

Jamaica History

The natural beauty and colorful history of Jamaica State Park owe a great deal to the West River. The river meanders through the park, slows temporarily and deepens to create an ideal swimming spot at the Salmon Hole. A 125-foot waterfall awaits hikers on a side tributary-Cobb Brook.

For thousands of years, Native Americans traveled the West River by canoe, following a major transportation route between the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain.

Abundant food sources along the riverbanks were attractive to the native inhabitants. Archaeologists theorize that a very large campsite or a small village existed within or near Jamaica State Park. Evidence suggests that the present-day Jamaica village area was a center for hunting, fishing, plant gathering and tool making for much of Vermont's pre-European settlement history, a period of more than 8,000 years.

Today, only traces of Native American settlement and use remain. When European settlers claimed the land, many natives left the area or died from diseases brought from the Europe that their immune systems could not fight off. Those who remained were the ancestors of Vermont's modern Abenaki people.

Native Americans were not the only people to use the West River. European-American settlers, soon after their arrival, began logging and farming along its banks and harnessing the water to power mills. In 1881,



Artist's depiction of a Native American village

the West River Railroad began running from South Londonderry to Brattleboro and back each day, following the river's course through the mountains. Floods and storms took quite a toll on the railroad. These and other problems led the community to call the railroad "36 miles of trouble." A historical brochure on the railroad is available at the park.

Today, people use this area mostly for fishing, hiking and swimming. The West River is also popular for white-water canoeing and kayaking in the spring and fall.

Jamaica Sights

Jamaica State Park consists of 772 acres in Jamaica and Londonderry. The park is broken into two separate tracts: West River and Shatterack Mountain. Both areas contain diverse woodlands and an abundance of scenic beauty.

Hemlock, mixed with a variety of hardwoods, make up almost one-third of the forest cover. White pine, red oak, red spruce, elm and ash are scattered throughout the area. At higher elevations, northern hardwoods, such as sugar maple, beech and white birch, predominate. Deer, beaver and grouse are among the many animals attracted to Jamaica's abundant waters and diverse woods.

The most popular places to visit along the trail system in the park are:

Hamilton Falls – A breathtaking geological feature, the falls are beautiful and dangerous. The rocks are very slippery and a slip could be fatal. Forty-one acres around Hamilton Falls have been designated a State Natural Area.

The Dumplings – at this location on the West River, there are large boulders (glacial erratics) in the river. This is a popular "play area" for white-water boaters. A viewing deck has been constructed here to provide scenic views of the river.

Salmon Hole – Great for swimming, this

area marks the site of the "Salmon Hole Massacre" where a group of French men and Native Americans ambushed British soldiers in 1748.

For more information on Jamaica State Park, ask park staff or visit our website. Interpretive programs are offered from mid-June until Labor Day. A railroad-history brochure is available at the park.



West River Railroad locomotive crash, Newfane



This document is available upon request in large print, Braille and on audio cassette. Printed on recycled paper.
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Jamaica State Park

Recreational Trails Guide



West River, Jamaica State Park

Foot Trails
Multi-Use Trail
Whitewater Paddling
Scenic Waterfall & riverway

Open Early May-Columbus Day
(802)874-4600 (operating season)
www.vtstateparks.com

Recreational Trails in Jamaica State Park

All distances are one-way

1. West River Trail

2.5 miles from park entrance to Cobb Brook Bridge. Unblazed.

One of the only converted rail beds in southern Vermont, the section in the park is universally-accessible trail and great for easy walking, jogging or biking. The trail meanders along the West River, following the old bed of the West River Railroad. Look for “The Dumplings,” a group of large boulders about 1 mile up the trail. Follow the trail for another 1.5 miles to reach Cobb Brook. After crossing the brook, the trail continues to Ball Mountain Dam (another 0.5 mile on federal property). Completed in 1961 for flood control, the dam stands 265 feet high and is 915 feet long. The section of trail in the park is part of a 16-mile rail trail that is managed by the Friends of the West River Trail (see additional information elsewhere in this brochure).

2. Hamilton Falls Trail

1.1 miles from West River Multi-Use Trail to base of Hamilton Falls. Blue blazes.

Follow the West River Trail 2 miles. Before reaching Cobb Brook, the trail intersects with the Hamilton Falls Trail. This trail was originally an old wagon and truck road. Bear right and continue up the trail for one mile. A steep footpath on your left brings you to the bottom of the falls. To go to the top of the falls, continue on the trail to the end, turn left past the Hamilton Falls Lumber Mill, and turn left again onto a steep path. Once there, you will be looking down a 125-foot cascade onto a unique series of potholes.

Climbing along the falls is dangerous and causes erosion! Please stay on the marked trails.

3. Overlook Trail

2.0 miles from campground to West River Multi-Use Trail. Blue Blazes.

Beginning near Hackberry lean-to, the trail loops around a fence and joins a logging road. Turn left and follow the road for about 0.5 mile. The trail then turns sharply to the left and climbs the ridge to a series of scenic vistas at the summit of Little Ball Mountain. The vegetation here is easily damaged, so please walk carefully and stay on the trail. The trail continues down the north side of the ridge and through a wooded valley before joining the West River Trail.

Jamaica State Park is an important archaeological site held in the public trust. Digging, metal detecting and artifact collecting are not permitted. These activities are against the law and violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.



Friends of the West River Trail

The FWRT was formed in 1992 with the goal of establishing a rail-trail along the original route of the West River Railway from Brattleboro to South Londonderry. Since its inception, the FWRT has raised over \$1.7 million for trail construction projects, including the Cobb Brook Bridge, Ball Mountain Dam switchbacks, and rehabilitation of the South Londonderry Rail Depot into an information center. For more information on the FWRT, or to make a donation to the 501 (C) 3 non-profit group, contact info@westrivertrail.org or PO Box 2086, S. Londonderry, VT 05155; www.westrivertrail.org.

