

Reformatory Branch Railroad

The Reformatory Branch Trail was originally a railroad right of way of the Middlesex Central Railroad which opened in 1873 running from Lexington to Bedford and Concord. In 1879 the railroad was extended 2.5 miles west to Elm Street near the Concord Reformatory (now Massachusetts Correctional Institution), with a connection to other rail lines at Concord Junction in present day West Concord. The railroad was taken over by the Boston and Maine Railroad in 1887. Passenger service was maintained by the B & M until 1926 and remaining freight service until 1962 when the entire branch was abandoned. The right of way was purchased by Concord and Bedford at that time. Only the straight-as-an-arrow graded path reveals its former purpose, with an occasional exposed railroad tie or concrete signal post to prompt our imaginations of a steam-engine railroad past. The bridges that carried the railway across the Sudbury and Assabet Rivers no longer exist; the Sudbury bridge was destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. The rail bed west of the Assabet River is now overgrown and impassable. This trail passes by some of Concord's significant recreational and historic sites.

Location and Access

The rail bed extends from Lowell Road, Concord to Route 62 (Concord Road) in Bedford, with many points of access. Access points near Concord center are at Lowell Road across from Keyes Road to the right of Concord Lumber Company and where the trail crosses at Monument Street. Another Concord entry point is at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (GMNWR) off Mosen Road where there is ample parking.

In Bedford the trail crosses Route 62 (Concord Road) next to the Bedford Children's Center (204 Concord Road). The trail access toward Concord is across the road (behind the guard rail) from a small parking area. Originally, the railroad bed passed beneath a wooden bridge on a raised section of Route 62.

Access to the railroad bed west of the Sudbury River is described in the River Confluence Trail Guide.

Dog Owners: Keep dogs under your control at all times and away from private yards and buildings. It is the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any feces left by his or her dog.



Chronology of Reformatory Branch

- 1872 - The Boston & Lowell Railroad creates a subsidiary corporation, the Middlesex Central Railroad, for the purpose of extending its Lexington Branch eight miles further west through Bedford to Concord Center.
- 1873 - The Middlesex Central Railroad opens its new extension to Bedford and Concord Center.
- 1879 - The Middlesex Central Railroad opens another extension of its branch line 2.5 miles further west to Elm Street across from the Concord Prison.
- 1887 - The Boston & Lowell Railroad is absorbed by the Boston & Maine Railroad.
- 1926 - The Boston & Maine Railroad ends passenger service on the Reformatory Branch.
- 1927 - The Boston & Maine Railroad abandons the 2.5 mile section between Concord Station and Reformatory Station on Elm Street.
- 1962 - The Boston & Maine Railroad abandons the Reformatory Branch between Bedford and Concord Center. Concord purchased the section adjacent to the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge to be maintained as a buffer or protection strip and be used as a path overlooking the marsh.



Town of Concord

Reformatory Branch Trail Guide



Locomotive at Monument Street, 1951

Photo by S. K. Bolton, Jr.

Collection of George M. Dimon



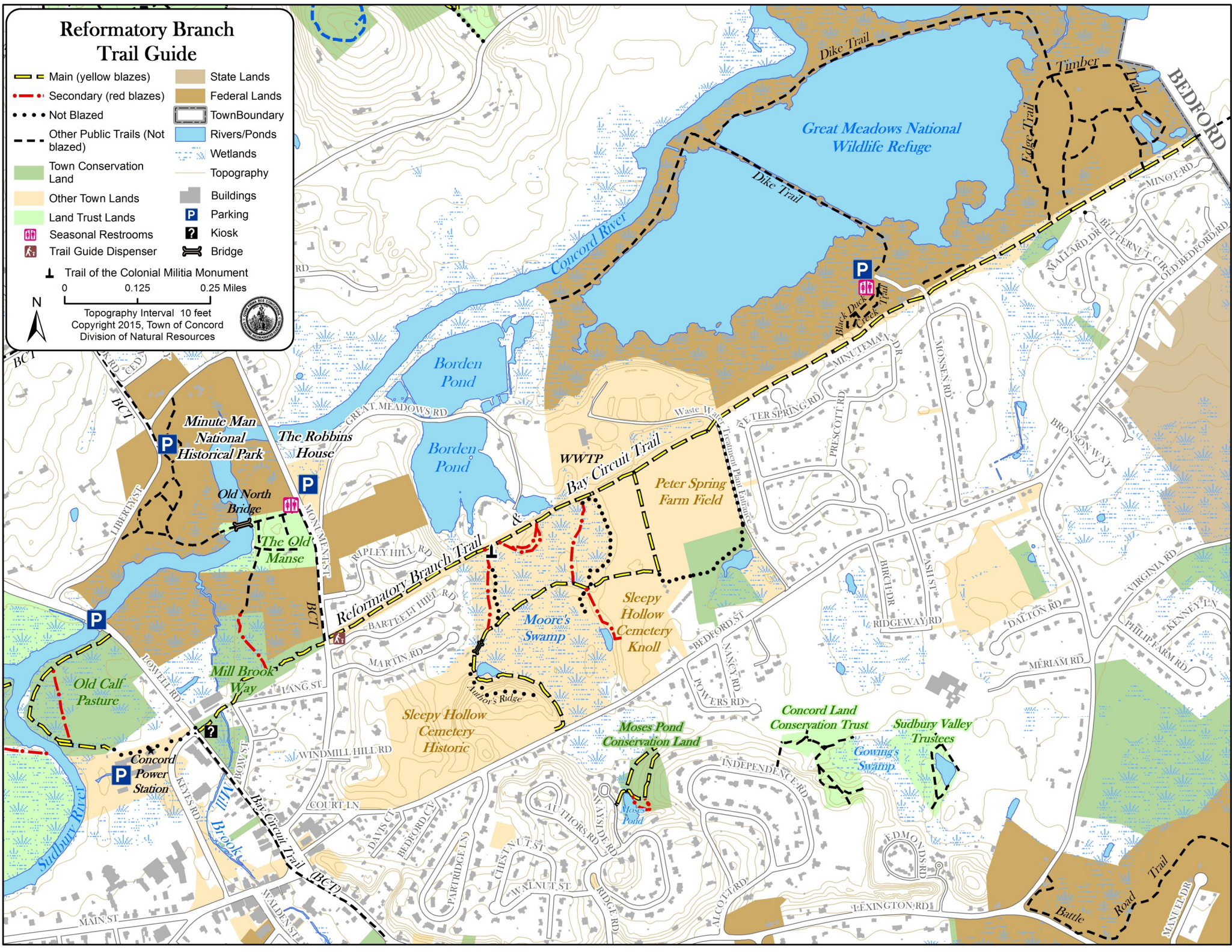
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Reformatory Branch Trail Guide

- Main (yellow blazes)
- Secondary (red blazes)
- Not Blazed
- Other Public Trails (Not blazed)
- Town Conservation Land
- Other Town Lands
- Land Trust Lands
- Seasonal Restrooms
- Trail Guide Dispenser
- Trail of the Colonial Militia Monument
- State Lands
- Federal Lands
- Town Boundary
- Rivers/Ponds
- Wetlands
- Topography
- Buildings
- Parking
- Kiosk
- Bridge

0 0.125 0.25 Miles

Topography Interval 10 feet
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 Division of Natural Resources





Reformatory Branch Trail

Suggested Walks

Reformatory Branch Trail

A main trail crosses the full length of the property, the Reformatory Branch Trail. The developed trail begins at Lowell Road opposite the Keyes Road intersection. It crosses the Mill Brook to reach the Mill Brook Way Conservation Land sign. From here the trail follows the railroad bed, crossing Monument Street and continues along a series of cuts and fills that maintain a smooth railroad bed as the land changes from glacial moraine to wetlands. The trail briefly leaves the railroad bed to skirt the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) on a farm vehicle road. After crossing the WWTP entrance road, the trail rejoins the railroad bed and continues along Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The trail crosses the Bedford town line about ¼-mile from the intersection of Route 62 (Concord Road). Walking time: 45 minutes one way.

Side Trails and Walks

Elm Street Extension - The railroad bed extended across Lowell Road from Concord Lumber but now is obscured by development. You can access the rail bed again from behind 135 Keyes Road where a yellow-blazed trail climbs up the side of the railroad bed and continues left to the Sudbury River. This trail connects to trails leading to the Old Calf Pasture. Walking time: 5 minutes one way. (See also the River Confluence Trail Guide.)

Monument Street - A short walk north (away from Concord Center) on Monument Street leads to the Minute Man National Historical Park (MMNHP). The area includes the Old North Bridge, The Old Manse, and The Robbins House. Walking time: 5 minutes one way.

Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) - From the south, the Bay Circuit Trail rounds Walden Pond, follows the Emerson-Thoreau Amble, then passes through Concord Center to join the Reformatory Branch Trail at Mill Brook Way. A signpost located at the crossing of Monument Street identifies a split in

the BCT. One branch continues the entire length of the Reformatory Branch Trail and on into Bedford and beyond to Billerica; the other section proceeds along Monument Street, over the Old North Bridge, along town roads, through the Annursnac Conservation Land to Acton.

Sleepy Hollow Path - At a granite monument commemorating the Colonial Militia, a red-blazed trail briefly joins a yellow-blazed trail that leads to a path into Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. A short walk up a steep path on the left side of the cemetery cul-de-sac guides you to Author's Ridge. Walking time: 5 minutes one way.

Moore's Swamp Path Loop - Between the colonial militia granite marker and the Waste Water Treatment Plant, a red-blazed trail leads down a steep slope and across a narrow section of Moore's Swamp. The trail crosses two boardwalks, turns right at a yellow-blazed trail across the middle of the swamp, then a sharp right onto a red-blazed trail back to the Reformatory Branch main trail. Walking time for loop: 20 minutes.

Dike Trail Loop (GMNWR) - The Reformatory Branch Trail crosses the entrance to Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge where the Dike Trail leads around the refuge. Walking time for loop: 40 minutes.

Points of Interest

Concord Power Station

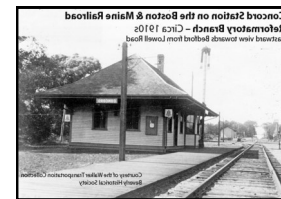
The Federal Revival style brick building at 141 Keyes Road was built in 1899 as the combined electricity-generating and sewage-pumping station for Concord. Electrical service began February 2, 1900. The sewage-pumping facility never operated as well as planned and was eventually replaced with pumps installed in the small brick building next to the railroad bed. The coal-fired station received coal by shipment on the Reformatory Branch. Today electricity is distributed elsewhere in Town and the building houses the offices of the Department of Planning and Land Management.

Mill Brook

The Mill Brook flows under Lowell Road and runs through Mill Brook Way conservation areas. The Mill Brook played an important role in the early history of Concord. The brook distributed water to a millpond in Heywood Meadow that powered a gristmill in the town center. The mill was closed and the pond was drained and filled in 1828. To accommodate railroad construction the Mill Brook was routed through a tunnel under the rail yard where Concord Lumber is today.

Concord Railway Station and Rail Yard

The Concord Railway Station and rail yard, no longer in existence, were located off Lowell Road, behind present day Concord Lumber, in Mill Brook Way. The station served passengers and doubled as the publication and print shop for The Concord Journal. Whitney Coal and Grain Company had its facilities on the eastern end of the yard.



Monument Street Historical Sites

A short walk on Monument Street from its crossing with the Reformatory Branch Trail leads to the Minute Man National Historical Park and a hub of Concord history. Located here are the Old North Bridge of the American Revolution's "Shot heard round the world"; The Old Manse, built for Rev. William Emerson in 1770 whose grandson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, spent time here and Nathaniel Hawthorne lived here in his early-married life; and, The Robbins House which accommodates Concord's African American History with exhibits open to the public on a seasonal basis.

Colonial Militia Marker

About ¼ of a mile east of the Monument Street crossing there is a granite monument inscribed "Across these fields passed the Colonial Militia – North Bridge to Merriam's Corner – April 19, 1775". This marks the route that the Minute-

men took after the battle at the Old North Bridge. It was their intent to bypass the British "Red Coats" while they regrouped in the center of Concord, thereby enabling an ambush and harassment of the British troops as they proceeded on the route back to Boston. Many of the Minutemen from more distant towns joined the battle at this time.



Old North Bridge

Sleepy Hollow Cemetery

Author's Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery provides a side-trail tribute to Concord's literary past. Here lie the graves of literary notables Henry David Thoreau, Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The headstone for Peter Hutchinson's grave that remained unmarked until 2013 may also be found north of Author's Ridge.

Moore's Swamp

A short distance west of the Concord Wastewater Treatment Plant, a red-blazed trail leads off the Reformatory Branch Trail into Moore's Swamp. The swamp is named for John B. Moore who purchased and partially reclaimed it for farming in the mid-1800s. The swamp is of great interest to naturalists as a nesting place of Great Blue Herons, home to threatened Blanding's Turtles, and an abundance of other swamp life. Wood ducks, green herons, several species of woodpeckers, and great horned owls are among the bird species often encountered in and around Moore's Swamp.

Native American Encampment

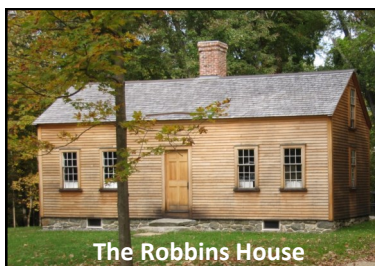
Paleo-Indian settlement is believed to have followed soon after retreat of the glacial ice cover, placing human habitation here at least 11,000 years ago. The ridge formation that was a natural route for railroad construction in the 19th century had been a dry campground in wet terrain in pre-history. A Nipmuc Tribe of the Algonquin Nation was known to live here as recently

as the 1800s. Much evidence of early inhabitants has been found along the railway including leaf-shaped spear points, gouges, and grinding mortars.

African American Settlement

The homestead of John Jack, the first former African American slave to own land in Concord, was located on 8.5 acres of high ground above Great Meadow in the early 1700's. It was near the current site of the Concord Waste Water Treatment Plant. A succession of related African American families followed here, including Caesar Robbins who, though born into slavery, became a patriot serving as a stand-in for his owner in the French and Indian War and later enlisting to fight in the Revolutionary War. Two of Caesar Robbins' six children, Susan and Peter, and their families lived here in a two-family house built in 1823. It was moved in 1871 and again in 2011 when it was transported to land adjacent to the parking lot for the Old North Bridge

where, after restoration, it survives today. It now houses The Robbins



The Robbins House

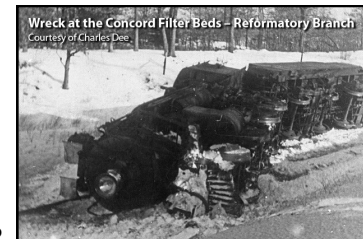
House - Concord's African American History.

Peter's Spring

A distant kinsman of Caesar Robbins, Peter Hutchinson, lived in the Robbins house by the meadow in the mid-1800s. A nearby natural spring became named Peter's Spring. He was well known in Concord for his work traveling to farms, slaughtering pigs, and curing the hams. Henry David Thoreau knew Peter, recognizing him in his journal, "a dexterous pig-butcher". In his old age, Peter Hutchinson lived in the Thoreau birthplace farmhouse on Virginia Road, where he died in 1882, twenty years after Thoreau's death. The Dee family perpetuated the name by naming their property Peter Spring Farm.

1940s Train Wreck site

The place where the Reformatory Branch Trail crosses the current entrance road for the WWTP



was the site of a locomotive derailment in a heavy snowstorm in the early 1940s. Though injured, the engineer and brakeman managed to escape, crossing the agricultural field to seek help at a farmhouse on Bedford Street.

Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (GMNWR)

Known in colonial times as The Great Meadow, it was then one continuous wet plain along the Concord River valued for its rich marsh hay, which was harvested as cattle feed. Samuel Hoar purchased 250 acres of the meadow in 1928 and built dikes to raise the water level in separate impoundments, attracting waterfowl for improved hunting opportunities. Hoar made a gift of the meadows to the federal government in 1944. Today it is the site of The Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge - Concord Unit, an important stop on the flyway for migratory birds.

Great Meadows is a naturalist's haven. Growing in the meadow is a mix of native cattails, water lilies, and marshland growth as well as invasive American Lotus, Purple Loosestrife, and Water Chestnut. Frequently seen birds include Red-Winged Black Birds, Canada Geese, Mergansers and other duck species, Snowy Egrets, and Great Blue Herons; sightings of the American Bald Eagle are also reported. The shallow waters are abundant with amphibian and reptile species, including the declining Northern Leopard Frog and the threatened Blanding's Turtle.

West of the GMNWR entrance, the terrain is higher, with a glacially formed ridge and a steep drop off where ice remained as the glacier receded from the open plain of the Great Meadow. The bluff affords a fine vista of the Great Meadows.