



RECREATIONAL & SCENIC RESOURCES

The abundance of natural, recreational and scenic resources draw tourists as well as new residents to Kent, including the Housatonic River, the many lakes and ponds, and the federal, state and local parks. Though many of these features have been addressed in previous chapters we look at them here in their purely recreational dimension.

The Housatonic River

The river's recreational value is substantial and growing and lead by the Housatonic Valley Association, efforts continue to create a Greenway belt of conserved river front along extensive areas of the river. Such a belt will be of particular value in Kent which, according to the Housatonic River Authority's 2007 Management Plan, is described as a section heavily used for boating and fishing. The stretch of the river from the Cornwall line to Kent Center is typically wide, shallow, sometimes turbulent and sometimes stony, depending on the river's height in flood or low flow times. (The conversion of hydropower dams at Falls Village and Bull's Bridge from "pond and release" to "run of the river" allows a more natural stream flow regime and has changed river depths and consequently boating use since 2004.)

The segment below the bridge at Kent School is consistently flat water, good for canoeing, kayaking and rowing. Kent School uses the river for its crew practice and has its own floating docks on either side of the Memorial Bridge. Informal watercraft take-outs are located along River Rd. on the west bank and just north of Spooner Dam on Bull's Bridge Island. Another boat access with formal parking facilities at North Kent Rd. #2 on the river's east bank was proposed in 2007 at the time that GE was making financial restitution in the form of recreational grants for its earlier PCB contamination of the river; a favorable decision was announced in March 2009.

Below Spooner Dam a spectacular gorge creates expert kayaking challenges rated at Class 4-5, according to the Housatonic Area Canoe and Kayak Squad (HACKS). The Bull's Bridge scenic area is popular with out-of-town visitors. The covered bridge is one of only two left in the state. The bridge and scenic overlooks provide dramatic views of the gorge and waterfalls over the dams. At the entrance of Ten Mile River, a major tributary on the western bank beyond the falls, the river has both bass and trout management areas under the management of the State DEP.

State and Local Parks

Alain and Mary White, heirs of Danbury's wealthy hat manufacturing family, recognized the threat development posed to Northwest Connecticut long before the conservation movement began in earnest. The Whites bought choice parcels of land around Northwestern Connecticut early in the 20th century and donated them to the state, forming the backbone of the current state park system. Alain White's home in Litchfield is now the site of the popular White Memorial Foundation. In Kent, the Whites' generosity extended to purchases that would become Kent Falls State Park and Macedonia State Park. Parts of the Housatonic Meadows and Mohawk Mountain State Forest in Goshen are still other gifts that continue to add to the quality of life in Litchfield County.

Kent Falls, with its dramatic series of cascades descending 250 feet through marble outcroppings, has attracted visitors for centuries. Indians camped and fished here. Early settlers capitalized on the many elevation changes to power their water wheels and grindstones, timber saws and apple presses. Later, as part of the Lorch family farm, Kent Falls gained a reputation as a tourist attraction.

Acquisition of the park began in 1919 with a gift to the state of 200 acres by the White Memorial Foundation after years of negotiation with the Lorches. Other parcels were donated or purchased to bring the park to its current size of



approximately 217 acres. Soon after the park opened, the state added the so-called Refectory Building. An early roadside rest stop for tourists, it served drinks and snacks and sold fuel. All that remains of this grand old structure is the towering fieldstone chimney and the water pump.

In the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was brought in to develop this and nearby sites. The CCC was part of Roosevelt's New Deal, created under 1933's emergency Conservation Work Act. By the end of July 1933 camps were being set up in every state to address problems of soil erosion and deforestation. Kent's Camp 11057 opened in July 1935 near Kent Falls State Park on land west of the Brookwoods residential development. Kent's CCC camp is notable for being the only one in the state devoted to park development. The men's work remains visible in sections of the stone walls, some laid up by hand to 12 feet in height.

Considerable trail reconstruction was done at Kent Falls State Park by the park service in the mid-1970s (for specifics on Hiking Trails see the Trails Section later in this chapter). The covered bridge is a reproduction built in 1974 by a park employee Edmund Palmer. Trails and retaining walls were again improved in 2007 by a private contractor for the state.

Kent Falls State Park is adjacent to part of Wyantenock State Forest, adding to the protected land available for wildlife.

The falls are fed by Kent Falls Brook, which drains an area six to seven miles square in Warren. Kent Falls Brook flows over pocketed limestone to enter the Housatonic River below. Kent Falls Brook is one of 11 water bodies in the state that the DEP designated as a trout park and stocks each spring. According to DEP estimates, some 122,000 visitors come to Kent Falls State Park annually.

Macedonia Brook State Park originated in 1918 with a 1,552-acre gift to the state from the White Memorial Foundation of Litchfield. The park's distinct landscape has been carved by eons of glaciation and runoff from Macedonia Brook and several other smaller streams. Before the park was created, this area was a prime location for water-driven

mills of all kinds. The remains of a once-thriving blast furnace (see Chapter Six) are still visible near the southern entrance of the park, as well.

The state undertook a substantial tree-planting effort upon assuming ownership of the park land, purchasing some 15,000 red pine, arbor vitae and other seedling species from the Hopson family property nearby in the first year. The CCC also did much site development here in the 1930s, including construction of a pavilion and a carriage road with massive retaining walls constructed without mortar.

The park remains a cool, shady retreat for hikers, campers, and fisherman with its current size of 2,300 acres, 51 campsites and numerous picnic sites. An estimated 52,000 visitors use the Macedonia facilities annually, with 8,877 of them staying as campers. For more on this and Kent Falls State Park go to www.ct.gov/dep/cwp, for excellent geological and hiking guides.

Kent also has Lake Waramaug State Park within its borders. The park was purchased outright by the state in 1920 from an assemblage of 75 acres belonging to three summer residents living in Kent Hollow. In 1927 20 adjacent acres were added in a purchase from the Waller Farm in Kent Hollow. Lake Waramaug State Park remains one of the state's most popular camping and swimming destinations and includes 77 campsites, a sandy beach and car-top boating access to a 680-acre glacial lake. In 2007 101,423 visitors used this park, including 17,558 who stayed at least one night at one of the 77 camp sites the state provides.

The Town of Kent owns Emery Park, a 200-acre recreation and forest area donated to the town by the Emery Family between 1959 and 1962. The park includes a swimming pool fed by Womenshenuk Brook, a wading pool, and a climbing gym for children. It also features a hiking trail, described below, that weaves through wooded areas. Emery Park is home to the Park & Recreation Commission's summer program for local children.

In 2001 Kent Park and Recreation commissioned a Forest Stewardship Plan that described the natural resources of the park. The park's hemlock stands—in some instances specimens as old as 270 years were identified—were declining due to age and insect infestation. It was recommended that the accessible portions of this timber be harvested to promote regrowth of more vigorous mixed woods, including northern red oak, white oak, chestnut oak, sugar maple, red maple, white ash, basswood, black birch, yellow birch, aspen, American beech, tulip, eastern hemlock and elm. Shrubs include witch hazel, striped maple, ironwood and serviceberry. A number of invasive shrubs are also present.

The Appalachian Trail

Kent is fortunate to have the historic Appalachian Trail (AT) running through its interior. Benton H. MacKaye of Massachusetts first conceived the idea of the multi-state federally-managed Appalachian Trail in 1921. He proposed a narrow footpath running along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains from New Hampshire to Georgia linking a series of work, fire prevention and recreational camps.

During the next few years, volunteers, along with National Park Service (NPS), United States Forest Service and state park and forest officials routed, cut and blazed (with white-painted marks) the 2,000-mile Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia. Much of the Trail crossed private land with the acquiescence of private land owners and a handshake agreement. However, between the late 1930s and the late 1960s land development increasingly threatened the status of the Trail.





When landowners who had agreed to allow the Trail on their property sold their land, the new landowners frequently refused to continue the agreement. Requests from landowners to relocate the Trail and instances of development on or near the Trail route increased. This often resulted in relocating the Trail onto existing public roads.

In 1968, Congress recognized the need to protect the AT and other trails of national significance and passed the National Trails System Act, authorizing federal acquisition of lands for protection of the AT. States traversed were encouraged to initiate their own acquisition programs. In 1976, Congress amended the National Trails System Act, authorizing the NPS to become actively involved in protecting and acquiring lands. An additional amendment to the National Trails System Act in 1978 authorized federal monies from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to be used for AT corridor land acquisition. Since 1980 many significant purchases and relocations have been made, including the purchase of 2,000 acres along the Housatonic River in Kent and Sharon from the Stanley Works.

The AT is unique in its public-private management. Federal, state, and private organizations work cooperatively to protect and maintain the AT and its corridor lands. In Connecticut, for example, the National Parks Service retains the primary authority, owning approximately 7,000 acres of AT corridor lands and protecting hundreds of additional acres

with conservation easements; it works closely with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and other state and local agencies.

The NPS works cooperatively with the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC) on most day-to-day management activities. The ATC, in turn, delegates these responsibilities to 31 trail-maintaining clubs. The 55 miles of trail and corridor lands in Connecticut are the responsibility of the Appalachian Mountain Clubs (AMC) Connecticut Chapter. The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) provides support to the Connecticut AMC in the Kent area by allowing the Trails Committee to store trail tools and equipment in two outbuildings and maps and property records in its main office just over the line in Cornwall. HVA also welcomes community groups, including the Trails Committee, to use the main office for meetings and functions.

The portion of the AT that traverses Kent is about 15 miles long. It extends in a roughly southwesterly to northeasterly direction from the Sherman town line at the Ned Anderson Memorial Bridge, which crosses the Ten Mile River near Rte. 55, and ending at the point where the trail crosses into Sharon. The section through Kent offers some highly varied terrain and scenery, following the west shore of the Bull's Bridge Gorge and its stretch of Class IV-V rapids to Bull's Bridge Rd., then continuing north on the Schaghticoke Rd. and west on the south side of the Schaghticoke Reservation and over Schaghticoke Mountain.

The Trail next descends "the Grand Staircase" to cross Rte. 341 and Macedonia Brook near Kent School and soon ascends a series of ridges with several open vistas, including distant views from Caleb's Peak. It descends St. John's Ledges to return to the Housatonic River at River Rd. and follows the shore of the river—the AT's famed River Walk—for about five miles into Sharon.

St. John's Ledges is one of the highlights of this section of the AT. The ledges mark the eastern boundary of the Housatonic Highlands Massif (granitic gneiss over one billion years old), making them one of the oldest bedrock formations in New England. The vertical rise from the river below is 500 to 600 feet. The land encompassing the ledges at one time belonged to the Stanley Works of New Britain, CT.

The company purchased large tracts of land on either side of the Housatonic River at the start of the 20th Century to build a dam in the area, a plan never carried out. Stanley gave 132 acres, including St. John's Ledges, to the Nature Conservancy and granted an easement for the part of the AT that runs north into Sharon on the west bank of the river. This latter area was subsequently sold by the Nature Conservancy to the National Park Service for the AT. It is said to be one of the most beautiful stretches along the entire AT. The ledges are also very popular with rock climbers.

Highlights of Other Kent Hiking Trails

Bull's Bridge is a loop hike of about two miles from the trail head on the west side of the bridge and includes a small part of the Appalachian Trail. The trail follows the river south to the footbridge over the Ten Mile River. Markers are white blazed on the AT portions, blue blazed elsewhere. A shorter trail runs from the covered bridge north across the island.

Cobble Vista trail head begins on Studio Hill Circle off Studio Hill Rd. and goes up Kent Mountain. The red loop is 2.5 miles long and steep in places. For a shorter, easier option follow the blue trail markers on a smaller loop of 1.25 miles. The hike offers great views of the Cobble Brook Valley below. The property is a Weantinoge Heritage preserve.

The Currie Sanctuary has a single marked trail, beginning at a modestly-marked entrance 2.7 miles west of town center on the right, with parking across the road. The trail ascends to a height of approximately 1,150 feet, traversing a mile-long circuitous path leading to distant views of the Catskills at the top. Along the way are marked sites including a charcoal



transport road, charcoal mounds, a grove of mature red oak, numerous glacial erratics and a variety of ridge vegetation.

Emery Park's main trail is marked by blue discs, the side trails by yellow discs. The mile-long hiking trail was added in 2004 and rises 700 feet from the base to its highest point (1,144 feet) and includes three vistas. A 900 foot side trail was also built to highlight some of the larger and older specimen trees. On the steep hillside beyond Womenshenuk Brook several giant sugar maples grow, each estimated to be at least 300 years old, making these examples as close to old-growth forests as can be found in Connecticut.

The three vistas are:

- a north vista toward St. John's Ledges and the Housatonic River with Kent Cobble in the middle ground
- a northwest vista overlooking the center of Kent and west up Rte. 341 to Cobble Mountain, Macedonia Brook State Park and beyond
- a western vista overlooking Schaghticoke and Preston mountains and the Catskills beyond.

Iron Mountain Preserve, a 300-acre preserve in South Kent, has a 1.5-mile hiking trail. It descends from a parking lot near the junction of Flat Rock and Treasure Hill roads through second-growth woodlands composed of oaks, sugar maple, ash and black birch trees. En route it passes remnants of early charcoal pits. Some 27 bird species have been sighted at Iron Mountain Preserve.



The Hopson girls

Kent Falls State Park has several short trails. One goes straight up along the south side of the rocky falls for about a quarter mile along steps and viewing platforms. Another trail is marked as the North Ridge trail and leads from Dugan Rd. along the top of the ravine for about half mile to the north end of the parking lot. The more gradual Yellow Trail splits off from the North Ridge Trail and follows part of the old CCC road.

Macedonia Brook State Park has 13 miles of marked foot trails including the road put in by the CCC. All trails cross or meet the blue-blazed Macedonia Ridge Trail (MRT), an oval loop of approximately 6.2 miles that encompasses much of the 2,300-acre park in its meanderings. The MRT includes sections of the former Appalachian Trail before the latter was rerouted. The western parts of the MRT trail, which ascends to South Cobble Mountain (1,130 feet), to Cobble Mountain (1,380 feet), and to Pine Hill (1,200 feet), are steeper than the eastern parts. Shorter trails—including the White, Red, Orange and the Green—weave between the sides of the MRT loop trail. As these trails are only sporadically maintained, it is recommended that hikers visit the camping office in the park for current information on conditions and markings.

The McAllister Preserve has an easy mile-long trail running between a quartzite ridge to the west and Mud Pond to the east. Along the way several calcareous wetlands can be studied. Access is at a metal farm gate on the south side of Camp Flats Rd. a couple hundred feet beyond Geer Mountain Road.

The Claire Murphy Riverwalk runs along the riverbank of the Kent Land Trust Farm property on the east side of the Housatonic River. The level path, less than quarter mile in length and featuring markers of specimen trees and plants as well as picnic tables, honors the service of Land Trust founding member Claire Murphy, who died in 2003.

Pond Mountain Natural Area comprises nearly 775 acres including 40-acre Fuller Pond with its spring-fed lake at the center. (See Chapter Four.) The network of approximately four miles of trails is relatively easy walking, especially on the 1.2 mile trail blazed with blue circles that skirts the pond. This trail is also popular with cross-country skiers. A more challenging 0.6-mile yellow-blazed trail leads to the top of Fuller Mountain, elevation 1,332 feet. The trail takes walkers to high views of Massachusetts and New York State and a stand of scrub oak (bear oak), a diminutive species of the *Quercus* genus that is not commonly seen in these parts.

The property is administered by the Pond Mountain Trust in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy. The land and caretaker house, part of the old John Hopson farm, were donated in 1967 by daughter Myra Hopson (1882-1970). The property shares its southern boundary with St. John's Ledges and its trail system ties in with the Appalachian Trail via the Red Gate Trail in the southeast corner of the preserve.

Hunting and Fishing

Over the past half century, wildlife populations of deer, turkey and migratory fowl have gradually recovered from the depredation of two centuries of unregulated hunting and trapping. Through conservation efforts, the reforestation of hillsides and the decline of predators that once threatened deer and wild turkeys in particular, some species have rebounded so well they have reached nuisance levels in parts of the Northwest Corner. (Wild turkeys were reintroduced between 1975 and 1992 at 18 sites in Connecticut and are now



Camp Family catch (c.1911)

found in all 169 Connecticut towns, with seasonal hunting permitted since 1981. Fishers, a medium-sized carnivore of the marten genus, were reintroduced in 1988 and became sufficiently well-established that trapping was permitted beginning in 2005.)

To promote responsible, sustainable management of wildlife, the state DEP oversees individual licensing as well as the regulation of public hunting areas.

Kent has parts of three public areas in which hunting is allowed by permit. The Northeast Utilities/Skiff Mountain Wildlife Management Area is a 710-acre preserve, primarily located on the Sharon side of the Kent-Sharon boundary. The Housatonic River Wildlife Management Area comprises 480 acres along the east bank of the Housatonic River in Kent. Nearby and shared with Warren and Cornwall is Wyantenock State Forest, at 4,083 acres.

The Kent Rod & Gun club was disbanded recently, but there are several private hunting clubs in Kent. The largest is the Preston Mountain Club. (For more, see Chapter Seven, Forest Resources. The northeast corner of Kent is also part of a private hunting preserve.

The state DEP also manages a number of public fishing resources in Kent. It stocks a trout park at Kent Falls and since 2002, a trout management area in the vicinity of Bull's Bridge on the Housatonic River. Access is at the Bull's Bridge Gorge Recreation Area just north of the power plant on the west side of Rte. 7. The DEP also stocks bass management areas at two locations within Kent's portion of the Housatonic River, offering good fly-fishing opportunities. Access is at the north end of River Rd. and between North Kent Rd. #1 and #2; smallmouth bass, brook trout, brown trout and calico bass are all found here. Leonard Pond, Hatch Pond, South Spectacle Lake and Lake Waramaug offer licensed fishermen public access to varied fresh water fishing, including largemouth bass, chain pickerel, yellow perch, and brown bullhead. The slow-water section of the Housatonic, south of the Memorial Bridge, is home to introduced northern pike, the largest game fish in the area. Access is available on both sides of the river at several locations.

Kent also encompasses numerous privately owned fish ponds, for which nothing beyond the owner's permission is required. In 2007 the Town of Kent, acting as an agent of the state, issued 611 hunting and fishing licenses to residents and non-residents.

Scenic Roads and Scenic Areas

In 1987 the Connecticut State Legislature enacted PA 87-280 authorizing certain rural two-lane state highways or portions of them to be designated as "Scenic Roads." The Act was intended to recognize the sight-seeing appeal of such roads and to help prevent them from being widened, straightened or modified in ways that would endanger those qualities. Roads that pass through agricultural lands, past historic buildings of some note, as well as roads affording vistas of marshes, shorelines, forests with mature trees or notable geologic or other natural features were listed as potential candidates. In 1991 the 10.5-mile section of Rte. 7 from the New Milford/Kent line to the Kent/Cornwall line was so designated. Subsequently, additional miles north of Kent were added to create a Scenic Road along the Housatonic that now stretches through Cornwall and Sharon as well.



Many towns, including Kent, followed with similar ordinances. Kent's Scenic Road Ordinance, passed in 1989, allows property owners to petition the Planning and Zoning Commission to designate their road as "scenic" based on specific criteria, including scenic vistas, stone walls and a preponderance of mature roadside trees. The Scenic Road Ordinance does not prevent the Town from conducting routine maintenance or improvements on designated roads, but does require that alterations and improvements be approved by the Commission and that such changes "shall be discouraged except for reasons of public safety."

To date, eight town roads, or portions thereof, have been designated as scenic (see Map #1) through neighborhood efforts, although many more fit the criteria. They are

- Treasure Hill Rd., entire length
- Kent Hollow Rd., from Rte. 341 to Upper Kent Hollow Rd.
- Cobble Rd., entire length
- Cobble Lane, entire length
- Skiff Mountain Rd. from Marvelwood School to Sharon town line
- Geer Mountain Rd., entire length
- Mud Pond Rd. from Camps Flat Rd. to New Milford town line
- Dugan Rd. entire length

Horizon Belts

A stated policy of the 2000 *Town Plan of Conservation and Development* is to preserve scenic views and ridgelines: "Hillsides and ridges deserve special consideration because of their high visibility from many places in town. The P&Z Commission should review its existing regulations and consider changes to minimize the visual impact of development in these areas."

To carry out this recommendation Kirk Sinclair, GIS specialist at the Housatonic Valley Association, in collaboration with the P&Z, developed a GIS computer model to delineate "horizon belts" using digital topographical information available online. Horizon Belts were defined as areas where a 35-foot-high structure (the maximum building height allowed in town) would show above the horizonline, as seen from selected points on the town's public roads. The areas were mapped and the P&Z subsequently adopted a Horizonline Conservation District as an overlay over the existing

zoning map.

Since 2005 most new construction and forest clearing in these areas have required this additional review by the P&Z, the goal being to move development away from the most obtrusive sites and to make construction and other alterations blend in with the natural environment. Other towns in Connecticut are studying this model and are planning to apply it to their towns. The Horizon Belts are shown on a large map that includes lot lines in the Land Use Office in Town Hall and on Map #12 in this report. The map also shows the scenic ridgelines that form the core of the Horizon Belts.

Other Recreational Opportunities

Kent's Main Street, with its attractively preserved architecture and its shops, is a popular visitor destination. Kent's several museums provide other recreational and educational opportunities that give the town vitality. The town is underserved with recreational playfields of its own but has the use of 6.5 acres of land leased from Kent School on which it has soccer, baseball and softball fields.

In 2004 the 377-acre 18-hole Bull's Bridge Golf Course was opened on land purchased from the former Newton Farm and South Kent School. Named among the best new courses in the U.S. in 2004, it was designed by the noted course designer Tom Fazio. A private club, it straddles the Kent/New Milford town line and is accessed primarily from Old Stone Rd. Kent is also home to three private summer camps, all that remain of what were once seven such facilities. Birding by locals and visitors also provides substantial recreation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seek opportunities with owners of large land parcels to extend hiking, horseback and cross-country skiing trails, citing the state statute "Recreational Land Use Immunity Act" CGS 52-557, which protects property owners who allow free trail access from associated liability.
2. When selecting open space set-asides in subdivisions give consideration to connecting any contiguous existing or potential trails on surrounding properties.
3. Seek right-of-way easements from the State and private owners for a riverside trail from the Sloane Stanley Museum grounds to Johnson Rd., along the edge of the existing farmland. This would become part of the Housatonic River Greenway.
4. Should the railroad line through town ever be abandoned make acquisition of this corridor for a recreational trail a high priority for Kent and the other towns along the line.
5. Continue to support adequate funding for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, with the specific goal of increasing the maintenance and policing of state parks and wildlife areas and for monitoring fishing, hunting and logging compliance.
6. Keep existing dirt roads unpaved.
7. Whenever upgrades or maintenance work is done along designated Scenic Roads avoid the use of visually inappropriate W-beam rails in favor of more appropriate alternatives.
8. Limit development only in Town Character Areas and along Scenic Roads, and work with owners and developers to design and site buildings to blend unobtrusively with the sensitive scenic and historic landscapes.
9. Be more proactive in early discussions about siting cell phone towers and strictly enforce existing zoning regulations regarding the siting of towers to protect Kent's scenic vistas.
10. Publish and distribute trail guides.

REFERENCES

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