

St. Francis Woods

What to look for along the St. Francis Woods Trail

Begin your walk at Trailhead 1 and, bearing right, follow the blue-blazed trail south through a lowland mesic forest of red and white oaks, beech and red maple. Soon, the trail nears and passes alongside a stream and its floodplain, dominated by swamp red maple overstory and an understory shrub layer of spicebush, sweet pepperbush, witch-hazel and wild azalea. Marsh marigolds bloom along the stream in early spring. The trail gradually ascends a rocky slope near the stream bed—here beech, hickories, large chestnut oak and some sugar maple occur. The steep outcrops of the ridge east of the stream can be seen once the trail levels off. This level area comprises a large wetland floodplain which the trail skirts for a few hundred yards before swinging sharply left through a stand of large beech and red maple. It then crosses the stream on a stepstone bridge.

From here the trail turns northward, ascending over moss-carpeted ledges to mid-slope of the ridge sighted earlier. Good views of the stream and its floodplain can be seen—especially in the spring and fall. Mountain laurel thickets arch over the trail and are beautiful in June. Chestnut oak, white oak, and beech are abundant here. The trail ascends across slope below ledges, and then steeply to the crest of the west-facing ridge of ancient granite. From the rock outcrops, excellent views can be had of the deep stream valley, especially in late fall, winter and early spring. This is a good place to stop and rest. Note the chestnut oaks whose short, crooked stems and deeply furrowed bark (a sign of slow growth) attest to the shortage of soil moisture and to the storm winds that affect them on this exposed site. The understory, less diverse than in the stream valley below, is composed of blueberries, huckleberries, grasses, sedges and other dry-site plants.

Proceeding north, the trail soon descends through a saddle area more favorable for growth as revealed by the tall, straight trees, and then follows once more the exposed ridge. Near a house, it cuts sharply back to the southwest and zig-zags down the slope. Follow the blue blazes carefully down the zig-zag to the slope bottom and then through several turns, past a large rock and across a small stream, and enter onto St. Francis Woods Road at Trailhead 2.

If time allows, continue north on St. Francis Woods Road about 800 feet to its cul-de-sac and Trailhead 3 which marks the **path to the Donnelly Memorial**. The path ascends through woods and then quickly emerges into a mowed area. Turn left, along the edge of the field, to the path that cuts left along the west side of the cemetery and leads to the sitting bench. This bench, which provides a quiet place for rest and reflection, was placed in memory of Richard C. Donnelly. Mr. Donnelly was on the faculty of the Yale Law School. Committed to Madison and to the beauty of the community, he was instrumental in the founding of the Land Trust and served as its first vice-president in 1963.

Historical Note

In 1754, land for the West Side Cemetery was granted to the settlement known as North Bristol “near the parting of the paths to Cranberry and Race Hills” for a burying ground. Many old stones bear names still encountered in Madison. The first person buried here was Demetrius Crompton. Forest hikers might learn from his demise—he was killed by a falling tree limb.

Permitted Activities:

The trails areas in the MLCT properties are for hiking only. Dogs are allowed, but must be leashed. Please pick up all animal waste. Contact the State Forest HQ for other activities allowed on their sites.



Photo by the Madison Land Conservation Trust

The St. Francis Woods Trail is a loop trail that offers exposure to a variety of natural settings. It provides an excellent experience for a family outing, although it is not suitable for very small children. The trail passes through a lowland mesic forest, abuts a valley flood-plain and beautiful stream, then ascends to and progresses along a rocky ridge before descending once more to lower valley. The walk can be extended to include a visit to the Donnelly Memorial bench near old West Side Cemetery.

GPS Directions: 100 St Francis Woods Rd, Madison, CT 06443

Category: Short walk with one steep climb

Start: Trailhead 1 on St. Francis Woods Road, North Madison

Distance: About 0.7 mile for the woods trail; 1.0 mile if a walk to the Donnelly Memorial is included

Approximate Time: About 1-1 1/2 hours with a visit to the Donnelly Memorial

Parking: Along St. Francis Woods Road and at the cul-de-sac

Historical Feature: Old West Side Cemetery

For more information about this walk contact:

Madison Land Conservation Trust
www.madisonlandtrust.org





MLCT

Madison Land Conservation Trust

St. Francis Woods

Dowd Hollow Brook

Race Hill Rd

Saint Francis Woods Rd

(0.91 mi)

Inwood Rd

Saint Francis Woods Rd

Bradley Corners Rd

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Legend

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|--|---------------------|--|----------------|
| | Parking | | Trail Junction |
| | Trailhead | | Stone Wall |
| | Papermill Trail | | Bridge |
| | Wetlands | | Waterfall |
| | Land Trust Property | | Ruins |
| | Town Property | | |

Map Produced May 2016

