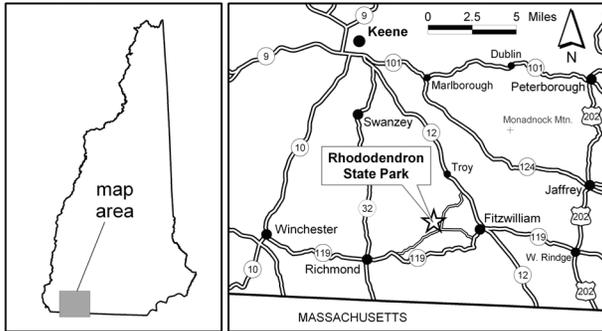


DIRECTIONS

From Rte. 119 between Fitzwilliam and Richmond, take Rhododendron Rd and follow signs to the park.



RHODODENDRON STATE PARK

This 2,723-acre park located in southwestern NH is named after its focal point, a 16-acre grove of giant rhododendron. A universally accessible trail encircles the grove allowing visitors to observe the plants close up. Mid-July is the best time to see blooms.

PARK USE GUIDELINES

This park is open to the public for recreation and education. Please, for the protection of the area and its inhabitants, and for everyone's enjoyment:

- NO MOTORIZED WHEELED VEHICLES.
- NO PETS ALLOWED.
- CARRY OUT ALL TRASH.
- NO CAMPING OR OPEN FIRES.
- PRACTICE LOW-IMPACT RECREATION.
PLEASE DON'T PICK PLANTS OR FLOWERS.

NH DIVISION OF PARKS & RECREATION

The mission of the NH Division of Parks and Recreation is to protect and preserve recreation, historic, scenic and natural areas of the state, to continually provide such additional park areas and facilities, to make these accessible to the public for recreational, educational, scientific and other uses consistent with their protection and preservation, and to encourage and support tourism and related economic activities within the state.

www.nhparcs.state.nh.us

GIANT RHODODENDRON

Giant rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*), also known as great laurel or rosebay, is a large evergreen shrub known for its showy flower displays. It is near the northern limit of its range in New Hampshire and native populations are rare. In fact, it is considered rare or uncommon throughout New England. It is really a species of the southern and central Appalachians, where it is common on wooded mountain slopes, often forming dense and extensive colonies.

Giant rhododendron prefers moist acidic soils that are high in organic matter, like those found in evergreen swamps. However, once established in moist soils, it can spread to surrounding upland areas. In addition to producing seed, rhododendron can spread vegetatively through a process called "layering," where low growing branches that make contact with the soil can take root, establishing new stems and expanding the colony.

The fragrant clusters of the giant rhododendron's pink and white blossoms burst into bloom in mid-July and often last for a few weeks.

This brochure was created by the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau as part of a series designed to educate the public about the state's special plants and natural communities. More site guides and profiles are available on the Visiting New Hampshire's Biodiversity program page at:

www.nhnaturalheritage.org



NEW HAMPSHIRE
NATURAL HERITAGE
BUREAU

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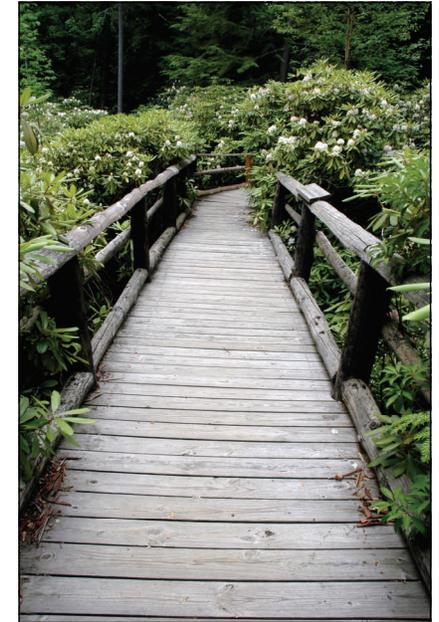
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NH NATURAL HERITAGE BUREAU

VISITING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY

RHODODENDRON STATE PARK



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Division of Parks & Recreation



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TRAIL DESCRIPTION:

This guide primarily describes the vegetation seen along the Wildflower Trail and the Rhododendron Loop Trail. The entire walk is a little more than half a mile over gentle terrain.

Leaving from the trailhead on the west side of the parking lot, near the public restrooms, the trail passes an old stone wall. The presence of these stone walls indicates that this area was cleared for pastureland at one time. In the years since these farms were abandoned, forests regenerated in their place, creating the New Hampshire landscape we are familiar with today. The natural community that now occupies this site, and much of southern and central New Hampshire as well, is a **hemlock - beech - oak - pine forest**. Many of the tall white pine trees (*Pinus strobus*) that originally colonized the site are still present, joined by red oak (*Quercus rubra*), hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), and red maple (*Acer rubrum*).

After a few hundred feet, turn left at the junction with the Wildflower Trail. Along this trail you will see numerous small signs near the ground level. These are the handiwork of the Fitzwilliam Garden Club. These markers identify a variety of wildflowers, many of which have been planted by the club, and most of which are native to New Hampshire. The various species here bloom from early spring to the first frost. As you follow the trail, you will continue passing through areas that were once farmland, and see other stone walls that have been left behind.

Eventually, you pass through a gap in one of these walls and arrive at another trail junction. The Laurel Trail turns right here, but stay to the left on the Rhododendron Loop Trail. Soon after the junction, the trail enters a dense stand of giant rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*), which grows so tall and thick that it feels as if you are entering a tunnel. This shrub reaches its northern limit in New Hampshire, and is quite rare in the state.

Emerging from the shadow of the rhododendron thicket, the trail crosses a boardwalk over a low, wet area. From this vantage, you can look out over a shrub swamp dominated by rhododendron with a very sparse tree canopy. When the rhododendron

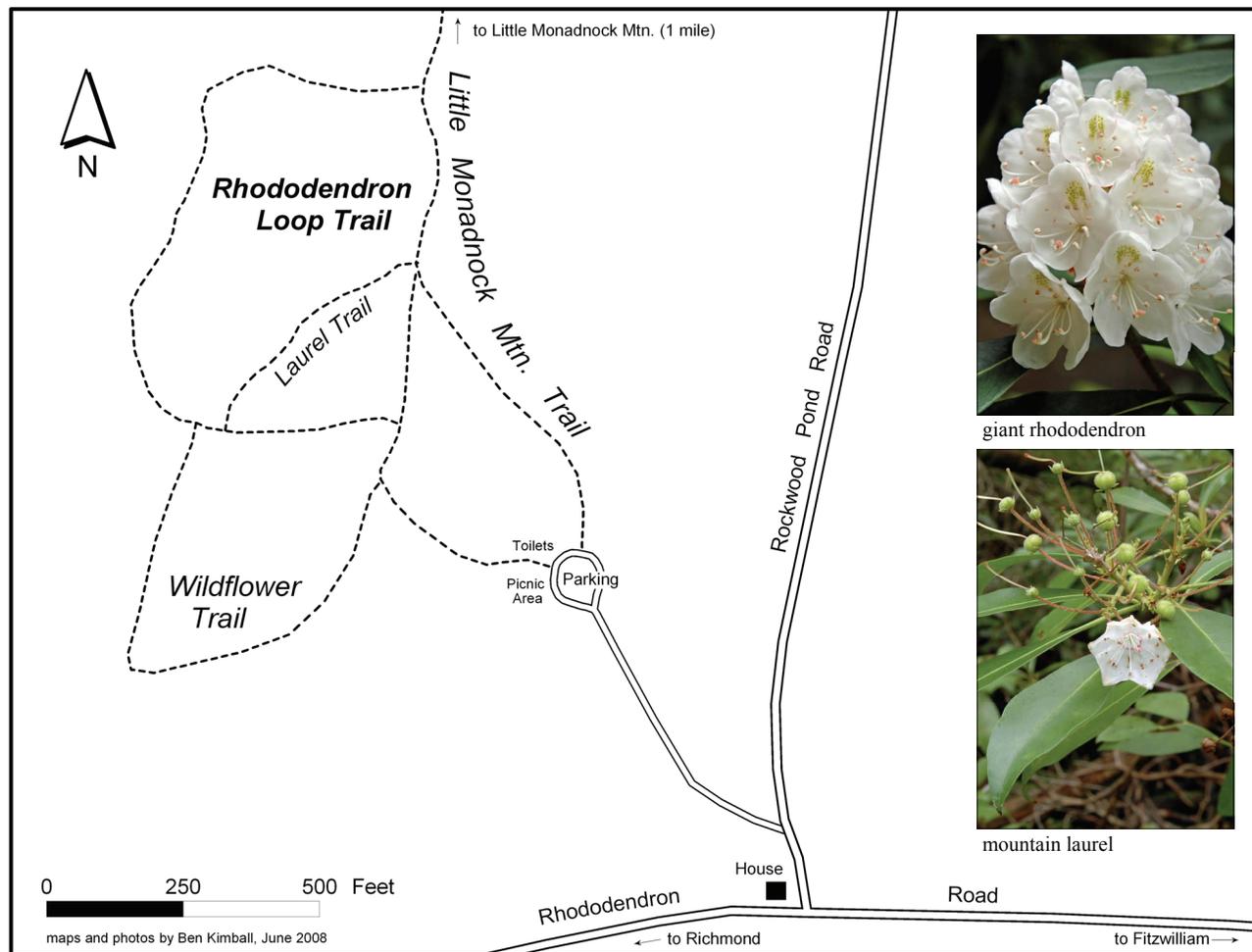
flowers, usually in mid-July, this will be a sea of large, pinkish-white blossoms.

Although there are only a few trees in the swamp, they comprise an interesting mix of northern and southern species. Northern conifers like red spruce (*Picea rubens*) and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) are present alongside black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), which is near its northern limit in southern New Hampshire.

Leaving the boardwalk, the trail dives back into the deep shade of the rhododendron thickets. Along the way, you may notice a different shrub, mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), which is one of the rhododendron's close relatives. It is another shrub which is found primarily in southern New Hampshire.

Like rhododendron it has evergreen leaves, although they are smaller and not as thick and leathery. Mountain laurel also produces showy clusters of white-to-pinkish flowers, but typically blooms about a month before the rhododendron.

The trail soon arrives at the junction with the Little Monadnock Mountain Trail. For a moderately strenuous climb to a fine view of Mt. Monadnock and the surrounding region, turn left and hike roughly 1 mile to the summit. To return to the parking lot, turn right, and stay to the left at the junction with the Laurel Trail (this narrower trail provides an alternate way back through a thicket of rhododendron and mountain laurel shrubs).



giant rhododendron



mountain laurel