

FORT BARTON REDOUBT & WOODS



Parking and entrance on Highland Road (across from Town Hall), Tiverton, Rhode Island

Managed by Tiverton Open Space and Land Preservation Commission

Trail maps available in PDF at <http://www.tiverton.ri.gov/recreation/recreation.html>

CULTURAL HISTORY. The soil and terrain in the area suggest the Pocasset Indians would have used Fort Barton Woods for hunting and gathering. Also, the shelter available alongside granite ridges, and the dependable water supply in Sin and Flesh Brook would have provided suitable conditions for winter quarters. Native American presence ended, however, with the King Philip's War of 1675 when the Pocasset were driven from the East Bay. In the late 17th to early 18th century European settlers cleared this land and likely used it for pasture. As New England agriculture diminished in the 19th century and domestic fuel use shifted from wood to coal, forest cover gradually returned to this land where it remains today.

During the King Philip's War many bloody attacks by both sides occurred, one of which involved the murder of a Quaker preacher traveling through Tiverton. His mutilated body was found in a stream, which the Quakers then referred to as "Sinning Flesh River." That stream is today's Sin and Flesh Brook.

During the American Revolution these "Tiverton highlands" represented an important strategic location for preventing an invasion of the mainland across the narrow Sakonnet River strait by British Forces who occupied Aquidneck Island. Consequently, the Massachusetts Bay Colony commissioned a defensive fortification, originally called Tiverton Heights Fort. An extensive system of earthen ramparts was constructed and defended by artillery. At one point the fort was manned by several thousand colonial troops. This was during the staging for an unsuccessful invasion of Aquidneck Island known as the Battle of Rhode Island.

In July 1777 a daring raid was launched from the Fort. In the middle of the night Lt. Col. William Barton, with 40 men in three boats, slipped through British ships anchored in the bay and made their way inland to capture the commander of British forces, General Prescott, from his quarters in Portsmouth. This action had little strategic significance but reports of the General being led off in his nightclothes was a big morale booster to the colonial army. Subsequently, the redoubt was renamed Fort Barton by the Continental Congress to honor the leader of the raid. The original Revolutionary War ramparts dug by colonial troops survive today in the vicinity of the observation tower.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES. Fort Barton Woods today is a mature, mixed hardwood forest, with some trees exceeding 100 years of age. Individual tupelo trees have been found that are several hundred years old. The forest is dominated by the common broadleaf species of southern New England: red oak, black oak, white oak, black birch, yellow birch, sassafras, American beech, white ash, black cherry, eastern hophornbeam, American hornbeam, flowering dogwood, and hickory species. The only native evergreen broadleaf tree of New England, American holly, is also abundant. Red maple and tupelo are plentiful in the wetter areas. There is not a significant population of conifers, though isolated large eastern white pines are found in protected areas. Sin and Flesh Brook winds through the woods and is joined by a number of small rivulets to create significant streamside habitat. Three vernal pools and a small sphagnum swamp are also present.

Given the variety of conditions — exposed bedrock, streams, slopes, and upland soil — there is a diverse assemblage of woodland herbaceous plants and shrubs in Fort Barton Woods, some of which are listed below.

Ferns: royal, cinnamon, New York, marginal wood, evergreen wood, netted chain, rock polypody, lady, sensitive, bracken, hay-scented, broad beech, Christmas, silvery glade, and crested wood ferns.

Shrubs: arrowwood, maple leaf viburnum, elderberry, beaked hazelnut, winterberry, witch hazel, devil's walking stick, sweet pepperbush, spicebush, mountain laurel, highbush blueberry, shadbush.

Be kind to the natural essence of these woods and enjoy your visit between sunrise and sunset. Do not remove or disturb vegetation or any object intrinsic to Ft. Barton Woods. Use only marked trails.

Biking in the redoubt area and in the woods, alcohol beverages, campfires, and motorized vehicles are prohibited.