

# 36 Ascutney State Park

## 1826 Back Mountain Road, Windsor, Vermont

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The stock market crashed. Banks closed. People were out of work. Not exactly the types of things you'd think about as you climb to the 3,130 foot summit of Mount Ascutney. But, it's those very factors, along with President Roosevelt's New Deal, that created this pristine retreat.

Following the 1929 Stock Market Crash, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as one of his New Deal programs to provide environmental work to 18 year old youths and older who were unemployed throughout the country. While Vermont was given an initial quota of three camps, 200 men per project, the federal government soon expanded it to 20 camps, and included the creation of Ascutney State Park.

Between 1935 and 1938, the State of Vermont utilized federal public works funds to purchase three tracts of privately held land, totaling 1,500 acres, and set about creating Ascutney State Park. With the manpower of "CCC Work Group SPI" laboring year round until completion in 1939, the men had forged the summit road, built stone toilet facilities, set up campsites 1-18, and constructed the stone ranger's quarters, utilizing granite found on the mountain.

Today, Mount Ascutney State Park, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, totals 2,000 acres of protected forests. Its name comes from the Abenaki word *Ascutegnik*, which was the name of an Abenaki settlement located where the New Hampshire Sugar River meets the Connecticut River.

Excellent viewing is offered from points along the summit road and trail. The original fire tower with the cabin removed has been relocated for excellent views in all directions. Another great vantage point is found at Brownsville Rock, a quarter-mile by trail northwest of the summit.

Brownsville Rock is also the most notable hang gliding site in New England, due to its excellent soaring abilities. It is not unusual for hang gliders to fly from Mt. Ascutney to neighboring states, with some trips ending at the coastline in New Hampshire or Massachusetts, a flight of over 90 miles. The record flight from Mt. Ascutney is held by Curt Warren, who flew 131.6 mi into Connecticut on August 7, 2002.

While the summit can be reached via a short trail from the parking lot at the end of the only road up the mountain, four main trails are named for the towns where they originate:

The Weathersfield Trail begins in a parking lot at the end of Cascade Falls Rd, off of Vermont Route 131 in Weathersfield. As the one trail on the south-face of the mountain, hikers can enjoy Cascade Falls, the largest waterfall on the mountain.

The Windsor Trail originates from a small parking area off Vermont Route 44A, just east of the junction with Vermont Route 44. One-third of the way the trail meets a small waterfall then a small log lean-to shelter. Near the top, the trail merges with the Brownsville Trail.

The Brownsville Trail begins at a parking area along Vermont Route 44, a little over a mile west of its junction with Vermont Route 44A. The lower end of the trail follows an abandoned logging road, before it stops at the old granite quarry and turns into a traditional hiking trail.

The Futures Trail begins in the campground at Mt. Ascutney State Park on Route 44A, one mile west of the junction with U.S. Route 5 in Ascutney. This is the longest trail on Mt. Ascutney at 4.6 miles, covering a wide variety of forest and geography before it connects to the Windsor Trail near the summit. Highlights of this trail include Bare Rock Vista at the 1-mile mark and the Steam Donkey at 3.5 miles. The Steam Donkey is a steam powered machine used for cable logging in the early 1900s.

Mount Ascutney State Park is the perfect option for hikers of any ability as The Futures Trail has several access points along the access road for shorter journeys. The Park is open Memorial Day through October, and now features 39 wooded tent/trailer sites and 10 lean-to sites.

**Directions:**

From I-91 (Exit 8) travel .2 miles east to the intersection of Route 131 and Route 5. Turn left on Route 5 North for 1.2 miles. Bear left on Route 44A and travel one mile to the official park entrance.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.crjc.org/heritage/N07-7.html>

<http://www.vtfpr.org/lands/ascutneymu.naturalresourceassessmentandanalysis.02022012.pdf>

<http://www.vermonthhistory.org/documents/GrnMtnChronTranscripts/200-7MerrillPerry.pdf>