

A Perfect Summer Drive

Enjoy this 56-mile loop through northwest Connecticut.

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Welcome to *Yankee Magazine's* driving tour of Litchfield County in the northwest corner of Connecticut. This recording follows the 56-mile tour in a counter-clockwise direction, beginning in the town of Litchfield.

Set your odometer to zero at the junction of Routes 63 and 202 in downtown Litchfield (1). One of the prettiest towns in New England, Litchfield was founded in 1721 and was the leading commercial, social, cultural, and legal center of northwest Connecticut by the end of that century. It's known especially for local lawyer Tapping Reeve, who systematized his law lectures for young students, creating the Litchfield Law School in 1784. As you travel north out of town on Route 63, you'll see a sign for Pierce Academy on your left (2). Established in 1792, it was one of the first major educational institutions for women in the United States.

Notice the stately homes along this stretch of Route 63, many bounded by stone walls. Litchfield's fortunes declined after its golden age of law and education in the 1700s because it didn't have an adequate water supply or rail transportation. It was rediscovered as a resort community in the late 19th century; at that time the town embraced the Colonial Revival movement, and many of the homes along this stretch bear the evidence in their white clapboards and black shutters.

At 2.6 miles the campus of the Connecticut Junior Republic comes into view on the right side of the road (3). This private, nonprofit organization helps troubled youth of all backgrounds become productive members of their communities. Just beyond, you'll see a red farmhouse on a hillside tiered by stone walls. As you may already suspect, this will be a visual theme throughout our tour. When the glaciers retreated from this area of the country, they left behind a geologic gold mine—rocks of every size, shape, and type.

At the three-mile mark, you'll see a sign for Goshen, long an agricultural stronghold in the region. First settled in 1737, the town is home to the Goshen Agricultural Society and its fairgrounds (4), where the annual Goshen Fair takes place every Labor Day weekend. This is an old-fashioned agricultural fair with tractor pulls, woodcutting demonstrations, country line dancing, and livestock shows and competitions.

At six miles -- the tiny center of Goshen -- you'll encounter a small roundabout at the intersection with Route 4 (5). Take a right onto Route 4.

In two miles, when you see the sign for Action Wildlife, turn this recording back on.

A large carved wooden bear greets visitors to Action Wildlife (6). Drive through the break in two long stone walls up the dirt driveway; all the stonework you see is the work of owner Jim Mazzarelli. About nine years ago, he began turning this 116-acre former dairy farm into a haven for exotic and rare animals from around the world. As you drive and walk the grounds, you'll meet zebras, ostriches, goats, swans, oryx, deer, buffalo, yaks, and more.

[Recorded animal sounds from Action Wildlife]

When you get ready to leave Action Wildlife, turn this recording back on and set your odometer to zero.

Take a left out of Action Wildlife to head east on Route 4. At 1.6 miles by your odometer you'll see a sign for Wright's Flea Market at Wright Road (7).

Here, stone walls encircle another former dairy farm, now home to the flea market, where on weekends, antiques and collectibles dealers display garden tools, salt and pepper shakers, movie posters, and more. It's worth a stop, and if you do, turn this recording back on when you return to Route 4 heading west.

Back at Action Wildlife, set your odometer to zero again, and continue west. At .8 mile past Action Wildlife, you will see Nellie's Ice Cream on the right if you need a cool snack.

Back at the roundabout, the Old Town Hall is on your right (8). It's home to the Goshen Players, which has been staging productions in the historic venue for over half a century. Last year, shows included *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and Neil Simon's *Rumors*.

Continue through the roundabout to stay on Route 4 West toward the Cornwalls. Along this stretch of the road you'll see an old granite-walled graveyard on the right and Danielle Maier's colorful art gallery (open by appointment only) on the left side of the road, and just past that, Tyler Lake on your right (9). At 8.6 miles, a sign for Cornwall Town Line tells you the town was incorporated in 1740. At 9.2 miles, the Mohawk State Forest entrance is on the left (10). If you decide to take a hike and check out the views from the park's lookout tower, turn the recording back on when you get back on Route 4 West.

At 10.4 miles, you'll reach a crossroads; Berkshire Country Store is on your left (11). Continue straight through the intersection on Route 128 toward West Cornwall. Turn your odometer back to zero.

At 1.4 miles, there's a junction; continue straight on 128 to West Cornwall. A sign at 2.5 miles signals Housatonic State Forest (12). This particular parcel is one tiny speck in the overall state forest, which encompasses 10,000 acres (not all contiguous) in five towns.

At 3.7 miles, the road dips sharply into the village of West Cornwall (13). At its heart is a prime photo opportunity, where an 1864 red covered bridge -- one of just a few in the state -- spans the Housatonic River. Most days you can see fly fishermen along the riverbanks, filament flashing in the sun as they tempt trout to bite.

You can't (and shouldn't) miss the rustic Wandering Moose Café right next to the bridge. All fresco diners can listen to the Housatonic hurrying south. Choose from standard deli fare for breakfast and lunch, plus creative salads, featuring salmon, beets, and goat cheese. The dinner menu is fancier, featuring gourmet pizza, duck, and fittingly, trout.

Don't overindulge, because you must hike uphill to the Wish House. Bianca Langner-Griggs has owned this gift shop-gallery for a decade and filled the first floor of the quaint house with stylish women's clothing, kitchen accessories, baby and children's gifts, artwork, and imported items. A few houses away, Barbara Farnsworth, rare book maven, opens the doors of a former Masonic Hall on Saturdays to browsers interested in her 45,000-book collection. Notable categories here include literature, diaries, letters, and children's books, in addition to many others.

Even if you're not in the market for fine Shaker reproduction furniture (with prices to match), Ian Ingersoll's showroom on Main Street is worth a stop. (*Yankee Magazine* first recognized Ingersoll's rising star in the late 1980s.) The clean lines of his chairs, beds, and dressers, simply displayed, soothe the eye and spirit as much as the river does just beyond the door.

Also on Main Street is the Cornwall Bridge Pottery store (14), but when you're heading south on Route 7, you can also stop at the outfit's workshop (in Cornwall Bridge), where you can shop for bargain seconds and often catch potters in action.

[Recorded interview with potter Tod Piker]

At any rate, stretch your legs and explore this lovely village. When you get back in your car and get ready to head over the West Cornwall covered bridge, turn your odometer to zero and turn the recording back on.



WEST CORNWALL BRIDGE

With your odometer at zero, cross the one-lane West Cornwall Bridge. Observe the local courtesy: Flash your lights to signal drivers on the opposite side to cross. Once over, stay left on Route 7 South, a designated scenic byway, toward Cornwall Bridge and Kent.

You'll soon see why this road won its scenic designation. The Housatonic River rushes south on the left side of the road, while the Taconic Mountains—the Berkshire range—rise on your right. Along the spine is where the Appalachian Trail crosses this corner of the state.

At .9 mile, Clarke Outdoors (15) on the right side of the road is the place to stop if you want to dip a paddle in the river. The store offers kayaks and equipment for sale and rent as well as guided tours and drop-off services. Several pull-offs along this stretch of road entice you to get up close and personal with the river even if you don't have a boat.

Housatonic Meadows State Park spreads out underneath tall pine trees along the river at 2.6 miles (16). It's a favorite spot with fly fishermen.

In fact, April through November, anglers ply the Housatonic in quite large numbers. There are several outfitters catering to this crowd. Just past the Cornwall Bridge sign at 3.7 miles sits the Housatonic Meadows Fly Shop, which offers daily river reports, tips, fly-fishing lessons, and tons of gear. At 4.2 miles, you'll cross the river on a cement bridge (17); stay on Route 7, bearing right, and just over the bridge you'll see a covey of shops, including Housatonic River Outfitters, which offers guided trips for fishermen and boaters, as well as camping supplies. (The Cornwall Bridge Pottery workshop is adjacent to this complex; there you can see potters in action and shop for seconds.)

At 5.5 miles on Route 7 South, notice The Insiders/Outsiders Art Gallery on the left side of the road (18); it's hard to miss the giant metallic trout in the front yard! The gallery bills itself as "home of unusual, trained, and self-taught artists." Worth a stop, though much more folk than fine arts.

A tenth of a mile past the gallery on the right, the headquarters of the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) occupies a big white farmhouse (19). Founded in 1941, the HVA works to protect and restore the lands and waters of the Housatonic watershed. If you like what you see in these parts, you may wish to wave or tip your hat in thanks as you drive by!

Stone walls and farmhouses generously dot the next stretch of roadway. At 6.5 miles, a sign indicates the home of Matthews 1812 House, a catalog company offering gourmet cakes and cookies. Sometimes the showroom is open to the public. Just south of there, the Cornwall Inn offers rustic lodging and country dining.

If you're in the mood for a hot dog, at mile 7.2 a big red barn bearing the sign "Raw Milk Is Real Milk" is your landmark. These dairy farmers often set up a small food cart in the front yard to augment their milk sales.

When your odometer spins to 8 miles even, you'll see a big stone chimney on your right and then the entrance to Kent Falls State Park on your left (20). Take a short path from the state park parking lot across a small gray covered bridge. Continue on the trail for fabulous views of the falls' limestone sluice; be prepared for a refreshing spritz from the cascade.

KENT FALLS STATE PARK



If you can manage it, hike to the top of the falls on a steep quarter-mile trail. The falls wears the region's geologic history on it sleeve. You'll see white potholes -- bowls scoured long ago into marble boulders by pebbles, signs of a fault line, even lumpy boulders that upon closer inspection are studded with garnet, the Connecticut state mineral.

At 8.7 miles, look for a street sign saying "Sculpturedale" and another sign, "The Dog Show," on your left (21). The outdoor gallery features metal figures by sculptor Denis Curtis, while his wife's barn-shop, The Dog Show, carries dog-themed gifts and goods. This stretch of road is fringed with stone walls and pastures, and more views of the Taconic mountain range to the west.

At mile 11.5, you should be at the Kent Historical Marker sign (22).

[Recorded reading of Kent Historical Marker]

Set your odometer back to zero at the sign. Just ahead you'll see the Inn at Kent Falls bed-and-breakfast, a lovely place to stay. Built in 1741, the gracious farmhouse offers all the modern amenities in three suites and three rooms.

Less than a mile south on Route 7, the yellow sign at a railroad crossing (.7 mile) signals the Sloane-Stanley Museum (23). Landscape painter Eric Sloane teamed up with the Stanley Tool Company and the state of Connecticut to open it in 1969, commemorating the tool company's 125th anniversary. It features Sloane's collection of early American tools, a reproduction of his studio, and a pioneer cabin Sloane built in 1974 based on a description in *Diary of an Early American Boy*, an account from 1805 that the artist had published.

As you view Sloane's works you'll notice how he captured the mood of the countryside you've been driving through; he had a fascination with barns and some of the ones he painted still stand in the area. The artist also lived part of the year in New Mexico, and many works depict the Southwest landscape.

[Recorded interview with Paul Fink, docent at Sloane-Stanley Museum]

Down a slope from the museum stands a handsome stone chimney, the remains of the Kent Furnace, one of numerous iron ore furnaces that operated in the region in the 1800s. At the time, there were 40 or so furnaces from here to the border, mostly powered by charcoal. As you can imagine, the air quality wasn't very good because of it. The furnaces turned out pig iron for making locomotives and fine machinery. Fittingly, the museum shares a driveway with the Connecticut Antique Machinery Association, a compound of buildings where early tractors, engines, and mining and farm-related implements are on display.

The sooty skies of yore are far removed from modern-day Kent, which is a half-mile farther south on Route 7. This outpost of civilized life offers clear mountain air, gourmet dining, tasteful shops, and fine arts galleries on every corner; linger at your own financial peril. It's a magnet for New York City weekenders (it's about a two-hour drive), and also a crossroads for Appalachian Trail thru-hikers. There aren't too many towns with fewer than 3,000 residents in which you can buy homemade ice cream for a few bucks a cone (at Stosh's), Belgian chocolate truffles by the pound (at Belgique), or waist-high solid bronze asparagus for \$4,400 (at Morrison Sculpture Gallery).

Explore the town, especially the numerous art galleries. There are also several fine places to eat in town. When you get back in your car, turn your odometer to zero and turn the recording back on.

At the center of Kent, a dark gray granite Civil War monument honors the local soldiers who served (24); it was dedicated in 1885.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

At the monument in Kent, take a right. Once past Kent School (on the left), take a left onto Schaghticoke Road. It hugs the Housatonic. When it meets back up with Route 7, it crosses Bull's Bridge, a rustic covered span just below a hydro plant. Beneath, torrents of white water charge over smooth granite. Take Route 7 north to the monument in the center of Kent, set your odometer to zero, take a right onto Route 341, and resume the tour.

OR

From the monument, turn your odometer to zero here, and take a left onto Route 341.

Route 341 winds through the countryside. At mile 5.2, take a right onto Kent Hollow Road. This narrow way slips past a pond, stone walls, and houses. At mile 6, stay left on Kent Hollow Road (not South Kent Road).

Drive slowly on this gentle country road, which offers beautiful fields and views.

At 6.9 miles, you'll cross a narrow bridge and come upon a small grassy triangle in the road (25). Keep to the left (noting a white farmhouse with several red barns on the left), going straight up a hill on Anderson Acres road (the other road, a right-hand turn, is Kent Hollow Road; don't take this). As you venture up the hill, stone-walled pastures spread out to either side.

At 7.7 miles, you'll see Lake Waramaug, and a sign declares "Warren, Inc. 1786." Take a right onto West Shore Road. You'll see picnic tables, and soon a beach, then the entire Lake Waramaug State Park, a clean, pretty campground with lots of access to the water (26).

Shore Road is very winding and narrow, and residents often bike and walk its length, so drive very slowly. And you'll want to, to see the grand summer cottages and homes. You are headed toward New Preston, which is a village of Washington. You'll see a sign for the latter at 8.4 miles.

At 8.6 miles, look out across the lake to see its irregular shoreline. It has many spindly legs and coves. At 8.7 miles, take a sharp left to stay on Shore Road, crossing a small bridge.

At 11.5 miles, you'll meet up with Route 45 (27). Take a right, and .3 mile later you'll be in New Preston. Park wherever you can find a spot.

New Preston (28) has a handful of shops where sawmills and forges once made use of the zippy Little Aspetuck River that flows parallel to the main street. Now that river is a marketing tool: J. Seitz bills its furniture showroom as "on the waterfall level" of a former gas station. The distinctive clothing, bedding, and furniture store has anchored the postage-stamp-sized shopping destination for 20 years. Next door, the shop Pergola has views of the lively river, too, as well as garden supplies, topiaries, and curiosities such as handsomely framed butterflies.

[Recorded interview with David Whitman, owner of Pergola gift shop]

Within a short walk you can poke around the Village Barn and Gallery for antiques for every budget (lamps, a specialty) as well as local info (owner Craig Nelson said one gated estate belongs to Joan Rivers); and Dawn Hill and L & E Reid for Scandinavian, European, and American antiques for bigger budgets.

Have yourself a little retail therapy. When you get back in the car, take the main street out to Route 202 and turn your odometer back to zero.

With your odometer set to zero, take a left on Route 202 (29) and head east toward Litchfield.

At 4.1 miles, look for Guy Wolff Pottery on the right-hand side (30). You may have heard of this name before; this studio is home to the potter Guy Wolff. His name also bands together a loose guild of potters, the members of which make traditional garden pottery in the spirit of 18th- and 19th-century English, French, Tuscan, and American craftsmen. Wolff's studio is open to visitors.

Mount Tom State Park, one of the oldest in the state, is on the right side of the road at 4.4 miles (31). After a hike up Mount Tom (there's a stone tower lookout on the summit), take a dip in the park's pond and linger over a picnic.

This final leg of the journey traverses the corners of several towns, so don't be alarmed when you see signs for Litchfield, Morris, and Bantam all in rapid succession. At mile 6.9, you will enter Bantam; there are antiques shops and thrift stores along Route 202 that tempt browsers. At the lights at 7.6 miles, stay on Route 202 east to Litchfield.

White Memorial Conservation Center -- an environmental education center and nature museum -- is at mile marker 8.9 (32). The center is the heart of the 4,000-acre wildlife sanctuary encompassing fields, water, and woodlands, trails, campgrounds, boating facilities, and special areas for large outdoor educational and recreational gatherings. The museum focuses on the interpretation of local natural history, conservation, and ecology.

At 11 miles, you'll be back in the center of Litchfield, at the intersection of Routes 254 and 63 (1). We hope you've enjoyed this driving tour of Litchfield County, brought to you by the friendly folks at *Yankee Magazine*.