

Captain Sargent Farm

Summary: A moderately easy one-hour figure-eight tour of the property to the north of South Acton Road takes you through forest, past a farm, along Heath Hen Meadow Brook and its wetlands, and includes about 100 feet of elevation gain; you may also extend your hike via a link to the Flagg Hill Conservation Area. A half-hour loop to the south features level trails circumnavigating additional fields.

Trailhead Location: The Captain Sargent parking area is located on the north side of South Acton Road, just east of its junction with Tuttle Lane. The parking lot can accommodate several cars. A smaller roadside parking area lies just south of the junction of Tuttle Lane and South Acton Road.

Geology: Three low, rounded hills rising about 300 feet above sea level form a prominent feature of the Captain Sargent Farm property north of South Acton Road. The hills are drumlins, oval-shaped hills made of clay, sand, and rocks (glacial till) by glacial ice about 15,000 years ago. The hills are elongated in the north-south direction, reflecting the direction in which the ice sheet retreated in this area.

History: The Town purchased the farm in 1980, with assistance from the state under the self-help program. This land has been in agricultural use since the 1700's and was purchased from the estate of Mr. Babrocki, the last farmer to own the land. During the American Revolution the family of Nathaniel Sargent owned the land. Sargent served with the Slow Minute Men at Concord and Charlestown, and was company captain during Shay's Rebellion. A parking lot was cut into the northeast section of the land in 1994 and has encouraged use of the land. Much of the southern section is in use for agriculture, but the public may use the edges of these fields.

Nature to look for: What do bullfrogs in Arizona have in common with bittersweet in Massachusetts? Both are examples of invasive species, organisms that are transplanted to an area and then lack natural controls to their growth and reproduction. The Green Trail in the Sargent Farm woods passes through dense thickets of buckthorn and bittersweet, both common invasive species in Massachusetts. Bittersweet's attractive orange berries have made it easily recognizable and attractive for wreaths. Unfortunately, it is also attractive to birds that disperse its seeds. Bittersweet vines grow quickly in the right amount of light, rapidly covering trees and their leaves. Once covered, the trees have insufficient light to meet their own energy needs and soon die.

The trails of Sargent Farm provide opportunities to notice the variation of plant and animal life in different habitats. In the fields south of South Acton Road, you will find a variety of grasses. Grasses grow quickly in the full sun provided by the fields, preventing wind and water erosion and providing shelter to a variety of small mammals such as rabbits, moles, voles and shrews. You might hear the high-pitched cry of the red tailed hawk as it circles overhead looking for dinner. In the wetlands along the fields' edges, and along Heath Hen Meadow Brook, emergent vegetation such as cattails provides hunting spots for the red-winged blackbird. Within the deciduous woods of Sargent Farms, scarlet tanagers and eastern coyotes find shelter and food. A barred owl and a fisher have been seen in the area as well.

Suggested Route: Follow the red-blazed trail northwest from the South Acton Road parking lot. At the property boundary, continue northwest on a private property easement. Heath Hen Meadow Brook's wetland lies to the right of the level trail, which can be muddy in spots. Follow the red-blazed trail past farm and field. From the edge of one field a trail heads to the right, into the undergrowth, to the **Flagg Hill Conservation Area** across West Acton Road; you continue straight.

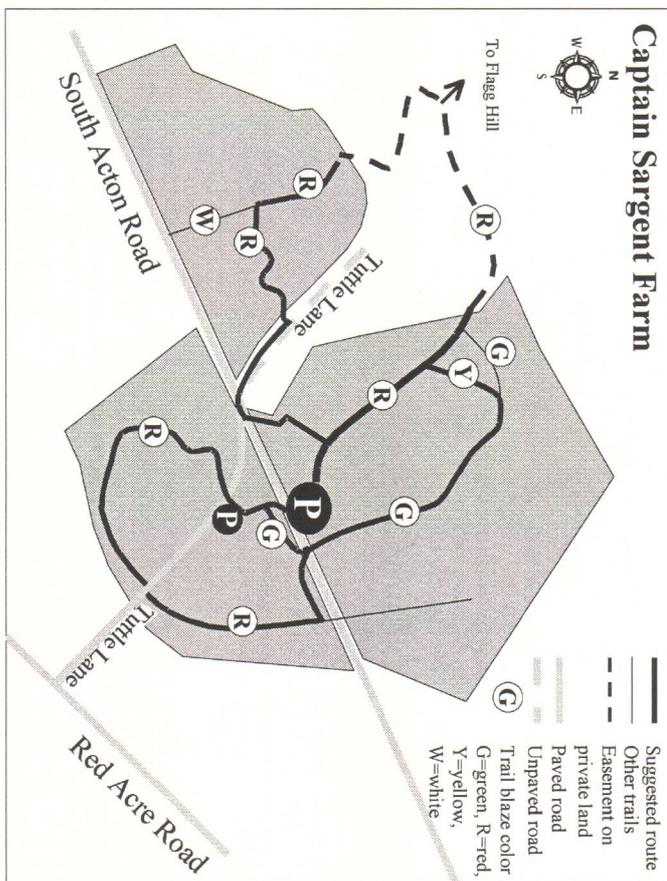
Re-enter the woods on a wide track, then bear left at a multiple trail junction. Continue straight as a narrow trail heads uphill to the left, then look for prominent red blazes to your left at the junction immediately ahead. Bear left and briefly uphill at this junction, following the red blazes to unpaved Tuttle Lane.

Turn right to South Acton Road, left along the road, and then take an immediate left onto a red-blazed trail into woods. After crossing a muddy area with several rivulets running through it, turn left onto the original red-

blazed trail, then right onto a yellow-blazed trail. Climb uphill past occasional granite outcrops, then turn right onto the green-blazed trail to return to South Acton Road just east of parking area.

To continue on to the southern portion of the property, just east of parking area and turn right along the field's edge. Cross Tuttle Lane (now paved), then follow the trail around the perimeter of two fields.

When your trail loops back to Tuttle Lane, bear right across Tuttle Lane to pick up the trail and follow it around two more fields. Near South Acton Road, bear left around the field to a small grove of trees; bear right around the trees to cross South Acton Road and return to parking area.



You will find something more in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.

Epistle - Saint Bernard (1091 - 1153)