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 his walk, swim, fish, canoe and cross country ski.

A replica of Thoreau’s house and the location of his mod- est home are available for viewing by the public. Year-round interpretive programs and guided walks are offered as well as a gift shop, book store and the Thoreau gallery.

Specialized Equipment includes portable FM listening systems for park programs and a beach wheel chair for visitors with physical limitations. 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. 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 1854 as a book, Walden. In 1854, Henry David Thoreau

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 nature lover, Thoreau was deeply influenced by ideas 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," and 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 his family's pencil-making business and engaged in carpentry, stonemasonry and gardening. He began his lifelong friendship and association with 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 house and room house. On July 4 of that year, he took up residence there. He studied natural history, gardened, wrote in his journal, read and drafted his first book, "Walden, or Life in the Woods," and expanded his family’s grain. In 1868, they dismantled it for scrap lumber and put the roof on an outbuilding.

In September of 1847, Thoreau completed his experi- ment in simplicity and became a spokesman 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 snowballs and raincoats 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.
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.”

In November of 1849, 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 1973, it became part of the Massachusetts State Parks system that currently consists of over 430,000 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 the visitor experience and to maintain the integrity of the park, 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. Grey 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-headed woodpeckers 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, is its chief food.”

The pond is kettle hole, a deep (103 foot) pond formed over 12,000 years ago when the last glacier to erode by vast amounts of sand and gravel carried by streams flowing from the glacier. As the blocks melted, they left behind depressions that eventually filled with water. Because of this geological history, most kettle holes resemble the hard and soft woods have since grown out of them. They leave behind depressions that eventually filled with water. Because of this geological history, most kettle holes have since grown out of them. 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-headed woodpeckers 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, is its chief food.”

The automobile brought increasing numbers of visitors to Walden Pond. The Town of Concord began offering fund-raisers, festivals and groups. The park included concession, swings, bathhouses, boats, baseball diamonds, a hall for dining, dancing and public speaking, and a cinder track for runners and bicyclists. The park was used for recreation. The Fitchburg Railroad, which had taken place around Walden. “All Walden wood might have been preserved for our park forever.”

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