



Original edition produced by David Hodgdon and Thomas Palmer

# Discover the Blue Hills

*Blue Hills Reservation Guide and Maps*

FRIENDS OF THE  
**BLUE HILLS**  
PROTECT & PRESERVE

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# Introduction

Whether you are a frequent sojourner in the Blue Hills, or a new visitor, there is always something new to be explored in this inspiring landscape. Among the 7,000 plus acres there are opportunities to hike, bike, ski, swim, climb and contemplate the simple beauty of nature. One can take a serpentine drive through the reservation, stopping to admire views along the way, or accept the challenge of hiking the Skyline Trail from beginning to end.



With this guide, you can explore each of the sections of the park. As you explore the Reservation throughout the year you will find new delights as each season transforms the landscape. In the spring, bring your binoculars and head to Fowl Meadow in the 000s, where you are likely to spot a pileated woodpecker and other colorful birds or catch a

glimpse of the unusual mating dance of the American woodcock.

You can spend your summers swimming at Houghton's Pond, a kettle pond formation, gift of the glacial age, or pack your rod for some fishing at Ponkapoag Pond. In the warmer months, try launching your canoe on the Neponset River at Fowl Meadow. When the precipitation turns to snow, revisit Fowl Meadow for flat, easy cross-country skiing or, alternatively, speed down the slopes at the Blue Hill Ski Area.

For adventurous souls, there's the challenge of biking Great Blue Hill or rock climbing on the vertical walls at Quincy Quarries in the northernmost part of the park. Those seeking a workout can hike the Skyline Trail from Quincy to Canton, a hike offering much elevation change and wonderful views. Even if you don't consider yourself a serious hiker, you'll still find easy rambles on trails that take you around Houghton's Pond. Any time of year is a good time to take the children to the Blue Hills Trailside Museum to see the creatures that live in the park and learn about the Reservation's rich history.

The Blue Hills Reservation exists to provide recreation and enjoyment for all people and to preserve and protect this precious habitat for all living things that call it home. The Friends of the Blue Hills is a 1,000-member non-profit organization devoted to preserving and protecting the Blue Hills Reservation's natural beauty, diverse natural habitats and many recreational opportunities. We invite you to join us in this mission by practicing good stewardship while in the reservation and by becoming a member. Enjoy this special place.

# About the Blue Hills Reservation

The Blue Hills Reservation encompasses approximately 7,000 acres of woods, ponds, wetlands and elevated rock set aside by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1893 for its citizens to use and enjoy. It is centered on the Blue Hills themselves, a long sweep of steep, stony ridges rising seven miles from Quincy's historic granite quarries in the east to the massive dome of Blue Hill in Canton and Milton in the west. Although none of the peaks is so much as a thousand feet high, they stand well above the surrounding lowlands, and dominate the landscape in all directions.

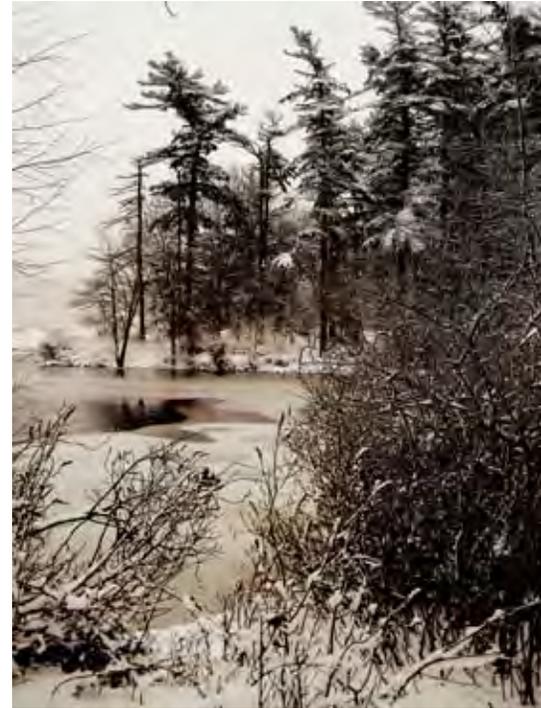
The Reservation was conceived by landscape architect Charles Eliot, as a contrast and counterpoint to metropolitan Boston's then-existing parks, such as Boston Common and Jamaica Pond, in that Nature, and not Art, would be its dominant theme. Instead of wide lawns and manicured groves, it would feature deep forests, shaggy cliffs, and free-running water. He was convinced that no city should be without spacious tracts of dramatic natural scenery open to all, and since this kind of scenery was rapidly vanishing around Boston's turn-of-the-century metropolis, he chose one of the richest remaining lodes, the Blue Hills, as the site for his largest park. Other properties acquired under his direction include Nantasket Beach and the Charles River Esplanade.

Today his vision is largely intact, and the oasis he created in the Blue Hills continues to draw thousands into its delightfully hilly woods for an hour or a day. Containing portions of Boston, Dedham, Westwood, Canton, Milton, Randolph, Quincy and Braintree, the Reservation is vast enough to absorb multitudes and intimate enough

to charm each of them. Though it would take a lifetime to explore thoroughly, much of it is right next to Boston, and it lies open on all sides. Legally speaking, it belongs to everyone, and it offers a standing invitation to stretch your legs and walk over the earth as if you owned it.

The Reservation is managed for the Commonwealth by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and is open from dawn to dusk daily throughout the year. Now more than 100 years old, it is the largest component of Boston's peripheral park system, and it has become even more

precious as the region's population has grown significantly and modern development has reached out to Rt. 495 and beyond. Thanks to the Blue Hills, there is no need to drive to the Berkshires or New Hampshire to get a sizable helping of the New England outdoors in its natural state.



# BLUE HILLS RESERVATION

dcrc MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Mass Audubon  
Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts

DEDHAM

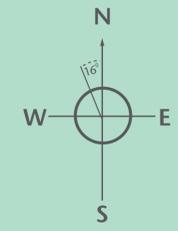
QUINCY

MILTON

BRAINTREE

CANTON

RANDOLPH



**RULES AND REGULATIONS**  
Park open dawn to dusk.

For the protection and enjoyment of the Blue Hills, the following are **prohibited**:

- Littering
- Open fires
- Metal detectors
- Alcoholic beverages
- Pets, except on a leash
- Hunting or trapping
- Posting or distributing leaflets
- Camping except at AMC Camp with permit
- Motorized vehicles, except on public roads
- Disruptive conduct, including public nudity
- Group use of 25 or more, except with a DCR permit
- Destruction or removal of vegetation, animals, structures, artifacts or other State property
- Off trail use without a permit

In addition, the following activities are **allowed in designated areas only**:

- Parking
- Sporting activities
- Mountain bicycling
- Charcoal grills or fuel stoves
- Non-motorized boating at Ponkapoag Pond
- Swimming at Houghton's Pond with lifeguard supervision

All visitors must follow directions of Park personnel or Police. Any violations of these regulations may result in arrest and/or fine per order of 302 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Regulations 12.00

**LEGEND**

**DESTINATION TRAILS** are marked with rectangles and are designed for much longer and more strenuous day hikes. These are not loop trails so plan transportation back to your starting point.

- Blue rectangles mark the popular Skyline which traverses the entire Blue Hills Range with many fantastic views. Note the north and south branches in the western part of the reservation.  
Length: 9 miles Hiking Time: 4 to 7 hours

**LOOP TRAILS** are marked with dots. Loop trails begin and end at the same point at designated parking areas as marked on the map.

- Green dots mark several woodland loops which allow you to enjoy the natural beauty of the reservation.  
Length: 2.4 to 4 miles Hiking Time: 2 to 2.25 hours
- Red dots mark rugged, rocky loops over hilly terrain providing a more challenging hike.  
Length: 1 to 3 miles Hiking Time: 1 to 2.25 hours
- Yellow dots mark short loops which enable you to enjoy parts of the reservation in a small amount of time.  
Length: 0.5 to 1 mile Hiking Time: 1 hour

**DIRECTIONAL LOOP TRAILS** are marked with triangles and both loops begin and end at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. These are designed as rolling routes for a fun mountain bike ride or long woodland hike. The trails are marked in one direction only and are to be followed counter-clockwise.

- White triangles mark the Forest Path loop in the Houghton's Pond section. This rambling 6-mile loop creates a long woodland hike or novice to intermediate mountain bike ride.  
Length: 6 miles
- Yellow triangles mark the Breakneck Ledge loop in the Great Blue Hill section. This 4.5 mile loop provides a rocky, rugged and hilly experience for the advanced mountain biker or avid hiker.  
Length: 4.5 miles

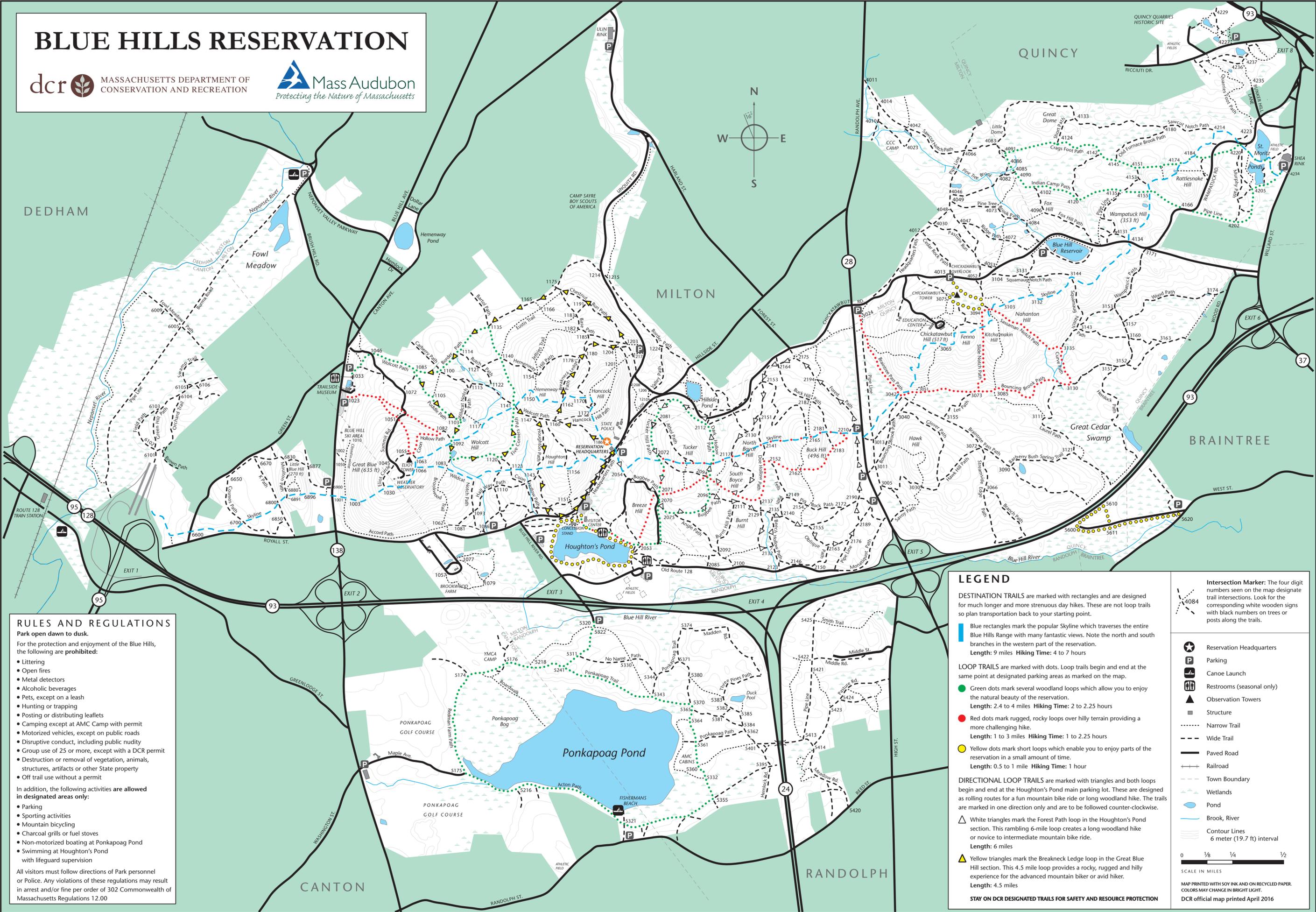
**STAY ON DCR DESIGNATED TRAILS FOR SAFETY AND RESOURCE PROTECTION**

**Intersection Marker:** The four digit numbers seen on the map designate trail intersections. Look for the corresponding white wooden signs with black numbers on trees or posts along the trails.

- ★ Reservation Headquarters
- P Parking
- Canoe Launch
- Restrooms (seasonal only)
- ▲ Observation Towers
- Structure
- - - Narrow Trail
- - - Wide Trail
- Paved Road
- Railroad
- - - Town Boundary
- Wetlands
- Pond
- Brook, River
- Contour Lines 6 meter (19.7 ft) interval

0 1/8 1/4 1/2  
SCALE IN MILES

MAP PRINTED WITH SOY INK AND ON RECYCLED PAPER. COLORS MAY CHANGE IN BRIGHT LIGHT.  
DCR official map printed April 2016



# Blue Hill

The Blue Hill section is centered on Blue Hill itself, a 460-million-year-old dome of granite porphyry which, at a mile wide and fifty stories high, is the largest chunk of rock anywhere around Boston. Massachusetts, an Algonquin name, translates as “At the Great Hill.” Four hundred years ago the local Native Americans used the term to refer to themselves. In adopting the name for their settlement, the Bay Colonists ensured that the entire state would be named after Blue Hill.

Wherever you enter the Blue Hill section, you’ll be going uphill, and the way can get rugged. Persist and you will eventually emerge on the summit, which at 635 feet is by far the tallest of the Reservation’s dozen peaks. Although there is no car access to the top, you can ride up in style on the ski area’s chairlift on October weekends. In addition, the DCR, provides wheelchair access on request.

The broad, grassy trails of Blue Hill Ski, which opened in the late 30’s, stripe Blue Hill’s western slope. Mechanical snowmaking was invented here, although most winters provide plenty of the natural product. Amenities include a lodge, snack bar, and equipment rentals. Many of Boston’s skiers cut their teeth on Blue Hill.

The summit is flat and is slowly re clothing itself in oak and pine. The turreted castle at its southern end houses the Blue Hill Weather Observatory, a semi-automated station in continuous operation since 1885. Tours are available for groups and on a walk-in basis on most weekends from February to November and by appointment year-round.

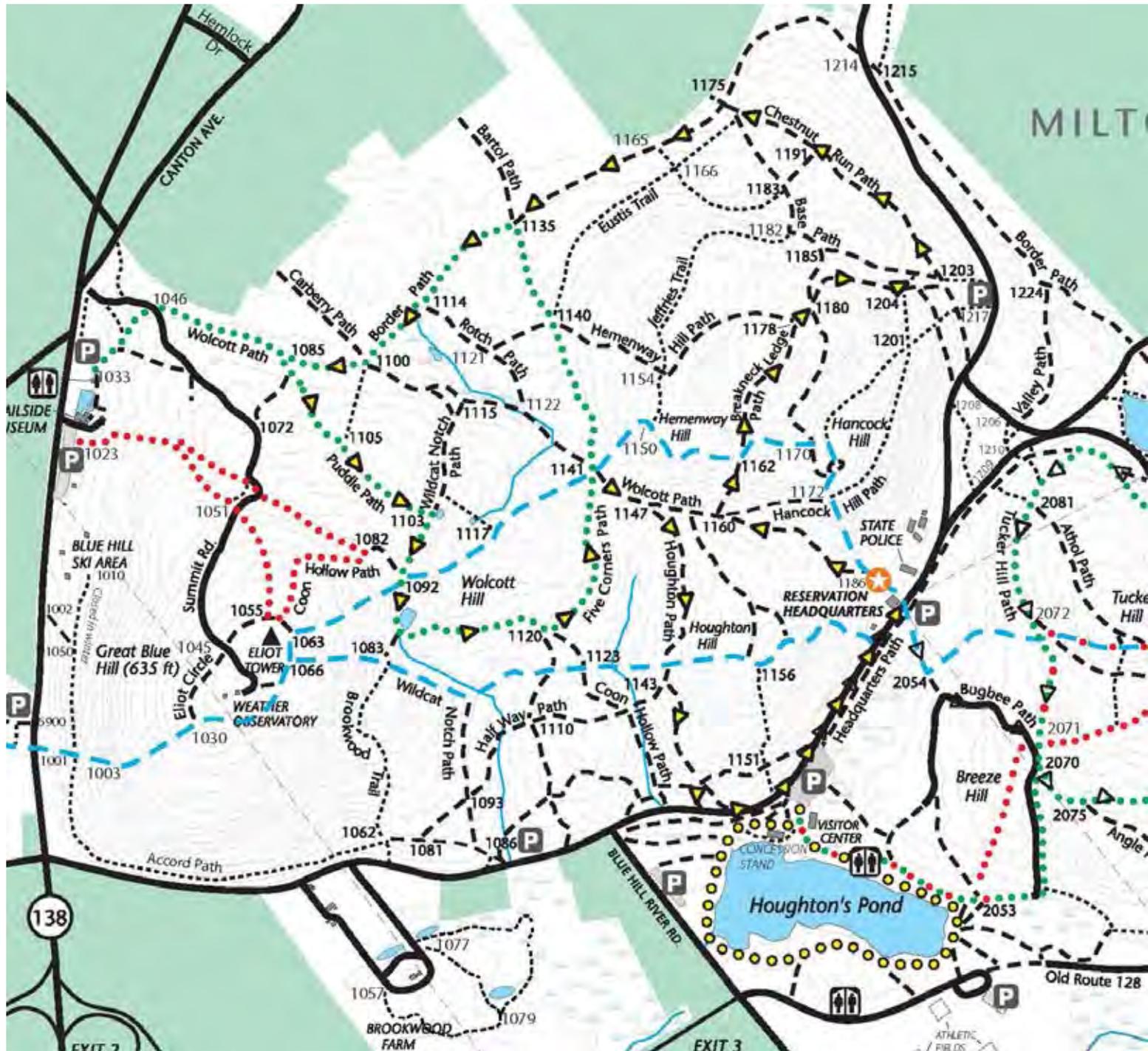
A short walk away at the summit’s northern end are the Eliot Memorial Bridge Tower and Pavilion. The granite footbridge, which

crosses a small gully, honors the Reservation’s creator, Charles Eliot. It leads to the three-story fieldstone tower built in 1929 from whose upper chamber much of eastern Massachusetts is visible on a clear day, highlighted by downtown Boston, and Massachusetts Bay. New Hampshire’s lonely giant, Mount Monadnock, may be in view sixty-seven miles to the northwest. Picnic tables are scattered under the roof of the stone-floored pavilion below.

The Reservation’s most popular year-round destination is the Trailside Museum on Rt. 138, just north of the ski area. Operated for the DCR by MassAudubon, it maintains a substantial collection of native wildlife for educational purposes, and its exhibits display the Reservation’s varied natural landscapes in detail. A full schedule of weekend and evening programs is available.

Follow Blue Hill River Rd to Hillside St around the southern edge of Blue Hill from Rt. 138. In about two miles you’ll reach the DCR’s Reservation Headquarters, a white frame house on the left, just up the hill from the State Police station. Here you can get maps, check the schedule of events, and have your questions answered by rangers.

The Blue Hill section also includes Wolcott, Houghton, Hemenway and Hancock Hills, which combine to give it the highest average elevation of any portion of the reservation. Runoff is swift, and there are few ponds or permanent streams. But the section is rich with the high bluffs, bare ledges, and broad vistas for which the Reservation is celebrated – they are strung along its upper trails in bunches. Once you’ve hiked past a few, you probably won’t want to come down.



# Houghton's Pond

Thanks to its splendid beach on a spacious sand-bottomed pond, the Houghton's Pond section is the summertime heart of the Reservation.

Twenty-five-acre Houghton's Pond owes its existence to a huge block of ice that got stuck on the south side of the Hills as the last glacier ebbed back across them about 15,000 years ago. Meltwaters laid down deep beds of sand all around the block, and when it finally vanished, it left a shelving basin like a window into the underlying aquifer. The Pond remains cool and clear even in the hottest weather, as if recalling its origins.

The Pond occupies a deep notch in the south-facing bulwark of the Hills, and its level surroundings were farmed for generations before their conversion to the Reservation. Today its broad north shore is largely reserved for swimmers, who come from Boston and elsewhere in droves. Lifeguards are on duty in the summer months.

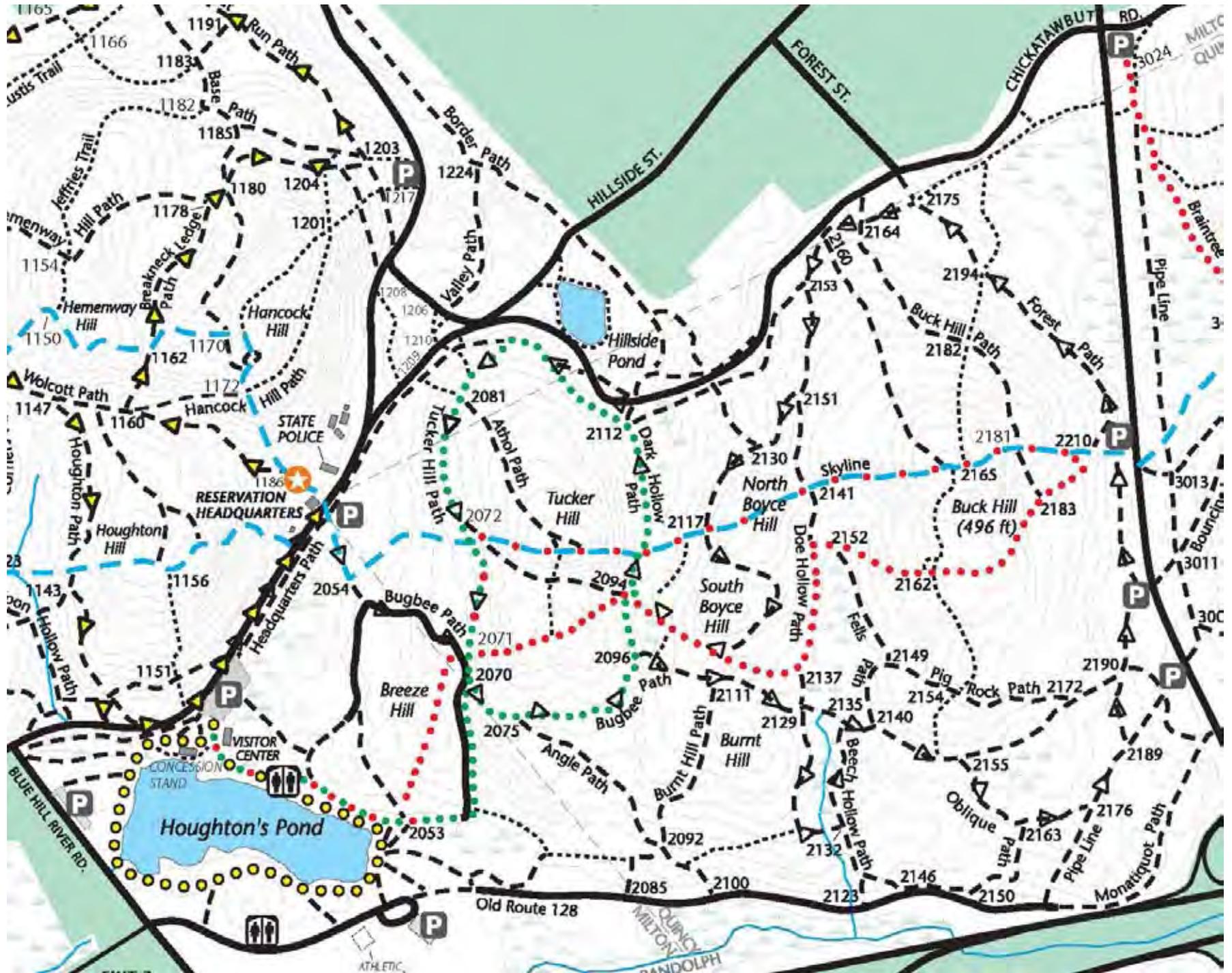
The rest of the Pond is surrounded by wide lawns, open woods, ball fields, tennis courts, bathhouses, shady picnic grounds dotted with barbecue stoves, and a stone-floored refreshment pavilion. The pavilion, which was put on the State and National Historic Register in 1980, was built in 1920 by Stickney and Austin. All of these features are within easy walking distance of each other. Although no boating is

permitted, fishermen catch trout, perch, sunfish and hornpout from the shore.

Just south of the Pond an abandoned portion of the original Rt 128 runs east of the softball fields for a mile or so along the base of the Hills before butting up against the embankment of the new Rt. 128 that replaced it. The old two-lane road provides a level surface for skiers, walkers and cyclists along Blue Hill River and its bordering maple swamps.

The northeast corner of Houghton's Pond marks the gateway to the rest of its section, which is heavily wooded and full of the rugged heights typical of the Reservation as a whole. 449-foot Tucker Hill, topped with a fine group of windblown pines, is a moderate quarter-mile hike away. A half-mile further stands its taller companion, 496-foot Buck Hill. Buck is well worth a visit, since it is unique among the high hills in being open on all sides near the top, with no ambitious trees interrupting the view in any direction. If you live anywhere near Boston, you may be able to see your house from Buck Hill.

Many of the people who have been coming to the Blue Hills for years have never gone further than the Houghton's Pond section. Perhaps this demonstrates the power of cool clear water.



# Chickatawbut

The eastern section of Chickatawbut Road runs two miles along this section's northern boundary from Rt. 28 in Milton to Willard St. in Quincy, paralleling the ridgeline along its gentle backside. Anywhere along here you can hike through to the crest, which is studded with rocky openings overlooking a carpet of treetops extending south to Rt. 128. If you climb down into these trees, you are entering the greenest and wildest part of the Hills. The road is gated at both ends, and is closed after dark.

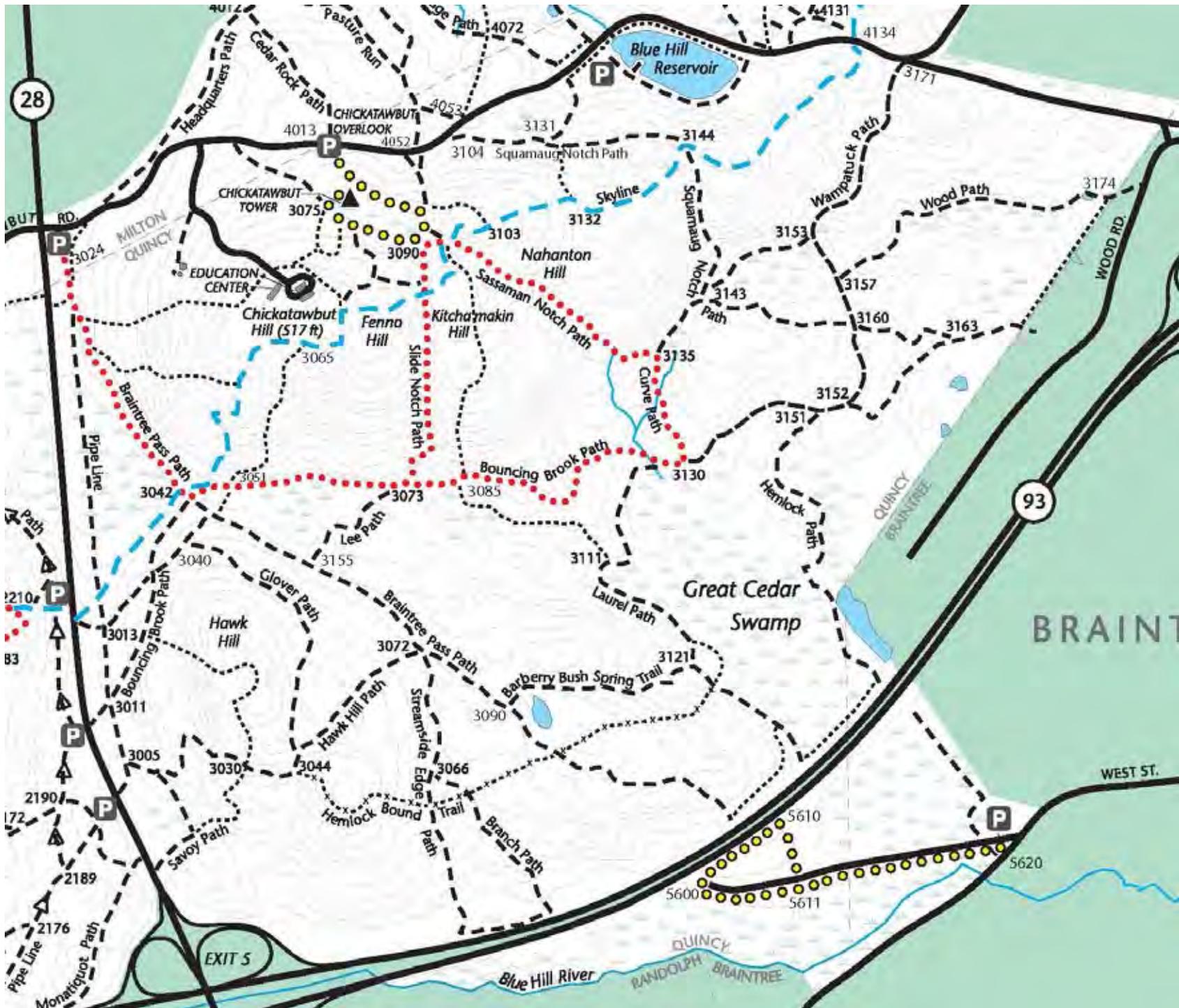
Halfway across Chickatawbut Hill the road widens briefly for the Chickatawbut Overlook, where a bush clearing downslope frames a terrific view of Boston's skyline, and a low stone parapet attracts summer sunbathers. The two or three picnic tables under the pines across the street go fast on summer weekends.

The broad steps under the pines lead a short distance uphill to an historic stone observation tower and pavilion built in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Similar to the one on Blue Hill, it has good views to the north. The tower lies about a hundred feet lower than Chickatawbut Hill's actual summit. To reach the top of Chickatawbut, follow the trail that skirts the small bog in a hollow of the rock just to the south. At 517 feet, Chickatawbut Hill rivals Blue Hill in size. Much of the Hill's broad summit is taken up by the fenced compound surrounding the Chickatawbut Hill Education Center, a

cluster of low cinderblock buildings where the Blue Hills Trailside Museum bases its day camps. The Air Force built the Center in the late 1950's as a radar installation for its 3rd Missile Battalion, and the airmen who lived here controlled the Nike anti-aircraft missiles housed in the silos two miles below in Randolph. Today both soldiers and missiles are long gone, but the site itself is still not open to the public due to safety and contamination concerns. .

Further east toward Quincy, opposite the Broken Hills, Chickatawbut Road descends into what used to be the Blue Hill Reservoir, built over the former Twinbrook Swamp to expand Quincy's drinking supply. The MWRA filled in half of the Reservoir to build two Covered Watertanks. Now, a parking area for a couple cars gives easy access to a short path along a small pond.

The Great Cedar Swamp lies a half mile over the ridge on the other side of the Reservoir. An elongate basin hemmed in by upland on three sides, it supports a mature and nearly impenetrable stand of Atlantic White Cedar, a valuable timber tree almost completely logged out centuries ago. Thanks to its comparative remoteness, the Swamp is probably the least-visited part of the Reservation, despite the showy display of mountain laurel – rare in these parts – that lights up the slope to the west in June.



# Quincy Quarries

More than a century ago the Quarries section rang to the hammers of Quincy's leading industry. Today the stonecutters are gone, but they left a dramatic landscape behind.

A good place to begin exploring this landscape is at the end of Mullin Avenue in Quincy, where a pair of stone obelisks at the bottom of the parking lot frame the Granite Railway Incline. Here, beginning in 1828, fresh-quarried granite blocks were winched down the steep slope on special cars riding the stone footers and pig iron rails still in place. The cars continued two miles north on custom-built tracks to Gulliver's Creek in Milton, where the blocks were loaded aboard sloops and barges on the Neponset River for shipment as far away as New Orleans and San Francisco. This was the first commercial railway ever built in the US, and it carried the granite for many New England landmarks, including Boston's Customhouse, Fort Warren on George's Island, and the Bunker Hill Monument. The blue gray stone, Quincy Granite, was prized for its hardness and durability.

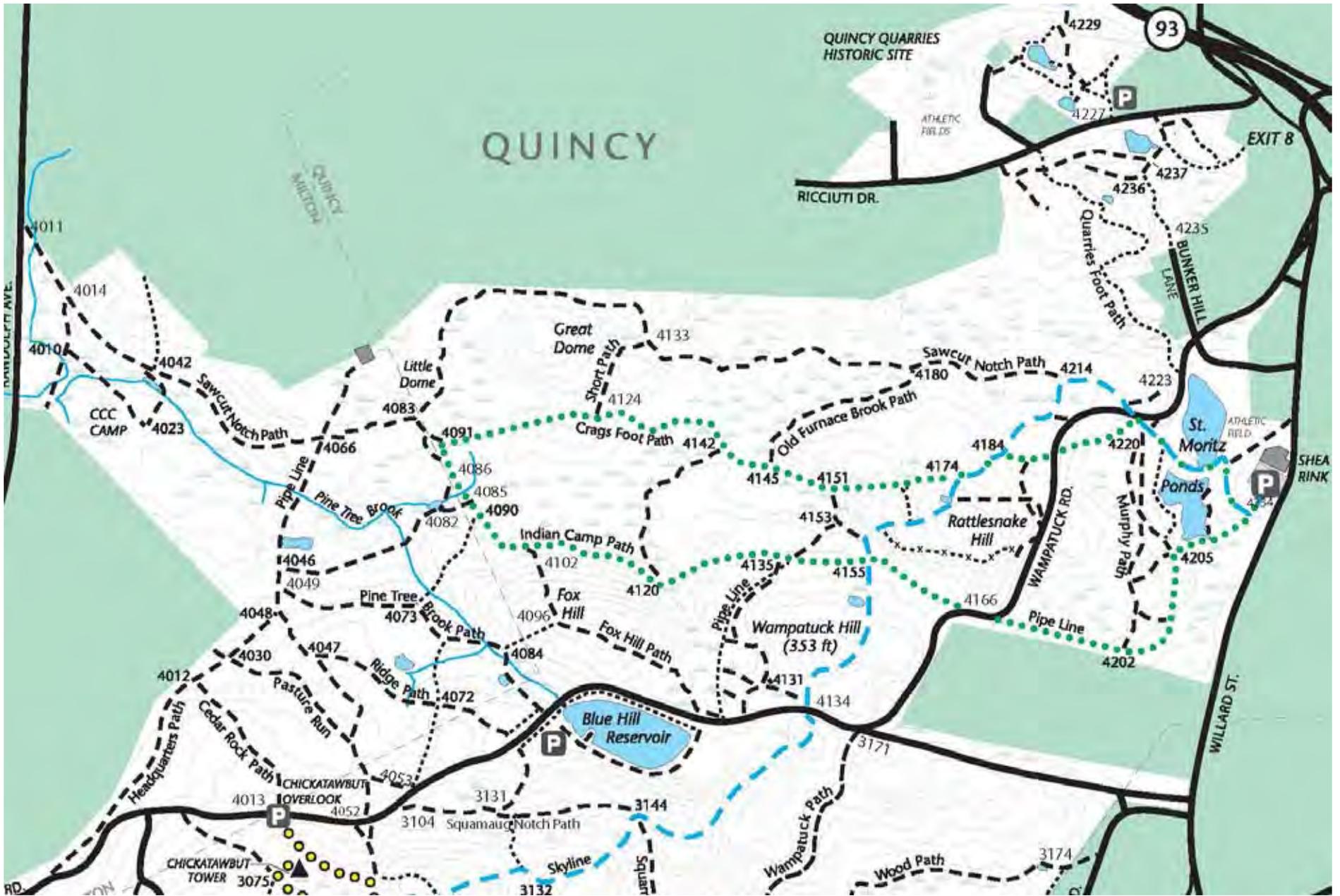
The Quarry Foot Path leads up the Incline and into the Quincy Quarries Historic Site, a 22-acre portion of the Reservation purchased in 1985 in order to preserve and showcase several representative quarries. Many others have been filled and redeveloped since quarrying ended after WWI. The steep, graveled path, marked by white rectangular blazes, enters the site between two of the larger quarries, Granite Railway on the left and Little Granite Railway on the right. Both of these quarries have long since filled with water, and appear as deep pools backed by towering cliffs. Though the water looks inviting, the cliffs drop off suddenly.

The sheer walls and tough, crystalline stone of the quarries have attracted rock climbers for generations, and in good weather you're likely to see a few climbers snapped into belay ropes high over your head.

When reinforced concrete replaced stone as a primary building material in the late 19th century, the bulk of the quarries' output began to flow toward markets for ornaments and facings. Walk Riccuti Drive to its end, follow the curve to the right, and you'll come upon the massive ruined walls of a building where much of this fine work was done, the 1893 Historic Lyons Turning Mill. Though it was humming until 1907, the Mill was left to crumble for a century. Recently, the City of Quincy has begun to reconstruct this historic structure.

In contrast to the bold profiles and heaped-up rock of the old quarries, the St. Moritz Ponds occupy one of the most tranquil spots in the Reservation, popular with young families and strolling sweethearts. These shallow, spacious ponds at the Reservation's northeast edge, created from dammed wetlands in the 1920's, are rimmed with tall pines and quiet trails, and brim with water lilies and painted turtles. They make an attractive transition to the deeper woods to the west, where diligent searchers can locate the foundation of a 20-meter ski jump built in 1925 by homesick stonecutters from Scandinavia.

Though it contains its share of unbroken forest, the Quarries section is most notable as an example of an industrial landscape abandoned to time. Come and see what wonders were worked here, and what was left behind.



# Ponkapoag Pond

The gentle terrain of the Ponkapoag section occupies a broad swath of woods, water and marshes lying across Rt. 93 from the Hills' southern ramparts. It includes some of the Reservation's most special places. Chief among them is 200-acre Ponkapoag Pond, the park's largest water body and premier fishing spot, which lies within Canton and Randolph. A loop trail completely encircles it.

The Pond's west side is dominated by the popular 36-hole Ponkapoag Golf Course, the country's first public course, whose clubhouse fronts Rt. 138 in Canton. Designed in the 1920's, its smooth slopes and broad fairways offer the park's best Nordic-ski touring.

Ponkapoag Pond, as well as Fowl Meadow, (see below) are designated by the state as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, which means that these areas contain unique and valuable natural resources and deserve a high level of protection.

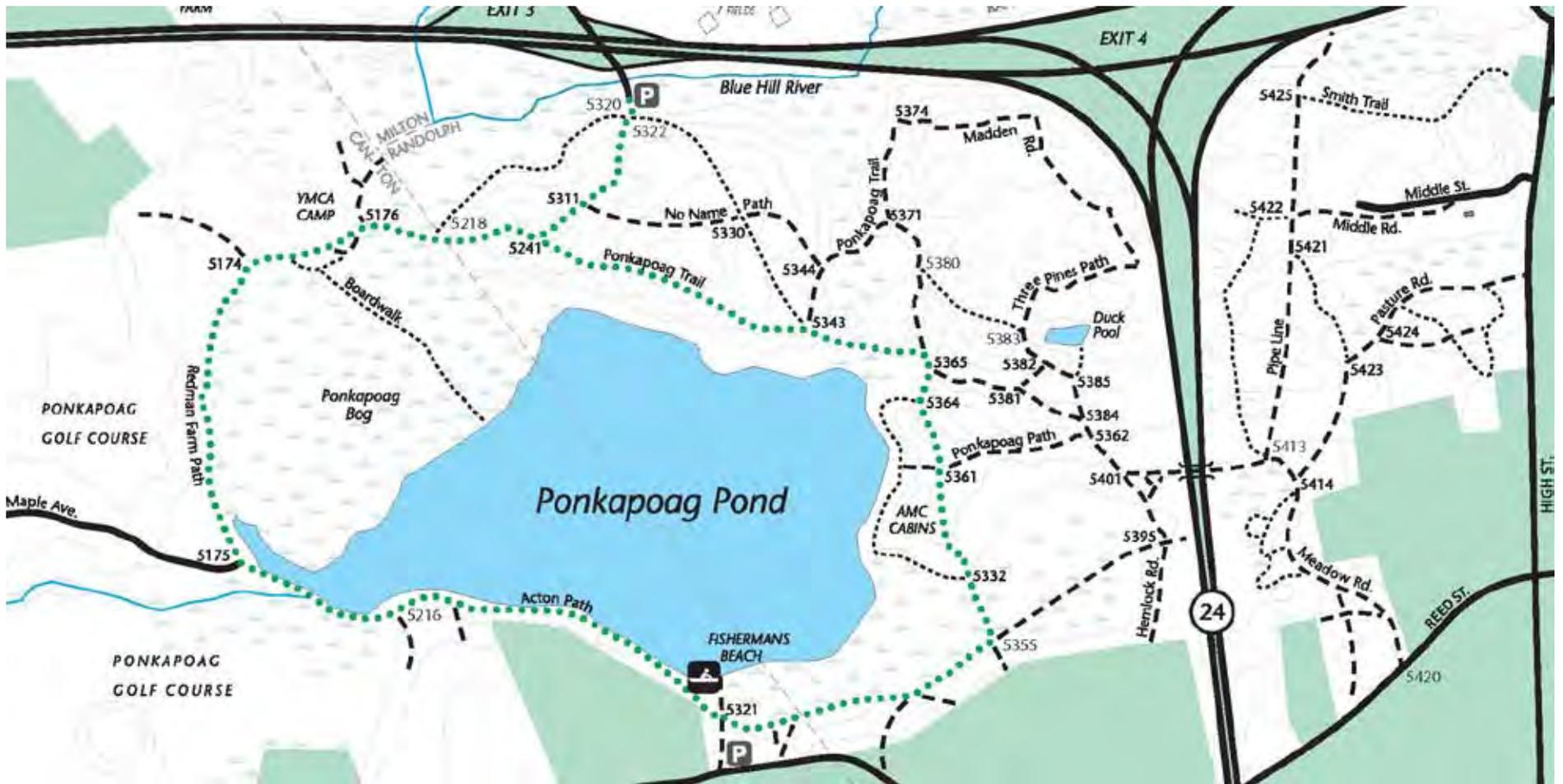
A quarter of the Pond's surface is underground, in effect, since its entire northwest corner is covered by an uncommon wetland plant community known as a bog mat – a buoyant layer of vegetation that spreads out from the shoreline. Eventually it becomes thick enough to support an extensive cedar forest. You can tour the Ponkapoag Boardwalk, a National Environmental Study Area. The Boardwalk is a string of anchored planks extending a fifth of a mile from dry land to open water.

The YMCA Day Camp has operated here summers since the 1920's. The Appalachian Mountain Club camp offers the only site where visitors can stay overnight in the Blue Hills. Hidden in a wooded bluff on the Pond's edge, visitors can stay in the AMC rustic cabins for an affordable get-away, right next to home.

The Pond's best boat launching spot is at Fisherman's Beach on its south shore.

Several trails in the oak woods east of the Pond lead to a pedestrian bridge across Rt. 24. On its far side (5,400 Section) lie about 200 acres of Reservation land called Ponkapoag Mid Section. At its center is a relic of the Cold War, a Nike site, a group of fortified underground silos which housed massive liquid-fueled anti-aircraft missiles in the early 1960's. Quail, uncommon elsewhere in the park, like the open terrain here (5,600 Section).

Ponkapoag East Section, which is the reservation's most obscure, is located off West Street in Braintree and Pond Street in Randolph. This area, a small upland cut off from the high ground by Route 93, is surrounded by marshes where ducks often gather. A parking lot, just west of Braintree's Ridge Arena provides access to this area while a piece of the old Route 128, now closed to cars, leads you into adventure. Every Blue Hills connoisseur loves this spot.



# Fowl Meadow

The broad expanse of Fowl Meadow is low-lying, devoid of rock, and flat as a pancake. It formed during the last glacier, when Canadian ice blocked the Neponset River at Hyde Park, and the lake that resulted reached all the way back to Walpole. The meadow is a deep deposit of sand and gravel now overlaid by the largest freshwater marsh remaining inside Route 128. It is bisected north to south by the beeline rails of the Amtrak Boston-to-New York route and by the meandering channel of the Neponset River.

The 30-mile long Neponset River drains most of the watershed of Norfolk County and forms a floodplain in the Fowl Meadow before curving east and emptying into Boston Harbor at Quincy and Dorchester. Though usually only yards wide, after heavy rains the river can leave its banks and widen to a half-mile or more. These occasional floods prevent trees from becoming established in much of the Meadow. In colonial times the Meadow's fine grasses produced hay that supported livestock, making it one of the area's most valuable resources.

A fascinating path, the Fisherman's Trail follows the winding levee of the Neponset's east bank through the length of Fowl Meadow. The river is flat water in the Meadow and is passable by canoe most of the year. Though once famously dirty, the river has become considerably clearer in recent years as the towns upstream have cleaned their discharges, and fish and aquatic plants are beginning to return.

The Meadow's downstream end is marked by the three granite arches of Paul's Bridge, where traffic has crossed between Milton and Boston since the 18th century, and two former structures have given way to the present one, built in 1932.

The most popular trail in the Meadow, the Burma road, begins near the parking lot just south of the bridge. It runs straight through the Meadow about 2.5 miles to Rt. 128. Built atop an embankment the Road

often remains dry when much of the Meadow is flooded, and allows access to, and a good view of, the Meadow's open water, broad marshes, old oxbows, and extensive stands of red maple and aspen, all of which attract considerable numbers of migrating waterfowl and songbirds in season. Near its midpoint side trails branch off toward the bordering river and uplands.

Walkers are more likely to see deer along the Burma Road than anywhere else in the Reservation, as they find their way under Rt. 128 via the Neponset River.

At its southern end, the Road runs into the Interstate 95 Stub, a crumbling relic of a citywide battle between citizens and highway builders in the late 1960s. Plans to extend Interstate 95's six lanes through the Meadow and into Boston along the current route of MBTA Orange Line were scrubbed at the last minute by popular outrage and the leadership of Governor Frank Sargent. Today the areas around the defunct ramps, which were never opened to traffic, are maintained as open fields by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. This habitat is important to wildlife and is otherwise scarce in the reservation as a whole. Public access is available off the final curve of the ramp leading from Rt. 95 to Rt. 128 westbound.

Beginning at the I95 Stub, a wooded corridor incorporating the Skyline Foot Path connects the Meadow to the main body of the Reservation across Rt. 138 to the east. Smack in the middle of this corridor lies Little Blue Hill (6,500 Section), a matchbox version of its neighbor. Though it can be climbed in minutes, its ledgy summit is open in places and offers fine views of Blue Hill itself. Trails start from the large public lot just north of the Dunkin Donuts on Rt. 138. With its easy grades, its abundant water and its rich and varied animal and plant life, the Meadow has always been popular with local residents as a tranquil oasis amidst its busy surroundings. Come and explore.

