

ACTIVEfamily

MAGAZINE

Your Guide to Fun, Healthy Activities, Ideas, Books, the Arts, Games and More!



Been There, Love That!

Ayers Gap Preserve, Franklin, CT

Mother's Day 2009 bloomed with pure Spring beauty: crystalline blue sky, warm earthy smells, and a delicious breeze to tease the senses. It was a fine day to hike with my daughter and a few dear friends at Ayers Gap in Franklin, Connecticut.

This 80 acre preserve offers cool hemlock groves, dappled sunlight filtering through yellow birch and maple trees, and lovely rare ferns known to exist in just five other Connecticut locations. Our favorite part is Bailey Brook, which runs through a gorge in the middle of the preserve. The brook tumbles down waterfalls and miniflumes, over and through dark gray slabs of metamorphic rock (known as Scotland Schist) glinting with mica. Many of the huge slabs of rock are covered with thick moss and topped with delicate fern.

When we got to Bailey Brook's first waterfall, we left our back packs with our lunches, intending to picnic there after a short jaunt downstream. Little did we realize that we'd be gone for an hour and a half! As we walked along the brook we found little pools housing green frogs, oozy black mud that felt like Jell-O, logs to scamper over, high ledges to survey from, long moss-carpeted ledges on which to catnap, and giant "faces" in the rock that looked like creatures from Star Wars!

The enticing brook promised more delights around every bend, but our grumbling tummies overruled, so we walked back to our packs. Funny, though, it took just 15 minutes to get back to our original spot.

After a shady picnic, we continued on our original trail. A short time later we came

out of the preserve and onto a small road across from an exquisite farm with lovely yellow barns. A five minute walk brought us back to our cars, full of happy plans for our next visit. We then went to Buttonwood Farm Ice Cream to celebrate!

Trail Notes

When you arrive at the trailhead parking area, walk to the right-hand side of a huge boulder. There you see a rocky trail proceeding up into the trees. White blazes on the trees mark your way and, though a bit steep at first, a five minute walk takes you to the top. About half way up this initial ascent, watch for a clearing on your right; there's a gorgeous view which must be breathtaking in autumn.

After a 35 minute walk along this easy trail, you arrive at Bailey Brook. (For sure-footed explorers up for a challenge: we chose to follow the original trail after exploring the brook. Next time, we plan to go all the way downstream, because it comes out just to the left of the parking area.)

It's easy to cross the brook along the trail and from there it's about a 10 minute walk to a big fork in the trail.

When you arrive at the fork, you can see a white blaze about 50 feet ahead of you on the right. Stay right, following the white blazes; the rock ledges underfoot can be slippery when wet leaves cover them, so take your time.

A half-hour after leaving Bailey Brook you arrive at the road, across the street from a white farm house. Bear right on the road and walk about 2 minutes to Route 207. Go right onto 207 and you can see the huge



boulder at the trail head; just on the other side is the parking area.

When You Go

- Wear sturdy shoes
- Bring a picnic; remember to "carry in, carry out"
- Leave only footprints, take only pictures
- Bring mosquito spray in summer
- The Nature Conservancy owns Ayers Gap preserve; for directions and more information, go to www.nature.org and type "Ayers Gap" in the search window.
- Ayers Gap is located on Route 207 about 1 mile from the intersection of Routes 32 and 207, heading towards Baltic. Look for the trailhead parking area on the left.
- Buttonwood Farm Ice Cream is in Griswold, CT; go to www.buttonwoodfarmicecream.com for details.