



Old Saybrook Natural Heritage Tour

The Natural Heritage Tour of Old Saybrook begins on Saybrook Point at Fort Saybrook Monument Park (Stop No. 1). Directions to each subsequent stop can be found in the descriptions of each tour stop on the backside of this brochure. To return to the start of the tour, follow Main Street (Route 154) back to Saybrook Point. This route takes you through the center of town, past the restored Town Hall and the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center. Turn left at North Cove Road for views of the North Cove Embayment and the tidal marsh lands. Turn right on Cromwell Place and left on College Street to return to Stop No. 1.

Natural Heritage Route	Water Bodies
Open Space	Roads
Wetland	Railroad
	Streams

Facilities	Activities	Environment
Access Pier	Bird and Wildlife	Intertidal Flat
Boat Launch Ramp	Crabbing	Tidal Wetland
Car Top Boat Access	Fishing	Tidal River
Food Concession	Lighthouse	Sandy Beach
Picnic Area	Walkways	Rocky Shore
Handicapped Access	Trails	Bluff Escarpment
Restrooms	Supervised Swimming	Fronting Long Island Sound
	Historical or Cultural Interest	

Town of Old Saybrook
Conservation Commission
302 Main Street
Old Saybrook, Connecticut 06475

1 inch equals 1,960 feet

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles

<http://www.oldsaybrookct.org>

NATURAL HERITAGE TOUR



Tour map on other side

1 Fort Saybrook Monument Park

Fort Saybrook Monument Park exemplifies the Town of Old Saybrook's Conservation efforts. This park preserves the historic elements of the railroad roundabout and honors the town's colonial founders while providing public access for recreation and educational enjoyment. The Park's boardwalk and viewing platform afford an opportunity to witness a tidal marsh restoration area. This tidal marsh area provides habitat for several species of plants and animals including birds such as rails and thousands of migrating and wintering waterfowl including black ducks and native songbirds. The Fort Saybrook Monument Park and adjacent Pasbeshauke Pavilion public parking lots provide convenient starting points for those interested in bicycle riding or walking. Natural Heritage stop Nos. 2 and 3 are within walking distance (less than 1 mile distant.) **Location: Intersection of College Street and Bridge Street.**

6 Oyster River Overlook

The Oyster River Overlook provides a view of the Oyster River and its associated marshes. The Oyster River can truly be said to be Old Saybrook's own, as its watershed is almost entirely contained within the borders of Old Saybrook. Its origins are in the Town's Northwest Uplands where interconnected cold springs and intermittent streams form the headwaters. The Oyster River watershed ultimately discharges to Long Island Sound. This watershed is home to migratory fish species, including alewife and blue-back herring, that travel thousands of miles from their life at sea to spawn in the upper reaches of the Oyster River. The Oyster River contains a complete suite of healthy tidal marshes, from salt to freshwater, that support a diversity of wildlife including birds and fishes. Once abundant in the Oyster River, the oyster has been over-harvested, succumbing to introduced parasites and suffering from loss of habitat due to environmental pollution. Nature's powerhouse of water purification, an adult oyster will consume water-borne nutrients and algae by filtering water at a rate of up to five liters per hour. Oyster reefs provide habitat for other species, including worms, snails, sponges, crabs and fish. A single female oyster produces up to 100 million eggs annually, providing food in the form of larvae for other dwellers of the estuary. Fortunately, restoration efforts are underway to bring them back to the Oyster River. **Location: Intersection of Route 1 and Route 154. Look for the bench located at western end of the "Riverside Square" parking area.**

habitats, all of which are inextricably linked by the tidal waters of the Connecticut River itself. There is a tremendous degree of ecological interaction and interdependence among its tidal waters, tidal wetlands, adjacent uplands, and species populations within an ecosystem or watershed framework. This concept of a single integrated ecological complex forms the basis of this international significance. **Location: Just east of the intersection of College Street and Bridge Street, behind the Dock and Dine Restaurant.**

3 South Cove Causeway

A short walk from Tour Stops Nos. 1 & 2, a stroll across the causeway affords, to the east, views of the Connecticut River, Great Island and Griswold Point Preserve and the Borough of Fenwick. To the west is the South Cove embayment. An embayment is a semi-enclosed body of coastal water, such as a tidal river or cove, where a fresh water influx measurably reduces the salt water concentration. These brackish waters have high biological activity, providing significant habitat for shellfish, fin-fish and waterfowl. These embayment areas provide nursery grounds as well as shelter and refuge for various aquatic species. The various marsh plants that can be seen growing around the edges of the cove help to filter sediments out of the stormwater runoff before it reaches the waters of the cove. Town and State regulations attempt to preserve this vegetative buffer zone that rings the open water area of the cove. The Town of Old Saybrook, in conjunction with the Old Saybrook Land Trust has worked to acquire areas of this protective marshland to ensure the continued viability of the embayment waters. Programs to reduce the spread of invasive plants such as the tall reeds known as Phragmites are underway. These vigorous plants overwhelm the more

7 Great Cedars Conservation Area

The Great Cedars Conservation Area provides miles of interconnected walking trails that meander through a variety of terrain and habitats. Trail maps are available on-site. Deep within this area are Atlantic White Cedars. Coveted as rot-resistant timber, Atlantic White Cedar swamps were historically over-harvested, reducing what at the turn-of-the-century were 80 significant population occurrences in the state to less than 20 areas of conservation significance today. Old Saybrook has protected its best population of these trees in Great Cedars Conservation Area. In 2003, the new state champion tree was officially recognized, from Old Saybrook, with a 75-inch diameter (that is over 6 feet wide!) **Location: From Rte. 1 (by the McDonald's restaurant), Right on Ingham Hill Road, Left on Elm Street/Ingham Hill Road approximately ¾ mile.**

8 Chalker Millpond Fishway

Chalker Millpond Fishway represents the ongoing efforts of the State of Connecticut, the Town of Old Saybrook, local conservation organizations like the Old Saybrook Land Trust and private land owners to work together to reestablish fish migration routes. Historically, the Oyster River watershed supported a significant migratory fish population. Species, including alewife and blue-back herring, travel thousands of miles from their life at sea to spawn in the fresh water upper reaches of the Oyster River. Over time, many of these fish passage routes were blocked by the construction of dams and roadway cross-culverts. The flow of water through the fish ladder allows these spawning fish, referred to as anadromous fish, to pass around the dam and access the millpond. In a

diverse marsh plant communities that are native to the shores. **Location: Bridge Street – just south of the Saybrook Point Inn.**

4 Castle Overlook

Castle Overlook provides a view of Long Island Sound, Long Island, Plum Island and a cobble beach. The overlook, at the top of the bluff or escarpment, is a geologic feature, a glacial deposit called a "moraine." The last glacial ice advance (the Wisconsin) started in Canada about 85,000 years ago, reached Connecticut about 26,000 years ago and began to wane on Long Island about 21,000 years ago. The southernmost extent of the Wisconsin glacier was along the middle of Long Island. When the Wisconsin glacier was at its maximum, sea level was about 300 feet lower than it is today and the shoreline was 50 to 70 miles south of Long Island. By about 20,000 years ago, the glacier receded from its southernmost position. It stuttered and paused several times. At each of these pauses (recessional positions), it left a pile of glacial debris known as a recessional moraine. The bulk of the above-water portions of Fishers Island, Plum Island, and northernmost Long Island are parts of the Harbor Hill-Roanoke Point-Fishers Island-Charlestown recessional moraine. Bluffs and escarpments are naturally eroding shorelines marked by dynamic sea cliffs with steep slope angles. Escarpments represent an intricate and dynamic balance between erosion, drainage and plant cover. Bluffs and escarpments reduce the impact of coastal flooding by dissipating wave energy. Destruction of the protective vegetation that grows on the face of the bluff reduces the ability of the bluff to resist erosion. The Town of Old Saybrook has encouraged a slope stabilization program at this site. Vegetation is being established to reinforce

the generally loose, stony moraine soil so that it can withstand the erosion of wind, rain and waves. While visiting the Castle Overlook, consider walking along the shore-side paths and roadways. Visit and enjoy the vistas from the numerous marked public access, scenic overlooks along this section of shoreline. **Location: Maple Ave (Rte. 154 west), Left on Hartland Drive, parking at intersection of Hartland Drive and Pratt Road. Look for the red roof tile of Cornfield Point's "Castle" as you drive west along Willard Bay, along the shore from Tour Stop No. 3.**

5 Plum Bank River Overlook & Town Beach

The Town Beach / Plum Bank Overlook provides an opportunity to see one of the few natural sand dunes in the Town of Old Saybrook. The native Prickly Pear Cactus can also be found here. The tidal marsh to the north side is associated with the Back River. This marsh is frequently inundated with salt water during the monthly "spring tide." Surrounded by developed land and receiving roadway runoff, this marsh is under stress from water quality degradation and invasive plant species. Despite these pressures, and its relatively small size, the marsh harbors a surprising diversity of species, particularly birds, including egrets, herons and osprey. The Town Beach to the south provides Old Saybrook residents access to Long Island Sound and its wide tidal sand flats for year round enjoyment. Harvey's Beach, ½ mile to the west, serves as a beach access for out-of-town visitors. **Location: Plum Bank Road (Rte. 154 west) across from Town Beach, Park in the marsh-side parking lot.**

on average, every second, 20,000 cubic feet of water flows past this vantage point. As recently as the 1960s the water of the Connecticut River was extremely polluted. It was referred to as the "best landscaped citizen in the nation." Due to the efforts of concerned citizens as well as local, State and Federal government regulations and expenditures, the construction of up-river waste water treatment plants and the reduction of industrial discharges have improved the water quality to the extent that the submerged aquatic vegetation and fish have returned to the river. The lower Connecticut River now supports over 78 species of fish, the greatest diversity of fish in the region. **Location: Essex Road (Old State Road) to Ferry Road, Park at DEP Boat Launch under the I-95 Baldwin Bridge.**

12 Founders Memorial Park

Founders Memorial Park provides panoramic views of the most downstream section of the Connecticut River; the confluence of the river and Long Island Sound; the tidal wetlands and marshes; North Cove; Ragged Rock to the north and the Great Island marsh system on the opposite side of the river. The park is an example of creative and constructive reuse. This magnificent view is afforded from the crest of a former municipal landfill. The landfill has been capped with impervious material to prevent rainwater entering the buried landfill material. The capped landfill has been landscaped to provide Town residents and visitors with a valuable recreation resource. At the base of the "hill," take a walk along the former railroad bed into the tidal marsh. These marshes and protected open water areas provide year round homes and sheltered areas for waterfowl and shorebirds. **Location: From Main Street (Route 154) turn on Coulter Street, follow to end of street.**

Welcome. Old Saybrook is endowed with abundant and exemplary natural assets. This Natural Heritage Tour will guide you to 12 stops throughout Old Saybrook. It is hoped that citizens and visitors will take the opportunity to experience and appreciate the recreational and scenic value that these areas provide. The existence and quality of these areas should not be taken for granted. These areas are subjected to pressures and threats that can degrade or deplete them. The Conservation Commission encourages active support and participation to protect and conserve these valuable assets.

Old Saybrook is fortunate to have committed citizen volunteers and elected officials who have worked to protect these assets. One tool used to accomplish this is the Plan of Conservation & Open Space, which guides efforts in obtaining and preserving areas of open space. Although the "ecosystem services" provided by the clean air and water protected by open spaces are an important element of our quality of life, the cost of community services associated with developing our open spaces – roads, schools, safety, infrastructure – in many cases are higher than the costs of leaving these spaces undeveloped. The compromises between growth and preservation will continue to be an important challenge... part of our town's future.

Old Saybrook Conservation Commission
January 2008

NATURAL HERITAGE TOUR

Town of Old Saybrook

A self-guided tour of open spaces throughout Old Saybrook, Connecticut



January 2008