

Crystal Peat Trail Notes

Trail starts by *Crystal Peat Conservation Area* sign on Cook Road. To the left is Japanese Knotweed, one of the very common invasive plant species in CT. It spreads by underground rhizomes and seeds from the beautiful white flower racemes (pronounced *ray seems*). The Blue Trail is the old gravel road that was two lanes wide and used to connect Tolland and Ellington, particularly those going to Crystal Lake. Continue downhill, careful of loose gravel on road. You'll note that these woods are filled with Oak, Maple, Ash, Apen and Pine trees. As you get deeper into the wooded areas listen for the falling acorns. The only sound disturbing the quiet. Along the right side are the bright yellow flowers of the solidago/ goldenrod. Despite goldenrod's reputation, it is ragweed that causes the most allergy problems.

Continue straight on the Blue Trail as you pass a pair cement blocks on right. (Trail to the right just past the pair of blocks will lead directly to the bogs and wall mural.)

Continue on gravel road passing 2 more pairs of big cement blocks. The property ends beyond the 3rd pair. The vertical sign with activity stickers marks the property line. (The gravel road continues and eventually ends at Ladd Road which connects to Route 140 in Ellington). Along these trails is native White Pine that grow tall and straight to 100'. Tolland has many white pine forests. As the trees age the lower, long horizontal branches die and can easily be snapped off.

Turn around and retrace your steps, passing a pair of cement blocks. At 2nd pair of cement blocks, bear left to follow the Yellow Trail. This trail was the exit route for the trucks of the peat operation and unfortunately used for asbestos dumping by a local plumbing company that required a large cleanup effort. Along the foot path watch out for poison ivy under foot and along the sides. Even when the ivy begins to die back and turn red, it still contain urushiol, the oil that causes the red, itchy rash.

The previously mentioned short cut comes in on the right. After the Yellow Trail curves sharply left, passing alongside the pond on left, notice the

remnants of old foundations on top of a small embankment. These might have been warehouse rooms or work rooms.

After the foundations, turn left on the Orange Trail. This trail has a short spur on left that leads to a pond view. After the short spur, continue on the Orange Trail which is a lollipop trail heading north to a view of the bogs. The peat bogs are best viewed in the winter with a light snow cover, when you can see the square pattern of drainage ditches dug for the water control of the peat growing.

Complete the Orange Trail and return to Yellow Trail, turning left to continue. Throughout these woods you'll see standing dead trees, called snags. Snags are important protection for birds and small animals. They use the holes pecked out by the woodpeckers as protection from predators and winter's cold.

On right side of the Yellow Trail, there is a mural painted on a cement and stone wall by Tolland High School art students in 2015. There is an information sign near the mural. Along the trail and small aster like blue or white flowers called fleabane.

Continue on Yellow Trail alongside Brooks Brook. The Yellow trail turns left and crosses over a small stone bridge. See the fallen trees with mushrooms growing on them.

The Yellow Trail bends right to exit to Amanda Way.

Turn around and retrace steps passing the mural wall and then foundations, both on left side of trail. Turn left on a short uphill trail by the rock cairn (small pile of rocks). This is the previously mentioned short cut.

Just before the pair of cement blocks there is bearberry on your right. The red fruit is eaten by birds that replant this invasive with their droppings. At the cement blocks, turn left on gravel road. This will lead back to the property entrance on Cook Road.

This trail loop is approximately 2.70 miles and will take about an hour.