

FRANKLIN NATURE TRAIL

Interpretive Trail

Main Attractions

Interpretive trail, forest hike, white pines, hemlock groves, tamarack bog, and scenic views of Butternut Lake.

Distance

1.0 miles, loop

Approximate Time

45 minutes

Trail Surface

Hard-packed dirt path, average width: 2 to 3 feet

Rocks & Roots

Occasional, often occurring on inclines and declines

Exertion / Intensity

Very light

Trail Terrain

Mostly flat with a single low ridge

Total Elevation Gain

< 100 feet

Assurance Markers

Yes

Camping

The Franklin Lake Campground (Nicolet National Forest) is located within easy walking distance of the Franklin Nature Trail. There are 77 campsites.

Facilities

Parking area, pit toilets (water available at nearby picnic area & campground)

Trail Management / Ownership

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Eagle River Office
Tel: 715.479.2827

Hours / Season

Open daily, May 1st to November 1st

Trail Access Fee

USDA Forest Service - Forest Pass; daily: \$5, annual: \$20

Pets

Pets are allowed on the trail but must be kept under control on a leash no longer than 8 feet. You must clean up after your pet.

Directions

From the Hwy's 70 & 45 intersection in Eagle River, go east on Hwy 70 for 7.6 miles and turn right (south) onto Military Rd/FR 2178. Go 2.5 miles and turn left (east) onto Butternut Lake Rd/FR 2181. Stay on Butternut Lake Rd/FR 2181 for 4.4 miles to the Nature Trail parking lot which is on the right (south) side of the road.

Nearby Trails and Parks

The scenic, 15 mile-long Hidden Lakes Trail shares the same trailhead as the Franklin Nature Trail, and connects with the Luna-White Deer Campground (Nicolet National Forest).

There are public boat landings for Franklin Lake and Butternut Lake close by.

Trail Notes

The Franklin Nature Trail is a notable trail that features a wonderful variety of scenery over gentle terrain. The trail passes through a lush forest of mixed hardwoods, towering white pines, stands of large hemlocks, scenic views of Butternut Lake, a winding 400' long boardwalk through a tamarack bog, and several historical sites.

The forest understory is home to a wide diversity of plant life. Species include: Bluebead Lilly, Bunchberry, Lilly-of-the-Valley, Starflower, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, and dense patches of ferns. When you walk along the boardwalk through the tamarack bog, you'll often find yourself surrounded by a dense carpet of spongy, sphagnum moss beneath scattered tamarack trees. Other plants in the acidic swamp include: Leatherleaf, Bog Laurel, Bog Rosemary, Pitcher Plant, and Rosemary Tea.

This area has a rich cultural history. Indians have camped, hunted, and fished here periodically since about 8,000 BC. Archeologists have found evidence of these ancient inhabitants at several sites around Butternut Lake.

The Franklin Nature Trail is an interpretive trail. There is a free 16-page booklet at the trailhead information-kiosk that gives a narrative of 21 numbered "stations" located along the trail. The booklet provides excellent descriptions of the surrounding habitat and of the cultural history of the area. Overall, this is a

short, fun, relaxing hike suitable for almost everyone.

The gorgeous Franklin Lake Campground (Nicolet National Forest) sits next to the Franklin Nature Trail and features 77 campsites beneath tall hemlocks and pines, a picnic area and swimming beach on Franklin Lake, and boat launches for Franklin and Butternut Lakes.

The upper branches of the tall white pines provide nesting sites for **bold eagles**. Even though there may not be eagles present during your visit, please avoid talking loudly as the eagles are occasionally spooked by human voices.

The Franklin Nature Trail

The trail begins over a 4 foot wide crushed gravel surface that gradually becomes hard-packed dirt covered with pine needles. The trail passes through a beautiful hemlock forest.

Franklin-Butternut Creek

You'll soon pass over a short wooden footbridge that crosses over Franklin-Butternut Creek. A small sign states that this was a man-made creek that was dug in the 1800's and connects Butternut and Franklin Lakes. The creek may be dry.

The trail runs alongside the creek until reaching Butternut Lake where the path bends north to follow along the shoreline.

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The trail soon crosses over a second wooden footbridge.

Butternut Lake

Shortly after the second footbridge, you'll come upon station #9 where wooden steps lead down a short slope to a boardwalk that ends in a small viewing platform/pier. The pier offers scenic views of beautiful Butternut Lake.

Station #10

Station #10 immediately follows #9, and is located on a small rise with a bench beneath a grove of tall hemlocks. You can see Butternut Lake through the foliage. You're likely to see plenty of red squirrels.

Continuing on, the trail bends away from the lake and passes through an area of deadfall. Huge downed tree-trunks crisscross the forest floor. Soon, the trail crosses a narrow road (Nature Trail Lane).

Hemlock Grove

The understory thins out as giant hemlocks take over. A high dense canopy spreads out overhead blocking much of the daylight.

Junction with Hidden Lakes Trail

The Hidden Lakes Trail (Nicolet National Forest Trail) is a gorgeous 15 mile-long loop that runs through a lush northern forest and passes several scenic lakes. There is camping along the trail. The Hidden Lakes Trail ends at the Franklin Lake Campground.

Boardwalk, Tamarack Bog

A 400 foot-long wooden boardwalk winds through a beautiful tamarack bog. A dense carpet of sphagnum moss spreads out from either side of the boardwalk. Other plants in the acidic swamp include: Leatherleaf, Bog Laurel, Bog Rosemary, Pitcher Plant, and Rosemary Tea.

After the boardwalk, the trail runs through maple and birch forest. A short spur leads to the Franklin Lake Campground.

Ridge

After crossing the Main Campground Road for the second time, there's a short steep climb to the top of a low ridge. This is the most strenuous climb of the trail. There's a bench at the top to rest. Rocks and roots are frequent along the ridge so watch your footing. The trail follows the narrow spine of the ridge with steep slopes falling away on both sides.

Mystery Building

A stone building on the ridge is station #21, the "Mystery Building". Read the Franklin Nature Trail interpretive guide for a brief description and history.

Parking Lot

The trail soon ends at the parking lot, on the opposite side from the trailhead.

Driving Directions (Google Maps)



**Franklin Nature Trail
Parking Lot**