

Breaking Into the Woods: Trails for summer exploration

For *Motif's* new environmental podcast, *Earth, Wind and Water: We Will Be Ancestors*, **Sam Zimmer** sat down with **Mel Thibeault**, founder of RI Queer Hikes to talk about hiking around the Ocean State. Here's an excerpt with advice for the beginning or casual hiker. You can follow Thibeault at @ri.queer.hikes and catch the podcast at *motifri.com*.

Sam Zimmer (Motif): So say you've never been hiking before. What would you bring aside from a map or some information on your phone?

Mel Thibeau (Queer Hikes): Yes, map and phone. Definitely bring water. Bring a granola bar: You might get snacky. I get snacky. I have never used it, but it makes me comfortable if I go hiking alone to have a whistle. I have a little first aid kit, which I have needed when I took a tumble one time and scraped up my knee. Bring sunscreen. And in season, protect yourself from ticks and mosquitoes because they are terrible. The last hike we went on, I found four ticks on myself, and I gotta get that out.

SZ: Tick check is part of the deal, right? They flick right off.

MT: They do.

SZ: Do you know the trick about, if you have a tick, what to do? You know that they breathe through their butts? If you get a tick, but it's in there, to get it out, you just take some sunscreen or something and you cover its butt, which is exposed. That's where it's breathing. So it won't be able to breathe and it'll actually back out of your body. And then you can just pick it up, put it in a bag and get that tested to make sure that you don't have Lyme disease, or whatever else.

MT: It's important: All of the trails have "check for ticks" signs. Deep summer it definitely gets buggy.

SZ: Of all the places you've been in RI and the surrounding area, what would you say are three of your favorite hiking spots?

MT: Definitely. I know I mentioned [earlier in the podcast] Wolf Hill in Smithfield. That's the first hike we went on, but that's definitely a favorite. It's a good woodsy hike. There's a trail - I think it's the green trail - it's more elevated. So you're getting more of an incline than just a flat nature hike. That's also the trail I smashed my knee on, so just be safe out there. And there's also a waterfall. It's a small RI waterfall, but it's a cute little feature. It's on the path, but it's sort of off to the side so it's a fun little adventure. And there's an overlook so you can see the PVD skyline from there. There's a lot of variety and it's definitely a fun hike.

One that's a little bit more remote, but very pretty, is Long Pond in Hopkinton. So all of you PVD folks who want to take a drive, it's not that far. You can climb some rocks if you want at one point - there's a bit of a scramble. There's a beautiful pond and it's another fun, woodsy hike.

And then getting out of RI but not that far, Dartmouth, MA has a lot of beautiful hikes. One of my

favorites is called the Frank Knowles/Little River Reserve which has these boardwalks through this marshy area that I just keep going back to. It's fun to see it in different seasons. It's something different, with a little variety. I would say they're all good for beginners. So get out there!

The podcast is typically 30-40 minutes of deep dive into a given topic with local experts, and can be found at motifri.com or on most major platforms. It's sponsored by R1 Entertainment Center, Grey Sail Brewery and Trinity Beer Garden.