

The Neck River Uplands Preserve

This 115 acre preserve lies in the geographic center of Madison, immediately west of Route 79. It contains two parcels, one lying north of Route 80, the other, south.

The topography of the Uplands is determined by undulating bedrock, which forms very close ridges and plateaus oriented north-south. These features influence the flora and fauna of these areas. The dry plateaus and rocky ridges have thin soil, so rainwater quickly drains downhill, leaving little moisture behind. But slow-



growing chestnut and red oaks, along with some beech and red maples, create a lacy canopy overhead. The fruits of these trees offer a high calorie source of fats and carbohydrates that help deer put on weight as colder weather approaches. Turkeys scratch and strut here, and chipmunks whistle as they scurry along old stone walls to store provisions for the winter. Squirrels and white-footed mice live comfortably on the acorns, and hickory and beech nuts, dropped from above. But the web of life in the Uplands allows birds and rodents to fall prey to coyotes and their smaller relatives, the foxes. Numerous rocky overhangs offer ideal den sites for these canines.

Trees on the plateaus do suffer from exposure and the dry conditions. The death of some benefits the many woodpeckers that work on these snags. The cavities they create provide nesting sites for themselves and others, such as chickadees. Fallen trees and logs provide dens for opossums and raccoons. Just below the trees, mountain laurel, witch hazel, and highbush blueberries make the most of any remaining moisture. And of course, the deer love to browse on the blueberries.

From the high areas, slopes divert run-off into streams. In the northern parcel, three beautiful creeks flow into the Neck River. Likewise, three smaller streams also make their way to the river in the southern property. These inclines limit shrub growth and result in more open areas. The cracks and crevices of many rocky outcrops offer shelter for bats and snakes. Increased moisture gives rise to a greater variety of trees. The slopes afford them some protection, so fewer snags develop.

Below the slopes, rich pocket wetlands soak up drainage from above. Many of these areas are dotted with mounds or miniature “islands” that offer special protection and habitat for smaller creatures. In the spring and early summer, peepers and wood frogs celebrate their good fortune. Gray tree frogs and salamanders are more subdued but also thrive. Here, red maples grow for a while but usually die early from too much water. Alongside the river, many lush ferns and violets grow in warm weather. In winter snow, these same areas demonstrate the footprints of many creatures that come for a drink of fresh, running water.

Both parcels contain the remains of historic roads. In the northern parcel, just west of Route 79, the Durham Turnpike makes its way parallel to Route 79. This roadway was in use by 1811, providing a connection between the Madison town green and Durham. In 1825, the Killingworth-Fair Haven Turnpike cut an east-west route across the Durham Turnpike. This runs parallel to Route 80 in the southern parcel. Both of these areas provide so much to see and appreciate. Hikers, runners, and birdwatchers can enjoy the Uplands, and winter snow makes some of the trails suitable for snow shoeing and cross-country skiing.

Trails of the Northern Parcel

Category: Longer walk with a number of step-stone crossings of streams.

Start: Trailhead 1, the recommended access to this parcel, is on the left (Southern) side of Princess Drive.

Distance: About 2.2 miles.

Approximate Time: 2 hours.

Parking: Near Trailhead 1 on Princess Dr.

How to get there:

Trailhead 1: This is the recommended access for the northern parcel. Travel north on Route 79 to the North Madison Traffic Circle. Leaving the circle, continue north 0.4 mi. to Princess Drive. Turn left (west) on Princess Dr. and go 0.1 mi. to the trailhead on the left.

Trailhead 2: This access is only recommended for those crossing Route 80 on foot from the southern parcel. Please exercise **caution** when crossing to the northern parcel. It is located on Route 80 0.3 mi. west of the North Madison Traffic Circle. Parking and safe exit from and to Route 80 is difficult.

These trails explore streams that flow between three plateaus. Upland areas are also traversed. Traveling south from Trailhead 1, hikers become familiar with most of the common features of this trail system. Tall tulip trees are part of the mixed hardwoods along this eastern-most tributary of the Neck River. Ferns cover wet, rocky areas along the stream, while massive rocky outcrops provide shelter and den sites for mammals.



A 30' high section of exposed ledge

Points A – B

Junction A is marked by a steep hill on the right. A zigzag trail climbs this incline. Bypassing this branch in the trail, hikers continue through a widening valley with dramatic rocky outcrops.

Points B – Junction C

After crossing a wetland and stream with numerous moss-covered rocks, the Rock Room appears on the left half-way up an incline. Successive freezing and thawing over hundreds of years has lifted the lower wall of the room and allowed it to very gradually slide down hill to create a “room” in the ledge. The walls of the room are 8' – 10' high.

Turning right and going uphill, the trail enters an area thick with mountain laurel. At the top, stunted oaks show the effects of dry conditions. Here, the trail intersects a historic roadway, the Durham Turnpike, constructed in 1811. Turning right, the foliage canopy thins and an open, grassy area emerges. Blueberries thrive in the sun. As the trail reaches the apex of the triangular junction noted as point C, beeches become more common. Shade deepens and moss covers exposed areas of rock.

Points C – D

Progressing to the left, the trail passes the base of junction C and continues south. As elevation is lost, moss is less common and leaf litter covers the surface of the old turnpike. This section of road is 8' – 10' wide, with a stone wall defining its left boundary. Past the wall, a lush wetland containing the Neck River comes into view. At the bottom of the descent, a gap in the wall indicates where a bridge once crossed the river. From that point, the stone wall continues south until it is lost in the fill brought in to construct the North Madison traffic circle. The trail becomes narrow and follows the Neck River as it turns right (west). Again, a stone wall marks the northern edge of the river. In the spring, rushing water tumbles over a boulder-strewn channel, creating lovely water music. Violets bloom among the rocks.

As the trail moves away from the river, a glacial erratic appears in the wetland left of the trail. A tree has managed to grow on top of this rocky “table” by sending roots around the rock down to the moisture below. Past this area, sharp-edged rocky ledges protrude from the plateau along the right side of the trail. Here, glaciers traveled south toward the Sound, and in the process, “plucked” loose stone from the edge of the plateau. Large, jagged rocks litter the ground below the ledge.

Points D – E

This section of trail picks up the lower part of the same creek that lay along the trail at the beginning. Unlike the first portion of this stream, this section flows through a fairly broad valley. Once again, ferns cover the ground and tulip trees shoot upward.

Gradually, the height of the valley walls increase to some 50' on the left and 30' on the right. Layered rocky outcrops again frame the lowland. Moss covers boulders in the stream bed. Soon, the trail turns right up a slope to a narrow woods road. A right turn here leads back to the bottom of junction C. Turning downhill to the left, the valley continues to deepen. At the stream crossing, a broad, lush wetland lies to the right.



Looking uphill along the Durham Turnpike

Points E – F

After crossing the stream, a look to the right shows a trail continuing north back to point B. A short detour here provides an opportunity to view a massive stone outcrop to the left of the trail at eye level.

Returning to the trail that just crossed the stream, continue to follow the narrow but well-defined woods road up hill. The top of the first rise is marked by a remarkably straight and true stone wall. Chipmunks scurry in and out of openings.

Turn right, and continue to the next rise through numerous beeches. At the top of this incline, the trail is straight as it progresses through mountain laurel before turning left to reach the top of the plateau.

Here, the trail passes over exposed ledge. The wind blows along the track, keeping the trail clear of leaves so luxuriant moss can cover the surface. Some young hikers have named this section the Emerald Highway. A small loop trail, with a similar surface, branches off to the left before the trail reaches point G, its intersection with yet another moss covered woods road.



A linear stone wall

Points G – H

Turning left, a yellow pipe soon shows the northern boundary of this property. A short descent leads to the middle stream that augments flow in the Neck River. After crossing, turn left (south), making sure to catch the trail as it leaves a woods road. Following this narrow stream, large mossy boulders mark the edges of the watercourse.

Points H – I, and on to Lookout spur trail

After this crossing, the trail goes up an incline and distances itself a bit from the stream. Soon, the trail again draws near the stream. The rate of drop in the course of the stream increases the speed of flow and a smooth, steep section of rock directs the stream through a narrow flume. At point I, turn left to follow the stream as it turns and takes a serpentine course. Water scours the edges of the curves while depositing gravel and small stones on the inner sides. Large flat rocks produce tumbling water. Soon, there is a spur trail to the right that leads to a rocky overlook where water churns and falls with Spring runoff and rains. Retracing this short detour to its cut off point, the turn right leads to point D. Turning left, return to point I and the middle stream.

Points I – J

This low section of trail provides numerous views of lush wetlands. In Spring and early summer, peepers and wood frogs fill the air with intense sound. Mountain laurel is thick as the trail heads up to the next plateau and point J.

Points J – Trailhead 2

At this trail intersection, turn left to cross a sunny, open area. Blueberries cover the dry surface and oaks offer perches for red-shouldered hawks. After crossing this clearing, the trail makes a steep, diagonal decline as it passes through dense mountain laurel and beeches. At the bottom, this vegetative pattern persists, resulting in a narrow passage through deep shade. Soon, the laurel opens up and a large clearing may mark the location of an early charcoal mound. Bits of charcoal can be found on the surface. Blueberries diminish and the trail enters a section of grassy glades. Soon, aromatic hay ferns carpet the ground. The trail turns left and follows a broad fern-covered wood road to Trailhead 2.

Hikers may cautiously cross Route 80 to Trailhead 2 of the southern parcel, or retrace the trail to point J, a northbound section of trail, and eventual return to Trailhead 1 on Princess Drive.

Points J – H

After returning to intersection J, continuing straight. About 100' ahead on the right, a rocky ledge provides an excellent overlook for surveying the valley below. This is especially lovely in winter, when snow rests on the finest of branches and dark patches in the wetland indicate open water. The latter provides much needed cold weather drinking water for wildlife.

The trail swings north through intense growth of mountain laurel, before it rises to the top of another plateau. At one point, houses can be seen on the left, but soon the trail dips down to re-enter mixed hardwoods for a quiet walk back to point H.

Return to Trailhead 1

Turning left (north) at point H, reveals a familiar section of trail that returns to point G. Continue straight and along a zigzag path down a steep hill to point A. A left turn provides return to the point of entry at Trailhead 1.

Trails of the Southern Parcel

Category: Moderate walk with some rocky and root covered stretches.

Start: Trailhead 1, the recommended access to this parcel, is on the northern side of Opening Hill just west of Route 79.

Distance: About 1.2 miles.

Approximate Time: 1 hour.

Parking: Near Trailhead 1 on Opening Hill Road.

How to get to the trails of the Southern Parcel:

Trailhead 1: This is the recommended access for the southern parcel. Travel north on Route 79 and just before the North Madison Congregational Church, turn left (west) onto Opening Hill Road. Continue 0.1 mi. to the trailhead on the right (northern) side of the road.

Trailhead 2: This access is only recommended for those crossing Route 80 on foot from the northern parcel. Please exercise **caution** when crossing to the southern parcel. It is located on Route 80 0.3mi. west of the North Madison Traffic Circle. There is no parking at this trailhead.

These trails offer an opportunity to walk between historic stone walls along the Killingworth-Fair Haven Turnpike which dates from 1825. There are good views of the Neck River and varied habitats. Dense patches of mountain laurel provide shelter for deer and other woodland dwellers. Ferns proliferate in dappled sun that penetrates a canopy of Maples over an upland wetland.

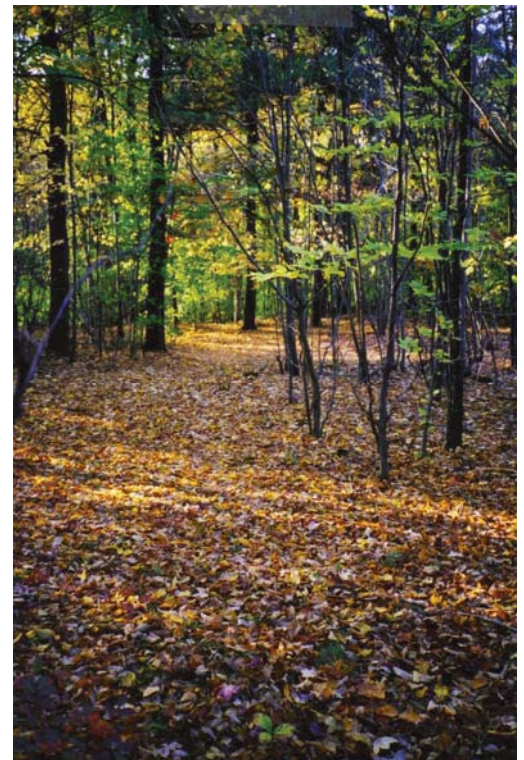
Trailhead 1 to foot bridge and Point A:

Initially, the trail follows an old woods road bounded on the left with stone walls. Almost immediately, the path takes a left turn to enter the section of woodland seen on the right. Here, piliated woodpeckers have made nearly rectangular holes in white pines. A number of large pines are found in this area.



The Neck River south of Route 80

At the bottom of this slight slope, the trail turns right with stone walls again on the left. At a perpendicular stone wall, turn left through an opening to enter the bed of the old Killingworth-Fair Haven Turnpike. The trail descends a long slope where it meets with the Neck River. Here, large boulders lie both sides of the river. In 1825, these provided footings for a bridge.



Entrance to the trail in the southern parcel

By the river, the trail turns south on an old woods road. After crossing a small stream on step-stones, the trail makes a gradual incline up the eastern plateau. Watch for a right-hand turn where the trail descends to the valley floor. This section has various sized rocks and many roots in the treadway. Shortly, a yellow pipe marks the boundary of the preserve with a private in-holding. Close to the end of this uneven section of trail, a second yellow pipe marks the southern boundary of the interior parcel.

After a short incline, the trail again dips down and crosses a second stream. Step-stones facilitate this crossing as well. Now the trail turns to run right alongside the Neck. After crossing the foot bridge over the river, the trail begins to climb up the next plateau. About 20 feet up, the path intersects the western loop at point A.

Points A – B:

As the trail goes uphill, it winds through mountain laurel and various hardwoods. About half-way up, a large glacial erratic rests on the edge of the plateau and right of the trail. Behind this enormous rock, a look downward provides a sense of how much elevation has been gained. The trail gradually continues upward before dropping down to point B and Route 80.

Points B – Trailhead 2:

At point B, the trail splits with a forward section to Route 80 and Trailhead 2. Two boulders provide an easy crossing for a stream. At the highway, hikers can cautiously cross Route 80 to Trailhead 2 of the northern parcel.

Backtracking to point B, take the section that goes southwest to form the upper part of a loop. A lush wetland lies north of the trail. In the Autumn, golden hay ferns carpet this wet area. Deer search for fallen acorns in the dappled sunlight on the wetland. Mountain laurel allows for a narrow path to the western boundary of the preserve. Again, this dense, low canopy provides excellent winter cover for deer and other wildlife.

A wire fence with cedar posts marks the western boundary of the preserve, Turning left, an open buffer provides an excellent route for the trail. At the end of the fence, turn left (east) to follow a broad woods road. As the trail descends, the sides of the road are built up with large boulders. Here, numerous beeches filter warm sunlight through to the path. Near the bottom of the hill, the trail again turns left (north) onto a lower area of the plateau. Soon, a right turn leads to a fairly steep downward slope where it intersects the beginning of the loop. Continuing downhill, the foot bridge over the Neck River is in view. Cross the bridge and backtrack along the trail to Trailhead 1.



Magnificent stone walls define the Killingworth-Fair Haven Turnpike