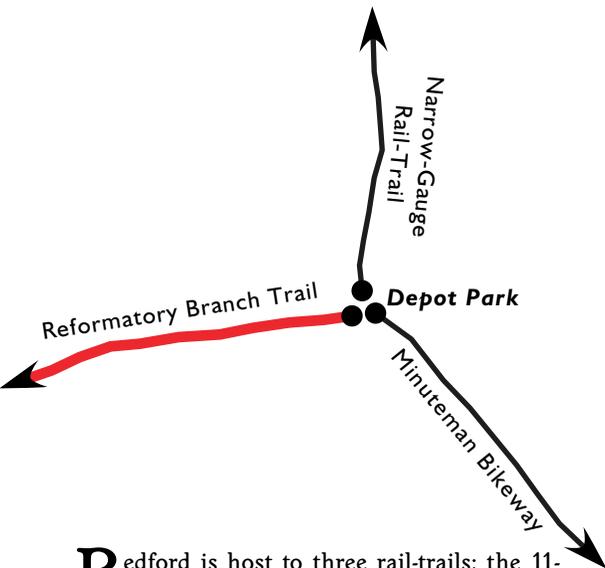


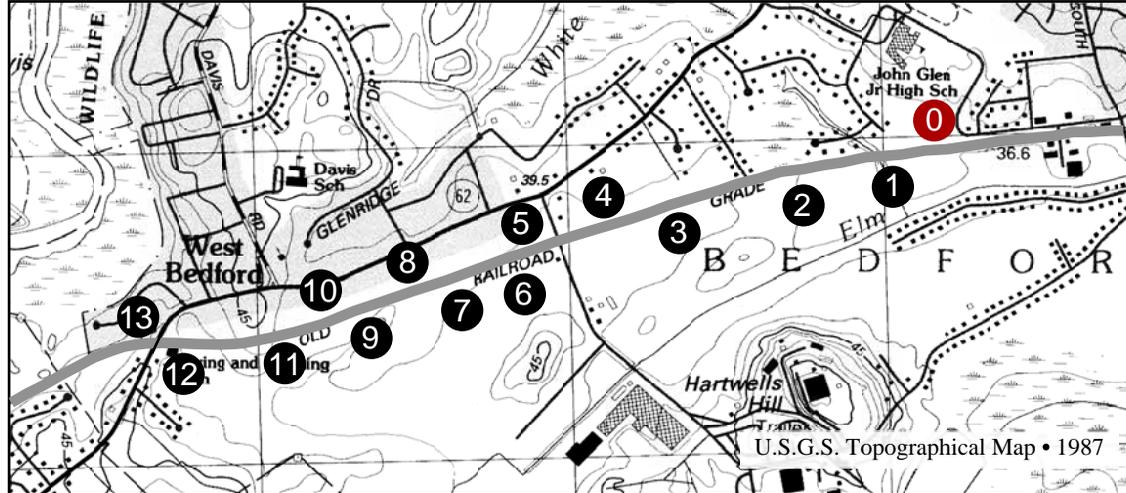
Guide to the Reformatory Branch Trail



Bedford is host to three rail-trails: the 11-mile **Minuteman Bikeway** to West Cambridge, the 3-mile **Narrow-Gauge Rail-Trail** to the Billerica town line, and the 4-mile **Reformatory Branch Trail** to Concord Center. This guide covers the latter.

The Boston & Maine Railroad's **Reformatory Branch** was built in 1873 to Lowell Road in Concord—and in 1879 it was continued 2.5 miles further west to Reformatory Station (across from the State Prison). There were four passenger stations on the line: Shady Hill, West Bedford, Concord and Reformatory. The branch was abandoned in 1962, and the right-of-way was purchased by Bedford and Concord.

A trip over the Reformatory Branch will reveal much natural beauty. The old rail line passes through woods and fields. In Concord, it skirts Great Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary, which can be a nice side trip. The roadbed is unimproved. You will need a hybrid or mountain-type bike to traverse this dirt path.



KEY POINTS

0. Beyond the **Minuteman Bikeway terminus** (Depot Park) on South Road, the right-of-way is interrupted by a few houses. To get onto the **Reformatory Branch Trail**, travel about a quarter mile down Railroad Avenue to where the street bends sharply to the right. On the left is a dirt parking lot. Access the trail through this lot.
1. An access path to **Elm Brook Conservation Area** is on the left side of the trail.
2. To keep the railroad level here, construction workers elevated the roadbed with “fill.” Often times, fill was obtained from dirt that came from “cuts” elsewhere on the line.
3. Note the presence of a railroad drainage ditch along this part of the trail.
4. The driveway for one of Bedford’s well water treatment plants was built atop the right-of-way.
5. A pile of derelict telephone poles on the right marks the site of the former **Shady Hill Station**. On the left side a freight siding once served the packing sheds of Shady Hill Nursery.
6. Look for many railroad ties that are still in the ground along the left side of the trail.
7. The purpose of the **whistle post** on the left was to

remind the engineer to sound the whistle for Shady Hill Road (now Hartwell Road) crossing. The yellow 45° arm indicates that the crossing had to be “flagged” by a member of the train crew. The rows of mature trees on both sides of the trail were once nursery stock for Shady Hill Nursery (now New England Nurseries).

8. This filled-in tunnel beneath the roadbed was a “cattle crossing.” It allowed farm animals to be moved between fields that once existed on each side of the track.
9. This section is mostly level. Look for a couple railroad ties still in the ground. They show us the alignment of the track.
10. This section is in a “cut.” A cut is where the landscape was excavated to maintain a level roadbed for the rail line.
11. The roadbed is built upon fill here. *Beware of the sandy terrain if you are riding a bicycle.*
12. On the left is the site of the former **West Bedford Station**. A freight siding once veered off on the right.
13. At Concord Road/Route 62, the Reformatory Branch went beneath a wooden bridge. In 1967, the overpass was removed and the street’s grade was lowered. *Be careful crossing the busy road!*

Reformatory Branch Trail 4 Miles, Bedford to Concord

Uses

- Bicycles (hybrid and mountain)
- Walking/Running

Surface

- Unimproved dirt path; sand in some places;
- occasional railroad ties

Significant Obstacles

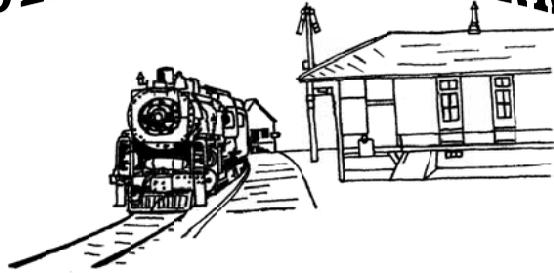
- Need to cross over Concord Road/Route 62 (point #13 on map);
- Have to temporarily leave the right-of-way near the Concord Sewer Treatment Plant (point #21) and divert to a dirt path alongside a farm field.

Side Attractions

- Great Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary:** The roadbed becomes an access road (point #15) for Great Meadows. You may circle the sanctuary and then return to the rail-trail.
- Old North Bridge:** Upon arriving at Monument Street in Concord (between points #26 and #27), turn right to reach Minuteman National Historic Park and a visitors center.
- Concord Center:** Upon arriving at Monument Street (between points #26 and #27), turn left to reach historic Concord Center and retail stores and eateries.

Friends of Bedford Depot Park offers this free rail-trail guide as a public service. No guarantees or assurances are expressed or implied. Travel is at your own risk. Exercise safety and use good judgment on your journey.

BEDFORD DEPOT PARK



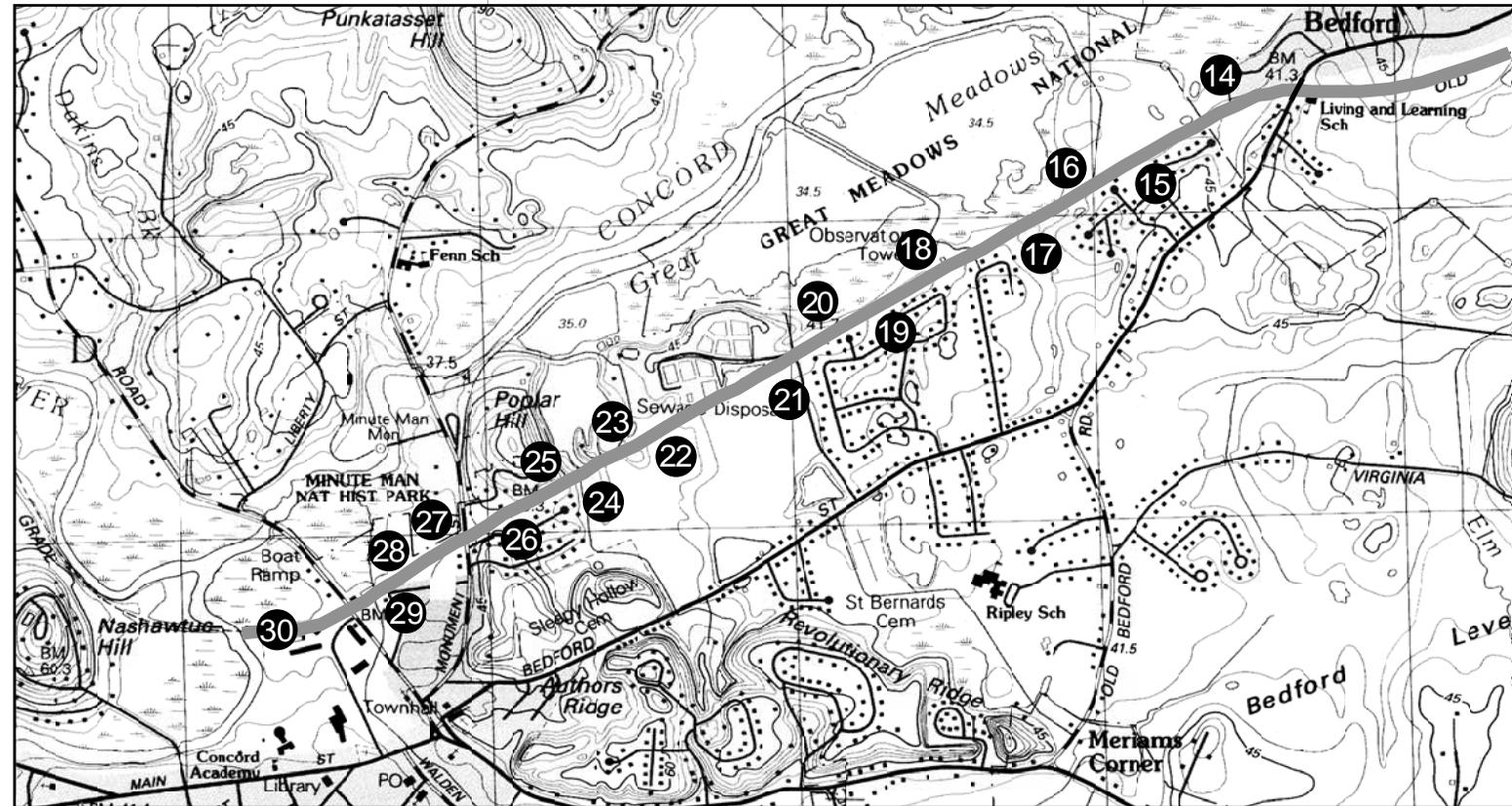
BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Friends of Bedford Depot Park operates the old B&M Freight House at the Minuteman Bikeway terminus. Please stop by for refreshments and to learn about the railroad history of our local trails and bikeways. The Freight House is staffed by volunteers. During the bikeway season, it is open on weekends between 10:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.

While visiting the Freight House, you might consider becoming a member of the Friends. Benefits of membership include a monthly newsletter—and for new members, a complimentary Depot coffee mug. FBDP is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Your contributions are tax-deductible.

Our web site has more information about Bedford's rail-trails and their railroad history. Please visit it at:

www.BedfordDepot.org



14. The roadbed is built upon fill here. There is a series of railroad ties still in the ground.
15. After a cut, the right-of-way becomes an access road for **Great Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary**.
16. The roadbed transitions to a fill.
17. Notice the string of railroad ties. A concrete **ring post** still stands on the right.
18. A fill carries the roadbed here.
19. The right-of-way passes through a cut with ties.
20. At the access road for Concord's sewer treatment plant, the original roadbed follows to the right in a deep cut. It was here in the 1920s that a steam engine derailed in the darkness of a winter storm.

21. Since the original right-of-way is interrupted, detour to the left and follow a dirt path on the edge of a farm field.
22. Get back onto the original right-of-way.
23. The railroad was built upon a fill here.
24. Note the stone culvert beneath the roadbed.
25. A tall fill carries the railway through the woods.
26. The roadbed transitions to a deep cut as we approach Monument Street in Concord. *The roadbed here is stony—so please exercise care.*
27. After crossing Monument Street, look for a **ring post** on the right that has been displaced by a tree. A concrete battery compartment, once used

- to power grade crossing equipment, remains here.
28. Whitney Coal and Grain Company once had its facilities on the eastern end of the railroad yard. A concrete coal chute still exists on the right side of the roadbed.
29. This is the former location of **Concord Station**.
30. The right-of-way continues a short distance beyond Lowell Road until interrupted by the Concord River. Between 1879 and 1927, the line continued another 2.5 miles to **Reformatory Station**. (The bridge over the river is now gone.) **Middlesex Junction**, the branch's connection with the Nashua, Acton & Boston Railroad, was another half mile further west.