

The Farmington Canal

West of Tillotson Road and inside the treeline, the hiking trail follows what was once a portion of the historic Farmington Canal. The canal, built from 1825-1835 with little more than shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows, extended over eighty miles from New Haven to Northampton.

The canal provided an alternative to poorly maintained and often muddy roadways for moving goods in and out of the southern New England interior. Lumber, cider, and cheese were among the products traveling south to markets in New Haven and New York City, while salt, rum, and coal were brought north along the waterway. Additionally, pleasure excursions became popular with residents, some of whom even went to church by boat.

Canal boats were pulled by horses, which traveled along the towpath, situated next to the canal for its entire length. Steam-powered craft, while common at the time, were considered a risk to operate on the canal as their wakes would disrupt the embankments. Indeed, even without such vessels, the canal suffered from leaks and the periodic washing-out of its banks as a result of floods.

Unlike in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, where state governments helped finance the construction of canal projects, in Connecticut the Farmington Canal relied solely on private funding. Ultimately, the canal could not compete with the railway, which began operation to Plainville in 1847. Over time, much of the canal itself was converted to rails. Today, absent of transportation infrastructure, the corridor provides valuable recreational opportunities.

Glacial Esker

Between Tillotson Road and the Farmington River, a significant glacial esker can be seen rising above the farm fields that surround it. An esker results when sediment is deposited by water flowing through an ice tunnel in a melting glacier. When the glacier finally melts completely, the accumulated sediment is left resembling the tunnel in the ice, resulting in a hill or ridge. Some eskers continue for many miles.

Today, the Fisher Farm esker supports a variety of tree species, including cedars, pines and hardwoods, but as can be seen in the 1917 photograph below, this was not always the case.



Source: USGS, August 30, 1917



Fisher Farm

Welcome to Fisher Farm. This property was acquired by the Town of Avon in 2002 for \$2.1 million after receiving a grant from the State of Connecticut in the amount of \$938,125 to assist in the purchase. An additional grant from the State was used to develop nearly four miles of hiking trails and install a gravel parking lot utilizing recycled processed material.

The eastern portion of the trail follows the Farmington River for approximately one mile, providing great access for walking, bird watching, and fishing. The southern portion of the trail offers a unique view of a significant glacial esker, a remnant of the last ice age, situated amongst the agricultural fields. The esker is also visible from Tillotson Road.

To the west of Tillotson Road, the primary hiking trail follows the historic Farmington Canal, which was completed in 1835 and connected New Haven with Northampton, Massachusetts (see reverse side for more information). The canal was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Fisher Farm is an active agricultural operation producing dairy products and hosting a locally grown seasonal farm stand. The operators also provide reasonable access to the farm for observation and learning experiences including many school visits and a number of community events. Because it is an active farm, visitors are asked to remain on the marked trails.

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