

Mica Ledges Trail

What to look for on the Mica Ledges Trail

Follow the dirt road south marked with the blue blazes of the Mattabasset "blue trail" for .1 mile to where it leaves the dirt road and heads west (right). Take care to **follow the blue blazes** as a number of woods roads and old trails cross the path. At the eastern base of a major north-south running ridge, the trail reaches **Pyramid Rock**, a large block of outcrop displaced from the ridge above by glacial forces 10,000 years ago. Here, just past the rock, the Red-blazed interior trail of Mica Ledges Preserve leads south (left). **Continue steeply upward** on the blue-blazed trail. Here hemlocks have been ravaged by the Woolly Adelgid. Many dead and dying trees attest to the debilitating and lethal effects of this insect invader. At the ridge top, **the trail swings southward** and, at times, breaks out into openings on the high granitic ledges that give the Preserve its name. Splendid views to the west of the valley below and the basaltic trap rock ridge beyond can be had from these heights.

About .5 mile from Pyramid Rock, in a sight saddle along the ridge, an red-blazed trail leads to the east (left) and down to Whitney Pond. This is Selectmen's Path referred to later. On the Mattabasset, just beyond this juncture, a cairn of stones marks the spot where the towns of Durham, Madison and Guilford share a common boundary. **A few yards south of the cairn**, the trail descends sharply and crosses a small, beautiful stream, then ascends steeply once more to bare rock and dry oak forest. At times, understory of huckleberry and blueberry give way to dense mountain laurel. Eventually, the trail dips and then rises very steeply through another ravine. Such ravines accumulate organic matter and eroding rock from above and consequently provide better growth conditions than on the thin-soiled exposed ridges sites. Note how much larger and better formed the trees are in such places. Once again, the trail breaks out on west facing ledges and continues south (eventually it crosses over to Bluff Head – the southern end of the trap rock ridge to the west).

Turn east (left) onto a Land Trust trail, marked with orange blazed. The species of pine ground here, pitch pine, is found in such places where moisture is limited and where fires occasionally occur. Heat helps the cones to open and disperse their seeds. This orange-marked trail is the **west end of the Maria Schmidt Memorial Trail**. Follow it east a few hundred feet to where a loop of the trail branches right and eventually rejoins the main trail just a short distance ahead.

The loop trail descends into a protected valley strewn with boulders whose rounded edges attest to their glacial transport and deposit. Follow the trail into Town of Madison open space and then upward onto a flat outcrop where in 1998 a fire burned for several days. Dead trees and a heavy grass cover now bear witness to the event.

Continue to where the loop rejoins the main trail and **proceed north (right)** and northeast through a forest with chestnut and red oaks now taller and of finer quality than on the ridge just traversed. As the trail descends into the sheltered, moist, northeast-facing valley, beech, red maple, and black and yellow birches become more abundant. The Maria Schmidt Memorial Trail ascends once more through laurel thickets on the ridge before ending at the east-west crossover trail that connects with the Mattabasset trail to the west (left), Whitney Pond to the east. **The south end** of the north-south running red trail that leads back to Pyramid Rock. **To the west**, 425 feet toward the Mattabasset, Selectmen's Path passes directly through the remains of an old charcoal mound revealed by a nearly circular area with darkened soil, charcoal fragments and very little vegetation. Just beyond, the trail crosses the bed of another intermittent stream and then gradually rises to join the Mattabasset trail near the western ledges. From the juncture of the Maria Schmidt trail and the crossover trail, hikers can **return to the trailhead** by the north-south red trail, or by continuing east to Whitney Pond and following the road system back north using Selectmen's Path.

The Red-blazed north-south trail

From Pyramid Rock go south, first along and through a great jumble of large rocks fallen from the ridge above, then, where the trail meets a logging road, turn sharply upslope to where a beautiful vernal pool with its backdrop of rocky outcrop and pitch pine presents and oriental and mystical appearance. (Con't)

The blazed trail travels up and to the south and passes, near the eastern drop-off, a series of caves formed by the fractured rock tallus. Beyond, the high dry oak forest with laurel thickets speaks to the thinness of the soil and to the general low water availability on these rocky ridges. The trail continues upward, passes by another vernal pool and then, turning east (left), eventually emerges into an opening where great views can be had to the east of the ancient central Connecticut Highlands Geologic Province. Mount Pisgah can be seen to the northeast. Pitch pines, scrub oaks and dry understory of blueberry, huckleberry, etc. are characteristic of these open, storm-swept sites. Follow the trail southward and then down to the east. Through the trees, especially in the dormant season, good views can be had of Whitney Pond. Follow the trail south where it joins the east-west trail crossing from Whitney Pond to the Mattabasset Trail to the west at the junction of Maria Schmidt Trail.

Permitted Activities:

The trail areas in the MLCT/MxLT properties are for hiking only. Dogs are allowed, but must be leashed. Please pick up all animal waste.

The Mica Ledges trail complex is one of our most challenging and rewarding. Special features include marvelous views from high granite ledges to the east and especially to the west along the Mattabasset Blue Trail, great rock jumbles, several streams, vernal pools and a beautiful pond. Most of the trails are in Durham as only 17 acres of the 100-acre preserve are in Madison. In Madison, a bit south of the Maria Schmidt Memorial Trail, a section dips south into Town of Madison open space. Purchased and maintained jointly by the MLCT and the Middlesex Land Trust, Mica Ledges represents our first major joint venture with a neighboring Trust.

GPS Directions: 59-69 Cream Pot Rd., Durham, CT 06422

Category: A series of trails varying in difficulty from easy woodland to difficult inclines and high rock outcrops with splendid views.

Start: Trailhead at the cul-de-sac parking lot of Cream Pot Road in Durham at trailhead kiosk J1.

Distance: Distances ranging from about 1.2 miles to 2.5 miles depending on choice of trails.

Approximate time: 2-3 hours to cover the main trail system

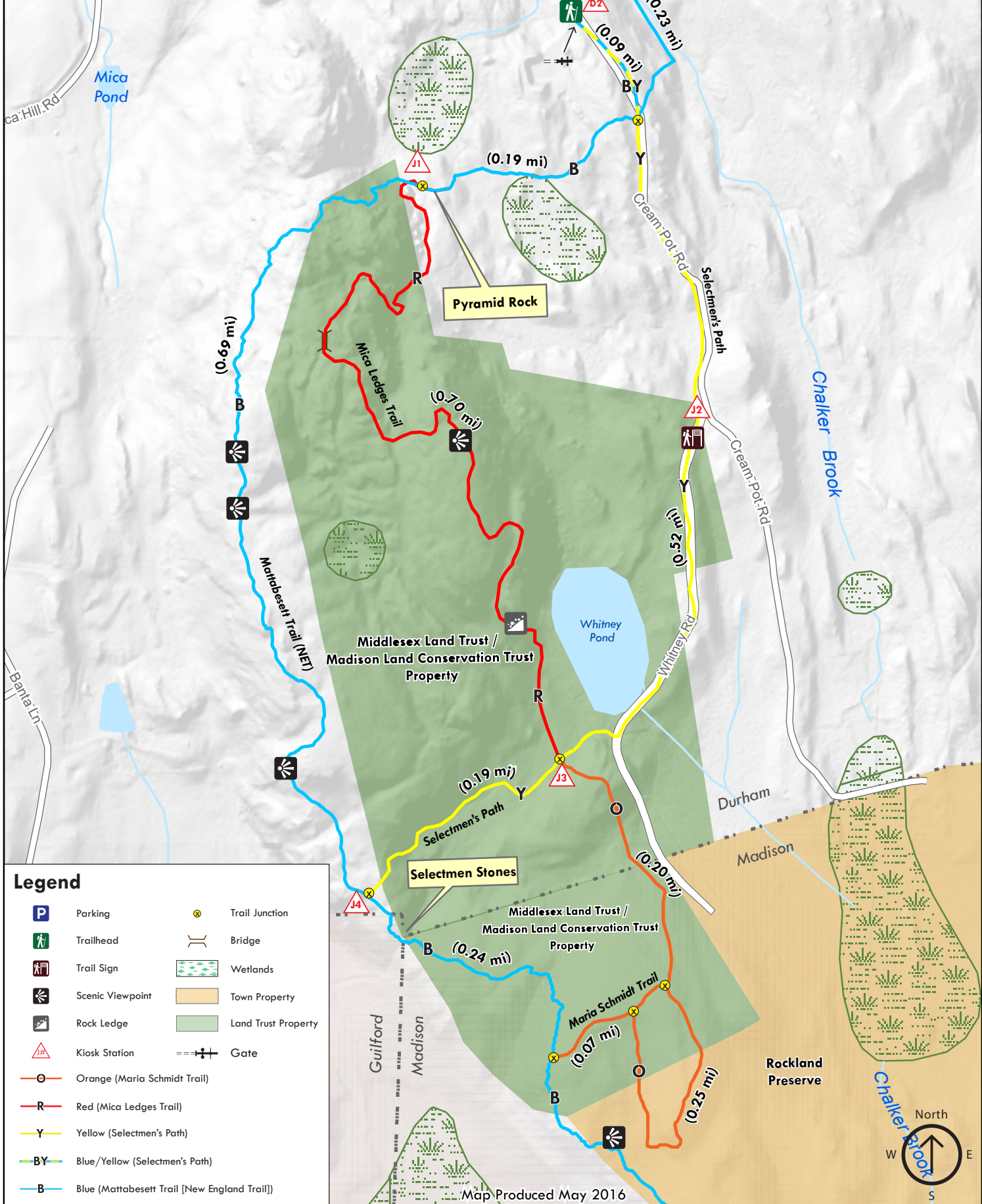
Parking: At the cul-de-sac on Cream Pot Rd

For more information about this walk contact:

Madison Land Conservation Trust
www.madisonlandtrust.org or
Middlesex Land Trust
www.middlesexlandtrust.org



Mica Ledges Trails



Legend

- | | |
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| Parking | Trail Junction |
| Trailhead | Bridge |
| Trail Sign | Wetlands |
| Scenic Viewpoint | Town Property |
| Rock Ledge | Land Trust Property |
| Kiosk Station | Gate |
| Orange (Maria Schmidt Trail) | |
| Red (Mica Ledges Trail) | |
| Yellow (Selectmen's Path) | |
| Blue/Yellow (Selectmen's Path) | |
| Blue (Mattabesett Trail [New England Trail]) | |

