

Flagg Hill

Summary: A 1.5 hour ramble through forest and by wetlands, with intriguing signs of earlier land use to consider, plus additional side excursions. Easy except for Erickson Loop, which has a steep section. The main trail continues through Boxborough to Windmere Drive, another trail across West Acton Road leads to Captain Sargent Farm.

Trailhead Location: The Flagg Hill trailhead in Stow is located to the left of a gray-painted concrete storage building on the west side of West Acton Road, 1.3 miles north of the Stow Fire Department (corner of Hartley and Crescent). There is also a trailhead located in Boxborough, on Windmere Drive.

History: The Flagg Hill Conservation Area consists of 286 acres acquired and protected by the people of Stow and Boxborough in 1998 to serve as critical wildlife habitat and natural ecosystem. Local funding approved at town meetings in both towns was supplemented by foundation grants and donations from hundreds of citizens to purchase the property.

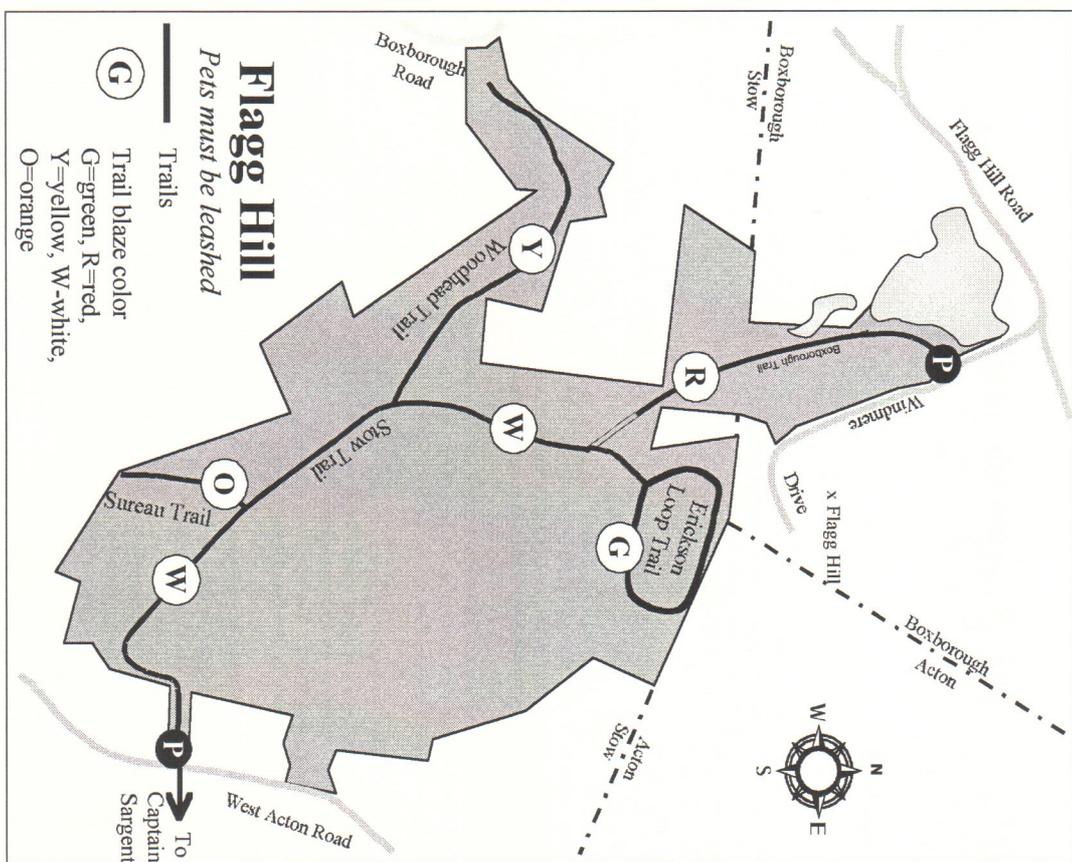
Nature to look for: Flagg Hill Conservation Area along with several contiguous protected properties provides more than 450 acres of unfragmented wildlife habitat. The large parcel gives animals a greater opportunity to find the food, water, and shelter needed to survive. The diverse forested habitats, from upland forest to abandoned orchards to red maple swamps, provides nesting opportunities for a wide variety of song birds, mammals, and amphibians. Visitors can view the parallel stone walls adjacent to the main trail and hazard a guess as to their purpose, as research continues on such Flagg Hill artifacts.

The main trail passes by a certified vernal pool soon after leaving the parking area on West Acton Road. Depending on the time of year, this vernal pool might look like a big puddle or a mud hole. Long unappreciated, the vernal pool is critical habitat for amphibians to reproduce without the danger of being eaten by fish. In winter, the vernal pool might resemble a small ice patch without life. By early spring, however, the wood frogs, spring peepers, and salamanders are courting and laying their eggs. In later spring, wading birds and dragonflies are looking for food in the pools rich with insect life and tadpoles. In summer, vernal pools often dry up and become uninteresting to humans as well as other animals. Come spring, however, their life will return, adults will court, and tadpoles will hatch to begin another cycle.

Suggested Route: Follow the white-blazed Stow Trail west from West Acton Road. Soon after turning right onto a wide track, take a few minutes to turn left on a narrow, unmarked trail through double stone fences to view the remnants of a stone storage structure. Continuing on the main trail, a left at the junction with the orange-blazed Sureau Trail winds along a red maple swamp and ends at a large boulder locally known as the "charcoal rock"; the property beyond is private (30 minute round trip). Farther along the main trail, you will pass the yellow-blazed Woodhead Trail on your left (45-minute round trip over Heath Hen Meadow Brook to a loop at trail's end).

At the junction of red, green and white trail markers, continue straight on the green-blazed Erickson Loop. This section of trail is the most challenging, due to uneven footing and some steep sections. When you return to the red-green-white trail junction, you may turn right onto the red-blazed trail and hike out to the Windmere Drive trailhead in Boxborough (45 min round trip), or return down the white trail to West Acton Road.

From this parking area, a trail easement on private property connects to **Captain Sargent Farm**. Cross West Acton Road to a wide grassy track running alongside a private yard. The trail soon passes through a series of wetlands. At a Y-junction, turn left; turn left again at the next Y-junction. After crossing a series of culverts connecting two wetland areas, the trail rises to the edge of a large grassy field. Turn left at the T-junction, then bear right at a Y, and continue skirting the edge of the field. Wetlands lie to the left as you pass through a stone fence gap into woods at the end of the field. Follow the red-blazed trail past a watery wetland, to a drier ground beneath tall pines. After passing over two stone fence gaps in quick succession, you arrive at the boundary of Captain Sargent Farm, about 15 minutes from the Flagg Hill kiosk.



I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Walden — Henry David Thoreau