

In all likelihood, each time you visit, this path can offer precious, new gems of discovery – perhaps subtle, perhaps remarkable.

Brookhaven at Lexington is a nonprofit lifecare community dedicated to enriching the lives of its Residents. The preparation of the Brookhaven Nature Path Guide has been made possible by volunteers from the Brookhaven Greenhouse, Grounds and Gardens Committee.

Limited parking is available in the Event Parking Lot for non-resident visitors to the Nature Path, as permitted by agreement with the Lexington Conservation Commission.

For the continuing enjoyment of all walkers, please do not pick any plants or flowers, or feed the wildlife.



## **BROOKHAVEN** AT LEXINGTON

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# The Brookhaven Nature Path

## A Gift of Nature

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In his ninety-fourth year, life-long nature lover Amyas Ames realized another of his generous ambitions — to give the Brookhaven community its own outdoor sanctuary, where we could enjoy walking through a small wilderness and appreciate its wonders. Amyas understood the ability of nature to refresh the human spirit, for from his earliest youth he had often explored the forests, fields, and ponds of his parents' 1200-acre estate in Easton, Massachusetts — now Borderland State Park. On coming to Brookhaven in 1996, he wanted to share his own reverence and love for the Earth with our community. And so, with guidance and support from his wife, Lucia, and his good friend, Brad Washburn, and propelled by the increasing enthusiasm of Brookhaven residents, an overgrown, bumpy old woodland path skirting the property was rebuilt into an accessible nature path. Briars and poison ivy were cleared away, ankle-twisting roots and rocks removed, and the path was surfaced with a hard and smooth layer of stone dust to accommodate wheelchairs and canes. Dangerous dead trees and limbs threatening walkers were taken down. Now, thanks to the initiative of Amyas Ames, Brookhaven's residents and visitors can enjoy the beauty of the path and the surprising variety of birds, wildflowers, trees and terrain that make it a Gift of Nature.



*Almost Winter*

## An Encounter with the Splendor and Tranquility of Nature

Doctors recommend walking, for those able, as one of the best exercises to enhance your quality of life. This path that Brookhaven maintains is designed for those who love nature and like to walk. It follows a winding course along a pond, and merges with an old abandoned town road, accommodating visitors with seven resting places: six benches and Halfway Rock. Each offers quiet views in natural surroundings.

The Brookhaven Nature Path is a little over a quarter of a mile in length, and courses over two slopes, one shallow and the other steep. It is under a canopy of trees all the way. If you have difficulty walking any distance, you might want to walk with a companion.



An interesting tapestry of plants, including lichens, grows along the path. Depending on the season, visitors can observe a surprising variety of birds and other animals.

Walkers enter the path at either its Lower or Upper End—just refer to the centerfold map for orientation and distances. Numbered benches allow walkers to judge where they are and how far they may wish to go. At the Lower End, a sidewalk across the Perimeter Road from the Harvard Garage becomes the path that leads to the granite marker engraved with Ames' words: "Where nature may delight your senses, lift your heart and refresh your spirit." The path ends at Bench Six. A path connects it with a green marker near Fairfield 1. Walkers entering the path at its Upper End should simply use the guide in reverse order.

#### **Walking from the Granite Marker to the First Bench**

offers a view over Green Pond, unofficially so named by residents. On sunny days, you may see painted turtles resting on rocks and branches to sunbathe. Large snapping turtles sometimes appear, and ducks and geese feed in the marsh across the pond. From here to Halfway Rock, the path meanders, providing you a sense of discovery around each bend and over each rise. Just beyond the first curve, weathered, bleached-gray snags of red cedar lie like antlers, having fallen decades ago, perhaps downed by hurricane winds. For centuries, this rot-resistant wood has been used for shingles and fence posts, where durability is essential.

**Walking to the Second Bench** up a shallow slope and down into a small swale offers vistas of the Green Pond. A variety of native trees surrounds the bench, including pignut hickory, known for its extremely tough, ax-handle wood; red maple with incandescent autumn foliage; red oak, a hard wood often used for flooring and cabinetry; the not-so-common swamp white oak; white pine; and a Norway spruce.



#### ***A Glorious Fall Day***

**At the Third Bench**, there are trunks of dead trees, whose holes have been used by chickadees and tree swallows for nesting. The wild life around the Green Pond is surprisingly diverse for such a small urbanized habitat. Patient watching may give you glimpses of a great blue heron gliding overhead or stalking frogs and fish. Mallards, grackles, and red-winged blackbirds frequent the shore, searching for food and nesting habitats. You may see migrating hooded mergansers and cormorants on open water, occasionally a kingfisher, and often Canada geese.

## PRINCIPAL BIRDS

Black-crowned Night Heron  
Canada Goose  
Cardinal  
Carolina Wren  
Cedar Waxwings  
Chickadee  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Downy Woodpecker  
Flicker  
Grackle  
Great Blue Heron  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Herring Gull  
Hooded Merganser (migrant)  
Junco  
Kingfisher  
Little Green Heron  
Mallard Duck  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Tufted Titmouse  
White-throated Sparrow

# The Brookhaven Nature Path

## PRINCIPAL WILDFLOWERS

Autumn Crocus  
Bloodroot  
Cardinal Flower  
Celandine  
Celandine Poppy  
False Solomon's Seal  
Foamflower  
Garlic Mustard (invasive)  
Great White Trillium  
Jack-in-the-pulpit  
Lily of the Valley (naturalized)  
Lyon's Turtlehead  
Mayapple  
Meadow Anemones  
Mertensia  
Sweet Woodruff  
Spotted Wintergreen  
Touch-me-not  
Trilliums (various)  
Violet  
Wild Geranium  
Wild Lily of the Valley  
Yellow Lady Slipper

## PRINCIPAL TREES

Black Cherry  
Buckthorn  
Norway Maple  
Oak, Black  
Oak, Red  
Oak, Swamp White  
Oak, White  
Pignut Hickory  
Red Cedar  
Red Maple  
Sassafras  
White Ash

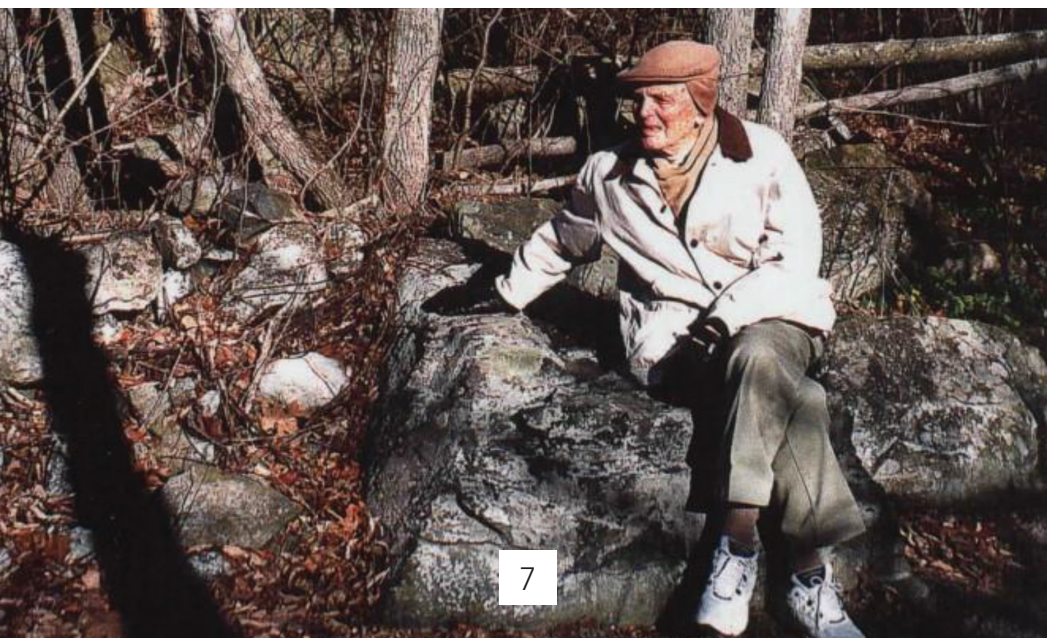
WAY POINTS	DISTANCE, FEET
Granite Marker to Bench 1	129
Bench 1 to Bench 2	141
Bench 2 to Bench 3	159
Bench 3 to Halfway Rock	229
Halfway Rock to Bench 4	154
Bench 4 to Bench 5	254
Bench 5 to Bench 6	260
Granite Marker to Bench 6	1326
Figure on a leisurely stroll of 30 minutes.	



Of particular interest here is the stone wall that stretches into the pond, ultimately submerging and extending along the bottom toward the other side, a remnant of agricultural land use before the Green Pond was created. John Shea farmed the land and sometime after 1929 built the pond. The wall shows us that much of Massachusetts was cleared of trees for firewood and lumber, and used for agriculture until the end of the 1800s. During the 20th century many of the region's forests have grown back. Stone walls that now interlace vast expanses of woodland date back at least 300 years, when rocks were hauled to the boundaries of newly opened fields to clear the way for grazing and tillage.

**Halfway Rock** is the next "seat," perfectly placed "by the artful hand of Nature herself" for walkers to rest. Aptly named by Amyas Ames, whose words are quoted here, it is almost exactly halfway along the path. In spring, before you reach the rock, you will see ostrich fern opening, celandine and celandine poppy, bloodroot, yellow lady's slipper, large white trillium, mayapple, and in the fall, autumn crocus.

### ***Amyas Ames at Halfway Rock***



### ***Anemones by the Meadow***

### ***A Great Blue Heron on Green Pond***

Touch-me-not, which was once abundant, also grows here, as does a small azalea fenced in to keep deer from eating its flower buds. To the left of the path is a half-acre meadow, maintained by periodic mowing to help control invasive species and other weeds.

Bear left at Halfway Rock to continue along the Nature Path. To the right is a winding footpath that follows the trace of an old road through conservation land toward the Western Greenway. This connecting trail links up with the Greenway's network of trails across the wonderful, extensive, varied conservation properties on Brookhaven's Eastern border. That network, all maintained by volunteers, reaches East as far as the Audubon Sanctuary in Belmont, and South as far as the Lyman Estate in Waltham.

Beyond Halfway Rock, look to the left and right for rock walls whose remnants demarcate Old Town Road. The walls are two rods or 33 feet apart, the width of a road used in colonial times. As you continue, they blend in with other rocks until the Fifth Bench. Old Town Road was part of the colonial road from the first settlement at Concord in 1636 to the Charles





### ***Part of Old Town Road***

River and to the ford at what is now Watertown Square. This was the route to Boston before construction of the Great Bridge over the Charles near Harvard Square in 1662.

**The Fourth Bench** offers a good view of a vernal pool on the right that extends all the way to the Fifth Bench. In the spring, wood frogs and spring peepers make a racket there. Along the way are wildflowers like jack-in-the-pulpit, wild geranium, false spikenard, and a variety of trilliums. Here, you will see garlic mustard with small white flowers on tall stalks, an invasive species introduced to the U.S. as a salad green, that can wipe out the wildflowers along the path if not continually cut back.

**The Fifth Bench** is near the end of the vernal pool. By late summer, the vernal pool often dries out. Poison ivy has colonized much of the area. It produces white waxy berries that are an important food source for robins, cardinals, and blue jays. Multiflora rose along the path needs to be pruned regularly. Its hooked thorns are to be avoided, but the most

aggressive ecological danger is oriental bittersweet. Many of the dead trees in the area were killed by bittersweet, which climbs to cover all of a tree's leaves. The Nature Path Stewards, all volunteers, keep it cut back. Across from the bench is a second cluster of yellow lady's slipper. The dead trees along the path provide nesting habitats and wood-boring insects for flickers, hairy, downy, and red-bellied woodpeckers that can be seen or heard drumming against old tree trunks. In the fall this stretch of path is bordered by trees whose berries attract robins and cedar waxwings. The path goes up a steep slope, past a bed of lily-of-the-valley.

**The Sixth Bench** marks one of the end points of the Nature Path where it merges with Brookhaven's landscape of shrubs, pine trees, and flower beds.

### ***A Long Vista on a Spring Day***

