

Come Explore the Town Forest

The Walpole Town Forest will be celebrating its 100th Anniversary on May 1, 2016. This article, the first in what will be a monthly series describing various topics related to the Town Forest, will answer a very fundamental question: “Where exactly *is* the Town Forest?”

Last Walpole Day, the Town Forest Committee rented a table as part of our outreach to meet people, talk about the Town Forest, and encourage people to go out and experience its beauty. We also handed out 300 blue spruce saplings. To our great surprise, a large fraction of the visitors didn’t know where the Town Forest was. Upon further reflection, we realized that there is not a single sign in Walpole that identifies the location of the Town Forest. Thanks to those visitors’ comments, we have begun to address this issue.

So, if you don’t know where the Town Forest is...this article is for you!

Walpole’s Town Forest comprises 365 acres on two parcels. The larger parcel, more than 200 acres, is located west of Washington Street and is bounded by Washington St. to the east, South St. to the south and west, and the high school to the north.

This parcel is mostly flat and has several miles of hiking trails, most of which are fire roads and therefore quite wide by trail standards and thus easy to follow. It is accessible from three parking areas: at the Water Dept. (1303 Washington St.), at the high school parking lot, and at a lot across from 221 South St. For the high school entrance, you can walk into the Town Forest via the trails behind the scoreboard at Turco Field or the trail behind the Lee Press Box. There is also a trailhead near the corner of the school building near the outdoor basketball court (identified by a sign for the Bay Circuit Trail), which passes through both Town Forest parcels. This trail is also identified by rectangular white blazes about 2” by 5”. There is a map kiosk at the 221 South St. parking area, and scenic White Bridge, which spans the Neponset River, is just a 100-yard walk away. This spot is the site of the Town Forest fishing derby (to be held April 2016), but it is popular with fishermen and –women at other times, too. The adjacent pond is bounded by evergreens and is one of the most beautiful spots in town. Three benches are available, so come for a visit! Easily accessible from this parking lot are Scout Island and Duffy Point, both offering lovely views of the Neponset.

The smaller parcel, about 150 acres, is located east of Washington St. and is bounded by School Meadow Brook and Jarvis Farm to the north, Route 1 and Walpole Park South to the east and south, and South and Washington Streets to the west. This parcel also features a network of trails, including the continuation of the Bay Circuit Trail. A beautiful new kiosk is located at the Town Forest parking lot across from 673 South St. Like other kiosks and trail bridges in town, it was built by the Boy Scouts of Walpole as Eagle Scout projects.

The eastern section of this parcel holds a stand of some of the biggest hemlock trees in town. These beauties are so big and dense that the trails beneath are shaded and cool, even on the hottest summer days.

We encourage you to get out and explore the Town Forest--a wonderful resource for the people of Walpole. Trail maps can be obtained at the Town clerk’s office or downloaded from the Town Forest Committee website: www.walpole-ma.gov/town-forest-committee . Don’t be afraid to

explore the Town Forest. If you get lost, don't panic. You're certain to find yourself on a street that you'll recognize.

As part of the planning for the 100th Anniversary, we have created a website for your photos taken in the Town Forest and stories of your Town Forest memories. Please go to: walpolematownforest@gmail.com. If you need help scanning your photos, contact Gary Riggott through the Town Forest website.

Lastly, the Recreation Dept. has scheduled a Town Forest Clean-up Day for Saturday, October 10, at 10:00 a.m. We'll meet at the Water Dept. lot at 1303 Washington St. For more information, go to the Rec. Dept. website. This is a great opportunity to explore the Town Forest with members of the Town Forest Committee and help us keep the forest and trails clear.

Future articles will discuss the Town Forest's formation and founding; its natural history; its past, present, and future; and ways we plan to mark its Centennial.