

GAY FRIENDLY/NATURIST SWIMMING HOLES OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS, VERMONT AND NEW YORK

massachusetts

CUMMINGTON RIVER

Nestled in the Berkshire Hills in the town of Cummington, about 20 minutes west of Northampton, is a swimming hole that has been a nudist and gay men's haven for as long as anyone can remember. Granted, people will joke about the name (see if you can guess) and, yeah, the joke is not completely inaccurate, but what happens at Cummington ...

Anyway, the area is on the east branch of the Westfield River, and it's all on state-owned land. It's a good little walk, since you have to hike about a half-mile of road, and a half-mile of path in the woods, but if you are adventurous, you shouldn't have a problem. You can always stop into Pride & Joy in downtown Northampton and see Mark to ask how to get there.

Directions: Travel west on Route 9 out of Northampton. Go through the towns of Williamsburg and Goshen. After you pass the sign that says "Entering Cummington," travel about 1 mile and you'll see a large parking area on the left that you can no longer use (which sucks), since they don't allow cars to be left unattended. *Don't think you are clever and park here anyway*, because you will return after a pleasant day with the guys to find an unpleasant empty space where your car once happily resided, before it was towed away ... But do keep this area in mind because you'll be traveling almost all the way back down here to cross the river once you park. Anyway, travel about another 1/2 mile to a smaller parking area on the left, which fits about 15 cars. (Again, do not let your car stick out into the road/shoulder area at all.) If this lot is full, then you must have done something really bad in a past life. So now you'll have to travel another mile or so further on, to another mid-sized parking area on the left. (For this reason, it's always a good idea to bring a bike with you in case you need to park in this further parking area.)

Finding the trail: Walk (or bike) *almost* all the way back down to the FIRST parking area (the one you can't park at). With the river on your right, you will see a house with an open yard on the left, across the street. This is the only house within sight. Keep walking, with the house to your left, until you see the guardrail begin near the end of their property. At this point—on your right—you will see a diamond-shaped road sign. This is where you go down the embankment to your right and cross the river. *[NOTE: after rains, the water was very high recently. Never try to cross if the water is swift, or above your waist. Use good judgment.]* Once across, go directly up the hill into the woods and—after about 15–20 feet up—you will see a path. Take the path to the left, following along above the river. Soon you will see a rock wall. Turn right (uphill) at the

stone wall and take that path all the way, straight up over the hill (through an intersecting stone wall) and down again, until you see the river before you. You will come out on a left-right path, with a fallen tree to your right. You are now in Cummington's hangin' out area. At this point, you can (a) go left and follow the trail until you see the main beach on the right. This is the nicest area for swimming and where a lot of the guys go. Or (b) you can continue "straight" to the river (a small path goes down through the river-growth) and cross the river *once more*. Follow the trail on the other side to the right (down stream) and—just beyond the area that looks like a firepit campsite—you will see a lot of rocks along the water to your right. (That's because this area is, well, extremely rocky.) Follow along down the river, just a little, and you will see where all the other guys are. There are lots of little pockets here to lay down your towel, where you can lay out, and maybe have a little privacy. This is, arguably, also the cruisiest part of the river.

SPECIAL NOTE: By mid-summer, the algae builds up on the river-rocks. And, even though they still look like regular brownish-gray rocks under the water, they are actually extremely slippery! I know this sounds like a message from the Department of Let's Warn You About Everything, but—no lie—I have already had two hard falls this year. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:** find yourself a nice walking stick, or—like my friend Greg does—an old ski pole is great.

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ROCK RIVER

Rock River, is Vermont's most popular place for gay nude swimming and sunbathing. It's known for being very cruisey. Running into people having sex in the woods is not uncommon, so if this is not your scene, just stay near the water and socialize. Speaking of which, it's known to have a good social atmosphere and everyone seems to look after each other. A popular activity is taking the rocks and building beautiful cairn structures. It's between Brattleboro and Newfane, VT, and has several natural pools.

A Brief Guide to the Pools: The first pool you reach is the largest (and the most enviable), but this is the straight area, and there will either be families picnicking or clothed teens (guys and girls) hanging out. Keep going. As you walk further upstream, you'll see to a second beach (across the river), which looks quite nice but is little-used. This is the "traditional" nudist area, which means men or women, ex-hippies, or whatever: people who just want to be outdoors naked in a boring commune-with-nature way. (Even though it is a nice spot, I have never seen more than three people here at once. Usually there's this one slumped nudist woman who looks like she forgot to bring a book.) *Keep going.* After a while the path will turn very sharply uphill to the left. At this point, if you turned right, to the river, this is the third beach. Finally, a gay one! A little rocky, this spot is for the more peaceful, just-want-to-relax gay guys. This spot is all nude and for the most part all guys/all gay. But if you want to go where most of the guys are, you continue further on. Climb up the hill to the left (there is a root system for handholds, and there is usually a rope, but I heard recently that someone is building stairs!) 15-20 feet up, the level path continues to the right. Follow this a short way, and the path goes back *down* the embankment. Follow the path further on still. The river will now be only about 10 feet below you on the right. When you start to see a sandy beach on the other side of the river, with quite a few guys, this is where you should cross. (First-timers often make the mistake of going too far down the path—at which point you can see a LOT of guys across the river—but it is very hard to cross here. I've seen many a guy with his full backpack go into the water. You can always ask about the best spot to cross; the guys are friendly.)

Directions: From Brattleboro, take State Route 30 north. After 7 or 8 miles, when you see the turnoff for Maple Valley Ski Area, continue north on SR-30 for another 1.5 miles, until you reach the Williamsville Road turnoff on the left. The turnoff is just before a large bridge over Rock River. Pull over and park on the east side of SR-30 just before the bridge. Cross to the west side of SR-30, then walk up Williamsville Road a short distance until you see the first spur trail on the right that heads toward the river (it looks like someone's driveway). Take this road to the river, past a few cottages, then hike upstream about a mile. See "*A Guide to the Pools*" above to know where to hang out.

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THE LEDGES

On Harriman Reservoir there are 2 established beach swimming places, but also a place called "The Ledges". This is a well-known, traditional clothing-optional place. A large sandy beach and big, flat rocks for sunbathing at the water's edge (size of beach may be diminished when water level in reservoir is high.) Some rocks to jump from. Please respect the place, no noise, gawking or littering. Most of the crowd is male, but the area is also popular with straight folks. Summer weekends draw over 100 nude bathers.

Directions: From Brattleboro, take RT 9 W. Before you get to Wilmington, go S on RT 100 to the Harriman Reservoir. Go 1.2 miles (past Dix Rd on the left) to an unsigned dirt road on the right. Go down this dirt road for about a mile to the parking area for the Jacksonville Picnic Area (it may say NEPCO Picnic Area). Note that there is swimming at the picnic area also for clothed bathers. Follow the trail to the right of the picnic area into the woods. When you see nude bathers, you are there. There are several rocky areas to swim from along this path. The gay area is beyond the central area where most straight skinny-dippers gather.

WOODBURY QUARRY

Woodbury Quarry, in Woodbury, VT, north of Montpelier and Barre, is an abandoned quarry. This is a great swimming hole deep in the woods. As most quarries, one side is a sheer rock wall. Before you dive in, you may want to check its depth to be safe. Nudity is a tradition here, and you'll normally find a few gay swimmers and sunbathers.

Directions: From Montpelier, head east on US Highway 2 about 5 miles to the junction with State Route 14 in East Montpelier. Turn left onto SR-14 and head north about 13 miles to the village of Woodbury. Once you see a white church (Woodbury Methodist) on the left side, turn right onto Cabot Road. Proceed 0.7 mile, then turn left onto a dirt road. Continue along this road (staying right at the fork) about 0.75 mile until the road turns sharply to the right (leading to a working quarry). At this point continue straight ahead another 0.6 mile. The road get rougher. Park and go a short distance through the woods to the quarry.

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BREWSTER RIVER GORGE

PLEASE NOTE: A reader indicated that this is now closed. The area is all fenced off and posted now. BUT a subsequent reader indicated that it never closed "... you just have to cross the stream to a path on other side ... closer to parking area ... must walk uphill ... 15-20 minute trek ... very easy."

Here is a very fun swimming and jumping place in the Brewster River. Is the water really warmer here or does it just seem so because you hate to leave? The trails have been known to be cruisey. When you first get out of the car and start walking, the first set of pools is used by clothed bathers. It's not until you cross the river do you run into nude swimmers. The main pool is surprisingly deep. Nudity is common in several places. Crowds are small and significantly gay.

Directions: From Johnson, go west on RT 15 to Jeffersonville then south on RT 108. Take RT 108 about .5 miles south and turn east (left) before the mill, then turn right before you cross the unused covered bridge. Park in the parking area. The trail begins at the far end of the parking area and goes along the Brewster River then crosses the (usually shallow) river (be careful crossing if the river is deep and/or the current is strong). Just beyond this crossing, you'll see the gorge and falls. The pool at the bottom of the falls is the swimming hole where most nude users gather. There are also some pools hidden in the rocks above this main pool.

MAD RIVER PUNCH BOWL

The best-known swimming spot near here in the Mad River is the Punch Bowl. There are several popular, excellent swimming holes. It's between Irasville and Warren, southwest of Montpelier. This area is privately owned by people who support the Vermont tradition of skinny-dipping and they happily opened it to the public with some help from local friends. It has a couple of pools of differing depths and a short chute which can be slid down if water level permits. Swimsuits are considered to be in poor taste here (very optional!). It has a couple of pools of differing depths and a short chute which can be slid down if water level permits. Both gay and straight visitors frequent this popular and very scenic swimming hole.

Directions: It's off the west side of Route 100, in the town of Warren just south of the Waitsfield line and less than a mile north of the turnoff for the Sugarbush ski area. Look for a field with a gray, wooden fence at the back about 100 yards from the road and a large, dirt parking lot. The swimming area is behind the fence; a picnic area can be found here too, but no bathrooms.

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CLARENDON GORGE

High cliffs and a deep pool with a rope swing. Popular local swimming hole, lots of parties, resulting in some litter. Clothed swimmers are closer to US-7, but nude use is customary as you go farther upstream along the river. If you come to a high suspension footbridge that spans the river, you've reached the end of the traditional nude area. This is also where the Appalachian Trail and Long Trail crosses the gorge. You'll just might see some hot thru-hikers skinny-dipping here. Nude use is well established, and the area is very popular with gay men.

Directions: From Rutland, take RT 7 south. After passing the intersection for RT 103 (Rutland Airport), take your next left onto RT 7B. The road immediately forks here; left is RT 7B, straight is River Road. The parking area will be on the right near the large concrete blocks. This section of the river is clothing customary; many families will be found here in the river on a hot summer day in sight of the northbound RT 7 travelers. Park, walk down to the river, and explore the area upstream where you will find other gay men.

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MOHONK PRESERVE

Mohonk Preserve in near New Paltz, in the northern Shawangunk Mountains. There are signs posted along Coxing Kill Creek that inform folks of nude use. There are several pools for skinny-dipping and rock areas for sunbathing. A small number of bathers are in the nude area, that includes some gay men. This area is very popular on those hot, hazy, and humid summer weekends. Officials are quite vocal about not cruising and having sex in the woods. This is not the place to test this out. Parking at the Coxing lot fills up quickly on summer weekends. If the lot is full, try returning to the Trapps lot (mentioned in the directions below). From the Trapps lot, a half-mile walk along the Shongum Path will connect you to the Coxing area.

Directions: From Interstate 87 in the Poughkeepsie area, take Exit 18 and head west on StateRoute 299. Continue about 7 miles through the town of New Paltz all the way to the end of the route at the junction with US Highway 44. Turn right on US-44. The highway will head north and then turn westward. Stay on US-44 about 3 miles to Trapps Bridge where you'll see a turnoff. After you go under the Trapps Bridge, you will reach the Trapps parking area on the right. Turn right onto the next road. After about 0.25 mile, bear right at the fork. You are now headed north on Clove Road. Count the bridges. After the third bridge, turn right into the Coxing parking area. You'll have to pay a day-use fee here (\$5 per person on weekdays; \$7on weekends). Near the parking lot, there is a bridge over Coxing Kill Creek at Split Rock swimming hole (where swimsuits are required). Cross the creek and turn left. Hike downstream about 5-10 minutes. Look for a sign posted on a tree that says "Beyond this point you may encounter nudity." Obvious, right?