Walden Pond
Walden Pond was once home to the renowned author, Henry David Thoreau. Now part of the Massachusetts Parks and Forests system, Walden Pond State Reservation preserves this peaceful area of protected open space so that visitors from near and far may come to experience the pond that inspired Thoreau, as well as his wise, wise, fish, canoe and cross country ski. A replica of Thoreau’s house and the location of his homemade woodlot are available at the boat ramp. Parking for vehicles with special needs is available at the boat ramp. Visitors from near and far may come to experience the pond that inspired Thoreau, as well as his wise, wise, fish, canoe and cross country ski. A replica of Thoreau’s house and the location of his homemade woodlot are available at the boat ramp. Parking for vehicles with special needs is available at the boat ramp.

Welcome to Walden Pond State Reservation
In 1845, Henry David Thoreau went to live and work at Walden Pond. He stayed for two years, keeping a journal 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 nature lover, Thoreau was interested in many diverse aspects of nature and society. 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,” and the two men found they had similar interests in spiritual fulfillment. Thoreau also became close friends with Emerson’s brother, John. Two years later two farmers bought it and moved it to the other side of Concord where they used it to store their crops. Thoreau’s practical talent and companionship, invited him to live in the Emerson household. Grief brought them closer together. The Emisons’ 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.

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Specialized Equipment includes portable FM listening systems for park programs and a beach wheel chair for visitors with disabilities. The Thoreau Society Friends of Walden Pond works for the betterment of the reservation. For more information or to become involved visit www.thoreaurt.org. Donations are gratefully accepted and are used to fund park enhancements projects. Please make checks payable to DCR, Walden Pond State Reservation in the memo section. Mail to DCR, P.O. Box 230, Concord, MA 01742 or leave with park staff.

For more information on the Massachusetts State Park system and to receive a free Guide to Massachusetts State Parks, visit our website at www.massageasons.com. To avoid disappointment, call 978-369-3254, particularly on hot summer days. Annual park passes are available.

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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, Forbush and Haywood families granted approximately 30 acres surrounding the pond to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with the stipulation of “preserving the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau, the birthplace of Henry David Thoreau’s sojourn at Walden started a long tradition of parks that came from the pond and its surrounding woods for recreation and inspiration. The emergence of the railroad as a public park in the 19th century created what 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 might have been preserved for our park forever, with the words of Thoreau, “preserved for our park forever.”

By the time the Commonwealth acquired the property in 1865, 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 sunrise or after sunset. 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 20th century and Thoreau and leveled by the great hurricane of 1938.

History of the Reservation

Henry David Thoreau's sojourn at Walden Pond in 1845 has inspired legions of writers and poets. The pond is a unique 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 bowls melted, they left behind depressions that eventually filled with water. Because of this geological history, most kettle holes resemble the hard and soft woods mix of Thoreau's day.

Today, it is estimated that approximately 300,000 people visit the reservation each year. In an effort to balance the visitor experience and to maintain the integrity of the resources, Thoreau and his friends held a public meeting in 1859 to establish a people capacity at the park to ensure a positive visitor experience and to maintain the integrity of the resources. Thoreau’s house site are stumps of some of the 400 white pines planted by Thoreau.

Natural History

By the time the Commonwealth acquired the property in 1922, much of Walden Pond’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 balsam fir, balsam bushes, sumac, pitch pine, history and oak. Above Thoreau’s house site are the stump of some of the 400 white pines planted by Thoreau and leveled by the great hurricane of 1938.

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