



From 1880 until 1936, the West River Railroad wound its way — originally on narrow-gauge track — along a tortuous 36-mile route from Brattleboro’s downtown railroad station to a depot in South Londonderry. Much of the railbed was wedged between the mountains and the twisting West River, a tributary of the Connecticut River.

Not long after the railroad opened, people began to call it “36 miles of trouble.” Its narrow gauge and winding route led to undependable, if not dangerous, service. Nonetheless, when all went well, the trip took two hours — a great improvement over the two days it took by horse and wagon. The trains carried passengers, mail, merchandise and livestock.

But gradually, automobiles and highways cut into the railroad’s revenue, and by 1936, the iron tracks were sold for scrap and the ties and other artifacts were removed. Much of the route itself became a trail, used informally for decades for hiking, skiing, cycling and enjoyment of the surrounding natural areas and scenery.

Since 1992, the non-profit Friends of the West River Trail has worked to repair and maintain portions of the trail, beginning with the 16-mile Upper Section from Londonderry to Townshend, and more recently the 5-mile lower section from Brattleboro to Dummerston.

A new vision for the Lower Section

In 2012, The Friends of the West River Trail began repairing and improving the Lower Section from Brattleboro to Dummerston. Improvements have included hardpack surfacing; repairs to culverts and drainage ditches; removal of trash, debris and even abandoned vehicles; and new signage. The Vermont Land Trust and others have helped with the purchase of adjacent land such as the Riverstone Preserve. Consistent with a land management plan, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps has helped to create new trails on the Preserve.

The trail’s surfacing and bridges are designed for non-motorized access by all visitors. The trail welcomes families, school groups, hikers, skiers, snowshoers, cyclists and even bicycle commuters. The trail offers solitude and recreation in a beautiful setting.

We plan to continue to make trail improvements that will also enhance its educational value. In the future, we hope to create connections between the Lower Section and other trails in the area — including connections to Wantastiquet Mountain and Fort Hill trails in New

Hampshire, opening connections to an extensive network of New Hampshire Trails.

We also dream of a pedestrian bridge across the West River to the Brattleboro recreational fields, which would enable a connection to the Brattleboro Retreat Trails.



What to look for on the Trail



The Lower Section provides access to a rich landscape that includes opportunities for the appreciation and study of local flora and fauna, geology, history, archaeology, and even engineering (since it passes below the unique bridge that carries Route I-91 across the West River).

The Riverstone Preserve and several other areas along the West River feature natural habitats that are rare or uncommon in Vermont. The eastern portion of the Preserve is a **Sugar Maple-Ostrich Fern Riverine Floodplain Forest**, with a rich variety of tree species, and native plants including Virginia creeper, Jack-in-the-pulpit, ostrich fern, sensitive fern, and bigleaf aster. In the **Rivershore Grassland** along the shore, there are willow shrubs and sycamore seedlings, along with a variety of native grasses and plants. Several **rare and uncommon** plants found along the trail are blue lobelia, hairy wild rye, flowering dogwood, spotted wintergreen, squaw-root, whorled milkwort, and sand cherry. Springtime hikers can enjoy the display of blooming wild columbines growing in the rock crevices.

Trail volunteers work each year to eradicate and limit the spread of **invasive plants** in the Preserve, including knotweed, honeysuckle, bittersweet, buckthorn, multiflora rose, & black swallowwort. In 2018 we received a USDA grant to have invasive plants treated professionally.

Birders can find a rich variety of **breeding and migratory avian species**. Depending on the season, visitors may encounter many varieties of ducks, geese, hawks, woodpeckers and warblers, as well as bald eagles, great egrets, bluebirds and many more.

Here and there, hikers may spot a **surviving railroad artifact**. There are stone culverts constructed by the railroad builders, and some metal components surviving at a watering stop. New mileposts have been erected indicating the distance north of the original starting point of the West River Railroad at Brattleboro’s Union Station.



Donate to help us carry out the vision!

We invite you to be part of growing this new legacy for the Brattleboro area by becoming a financial supporter of the Trail. Friends of the West River Trail incurs ongoing costs for trail and bridge maintenance, land acquisition, and trail amenities including signage, benches, picnic tables, parking areas and shelters.

Donations in any amount are welcome. Your gifts will help maintain and improve the Trail as well as help realize the vision of connections to other trails. To support the Lower West River Trail, please visit us at www.westriverval.org/donate/ (and click on the Lower Trail donation button). Or you may mail your contribution to:

Friends of the West River Trail, Inc., 138 Elliot Street, Brattleboro, VT 05354.

Friends of the West River Trail is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) donor-funded organization.

Volunteering

We welcome volunteers at scheduled work days in spring, summer and fall. To volunteer, or to send us comments and suggestions, please be in touch via email to lowersection@westriverval.org.

SEE YOU ON THE TRAIL!



General Guidelines

STAY ON THE TRAIL: Please respect neighbors’ property. The 3.5 mile lower section is open to the public for non-motorized recreation, providing excellent hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing. Swimming is permitted at your own risk. Fishing is permitted according to federal, state and local laws. No hunting or trapping on the trail or Riverstone Preserve. Day use only.

PETS: Dogs must be on a leash, per Brattleboro ordinance. Please remove pet waste from the trail.

BICYCLES: Yield to pedestrians.

PARKING: Park in designated areas only or be towed at your own expense.

TRASH: Carry in, carry out.

NO CAMPING OR FIRES are permitted at any time on or along the trail or in the Riverstone Preserve.

Photos by Alex Wilson, PutneyPics, and Jason Cooper



West River Trail Lower Section

**Brattleboro & Dummerston,
Vermont**

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WestRiverTrail.org

www.Facebook.com/WestRiverTrail