

Ponkapoag Bog, Blue Hills Reservation, Canton, MA

An extensive and weathered boardwalk provides for adventurous explorations through three types of bog/fen habitats: red maple/heath, Atlantic white cedar, and leatherleaf peatland.

Location: 2167 Washington Street, Canton MA; access is at the Ponkapoag Golf Course

Delorme Map edition and page: Massachusetts (2022), page 53, A-4

GPS location: 42.1131, 71.699

Directions

From Interstate 93 Route, take exit #2A for 138 South in Canton, MA. Merge onto Route 138 South and continue for 0.6 miles. Turn right onto Washington Street and take the first left onto Sassamon Street. Turn left again back onto Route 138 North. The golf course and parking area are on the right.

Bog Data

Bog type and acreage: Bog (quaking) of 50+ acres; 7,000 acres for Blue Hills Reservation

Trails: The Ponkapoag Trail is a 4-mile loop around Ponkapoag Pond. The Ponkapoag Bog boardwalk is approximately 0.25 miles and takes you deep into the bog and pond areas. The walk from the parking area to the bog entrance is approximately 1 mile.

Ponkapoag Bog Overview and Blue Hills Reservation History

The Ponkapoag Bog is located on the western section of Ponkapoag Pond, a 203-acre pond in the Blue Hills Reservation, in Canton, MA. The pond has a maximum depth of seven feet and an average depth of four feet with the southeastern and western shores bordered by the bog and marshlands. Ponkapoag is a Native American word meaning “a spring that bubbles up from red soil, sweet water, or shallow pond.”



The Ponkapoag Bog, as a natural poor fen, is the largest bog of its kind in eastern Massachusetts. The bog area is a national environmental study area. The boardwalk was first built in 1947 and rebuilt in 1988.

Established in 1893, the Blue Hills Reservation includes more than 7,000-acres and is the largest open space within 35 miles of Boston. The Civilian Conservation Corps worked in the Blue Hills Reservation between 1933 and 1937 building trails, a skiing area, camps, and a weather observation tower.

Trails, Hiking, and Highlights

At the Washington Street parking lot, start at Maple Avenue and the kiosk with a map of the Blue Hill Reservation. Follow the paved roadway, lined with mature maples, easterly. At the Ponkapoag Pond Dam sign, and white marker 5175, turn left and continue on the dirt path bordering the golf course. Ponkapoag Pond will be on the right.

Head north on the wide dirt path flanked with pitch pine, red spruce, and oak (red, white). After the path makes a slight descent into a spruce and pitch pine grove, it connects for a short distance with the paved cart path. At the 3rd hole tee box, continue straight and back into the woods at the small blue 5174 marker.

At the Y intersection and yellow yield sign, bear right heading east and through the metal gate at the white 5174 sign. After 200 yards, a narrow side trail to the right leads to the Ponkapoag Bog boardwalk. The bog is home to:

- Flowers: bladderwort, elephant ear, pitcher plant, sundew
- Ground plants and shrubs: blueberry, cottongrass, he-huckleberry, leatherleaf, pink azalea, red osier dogwood, sheep laurel, sweet pepperbush
- Trees: Atlantic white cedar, oak (red, white), red maple, pitch pine, white pine.



The decades-old and weathered boardwalk channels into a red maple and heath fen area that includes blueberry and sweet pepperbush. Note the extensive and lush green moss collections throughout the bog at the bases of shrubs and trees. The boardwalk gently zigs and zags along as the understory shrubs gradually enclose the walkway.

The boardwalk flows along into the first of two dense stands of Atlantic white cedar. Look around at the tangled mass of stumps, shrubs, blowdowns, and snags. The weathered planks are perched just above the waterline and tussucked shrubs. Further along, small canopy openings provide enough sunlight for leatherleaf and sheep laurel.



Upon leaving the cedar grove, the fen's open peatlands are home to leatherleaf, tufted sedges, stunted cedars, and wild cranberry. The single boardwalk continues into another cedar grove and ends at Ponkapoag Pond with red osier dogwood. Linger to your heart's content and look for pitcher plant and sundew upon the return.

Other Places of Interest Nearby

The Blue Hills Reservation covers more than 7,000 acres providing 125 miles of trails through forests, ponds, hilltops, and wetlands. Other local points of interest are:

- Black Pond Bog and Nature Preserve (Norwell)
- Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area (Hanson)
- Myles Standish State Forest (Carver)
- Wompatuck State Park (Hingham).