



Sudbury's Changing Land

A Guide
to 15,000
Years of
Landscape
Evolution



Walk  Drive  Explore

written and sponsored by
**Sudbury Valley Trustees and
Town of Sudbury
Conservation Commission**

in conjunction with an exhibit by the
Sudbury Historical Society



About This Guide

WHAT? This is a guide to Sudbury, Massachusetts, that illustrates aspects of seven eras of substantial change in the form of its natural landscape and human use of it.

WHY? This guide challenges you to look more closely, through personal outdoor exploration, at the environmental base of local life. The challenge is grounded in the belief that direct observation of natural conditions will make the ecological impact of human activity obvious.

WHERE? Seven geographic areas are identified in this guide, to help you explore Sudbury's landscape history. Each place illustrates two or more eras of change. They are located in different parts of town. Some you can see from your car, while others offer a hike into history.

- A. Davis Farm area
- B. Hop Brook
- C. Nobscot Hill complex
- D. Route 20 (Boston Post Rd.)
- E. Weir Hill
- F. Wayside Inn
- G. Wolbach Farm & King Philip Woods



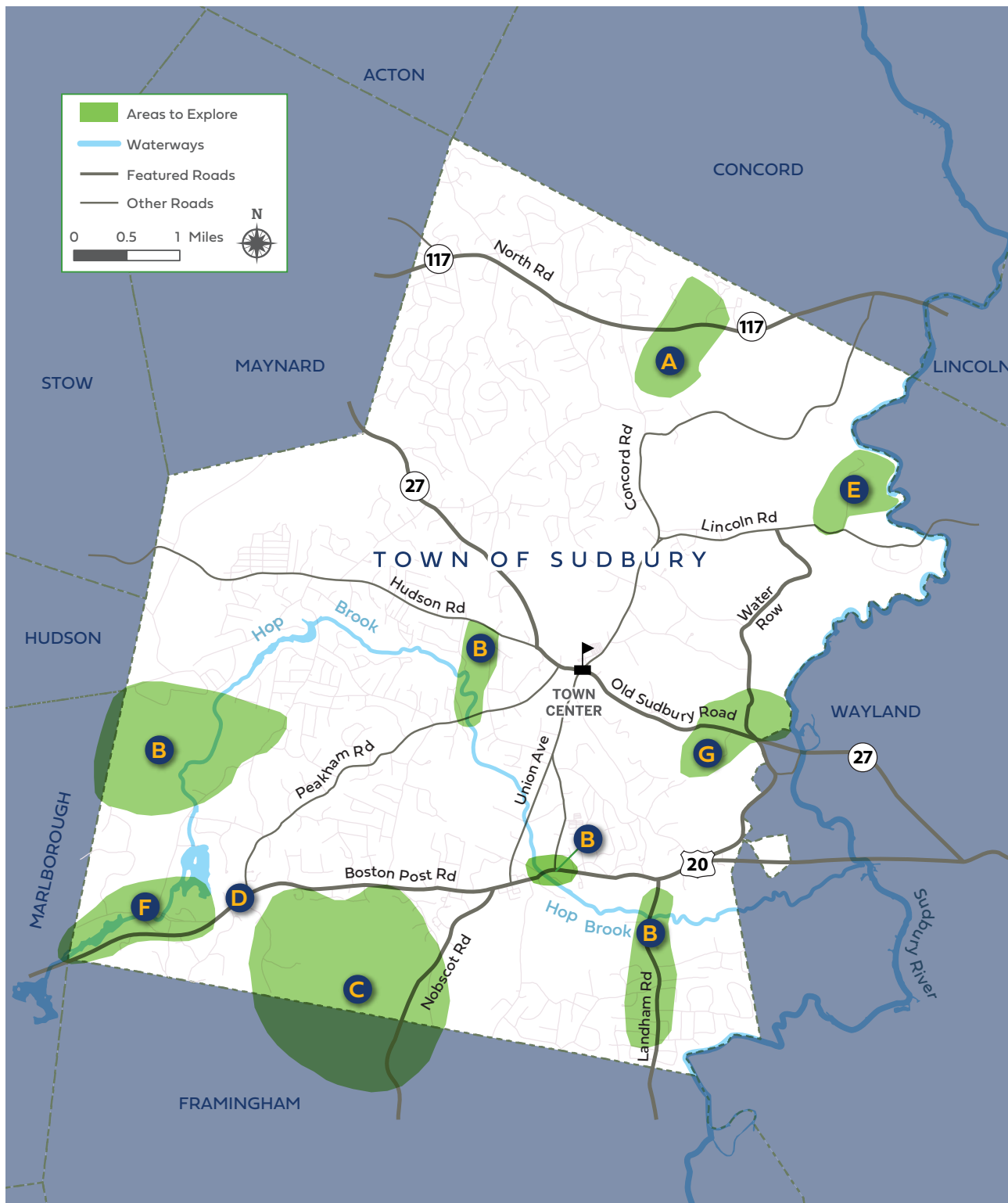
HOW? Directions, maps and much more about places you can explore are available on the Sudbury's Changing Land web page: sudbury.ma.us/conservationcommission/?p=5380 or scan the QR code above.

NEXT? Look for the opening of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in 2024 and the Mass Central Rail Trail in 2025. They connect many of the lands in this guide and offer new ADA-accessible ways to explore "behind the scenes" of Sudbury's land.

In the meantime have fun, and help make Sudbury a beautiful and resilient habitat for all its many species!

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"Waiting for Spring" cover photo by David Blohm blohmphoto.com.
Brochure prepared by Electa Tritsch. © 2024 Sudbury Valley Trustees



1. Setting the Post-Glacial Scene

The last glacier that receded from New England left behind a land surface scoured and shaped by ice. Melting ice carved stream beds and whole river basins.

Most of Sudbury was flooded with this meltwater – known as Glacial Lake Sudbury. The **Nobscot Hill** complex may have been the only land high enough to escape the flood, but its slopes are covered with massive boulders left by the glaciers as they melted.

Eventually the lake drained, leaving behind the Sudbury River floodplain and a very different land from what had existed before. At **Gray Conservation Area** and **Haynes Meadow** you can explore a glacier-sculpted landscape of eskers, kettle holes, and drumlins.

Where to explore:

🚗 **Nobscot Hill** – Take a careful drive along Brimstone Lane off Rte 20. Look for the glacial erratic boulders upslope and the steep drop-offs from the roadway.

🚶 **Hop Brook at Haynes Meadow and Gray Conservation Area** – SVT parking lot at corner of Old Lancaster Rd and Hudson Rd; roadside parking at end of Blueberry Hill Lane. Check trail map for short and longer options.



Tippling Rock Conservation Land glacial erratic boulders (SVT)



Wolbach Farm varied habitat (EKT)

2. Lands of Indigenous Peoples

Over a period of 12,000 years, as the climate warmed to more moderate temperatures and weather patterns, Sudbury's barren landscape filled in with plants and trees, soil and insects, fish, birds and mammals. It became a place for humans to hunt and fish and, later, to develop a seasonal settlement pattern that made the most of the area's rich and varied resources.

Get a glimpse from **Wolbach Farm** of the fertile landscape and varied habitat that was their home. At **Weir Hill**, hike over a drumlin that anchored tribal Nipmuc fish weirs and provided canoe access to the **Sudbury River**, a reliable transportation route.

Where to explore:

🚗 **Wolbach Farm** (SVT headquarters) – Wolbach Rd off Rte 27. Parking by house or at barn. Outdoor seating with a view.

🚶 **Sudbury River at Weir Hill** (Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge) – 73 Weir Hill Rd off Lincoln Rd near Sherman Bridge. Parking lot with access to hillside trails, ADA-accessible boardwalk trail and viewing deck.



Abenaki fish weir (EKT)

3. Frontiers of Change

When Sudbury became an English frontier settlement in the mid-1600s, it was already home to a permanent population of one or more Nipmuc and Wampanoag tribal groups. **King Philip Woods**, located between an ancient indigenous trail and the river marshes, is likely where one or more families lived before Anglo presence in the area.

Look for ancient trails such as **Water Row** (extends to River Road in Wayland). This was also the vicinity of some of Sudbury's earliest English homesteads including the Haynes Garrison House. Over the next century, as colonists took over level indigenous planting fields near the river and cut down much of the surrounding forest, some Nipmuc families resettled in more strategic, but much less hospitable, territory such as **Nobscot Hill**. A hike up Tippling Rock Trail on Nobscot Hill gives a feel for the steep and rocky terrain.

Where to explore:

🚗 **Water Row and River Rd** – north and south of Rte 27 along the Sudbury River – casual pull-offs along Water Row especially by Haynes Garrison House.

🚶 **King Philip Woods** – parking off Rte 27 across from Wolbach Rd plus a small area on Water Row.

🚶 **Tippling Rock Trail on Nobscot Hill** – trailhead parking lot on the south side of Rte 20 between Dudley Rd and Nokomis Rd.



Sudbury River marsh by Water Row (EKT)

4. European Land Use: Transport, Farm and Mill

Between the 1750s and 1780 the present Town of Sudbury separated from Wayland and then defined its own township. An important indigenous trail was adopted as the main **Post Road** (Route 20), tracing a narrow path along the Sudbury River floodplain and skirting the highlands of Nobscot Hill. English immigrants and heirs of the town's first Anglo settlers laid out claims to rich bottom land, notably in the southern part of town called **Landham**.

Farther west, some Sudbury settlers mixed farming and industry where reliable streams like **Hop Brook** powered agricultural mills. Located on the Post Road, the homestead known today as the **Wayside Inn** (built circa 1703) made the most of all these profitable land uses. The Howe family provided food and drink to travelers; the brook powered grist and saw mills for the town, and the homestead's acreage formed a useful farm.

Where to explore:

🚗 **Drive east to west along level Rte 20:** your route just avoids the Hop Brook marshes that feed into the Sudbury River. It also avoids the steep slopes of Nobscot Hill. As you return eastward, turn right off Rte 20 onto Landham Rd, crossing Hop Brook and on to the Framingham line – a low, flat area with rich soils.

🚶 **The Wayside Inn, 72 Wayside Inn Rd, off Rte 20.** Parking lots at main buildings and grist mill. Innkeeper's Loop Trail: 1.5 miles.



Haying scene with white horse (SHS)



Wayside Inn mill wheel (EKT)

5. Smooth River, Small Falls

Sudbury's brookside and river meadows had always been reliable sources of hay for the town's farmers, and a broad natural environment for fish and waterfowl. During the 19th century, dams downstream increasingly flooded meadows along the Sudbury River, while discharge from other mills upstream began to degrade the town's water quality.

New residents put new demands on housing stock. Farms were turned into house lots bought by Boston commuters, and multi-family housing was built for mill workers in **South Sudbury's Mill Village**.

Some farms, especially along the broad **Route 20** swath of floodplain, created a longer growing season with greenhouse production of vegetables and flowers for new urban markets.

Where to explore – turn on your imagination for this one!

🚗 **The intersection of Rte 20 and Concord Rd** marks "Mill Village". Falls on Hop Brook are behind trees; new buildings and parking replace 19th century mills and craft shops. Drive west to 578 Boston Post Rd, where J. P. Bartlett greenhouses remain as testament to the once-thriving agricultural business district on this road. On Union Avenue Cavicchio Greenhouses are another survivor.

🚶 **Park at Mill Village marketplace** and follow the sound of water to the Hop Brook falls. Imagine buildings noisy with workers and machines. On the Boston Post Road (Rte 20) look for houses from the 1700s and early 1800s, built for earlier artisans.



Wayside Inn train stop (SHS)

6. Rural Town to Western Suburb

In 1870 and 1880 two railroads sliced straight through Sudbury's flattest land. The trains provided new work opportunities for younger farmers, who found urban jobs and left the family farm. Farm abandonment in Sudbury continued through the 1900s as later generations sold land that was worth more for development than for food production. Farm neighborhoods became available for housing, such as the flat **Landham** area. Some farms dating back to Sudbury's earliest settlement were bought by urban professionals. **Wolbach Farm**, for example, was 'gentrified' with formal landscape design and new land uses.

Where to explore:

🚗 **Drive south from Rte 20 on Landham Rd**, across the marshes. Take any side road after that to see the overlay of housing on flat agricultural land.

🚶 **Wolbach Farm, 18 Wolbach Rd, off Rte 27;** look for SVT sign. Parking available. Lewis Trail: 1.2-mile loop walk.



Wolbach Farm paddocks and barn (SVT)

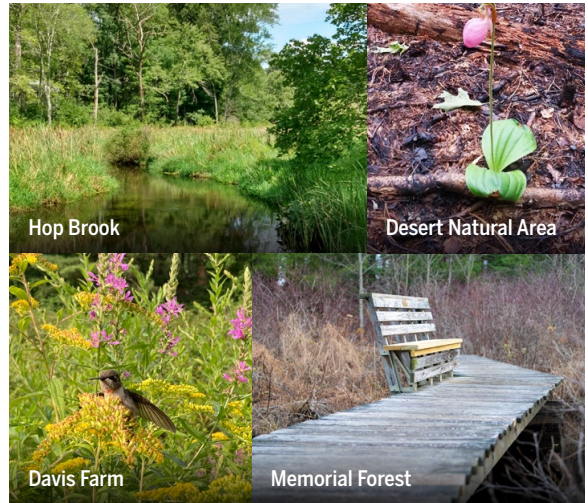
7. SUDBURY NOW: Conservation, Restoration, Resilience

300 years after European colonists began transforming the landscape, a growing number of Americans became concerned about what was being lost in the transformation. Public and private organizations began directing funds to the protection of rare sites and essential resources.

Today you can glimpse the impact of this massive **conservation** effort at the **Landham Road bridge**, where broad marshes along Hop Brook and the Sudbury River are filled with wildlife, all protected by a partnership of the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, the Town of Sudbury and Sudbury Valley Trustees. Walk along **Hop Brook Marsh** to a bridge over the brook to see natural diversity conserved by the Town of Sudbury to protect the town's water supply.


Trying to **restore** a landscape – to reverse the loss of natural value due to human use or misuse – often takes decades. Today a river-view platform at **Weir Hill** presents a calm vista of cattails and button bush, but only after this portion of the Sudbury River was declared a federal Superfund site and the river itself dredged.


In the face of quickly changing climate conditions, efforts to encourage the **resilience** of Sudbury's varied ecosystems are increasing. A prescribed burn within the 900-acre **Desert Natural Area** (which includes SVT's Memorial Forest) has served to support its pitch pine-scrub oak community, among the most endangered ecosystems in the country. Many of the Desert's plant and animal species are adapted to fire and depend on occasional fire for survival.





At **Davis Farm** a pollinator meadow now covers a hillside that had been an end-of-life pine plantation. The meadow provides food and shelter for many species of insects essential to the pollination of local plants and food crops.

Where to explore:

 **Landham Rd Bridge** — Turn south off Rte 20 at Landham Rd. Immediately after the bridge that crosses the wetlands, park in a small pull-off on the left. Best view is from the sidewalk on the bridge.

 **Sudbury River at Weir Hill** (Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge) — 73 Weir Hill Rd (off Lincoln Rd). ADA-accessible Red Maple Trail with observation platform on the marshes.

 **Hop Brook Marsh and Desert Natural Area/Memorial Forest** — area on Dutton Rd - follow Pine Trail west to Hop Brook crossing, then south to Desert Loop trail.

 **Davis Farm** — trailhead parking just west of 200 North Rd (Rte 117). 1-mile loop trail.



Sudbury River from Weir Hill