is found in only a few places in the world—including Myles Standish State Forest! As you hike this trail, keep in mind the complex history that has shaped this landscape and remember that, over time, it will continue to change.

About the Trail

This guide offers a brief and engaging self-guided walk along the Frost Pocket Loop. This trail brings you through the stark and beautiful Pine Barrens habitat and its unique geological and natural features. Download or print a park trail map if you choose to hike any of the other park's trails at https://www.mass.gov/locations/myles-standish-state-forest.
This hiking trail is about 1.6 miles long and is mostly flat. There are a few small hills and it is quite sunny. Hiking time is usually about 60 minutes. Enjoy yourself, but please remember...

- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Please stay on designated trails.
- Pets must be on leash at all times.
- Carry in, carry out all trash.
- Leave only footprints take only pictures.
- No motorized vehicles allowed on trails.



The Frost Pocket Loop directions:

The Frost Pocket Loop starts from Parking Lot 2 (P2). To begin, cross Upper College Pond Road and walk to your right, east-ward down Three Cornered Pond fire road (dirt road). At the Frost Pocket Loop sign, take a left to follow the walking trail through the Pine Barrens proper.

The Pine Barrens is a rare and beautiful habitat, with many rare species that are under serious threat. Many birds, insects and plants have adapted to living in this harsh environment. The Pine Barrens need your stewardship to help ensure they will continue to survive. Please stay on the trail and tread lightly as you enjoy the stark beauty of Massachusetts' largest Pine Barren.

Note: The walking trail will end at Pricilla Road, which is a dirt fire road. Turn left and walk along Priscilla Road until you reach the paved bike path. Turn left onto the paved bike path and follow it south back to Parking Lot 2 (P2).

Along Three-Cornered Pond Road

From Parking Lot 2, cross Upper College Pond Road to where the trail begins by walking down the dirt road, Three Cornered Pond Road.

Crossing into the Pine Barrens: The Pine Barrens of southeastern Massachusetts were formed by glacial deposits of sand and soil during the last ice age, which ended around ten thousand years ago. The dry sandy soil is the foundation of the Pine Barrens. The sandy soil and the frequent wildfires that occurred in this forest have caused this habitat to evolve in remarkable ways. Nearly every plant and animal in the Pine Barrens has adapted to thrive in dry sandy soil and with frequent forest fires.

The Three Trees: There are three dominate species of trees in the Pine Barrens. The first you will see as you walk down the fire road is the tall, straight white pine. Count the levels of the branches to tell how old the tree is. Each level of branches represents one year of growth! The bent, gnarled pine trees with rougher bark are called pitch pine. They are a pioneer species that thrives in dry, sandy, fire-prone places where other tree species cannot grow. The third type of tree looks like a shrub but has leaves like an oak tree. It's called scrub oak. Like the pitch pine they thrive in fire-prone areas. Scrub oak can survive a fire even if every part of the plant above ground is burned. Their roots can survive the fire and regrow stronger than before.

As you continue down the dirt road the terrain on your left drops off; this is a Frost Pocket. Follow the walking path on your left at the sign for the Frost Pocket Loop.

Along the Hiking Path

Follow the trail down into the frost pocket. Please stay on the trail as the ecosystem is very delicate.

Born of Ice: The depressions you are walking through are known as frost pockets. Made when huge chunks of ice were left behind at the end of the ice age, frost pockets can be much cooler at the bottom than at the rim since cool air is often trapped in the depressions. They can have frost at the bottom even into early summer! The lack of tall trees, dry soil, and frequent frosts allow rare and highly adapted plants and animals to thrive here.

Hardly Barren: Notice the lack of grass along the trail. Pine Barrens are usually too dry and acidic for much grass to grow. Heaths, lichens and bearberry cover the ground instead. The slightly taller leafing plants are huckleberry and blueberry. The stems of the blueberry are green while the huckleberry stems have a grayish, bark color. They often grow side-by-side and provide food to many animals in the Pine Barrens.

Deer Habitat: White-tailed deer often take refuge at the bottom of frost pockets to seek shade and cover under the scrub oak and cool off in the heat of the day. In the summer, fawns will often be seen in the evening accompanied by their mothers along the deer paths that cross the hiking trail. They can be tough to spot as they wind down from their grazing areas to the bottom of the frost pocket. Look for the tell-tale, heart-shaped hoof prints in the path.

Birds and Butterflies of the Barrens: There are many species of uncommon song birds and butterflies in the Pine Barrens. Eastern towhees and pine warblers are active during the day and whip-poor-wills who fly at night are just a few of the birds that make their home here. In the fall, look for the rare black, white, and orange Buck Moth and the dark brown Pine Barrens Zanclognatha moth. All these animals have adapted to survive in the unique ecosystem of the Pine Barrens.

A Shady Spot: At the top of the ridge, notice the scrub oak understory has given way to a blanket of pine needles. This is the largest white pine grove in this part of the forest. When white pines reach a certain height and density, their shade suppresses any new growth. Over time, this can have a detrimental impact on the health of the forest as most young plants are not able to grow in dense shade. Periodic fires help to fix this and maintain a healthier environment by killing off many of the white pines.

At the end of the walking path, turn left onto Priscilla Road (dirt fire road).

Along Priscilla Road

As you walk along Pricilla Road look to your right at an area that had a controlled burn a few years ago. Also called a prescribed burn, this fire management technique reduces fuel (dead branches, pine needles and dense underbrush) from the forest floor. This fuel can produce hot, fast-moving wildfires and prescribed burns help to reduce the threat to the forest and to surrounding homes.

Turn left onto the paved bike path and head south, back towards Parking Lot 2.

Along the Bike Path

Wild Indigo and Witch's Brooms: Along the edge of the bike trail you will see a low plant about 3 feet high with teardrop shaped seedpods. This is yellow wild indigo; it grows best along the edges of roads and clearings. Look up in the branches of some of the pitch pines along the path and you will see Witch's Brooms. These look like large nests but are biological mutations in the tree that cause the needles to grow overlapping themselves. In middle-ages Europe these types of mutations where thought to be the homes of witches and ghosts, hence its spooky name.

Red Pine Removal: You will see a number of pine trees that have died as you cross the road, as well as some newly cleared areas. These trees were southern Red Pine and were planted here beginning in the 1930s and ending in the 1950s. As of the late 1990s a blight called the Red Pine Scale began to kill off the trees. This tiny insect only affected the non-indigenous red pines. The decision was made to remove these trees from the forest to reduce the threat of wildfires and to allow native trees like the pitch pine and bear oak to return to the Pine Barrens.

The bike path will bring you back to Parking Lot 2 after it crossed Upper College Pond Road. This brings us to the end of the trail at Parking Lot 2. We hope you enjoyed this self-guided tour.

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