

## Palmer Kendall Mountain Trail Notes

Just as you enter the parking lot, there are vines growing up a tree to your right and left. These are Five-leafed Virginia Creeper which is quite prevalent in sunny areas along roadways.

From parking lot follow short trail to orange blazed Loop Trail

This conservation area is primarily a white pine forest. White pines grow very tall and straight. They produce long pine cones that are scattered on the forest floor. Pine cones are the carriers of pine nuts which grow on the cone. The white pine nut is very small, but edible.

Bear left onto Loop Trail to do the loop in a clockwise direction. Cross 1<sup>st</sup> stonewall

Cross brook (headwaters of Skungamaug River)

Near all of the brook areas you'll see the bluish aster like weeds called fleabane. In these wetter areas there are a variety of native ferns. Among them is the Ostrich Fern which produces fiddleheads in the mid spring. By the time the oaks and maples have their leaves the fiddleheads are no longer tasty to eat.

Pass through pine forest and cross 2<sup>nd</sup> stonewall

Turn left to follow yellow blazed Quarry Trail. Quarry Trail ends with an upwards view of rock/boulder pile. The rock formation in front of you is not a historical "quarry" where stone was mined for man's use. Rather, these large blocks of quartzite (the metamorphic equivalent of sandstone) are evidence of natural weathering along "joint" planes, which are fractures in the bedrock where no displacement has occurred. As erosion exposed the rock face, the release of pressure, combined with freezing and thawing, caused separation along the joint planes which allowed the stones to fall down the hillside. The chaotic pile of stone seems reminiscent of library books tumbling from their shelves.

Rock tripe is the common name for various lichens of the genus Umbilicaria that grow on rocks. Rock tripe can be found throughout northern parts of North America. They are edible when properly prepared and have been used as a food source in extreme cases when other food sources were unavailable, as by early American northern explorers.

In many Asian countries, rock tripe is considered a delicacy and is much sought by connoisseurs. The Inuit consider rock tripe to be a starvation food, eaten only as a last resort. The Cree ate rock tripe as a regular part of the diet, often using it as a thickener for fish broth. George Washington's men filled their bellies with it at Valley Forge in the winter of '77 – they lived, but didn't thrive.

Eating rock tripe is not something to be undertaken lightly. For one thing, it is full of bitter compounds and therefore must be soaked and boiled in several washes of water to render it edible. What is often left is this rather slimy mass. Good for thickening broths.

When times are good and there is plenty of moisture, the lichen is soft and pliable, like a piece of good leather. In times of drought, it becomes quite brittle, shriveling up a bit and prone to damage. If you are checking it out on granite rocks, please do not pull it off the rock. IT HAS TAKEN DECADES TO GROW.

Retrace steps and turn left to continue on orange Loop Trail

If you wish to shorten your hike, when the trail follows the brook for a short distance, turn right and cross over the brook near bench and follow orange blazes back to parking lot.

Continue on orange Loop Trail which winds through a thick Mountain Laurel forest. The Laurel are one of many 'understory' shrubs and trees that grow under the tall canopy of the pine and oak. Mountain Laurel is a shrub native to Connecticut that, in the wild, is often found in large colonies with abundant, beautiful, long-lasting clusters of white to pink flowers. Plants in the woods are often 6 or 8 feet high and can get considerably bigger than that. Mountain Laurel was a popular subject and inspiration for the Connecticut Impressionists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and most state forest lands and parks in Connecticut have some Mountain Laurel; many have extensive stands. In 1907 the state legislature chose the Mountain Laurel as the state flower of Connecticut.

Ridge Trail (blue blazed) will be on left. Follow Ridge Trail to lookout for a view to the southwest looking towards the Tolland Green in the distance and Bald Mountain with the cell towers.

Retrace steps and turn left to continue on orange Loop Trail.

Cross several bridges while following trail through wetlands. There will be a steep hillside climb. Particularly in the wetter areas with dappled sunlight shining through poison ivy is likely to be present. Poison ivy is not an invasive plant because it is native to America, but it is called an "aggressive", because it spreads rapidly. Urushiol is the oil within the plant that causes that red, itchy rash.

You will be passing a large rock hill on your right. There is a red blazed exit trail to Wildwood Road on the left. Continue on orange Loop Trail as it turns right. There will be a short un-blazed trail on the right side with a steep climb which leads to top of The Knob, another look out spot and nice picnic location.

Follow orange Loop Trail through switchbacks and along a small ridge. Pass bench on right by brook (previously mentioned short cut)

Pass over stonewall next to a large tree.

Continue until you see sign for parking lot exit trail. Turn left to get back to parking lot. Just before you turn the large marked tree on your right is a mature Ash. Young ash trees are smooth and silvery, but when they mature they develop a distinctive diamond pattern on the bark.

Total distance of the Loop Trail, Quarry Trail, and Ridge Trail is 1.75 miles.