

# The Providence Journal

---

## OUTDOORS

# Walking RI: 5 great hikes with ocean views

**John Kostrzewa** Guest columnist

Published 5:00 a.m. ET Oct. 29, 2021

Rhode Island's 400 miles of coastline include many seaside trails with unique ocean views from cliffs, rocky overlooks and sandy beaches.

The shrubs, thickets and trees along the trails change with the seasons. So do the migratory patterns of thousands of species of birds that fly up and down the coast.

But the paths always offer views of crashing waves that explode on rocky shores, sending white plumes of salt water high in the air. Or, walkers can gaze at long stretches of serene, blue water to calm the soul.

Here are five trails with ocean views that I have walked many times in the past and look forward to hiking again in the future. Enjoy.

## Beavertail State Park, Jamestown

JAMESTOWN — Lion's Head Gorge is a one-of-a-kind natural rock formation that most walkers seldom see. It's in the northeast corner of Beavertail State Park and named for the pounding of waves into a high-walled cleft of rock, which sounds like a lion's roar.

To get there, I set out from Beavertail Lighthouse and walked north on a grassy embankment along the East Passage and soon reached the Whiting Battery munitions bunker, one of several military posts built to defend the coast during World War II.

At low tide, I headed down the bank and walked about a quarter mile on the flat rocks to the gorge. From the top of the chasm, you can see Castle Hill across the passage and the Pell Bridge to the northeast.

After retracing my steps for a hundred yards, I climbed the bank to a green-blazed trail through a thicket of shrubs and a flat area that was once the site of a set of communication antennas built by the U.S. Navy. The eyelets and anchors for the cables are still visible.

I continued across the road that enters the park and took the red-blazed trail, which wound through what was years ago a secret military research facility.

Past the base, I walked to the edge of a series of cliffs above the West Passage with views north to Quonset, west to Narragansett and south to Point Judith. Several steep paths lead down to hidden sandy beaches.

The trail runs another half mile above the rocky shoreline to the base of Beavertail Lighthouse, where I'd started.

In all, I walked 4½ miles on the loop trail for 2½ hours.

**Access:** Off Route 138 East, take the first exit after the Jamestown Verrazzano Bridge. Drive six miles through the center of Jamestown and by Mackerel Cove to the park entrance.

**Parking:** Available at public lots.

**Dogs:** Allowed, but must be leashed.

**Difficulty:** Mostly easy, but moderate on the rocky shore.

## **Napatree Point, Westerly**

WESTERLY — Sitting on a huge, warm, smooth stone, I smelled the salt air and listened to the squawks of seagulls, the boom of waves striking the shore, the clang of bells in the buoys and the blast of a horn from a passing ferry.

My perch at Napatree Point, at the western- and southern-most point of mainland Rhode Island, can be reached after a 1½ mile walk on a crescent-shaped beach.

I set out from the Watch Hill Yacht Club, which isn't very crowded after Labor Day, and walked to the trailhead. After a short path through soft sand, the trail splits. I went left up and over a small hill to see a long, narrow stretch of beach to the west.

As I walked along the shore, small seabirds played tag with the waves. Farther up the beach, there's a lengthy dune at the top of a rise covered with plants, bushes and grass.

After a mile or so, I took a narrow side path through low bushes to the remains of Fort Mansfield, opened in 1901 and long abandoned. I headed down to the beach, rested for a bit on a rock with water on three sides and then climbed back up the bank to the trail that half-circled the western rim of the point.

I continued and turned east to walk on a rocky beach, with views northwest of Connecticut and the opening of the Pawcatuck River, until I came to a shallow channel that fills an inland cove. I took off my boots, crossed and rested again on the beach on the other side before continuing for another mile to where I'd started.

In all, I hiked 3.2 miles over 2½ hours.

**Access:** Take Route 1 south to Watch Hill Road through Avondale. Drive south into Watch Hill to Fort Road.

**Parking:** Limited on-street parking and in a small, nearby lot.

**Dogs:** Allowed, but must be leashed.

**Difficulty:** Easy, mostly beach walking.

## **Sachuest Point National Wildlife Preserve, Middletown**

MIDDLETOWN — Island Rocks is a natural formation just offshore that attracts a wide variety of migratory birds, depending on the season. On the rocks between the path

through the preserve and the ocean, I've often seen adults and children with plastic pails collecting sea life from the pools along the shore.

I first spotted Island Rocks while walking a loop trail through the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Preserve, which offers ocean views from several observation decks and outlooks.

I set out from the trailhead and walked clockwise on a wide path, called the Flint Point Loop, through several fields and then high thickets before I emerged at a platform that provides views northwest to Third Harbor. Saltwater surf fishermen cast lines from the rocks below.

I continued south on the trail and noted openings for eight side paths that lead down to the shore.

Island Rocks is just ahead. The set of boulders sticking up out of the sea was filled with cormorants, some flapping their wings to dry.

From a telescope on an observation deck, I looked at the seabirds and then across the Sakonnet River to Little Compton.

The trail then leads to a side spur, called Price Neck Overlook Trail, that runs up and down ledges and leads to Sachuest Point, a series of huge boulders and outcroppings at the southern tip of the preserve that juts into Rhode Island Sound.

I rested on a bench there and enjoyed the panoramic view of the ocean on three sides, including Sakonnet Lighthouse across the water and fishing trawlers that cruised Narragansett Bay.

From there, the trail turned north, with a clear look over the channel to Newport and the top of the Pell Bridge. Across Sachuest Bay, walkers can also see Second Beach, the causeway that leads to the preserve and, far away on a grassy hillside, the stately spires of St. George's School.

I returned to where I'd started after walking 2.9 miles over an hour and three quarters.

**Access:** From the north, follow Route 138 to Route 138A. Take a left on Prospect Avenue and a right on Paradise Avenue to Sachuest Point Road to the preserve.

From the south, follow Route 138 and take Miantonomi Avenue and Green End Avenue. Turn south on Paradise Avenue and then onto Sachuest Road.

**Parking:** Available at a large lot at a visitor center.

**Dogs:** Not allowed.

**Difficulty:** Easy, wide, flat trails.

## Cliff Walk, Newport

NEWPORT — Most hikers headed south on the Cliff Walk look right and across the sloping lawns to gawk at the huge, lavish mansions built during the Gilded Age.

I also like to look left and down from the cliff. The drops in some places are 70 feet to the rocky shoreline below. Along the stony beaches, surf washes over huge black and gray boulders and seabirds gather on exposed rocks.

I set out on the Cliff Walk, perhaps the state's most well-known trail, on the eastern edge of Newport, from an overlook at the end of Narragansett Avenue. Easton's Beach is north, just below the official start of the walkway on Memorial Boulevard. The paved trail rises uphill and high above the sea. Just below the overlook is the 40 Steps, which lead down to the water and once served as a gathering place for servants who worked at the mansions owned by the Vanderbilts, Astors, Whartons and other wealthy families.

The trail at the start is alternately flat concrete, stone and cement while passing through gates and crossing short stairways. I passed the Salve Regina University campus on the right and then a series of mansions, including The Breakers, built by Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1895.

As I walked, I could look east across the water to see Middletown and Sachuest Point.

The trail, often lined with *rosa rugosa* bushes and rose hedges, intersects with the ends of several streets. Just below Marine Avenue is a small natural beach, called Belmont, that is used by surfers, especially in stormy weather.

After a mile or so, the path passes by and partially under a Chinese-style tea house where Mrs. Otto Belmont once entertained her guests at Marble House.

Just ahead, the path passes through a tunnel at Sheep Point. For the last third of the Cliff Walk, the trail turns rugged, uneven and ledgy, requiring careful footing as it circles by Rough Point. After turning west, the trail offers views of Rhode Island Sound to the south and Bailey's Beach to the north before coming to an end.

In all, I hiked 3.25 miles over 90 minutes.

Remember, you have to walk back to where you started. You can simply retrace your steps or head north on Bellevue Avenue and take in the front of the mansions you hiked behind on the Cliff Walk.

**Access:** From Memorial Boulevard, turn south on Bellevue Avenue. Drive to Narragansett Avenue and take a left.

**Parking:** Some on-street spaces are available on Narragansett Avenue.

**Dogs:** Allowed, but must be leashed.

**Difficult:** Easy at the start. Moderate over rocks at the end.

## **Goddard Memorial State Park, Warwick**

WARWICK — A long string of black boulders, just off Sally Rock Point, stretches from the beach and into Greenwich Bay.

Standing on a boulder on the shore, hikers can look west to Chepiwanoxet Point and northwest to Apponaug Cove. To the north across the water is the Buttonwoods neighborhood and to the south is the wide expanse of Narragansett Bay.

It's quite a panorama.

To reach Sally Point, I set out from the beach at Goddard Memorial State Park and walked northeast up a slight incline to a wide path on a bank about 20 feet above the bay. Several side paths lead down to the shore, with views of the houses across the water.

Just ahead is a small, quiet pond. Listen and you can hear water rushing through two culverts under the path. I kept bearing left as other side trails cut in from the right until I saw some cottages and found a spur on the left that led me to Sally Point.

I rested there and took in the view before retracing my steps. But back at the pond, I turned left, followed the banks and then bushwhacked to a cart path. It led me by the edge of a golf course before passing a maintenance shed and then to the carousel building.

At that point, I crossed a pedestrian bridge and could have turned right and back to the lot at the beach where I started. But I decided on more exercise and took the path south along the banks above Greenwich Cove. There's a short side trail down to Long Point and a nice view of the East Greenwich marina across the cove. After studying the marina, I returned to the main trail, walked until I reached a boat launch and went a hundred yards inland to see Shippee Hollow Pond, which ice skaters use in the winter.

I retraced my steps and returned to where I'd started. In all, I walked 4½ miles over about two hours.

**Access:** Take Route 1 to Old Forge Road and drive southeast. Turn left on Ives Road and drive to the entrance to the park on the left.

**Parking:** Available at several lots.

**Dogs:** Allowed, but must be leashed.

**Difficulty:** Easy.

*John Kostrzewa, a former assistant managing editor/business at The Providence Journal, welcome email at [johnekostrzewa@gmail.com](mailto:johnekostrzewa@gmail.com).*