

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL HISTORY

In the 1960s, over fifty miles of the rail bed from East Hampton to the Massachusetts border were acquired by the Connecticut State Park System to construct a recreational linear park.

This trail has a colorful past. The "Air Line" was envisioned as a direct line between New York City and Boston. It opened in 1873 and 25 miles shorter, it offered fierce competition to the shoreline rail service from New York to Boston. The mesmerizing, white-painted express train, known as the Ghost Train, made the run between Boston and New York in six hours, a record time for 1884.

The construction of the new rail line contained ambitious feats of engineering, blasting through granite hills, navigating deep valleys and rivers along the route. The Air Line Railroad's "Ghost Train" began in 1891 and was designed to attract wealthy travelers. Luxurious Pullman cars were painted white with gold trim, and the staff of the train wore formal white uniforms.



The catastrophic Great East Thompson Train Wreck on December 4, 1891 clouded the introduction of this fast new rail service. It was one of the greatest train wrecks in American history, and the only train accident to involve four trains. Still, over the next four years, successful businessmen and prominent citizens, including President Benjamin Harrison, rode the increasingly well-known Ghost Train. As it sped across eastern Connecticut, its luminescent cars were easily recognized, especially at twilight.

In the new 20th century, technology increased, railroad engines became faster, rail cars became longer, everything became heavier and after World War II, access to automobiles and interstate highways reduce the profitability of rail travel. The quaintness of the Air Line's winding grades as well as the weight restrictions of the spindly trestle bridges began to show its limitations. During its construction, the Air Line Railroad was expensive and controversial, but its operational costs would lead to its ultimate demise and abandonment. Passenger service on the Air Line ceased by 1937, and the track was completely abandoned by 1965.

Today, visitors enjoy scenic panoramas, village life, wildlife, hiking trails, and the tranquility of the rural landscape. The United States Department of the Interior recognized the southern section of the Air Line State Park Trail as a national recreation trail in 2002.

For more maps in this series, email alspt.alliance@gmail.com or visit airlinestateparktrailalliance.org.



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AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL ALLIANCE



PARKING

Many parking areas serve the Air Line State Park Trail. Some primary locations are:

THOMPSON

- Large parking lot at 121 Riverside Dr, (Rt 12, Mechanicsville)
- Pull off for a few cars at Air Line trail crossing, 388 Sand Dam Rd
- 5 car parking lot, located at 662 East Thompson Rd, near the junction of New Rd

PUTNAM

- 18 Kennedy Dr, across from Canal
- 80 Kennedy Dr, directly across from the South entrance of Simonzi Park
- 98 Kennedy Dr
- 165 Kenedy Dr (DMV lot)

POMFRET

- 18 car paved parking lot at Pomfret Station, 13 Railroad Ave (off of Rt 169)
- Pomfret Town Hall, 5 Haven Road (Rt 44) paved parking adjacent to trail
- Parking available in rear of Town owned paved parking lot at Pomfret Community Center, 207 Mashamoquet Rd (Rt. 44)
- Wrights Crossing Road

HAMPTON

- Potter Rd 0.6 mile north of its intersection with Rt 6 in Goodwin State Forest

WINDHAM

- Intersection of Beaver Hill Rd and Windham Rd (Rt 203) in North Windham, at the CT Eastern Railroad Museum and in downtown Willimantic.

COLUMBIA

- Rt 87, Cook Hill Rd and Village Hill Rd

HEBRON

- Church Street, Rte 85; Grayville Road (limited); and Old Hartford Road.

EAST HAMPTON

- Depot Hill, Cobalt; Aldens Crossing (at Rt 16); Forest St (Between Hayes Rd and Childs Rd); Town Hall Rd (Off Main St.); Main Street; Watrous Street; Smith Street (at Cranberry Bog)

PORTLAND

- Parking at 82 Middle Haddam Rd

- Air Line State Park Trail
- Trail Entry/Parking
- Colchester Spur
- Hop River State Park Trail