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# Five less-traveled New London County hiking trails

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The author Edward Abbey wrote "I find that contemplating the natural world my pleasure is greater if there are not too many others contemplating it with me, at the same time." No doubt Abbey would have been appalled at the crowds descending on Connecticut state parks this spring.

With entertainment options limited by coronavirus precautions, it seems that more of us are rediscovering the outdoors. The Day's Erica Moser reported on **the crowds visiting Bluff Point State Park** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20200315/amid-coronavirus-closures-people-flock-to-bluff-point>) in Groton recently, and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection took to Twitter on Saturday to **encourage people to visit some of the state's less popular parks** (<https://twitter.com/CTDEEPNews/status/1241412505181679617>).

Hoping to avoid the crowds and maintain a healthy distance from others, I set out over the weekend to a few natural areas where I had spent solitary hours in the past without crossing paths with another human. I wouldn't be so lucky this weekend, sharing the trail with a handful of hikers, dog walkers and mountain bikers. But the number of interactions was certainly fewer than if I had braved one of the crowded state parks. If you're like Henry David Thoreau, who "never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude," here are five less-traveled locations for you to try. Location info for these trails and many more can be found in The Day's hiking guide at [www.theday.com/hiking](http://www.theday.com/hiking) (<https://www.theday.com/hiking>).

## Avery Tract - Waterford

Finding the Avery Tract, a 64-acre parcel managed by the Waterford Land Trust, used to be difficult unless you knew where to look for trail markings on the north side of Scotch Cap Road. With the Land Trust's recent addition of a staircase at the trailhead, the color-coded network of trails is easier to find and easier to access. A narrow strip of land between residences opens up to a vast hillside forest that slopes down to the Thames River. Higher up away from the river, the open forest gives way to mountain laurel bushes that arch over the trail to form a tunnel of green even in the early spring. A red-blazed loop of about two miles encircles the property, with a handful of criss-crossing side trails allowing further exploration.

## Candlewood Ridge - Groton

The trailhead for Groton Open Space Association's Candlewood Ridge is camouflaged between a couple of residential driveways on the north side of Gold Star Highway. The only indication of a hiking trail is a small sign on a mailbox (#1760, just west of Lambtown Rd.) that is barely legible when driving past. Sharp eyes are rewarded with an unexpected landscape that opens up a few hundred feet into the forest. It is a bit shocking to encounter what at first glance appears to be a clear-cut in the middle of a natural area. For about 2,000 feet, the ridge is nearly devoid of tall trees. Signs explain that the tree removal is part of habitat restoration for New England cottontails and other species that have been in decline. Several giant boulders, deposited thousands of years ago by retreating ice sheets, contribute to the other-worldly atmosphere.

## Goodwin Natural Area - New London

The Connecticut College campus, including the gated section of the Arboretum, is currently closed to the public, but there are miles of trails that remain open elsewhere on the college's land. The Goodwin Natural Area sits on the north side of Gallows Lane, with access from the back corner of a college parking lot. The old dirt and gravel road that bisects the property offers sound footing for those who want to take it easy, while the narrower red, yellow and blue loops have more varied terrain. Be sure to explore the rock formations and the old stone foundation that sits in the meadow.

## Smuggler's Rock Preserve - Salem

Salem Land Trust's Smuggler's Rock Preserve gets its name from the rocky pinnacle located about a mile from the trailhead at the end of Salem Ridge Drive. Among the rock formations is a large stone, aptly referred to as Balanced Rock, perched atop a much smaller one. Three progressively longer loop trails wend through typically rugged New England landscape. The well-marked footpath cuts through old pasture land, marked by ubiquitous stone walls, and crosses a lively brook — be careful to keep your feet dry, particularly during the soggy spring months. The footing is steep and rocky in places, but the view is rewarding. The land trust's website promises a view through the trees back to the center of Salem, but you may find the craggy surroundings to be scenic enough.

### **Selden Creek Preserve - Lyme**

Down the narrow, winding Joshuatown Road, south of the better-known Gillette Castle State Park, one will find a small dirt parking area between the bend of the road and a crumbling stone wall. To the west lies The Nature Conservancy's Selden Creek Preserve. Two trails, one blazed in blue, the other in white, snake through a wide-open forest beneath the tall canopy above. The trails terminate in a pair of overlooks atop sheer cliffs with views of the tidal marshes of Selden Creek, an offshoot of the Connecticut River. When the wind settles, one can hear spring peepers somewhere off to the north. In an area without many rocky peaks, the viewpoints offer the chance to take in an open panoramic scene, albeit from an altitude much closer to sea level.

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The photographer's son follows a trail as it curves between trees and a large boulder, left behind by melting glaciers, at the Groton Open Space Association's Candlewood Ridge on Saturday, March 21, 2020. (Peter Huoppi/The Day)