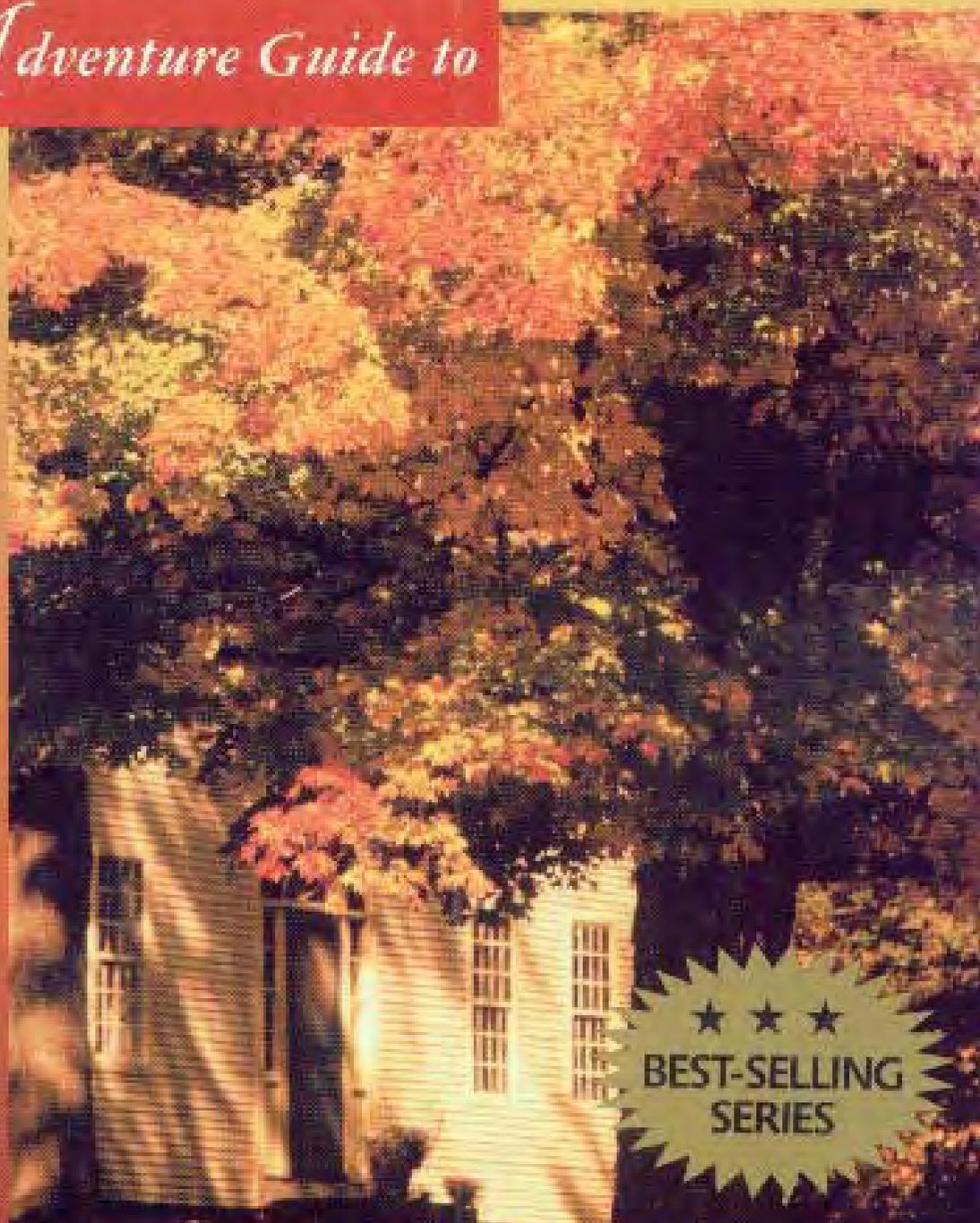


HUNTER TRAVEL GUIDES

Adventure Guide to



★ ★ ★
BEST-SELLING
SERIES

MASSACHUSETTS & Western Connecticut

Elizabeth L. Dugger

Adventure Guide to
MASSACHUSETTS
& **Western Connecticut**

Elizabeth L. Dugger



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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

I live in northern Vermont, five minutes from the New Hampshire border. When I told my neighbors I was headed to Massachusetts and northwestern Connecticut to research and write my next *Adventure Guide*, they clucked their tongues in dismay: All that traffic? All those people? What adventures, besides not being able to find your car?

Even the hikers I talked with, who ought to have known better, thought I'd have a tough time discovering adventure travel in a state they thought of as "civilized," meaning overrun with people and cars.

They were wrong.

On a hike up Savoy Mountain in Massachusetts with a group from that state – a dozen people loaded with backpacks and water bottles, headed for the deserted fire tower at the top with its awesome views – I asked a hiker who lived nearby what I should tell people with this book.

"Tell 'em the place is full of rattlesnakes and biting flies," he suggested grimly. "That'll keep 'em home instead."

Ha! Adventure travelers stay home just because of rattlesnakes and biting flies? A lot he didn't know!

But the truth is, Massachusetts and the northwestern corner of Connecticut are full of places to explore, and although I know there truly are some rattlesnakes, I haven't seen one yet, and I've been up and down a lot of hills! And biting flies? Just a matter of timing: Stay off Plum Island in July, for heaven's sake!

This guide is full of proof that there are rich adventures hidden all through this region, and the point of the book is to give you directions to the starting places for your own. I was driven to find them, not just to prove my neighbors wrong (I love a good argument, and so do they!) but to search out the ghosts of my own family too.

My mother's ancestors include one of the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*, as well as whaling captains and carpenters on early Cape Cod. She first met my British father at a family-run resort in the Berkshires, the western mountains of Massachusetts, where they were both working humble summer jobs; after work ended, around midnight, they were free to paddle in the ponds and sing under the stars. An early trip the two of them made to history-laden Concord, redolent of British defeat, nearly capsized their courtship! And the first camping trip of my childhood that I have firmly in my memories was by Bash Bish Falls, the spectacular torrent plunging down the rocks near the Connecticut state line. In Connecticut's neighboring Litchfield Hills, the towns of Salisbury, Kent, Canaan, Cornwall, and Litchfield resonate with family stories for me.

Although my mother died nearly 20 years ago, her notes on these family roots are with me, and her cousin Alice still helps with the details. My father lost his battle with cancer as I traveled the region, but he hung on long enough for me to talk to him by phone from the very resort where he and Mom had met 50

years before. He described the horse stables turned into a dancehall and the trails into the woods, just as I had seen them that afternoon. He reminded me of the authors who had lived nearby, like Herman Melville with his Berkshire farm. Later that week, I called my brother Dave, an ardent kayaker and former Boston resident, who listed coastal waters to explore and pointed me toward good restaurants and superb chocolate.

So I say today, Massachusetts is the heart of New England; its weathered-rock spirit lives on in the small state with the big history and the hidden valleys and changeable weather. Its people are varied, but generally welcoming, and passionate about preserving their land and its legacy of both nature and human love. I wouldn't have missed exploring here.

And to my neighbors: Just look what I found! I bet your roots are in Massachusetts, too. Welcome back to where New England first began to take shape and flavor. It's worth another look.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the state and regional agencies, and especially the town chambers of commerce, who provided so much information and made me so hungry to see and explore Massachusetts and western Connecticut. Thanks also to a number of hikers, cyclists, and paddlers who shared some of their favorite places – I hope I kept just the right amount secret so that you can still have places of your own to treasure. The Appalachian Trail Conference discussion on “Loving the AT to Death” was vital in shaping this guide. Many thanks especially to Deb, a terrific general store keeper, who listened to descriptions of one adventure after another, and who never quenched my enthusiasm as she handed me the next fresh-made lunch so I could keep going.

Finally, I offer this guide in memory of my parents, Joan Lancy (Palmer) Minden and Walter Ernest Minden, who took such delight in sharing New England with their children. I appreciate their loving gift.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth L. Dugger lives in Vermont, “with a lake at my feet and a mountain behind me.” Her two sons are nearly grown and follow their mother's and grandmother's tradition of seeking adventures. Beth has written two other guides published by Hunter: *The Adventure Guide to New Hampshire* and *The Adventure Guide to Vermont*, which is now in its second edition. Both books draw on the excitement of exploration; the beauty of New England and the warmth of its people are also reflected in the author's regionally well-known poetry and fiction.

Introduction

Massachusetts: The Unexpected Adventure

Where can you go to see bald eagles soaring over the water, and find tracks of coyotes and moose? Where are the oldest hiking trails, the ones walked by Presidents and great authors, the three-state views over rolling mountaintops? Where can you go sea kayaking, accompanied by curious seals, with whales sometimes passing along the distant horizon?

Surprise, surprise: It's Massachusetts.

How can all this happen within an hour or two of Boston, one of the world's largest port cities? And in a state relentlessly developed over the centuries to house millions of people?

Think Emerson. Think Thoreau. Think about Louisa May Alcott, and hundreds more early state residents whose childhoods included playing under waterfalls and blazing trails up mountainsides. Their families were already stewards of the land, and their writings created passionate defenders of wild places.

Here is Thoreau, trumpeting the new creed in *Walden*:

Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.

■ An Emphasis on Conservation



Private and state groups in Massachusetts and the adjoining Litchfield Hills of Connecticut have set aside mountain reservations, bird sanctuaries, seaside dunes. Even the Charles River of Boston has been restored to leisurely boating. This region is proof that

when enough people feel strongly enough, anything can get done – even protecting the wildness of the land from their own eagerness.

Where did I see eagles? Less than two hours from Boston, in the 119,000 acres set aside around Quabbin Reservoir, where moose, coyotes, and even an occasional wolf wander across the quiet trails. Bear? Try the state forests in the Berkshires. Sea kayaking with seals? The coast of Massachusetts meets the ocean in flashing, untameable splendor, and nearly every town has a place to rent a kayak, whether you want to flirt with the waves of the Atlantic or penetrate silently into the saltmarshes where thousands of waterbirds make their nests or pause in their great seasonal migrations.

If you never dreamed such adventures waited in Massachusetts, you're not alone. Even many local residents overlook their own advantage and ramble northward to the more famous mountains of New Hampshire and Vermont. For the adventure traveler headed to the Pilgrim state, that's a big plus: the crowds head someplace else a lot of the time. Especially in spring and fall, and always in winter, the natural bounty of Massachusetts is yours for the exploring. Sure, you might see another hiker or paddler; you might even see distant lights of a city, or occasionally hear the rumble of a truck or the faint moan of a train whistle.

But those distractions will be dreamlike, far removed from your adventuring. If the deer and raccoons and peregrine falcons can claim their share of the forest, why not you?

■ **About Adventure Travel**

Adventure travel makes you feel alive, wakes you up to yourself as well as to your surroundings. That doesn't have to mean hanging from a cliff by your fingernails (although if you're into it, you can find great rock faces not far from the state's highest mountain, Mt. Greylock). You don't have to dare death to feel glad you're alive, or to feel awestruck by what's around you. Just being in open lands or along the coast, most of the time, can give you that get-away feeling. But adventure gets the blood flowing, the heart pumping. Walk along an island. Climb a mountain trail. Canoe down a lake so silently that the loons don't dive underwater but watch you instead, as they keep on crying their long, crazed sorrows into the dusk.

The adventures in this book provide a range of challenges, some relating to climate or wild terrain. Others lead you to fresh interactions with the natural world. The hawks you'd never notice as they beat their wings above a town or city are present in a bird sanctuary, grim and fierce and lovely all at once. The trail under your feet isn't untrodden – many Massachusetts hiking trails are a century or more old – but one pair of feet on it may have been those of the author Nathaniel Hawthorne. Or a Pilgrim

from the *Mayflower*. You're in good company, even as you explore the land and its stories. The point is, you're here for an adventure. You're here to feel alive.

You can launch your explorations from the bustling city of Boston, or arrive on the many highways that connect the region with the rest of New England. This guide won't drag you through much traffic (although there's a section on the irresistible adventures that Boston itself offers). The point is to get out of town, even though you may come back in the evening to savor some of the superb dining available in this multicultural state. Climbing a mountain in hiking boots or on a multispeed bike will give you different views; so will savoring the silent grace of a hot air balloon ride over the valley. You might ride a pony down the dunes of Cape Cod; there's a spectacular sunset waiting for you. Photograph the whales, or the moose that browses in the swamp, or the bold coloring of the autumn leaves. Renew your capacity for delight.

OUTDOOR PRESERVATION AGENCIES

Appalachian Mountain Club, 5 Joy Street, Boston, MA 02108; ☎ 617-523-0636.

Cape Cod National Seashore, South Wellfleet, MA 02663; ☎ 508-249-3785.

Massachusetts Audubon Society, South Great Road, Lincoln MA 01773. ☎ 617-259-9500; Web site www.massaudubon.org.

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Division of Forests and Parks, 100 Cambridge Street, 19th Floor, Boston, MA 02202. ☎ 617-727-3180 or 800-831-0569.

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement, ☎ 800-632-8075. Web site www.state.ma.us/DFWELE; Division of Marine Fisheries, www.state.ma.us/DFWELE/DPT_TOC.HTM.

Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), 20 Somerset Street, Boston, MA 02108; ☎ 617-727-7090.

Trustees of Reservations, 527 Essex Street, Beverly, MA 01915-1530; ☎ 508-921-1944.

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Region, 300 West Gate Center, Hadley, MA 01035; ☎ 413-252-8200.

History



Nearly every school child learns that the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock on the coast of Massachusetts in 1620, and each Thanksgiving, Americans tell again the story of how these English settlers, deprived of many who had sickened and died on the long sea voyage in search of religious freedom, survived their terrible first winter on the untamed continent. Only through the help of friendly Indians, says the school story, were these first New Englanders able to eat and live.

Americans today live in a world where such simple stories are turned upside down. The damage done by settlers, through ignorance and accident, to both the land and its early Native inhabitants was enormous. Freedom of worship and self-government propelled the new country's birth, but not everyone involved was noble, many were downright greedy, and there are as many sad stories as there are triumphant ones.

Massachusetts and Connecticut, where the Revolutionary War erupted and where critically important American families like the Adamses and the Websters would emerge, present the riches of history everywhere you travel. Keep an open mind and prepare to be surprised. For instance, there are two Freedom Trails to follow here: the one that winds through the streets of Greater Boston, marking the efforts of patriots like Paul Revere, but also the one that reasserts the presence of African Americans, in early towns on the shore and the islands, in newly founded New England cities, and especially in the Farmington and Hartford areas of Connecticut, where many of the events memorialized in the recent movie *Amistad* took place. And the role of Native Americans is far more complex than the storied and charming friendship of Squanto and the Pilgrims. Today the remnants of the great Eastern tribes reclaim their history, as well as their rights to land: two noted casinos draw visitors to the small reservations these tribes hold in Massachusetts, and striking museums of Native American culture have opened in Connecticut. Both states take their names from these Native Americans, after all! *Massachuseuck* meant "people of the great hill," in the language of the Native Americans who lived around Blue Hill, about 10 miles north of present-day Boston (see the *Boston & Nearby Adventures* chapter, *On Foot*).

■ The 17th Century

One way to make your own pilgrimage through New England history is to begin at Cape Cod, far to the east, where the Pilgrims first landed before reaching the more farmable land of Plymouth. At the tip of the Cape, in Provincetown, a monument 252 feet high commemorates the Pilgrims' landing on November 11, 1620, and the five weeks they stayed in the area around the bay. In nearby Easton is First Encounter Beach, where the Pilgrims and their captain Miles (or Myles) Standish had a first – and

dangerous – meeting with local Wampanoags. It was during this time of mostly nervous waiting on their crowded boat that the Pilgrims drew up the Mayflower Compact, the first effort to lay out what we now think of as American principles of justice and rights.

Plymouth Rock, on the coast not far from Cape Cod, marks the site of the group's more permanent settlement. Soon groups separated, searching for yet more freedom of beliefs and life-styles, and headed for Rhode Island to the south and what would become Hartford, Connecticut.

Even earlier settlements had already begun on the nearby islands. Martha's Vineyard today is a resort home to at least one President and many politicians, actors, and writers. But in 1602 Captain Bartholomew Gosnold landed on the Chappaquiddick end of the island and named it for his daughter. By 1641, Thomas Mayhew had taken ownership of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands. Here the settlers do indeed seem to have maintained a working relationship with the Wampanoags, as they labored at fishing, whaling, and farming. Gay Head, at the western end of Martha's Vineyard, remains one of two Indian townships in Massachusetts today.

Although history textbooks move quickly to Boston's prominence in the next century, it pays to notice the founding of Hartford in neighboring Connecticut. From its founding in 1635 by liberty-seekers from Cambridge, Mass., and its incorporation (formal city status) in 1637, the city rapidly became a literary center in American life. When the American Revolution finally erupted, the Yale graduates who had come to Hartford would contribute much to the new country's government. Yale University, in nearby New Haven, provided some of the most prized formal training available at that time, and Jonathan Edwards, later to lead New England's "Great Awakening" into religious fervor, graduated from Yale in 1720. Later students would include Noah Webster (yes, the dictionary Webster) and novelist James Fenimore Cooper. New Haven and Hartford would later share status as the state's capital, from 1703 to 1875, as each had been the center for its own colony.

Connecticut too was occupied by Native Americans, and the arriving settlers engaged in their first "Indian war" in 1637, the Pequot War, which dispersed the local Schaghticokes. Those Pequots who survived were scattered and even enslaved by the colonists. Despite this treatment, during the Revolutionary War over a hundred Schaghticokes enlisted on the American side, creating an effective signal corps that relied in part on drums and fires. There is still a parcel of Schaghticoke (pronounced SKAT-i-cook today) reservation land near Kent.

Of course, Hartford and New Haven weren't the earliest European settlements in Connecticut (the Native American term for the region was *Quinnehtukut*, meaning long tidal river). Those took place along the lush

fishing grounds and easy entry of the Connecticut River, notably at Old Saybrook (first called Kievit's Hoeck) by the Dutch in 1623, and Windsor as an English trading post in 1633, followed by Wethersfield in 1634. These three river towns together drew up the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, another governing document that would later contribute to the new nation's Constitution – hence the nickname, “the Constitution State.”

But let's get back to the east and Boston, where an Anglican clergyman named William Blackstone (or maybe Blaxton) had set up a nice private home in 1625. Five years later, John Winthrop arrived, along with some 900 Puritans, and the original lone settler left the area. Winthrop was the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. William Bradford, his peer, was the first governor of Plymouth Colony. Other prominent early residents were poet Anne Bradstreet, and the great intellectual Cotton Mather, who would author 444 books and through his writing help to provoke the notorious Salem witch trials. (He did criticize their methods – more on that in the section on *Salem*.)

■ The 18th Century

The colonists would have their hands full for the rest of the 17th century. There was a war with the natives that began in 1675 (King Phillip's War), then the horrors of the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials. But soon tensions with the distant English government rose, and in 1765 its infamous Stamp Act, placing a tax on all papers and official documents, enraged the colonists. Two years later, more taxes were levied on glass, paper, and tea. Protest meetings were often held at Boston's immense Faneuil Hall, a center of both merchant trading and public debate. The Boston Massacre resulted on March 5, 1770, and three years later the Boston Tea Party took place, as Samuel Adams and his Sons of Liberty, disguised as Indians, defied the new taxes and dumped hundreds of chests of taxable tea into Boston Harbor. Boston suffered for this hostility, as the British closed the port to shipping in 1774, forbade town meetings, and demanded that settlers feed and house the British soldiers.

In hindsight, the events that followed were inevitable. The midnight ride of Paul Revere on April 18, 1775, that prepared the local patriots to meet the British soldiers the next morning, when the battle of Lexington took place. The battle that followed in Concord, with the Minutemen's bloody victory. Another bloody battle, a defeat, but one that cost the British dearly, at Bunker Hill, on the edge of Boston, on July 17, 1775. The wild fervor of the American Revolution itself, and the passion of the Declaration of Independence, adopted on July 4, 1776.

There would be more than seven years of fighting, much of it in Massachusetts, until the Treaty of Paris was finally signed on September 3,

1783. No Massachusetts town is without signs of those terrible years. Four major battles were fought in Connecticut, too.

■ Industrial Development & Civil War

The history of the two states from 1783 to the mid-1800s is one of industrial development and literary accomplishment. These were the years of Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*), Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*), as well as Edgar Allen Poe, who invented the mystery story in Boston, and poet Emily Dickinson, living to the west in Amherst. Don't forget Nathaniel Hawthorne, with his grim novels of justice, and Herman Melville, creator of the *Great White Whale*, plus the lyrical poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. These literary lights spread across the state, carrying writers and artists with them; no longer was the coast the only area where culture thrived. Harriet Beecher Stowe was born in Litchfield, Conn. in 1811 and would later write a book that inflamed the country and led to the Civil War – *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book was published in 1852 and sold more than 300,000 copies that year alone; when President Abraham Lincoln later met the author more than a decade later, he would say, “So this is the little lady who made this big war.”

Residents of Massachusetts were among the earliest to embrace the abolitionist movement, in part because northern industries simply didn't need slavery the way the Southern institutions did, but also because of their strong principles of individual liberty and rights that seemed to spring from the New England soil, as well as in the Puritan, Calvinist background of regional religious beliefs. Massive protests were held in Boston during the years leading up to the Civil War; William Lloyd Garrison made his first public speech against slavery at Park Street Church in Boston in 1829, when he was not quite 24 years old. From his hands soon came *The Liberator*, which did much to forward the abolitionist cause. Also printed in Boston was the slave narrative of Sojourner Truth. Again, Faneuil Hall – doubled in size since 1805 – was the scene for many a public meeting and rally, with speeches by Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, Frederick Douglass, Daniel Webster, Jefferson Davis, and Susan B. Anthony.

■ Up To The Present

After the Civil War, much of Connecticut's rural economy became industrialized, with even the far northwest pierced by railroads. Massachusetts became a textile center, with mill towns thriving on every river. Connecticut's iron industry, fostered by the Civil War, continued to be strong for some time. But immigration changed the region drastically after World War I, and the Depression's powerful knockout punch in the milltowns accentuated a wave of poverty for the urban regions in both

Massachusetts and Connecticut. After World War II, however, space and computer technology moved into Greater Boston, fueling fresh growth. Connecticut took urban renewal seriously, revitalizing its small cities. And political prominence returned to Massachusetts in the 1960s as the home of President John F. Kennedy. In the 1990s the visits of President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton would focus attention on Martha's Vineyard, until then mostly known only to East Coast residents. Even now, that area is able to maintain much of its Atlantic isolation and beauty despite so many prominent residents and guests.

A Focus On Conservation

An entirely separate history of the region can be written in terms of the preservation efforts that have kept green spaces and near-wild lands available despite the surges of population and industry. From the moment that Boston Common was set aside in 1634, New Englanders looked toward the future of both land and seacoast. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Trustees of Reservations, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the governmental groups such as the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Metropolitan District Commission, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service have sponsored and encouraged this outlook. Much of this history is given later in this guide, with specific destinations and adventures.

Geography



Massachusetts is a surprisingly small state, considering its historical prominence in America. At only 8,257 square miles, it ranks 45th in the nation for size. South of it is Connecticut, even smaller at 5,009 square miles (48th). The eastern border of Massachusetts is the Atlantic Ocean. New Hampshire and Vermont hem it in to the north, New York to the west, and Connecticut and Rhode Island fit snugly against the southern border. The land rises from the ocean to the western mountains, called the Berkshire Hills or the Berkshires. Where these hills continue into Connecticut they are called the Litchfield Hills. Both are part of the Appalachian Mountains. A hiker in the western part of the state is likely to cross the border casually, following the Appalachian Trail as it meanders along the ridgelines.

Halfway across Massachusetts is the Connecticut River, a wide waterway that cuts a luxurious valley of farmlands through the center of the state. Locally called the Pioneer Valley, it separates the very rural Berkshires from the more populated regions. Yet farmland occurs in wide patches even as close as 25 miles to the west Boston, the hub of activity for many of the state's six million residents.

Where Massachusetts meets the Atlantic, river mouths open in estuaries, some still vital shipping routes and others the tidal sanctuaries of seabirds, fish, and crustaceans, as well as explorers in kayaks. Boston's deepwater port, where the Charles River flows, is sheltered to the north by Cape Ann and to the south by Cape Cod. Cape Cod, much the better known of the two ocean-front regions, is shaped like a bent arm thrust out into the ocean. Provincetown, at its tip, is some 30 miles out to sea from Boston, placing it in the midst of whale migrations. The Gulf Stream is bent away from the northern coast by the Cape's presence. To its south are Nantucket Island, Martha's Vineyard, and the Elizabeth Islands, all of which were once purchased for the sum of four pounds by Thomas Mayhew in 1641.

There are many sandy beaches in these seacoast parts of the state – in fact, Cape Cod becomes mostly sand and dunes in its outer miles – but unlike more tropical areas, the landscape is flecked with small ponds and lakes. Geology buffs may enjoy noting that Cape Cod even shows traces of the moraine from the last glacial invasion. In fact, the glaciers left many lakes and ponds all across the state, and the need for reliable drinking water for the industrial cities generated reservoirs as well. The largest of these is Quabbin Reservoir, near the center of the state; to construct it, the inhabitants of four country towns were moved, and old village roads lead like ghost trails into the water.

The Connecticut and the Charles are the most noted rivers in Massachusetts, with the Deerfield providing spring whitewater and luxurious summer paddling to the west. The Connecticut continues south into the state that bears its name, where in the northwest the Farmington and Housatonic Rivers also offer miles of canoe and kayak exploration, as well as wetlands that host wide varieties of birds. Whitewater on the Farmington may be the best in the East.

Climate



Those old paintings by Currier and Ives showing the horse drawing the sleigh across snowdrifts portrayed New England winter at its most romantic. Massachusetts offers snowy winters for the delight of skiers and snowshoe hikers, and there are several downhill ski slopes in the Berkshires. Winter temperatures in the daytime range from the low teens to the 30s, with a rare plunge into the single numbers to either side of zero. Nighttime temperatures may be as much as 40° lower than the daytime ones, especially in the mountains – and the windswept winter seashore can feel even colder.

Spring begins with the tapping of maple trees for their sweet sap as early as mid-February, well before the landscape is restored to greenery. There