

Shepherds Trail

What to look for on the Shepherds Trail

From the trailhead, descend the short drop into the forest of red and sugar maples. Scattered among these species are occasional stems of black birch, sassafras, hickories and tulip poplar. Soon, the trail crosses a small stream that drains this lowland forest and the wetland to the east.

Just beyond a small bridge, **swing right to encounter a magnificent curving stone wall**. Why this wall was built, presumably by Rueben Johnson, is now a mystery. Mr. Johnson, who settled here in the mid-1700s, owned land from Summer Hill Rd. east to Buck Hill. Shortly on, the trail turns east across a stream that drains the wetland.

Turn left at the foot of the outcrop and on through a young stand of mixed hardwoods whose composition (sugar maple, hickory, black birch, red and white oaks, and several quite large black gums) indicates that the soil here is deeper and better drained than in the wetter forests just encountered. An understory rich in sugar maple saplings suggests that this shade-tolerant species will dominate this stand in the future.

Soon the trail joins an old woods road and heads uphill, turns right, and angles up to the rock summit. In the winter there are good views of Legend Hill to the west and of the valley below.

Descend to a small saddle and continue along the base of the next outcrop to where year-round seeps create spectacular falls of ice along the cliff face in winter. Just beyond, climb upward and continue east through a passageway created when several trees, perched on the sheer rock, blew over in a storm.

Descend steeply to mid-slope and cross a ravine through which water flows freely in wet times. In winter, ice flows develop here and water can be heard trickling beneath the ice sheets. Ascend steeply passing large old chestnut oaks to near the crest. Follow the trail carefully along the moss-covered rocks that can be slippery when wet or icy. Finally, pass through a young oak stand, whose multi-stemmed character reveals an origin from stumps of larger trees cut a few years ago, and emerge into an opening with excellent views to the south of Long Island Sound.

Upslope and to the east, the trail reaches the highest overlook. Unfortunately due to the large number of dead Hemlock trees, the trail is closed beyond this point. To return to your car, **retrace your steps to return to the trailhead**.



Photo by Emmeline Alaconis, SCRCOG

Madison Land Conservation Trust

founded 1964



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

Shepherds Trail This diverse trail includes a variety of ecosystems from lowland wetland swamps, woodlands and small meadows to upland forest and rocky exposed outcrops. The trail is one of our most demanding with several short, steep sections and rocky areas

GPS Directions: 438 Summer Hill Rd, Madison, CT 06443

Category: Fairly difficult due to steep climbs over rocky areas.

Start: Trailhead at the corner of Shepherds Trail and Summer Hill Rd.

Distance: About .5 mile, one way.

Parking: Near the trailhead on Shepherds Trail Rd.

For more information about this walk contact:

Madison Land Conservation Trust

www.madisonlandtrust.org



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