Your Guide to Hiking the Quinnipiac Meadows Nature Preserve

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Hope you were inspired to get out and hike after last month’s post about Connecticut hiking [1]. Ready for your first hike? Here’s how it’s going to happen.

Rainbow Over QM Preserve
Today's hike is an ecologically interesting stroll at the Quinnipiac Meadows Eugene B. Fargeorge Nature Preserve [2] at 1040 Quinnipiac Avenue in New Haven. This preserve is administered by Gather New Haven [3] (an organization in New Haven that functions as a traditional Connecticut town land trust, but also runs urban farms and community gardens). It sits right on the Quinnipiac River. Although New Haven is close to the water on many sides, it's surprisingly hard to get close to it as a pedestrian. As far as I know, this preserve is the most “natural” area by the water within New Haven’s city limits. Exploring the preserve will stretch your perception of what New Haven “is” and perhaps inspire you to envision how New Haven’s waterfront could look in more places.

The trailhead is on the left, about a five-minute walk from the Quinnipiac Avenue gate. There are two paths to choose from, the River Walk and the Meadow Walk. The names are a bit of a misnomer, as you can see both the river and meadows from each. Neither of them are more than a mile long (I don’t have exact distances, but I believe they are posted at the preserve entrance), so I recommend doing them both. The River Walk brings you through more of the marshy areas while the Meadow Walk brings you through the wooded portion to the bird blind.

Osprey Nest
This saltwater tidal march provides an ecologically enlightening hike. Its glory is the osprey nests near the water. Ospreys love fish, so Quinnipiac Meadows is a fantastic place for them to live. Their nests are huge, hulking things on top of posts. You can go in the bird blind on the Meadow Walk and watch them for hours. The bird blind is one of the chief attractions at Quinnipiac Meadows. Other than ospreys, you can watch the ducks, seagulls, and other water birds that thrive in the river. If you’re lucky, you might even see a bald eagle (I’ve never
seen one here, but it’s the kind of habitat they like).

View From the Bird Blind
I grew up in rural Arkansas and have hiked all over America, but the closest I’ve ever been to a deer was in this preserve! As you’re exploring, make sure to stay on the paths.

Grannis Island

Grannis Island. It is within the preserve, but separated from the portion with trails by the marshes and Quinnipiac River (you should not attempt to explore the island). It was an important settlement site for the Quinnipiac people, as this document from Gather New Haven explains. This is already a meditative hike, so it’s worthwhile to reflect for a bit on the human history of the area while you’re at the preserve.

How to Prepare

How to prepare for this hike? Here are some tips that will serve you well on almost any hike you go on (this list is adapted for this specific hike from REI’s excellent hiking guide):

1. Bring comfortable, moisture-wicking clothes. It’s often a good choice to wear long pants. I tuck my pants into my socks when I’m hiking. I look goofy, but ticks and mosquitos can’t get my legs!
2. Your shoes should be good for if your feet get wet. The trails at Quinnipiac Meadows have always been dry when I’ve been there, but being almost at river level means they could be wet. You could go with boots or sandals.
3. You can bring water or a snack, but the hike is short enough that you are probably fine to just leave them in your car. Always better to be safe than sorry though!
4. Bring a map, either digital (you can find the map on the preserve page. This is another reason not to rely on Alltrails.com; it doesn’t feature this hike at all!) or printed out from the preserve page. The map is conveniently published on a sign at the start of the preserve; if you take a picture of it on your phone there
you should be all set.

5. Speaking of phone, make sure your phone is charged. It’s almost impossible to get lost here, and you shouldn’t get hurt, but if something happens, you’ll be able to call for help.

6. Make sure to bring insect repellent! Mosquitos love being by the river too. Insect repellent helps with ticks as well. The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to not get ticks in the first place. Sunscreen is also a good idea.

Check the REI hiking guide [6] for other things you can do to prepare. My goal wasn’t to give a thorough guide, but rather to hit the most important points. The most important thing to bring on any hike is caution and common sense.

You can easily get to the preserve from Yale by car/rideshare or bicycle. If you drive, you can park right in front of the gates; just try to leave space so a vehicle could get in the gate if needed. It is difficult to get to Quinnipiac Meadows using public transit.

This is not a hike that will tax your endurance or give you sweeping mountain views. You may not even break a sweat! You will, however, be exposed to a unique ecosystem and might even see an osprey catch a fish. You’ll take away an appreciation for how coastal Connecticut would look without human habitation.

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[2] https://www.google.com/maps/place/Quinnipiac+Meadows+Eugene+B.+Fargeorge+Preserve/@41.317386,-72.8800749,17z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x89e7d76a0feeec37:0x7aa40180e4a7ea8818m2l3d41.3167654/4d-72.8806124
[5] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OF8MRwNEWOcBcnOFIOze-mETQjBUJSuPl2LmDPVnkGc/edit