

The Princeton—Rocky Hill —Mount Rose Ridge

The 103 acre campus of Princeton Day School perches on the side of a rocky ridge that runs east to west from Rocky Hill through Princeton and Mount Rose to the Sourland Mountain. If you travel south and east from this ridge, the land quickly becomes flat and stays flat all the way to the ocean. If you travel north and west, the land folds into taller and taller ridges, from Princeton Ridge to Sourland Mountain to the Appalachian chain that runs through the Delaware Water Gap and the Poconos.

The Fall Line

Why this abrupt change? Right here, along this ridge, the land changes from the coastal plain to the piedmont (a French word that literally means “foot mountain”; in English, we call the rolling hills that lead toward mountains the “foot hills”). In a way, it’s as if everything east and south of us were part of the beach, and everything west and north of us were part of the mountains. The dividing line, right here on Princeton Ridge, is called the “Fall Line.” The land falls away and becomes flat. Fresh water rivers tumble over the last set of waterfalls and become salty, tidal estuaries. The Delaware River is a fresh water river north of Trenton, but once it tumbles over the Trenton Falls, it becomes brackish and tidal.

The Fall Line in Human History

Draw a line from New York City southwest through Princeton, Trenton, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and keep going down through Richmond, Virginia, and the Carolinas. You are tracing the Fall Line, and of course you are also tracing Route 95, which in turn followed Route 1, the “Old Post Road” that connected the first major cities built by Europeans when they began to settle the North American continent. The Fall Line was the farthest point inland that ocean-going ships could reach, and the waterfalls that stopped them were the last places



where rivers heading toward the coast generated enough power to drive mills and factories in the early days of industry. So it’s no accident that our oldest towns and cities grew along this corridor.

The Fall Line in Natural History

Just as the human history of this area is shaped by the transition from coastal plain to piedmont, so is the natural history—the way plants and animals live here. If you travel south and east of Princeton, before long you enter the “Pine Barrens,” where the sandy soil supports only a limited range of plants, most prominently the pitch pines that give the barrens their name. By contrast, the well-drained soils here on Princeton Ridge and further west on Sourland Mountain support a rich variety of trees and shrubs, which in turn provide a home for an amazing variety of animals.

Songbirds Everywhere

In particular, the woods along this ridge provide a critical “rest stop” for birds migrating along the East Coast Flyway each spring. The berries and seeds they encounter in these woods enable them to refuel their fires after a long, grueling flight across the Delaware Bay and the Pine Barrens. In late May, you will find the newly-leafed canopy above the PDS Walking Trail alive with warblers, tanagers, and other songbirds, some of whom will continue their journey northward and some of whom will nest here. One of the best birding spots is the section of the trail that passes between Pretty Brook Farmhouse and the Orchard and loops around through the meadow on the other side of the farmhouse.

Pretty Brook Farm

Pretty Brook Farm was the home of Dean Mathey, long-time trustee of Princeton University and early benefactor of Princeton Day School. Dean Mathey lived at Pretty Brook Farm from 1927 until his death in 1972. Starting in 1927, with the help of his Princeton classmate, architect Arthur Holden, and landscape architect Ferruccio Vitale, Mathey transformed a pre-Revolutionary War farmhouse into the estate that still stands today. Between 1965, when Princeton Day School accepted its first students, and his death in 1972, Dean Mathey gave the school pieces of the original 140-acre estate and upon his death bequeathed the rest of the farm and farmhouse. Images of Pretty Brook Farmhouse as it appeared soon after its renovation can be found at American History Online: http://www.americanhistoryonline.org/search?facet=decade&facet_browse=Princeton%2C+NJ&facet_tag=city_state_facet&new_search=1

The Farm Today

As you walk the PDS Trails, you will find abundant evidence of the ways in which the school honors and sustains Dean Mathey’s love and stewardship of the living land. One example is the PDS Garden. The most prominent and vital emblem of the school’s commitment to sustainability, the garden provides an opportunity for students to sow and reap the fruits of sustainable living, by composting waste from the school cafeteria and helping to plant, care for, and harvest a rich variety of vegetables, fruits and ornamental plants. In the orchard that is the front yard of the farmhouse, you will find, interspersed among the old apple trees younger fruit trees planted a few years ago by a group of teachers and trustees – as if to say that a healthy education, like a healthy farm is self sustaining. Though the farm fields are gone, you can still feel the history of the place in the graceful lawns and meadows that surround the farmhouse, framed by woods and hedgerows where the cultivated meets the wild in a dance of daffodils and birdsong.

—David H. LaMotte
Upper School English Department Chair



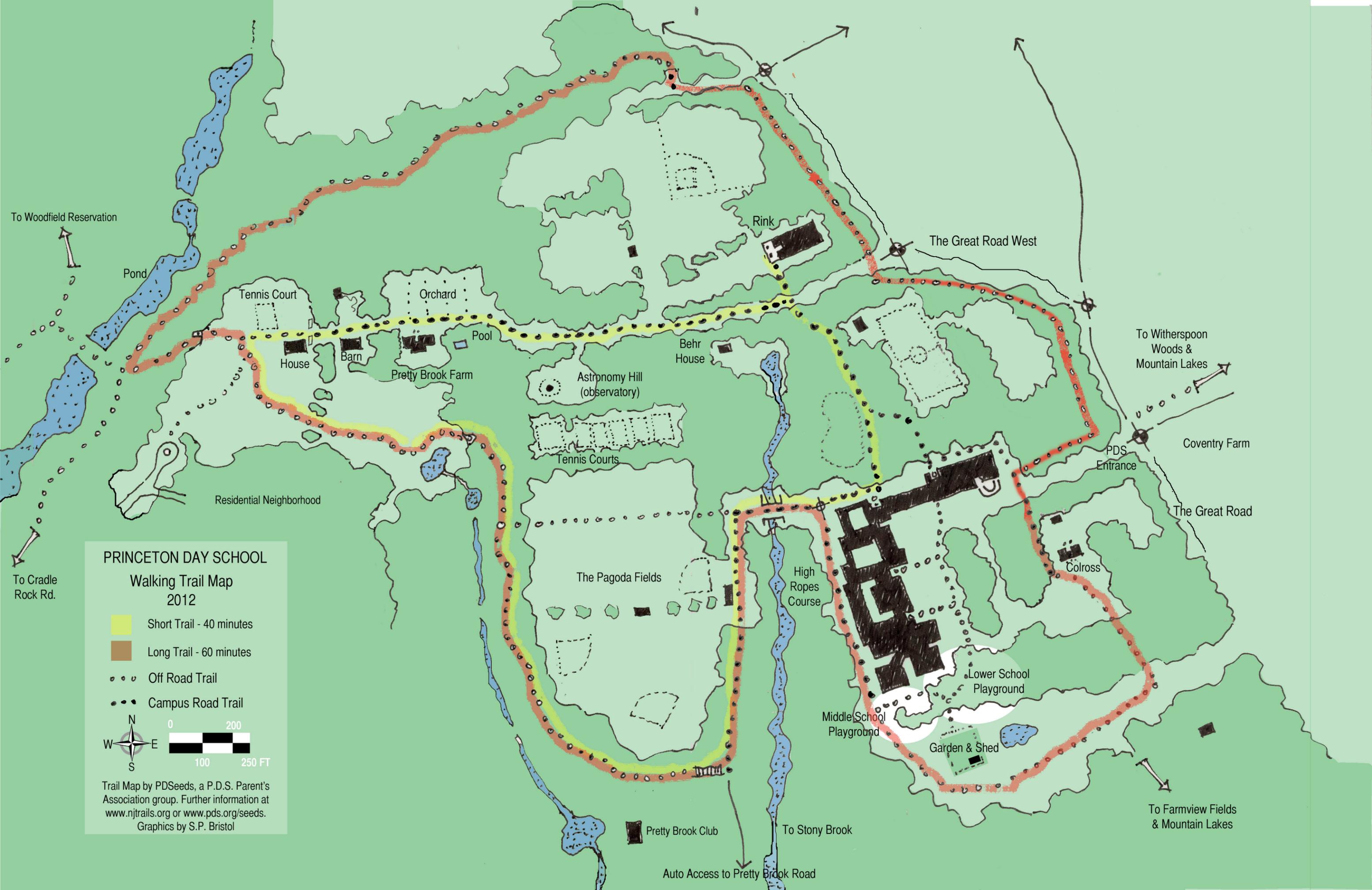
A Walker’s Guide to the Princeton Day School Nature Trails

Follow the Panther Prints! 

Map Design Courtesy of
Princeton Day School Parent,
Susan Bristol

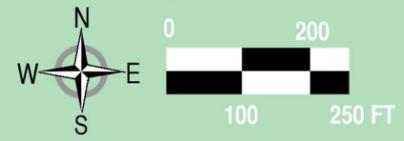
2012





PRINCETON DAY SCHOOL
Walking Trail Map
2012

- Short Trail - 40 minutes
- Long Trail - 60 minutes
- Off Road Trail
- Campus Road Trail



Trail Map by PDSeeds, a P.D.S. Parent's Association group. Further information at www.njtrails.org or www.pds.org/seeds.
 Graphics by S.P. Bristol

To Woodfield Reservation

To Cradle Rock Rd.

The Great Road West

To Witherspoon Woods & Mountain Lakes

Coventry Farm

The Great Road

To Farmview Fields & Mountain Lakes

Rink

Tennis Court

Orchard

Pool

Behr House

Pretty Brook Farm

Astronomy Hill (observatory)

Tennis Courts

Residential Neighborhood

The Pagoda Fields

High Ropes Course

Colross

Lower School Playground

Middle School Playground

Garden & Shed

Pretty Brook Club

To Stony Brook

Auto Access to Pretty Brook Road

PDS Entrance