



## Become a NorWALKer!

### EXPLORE HISTORIC SILVERMINE

Appreciate the artistry and history of this quaint neighborhood that dates back to the 1600s.

#### Loop 1

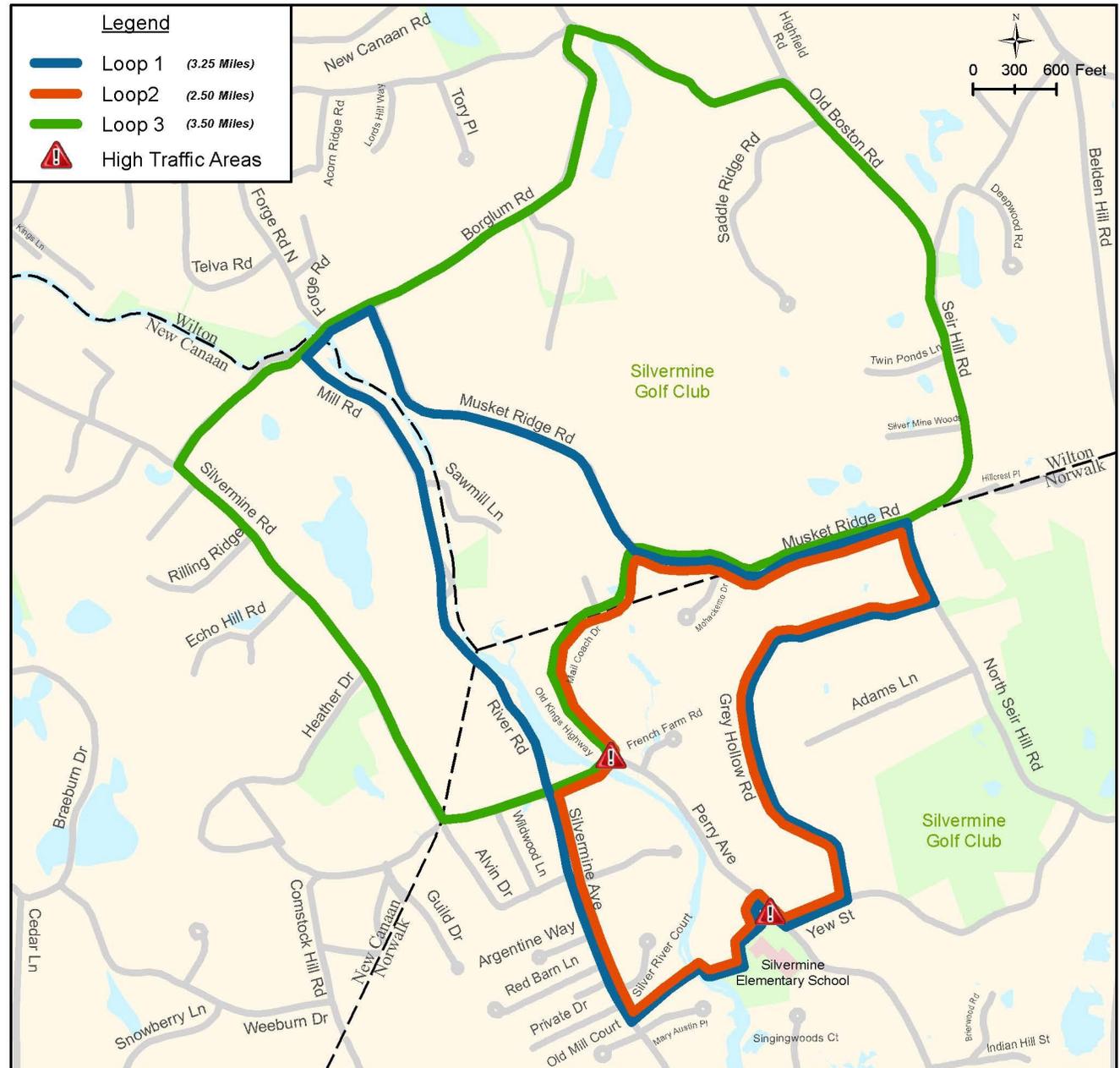
Start at Silvermine School's parking lot on Perry Ave. Cross softball field to the walking bridge (near dirt infield). Follow the path to Silvermine Ave. and turn right onto the sidewalk. Continue straight past the Inn at Gray Barn, where Silvermine Ave. turns into River Rd. River Rd. becomes Mill Rd. Turn right on Borglum Rd. Cross bridge and continue up the hill. Turn right onto Musket Ridge Rd. Continue on Musket Ridge and turn right on N Seir Hill Rd. Take a right onto Grey Hollow Rd. and follow until you reach Perry Ave. and return to Silvermine School.

#### Loop 2

Start at Silvermine School. Turn right on Perry Ave. and a quick left on Yew St. Turn left on Grey Hollow Rd. and follow to the end. Turn left on North Seir Hill Rd. then left on Musket Ridge Rd. Turn left on Mail Coach Dr., which turns into Old Kings Hwy. Turn right on Perry Ave., crossing over the one-lane bridge. Turn left on Silvermine Ave. Walk down Silvermine Avenue, and take a left to enter the footpath just past Silver River Court (but before Mary Austin Pl). This footpath leads to Silvermine School's field/playground. Walk up the hill to the parking lot, and back to the front of the school.

#### Loop 3

Begin at the Inn at Gray Barn on Perry Ave., with your back facing the building. Turn right onto Silvermine Ave., then right onto Silvermine Rd. Turn right on Mill Rd., which becomes Borglum Rd. Turn right on Old Boston Rd. At the intersection of Old Boston Rd. and Highfield Rd, turn right to stay on Old Boston Rd. Bear right at fork onto Sier Hill Rd., continuing straight onto Musket Ridge Rd. Turn left on Mail Coach Dr., then right on Perry Ave. Return to the Inn at Gray Barn.



### PROCEED WITH CAUTION WHEN FOLLOWING NORWALKER ROUTES!

The *Healthy for Life Project* is not responsible for any injuries or accidents that may occur while following NorWALKer routes. Consult your doctor before beginning an exercise program. Use pedestrian crosswalks when available, obey all traffic laws, and if no sidewalks exist, walk against traffic. Wear proper footwear and reflective gear, and bring water with you while walking. Have fun!

Silvermine, once called Silver Mine, may have been settled by the late 1600s or early 1700s and was populated by such notable Norwalk families as Buttery, Comstock, Hoyt, Gregory, St. John and Bartlett. At the time Silvermine was settled, the parishes of Wilton and New Canaan were part of the town of Norwalk.

Legend has it that the silver mine lies in close proximity to Silvermine Brook on the east side of Comstock Hill Road near its intersection with Silvermine Avenue. In the triangle of Norwalk land between Silvermine and River Road are eight houses marked in an early map as being “ancient” (meaning 18th century) and still standing. Many of these are plaqued today as being early 19th century, though they are probably earlier. Where Silvermine Avenue intersects with Perry Avenue, there are more houses from the period 1800-1900.

### MILL HISTORY

Even before the Revolution, it was the river and the timber growing tall around it that brought settlers to Silvermine. A dam was made on the Silvermine River in 1709 near the site of the second Buttery Sawmill (1741). The first dated from 1688 and was a quarter mile farther north.

English-born Henry Guthrie owned a shipyard and three mills clustered around the Silvermine Tavern, now known as the Inn at Gray Barn (194 Perry Avenue). Outside of the Silvermine mills was another mill, which is now a lovely residence, on Davis Pond on James Street. The miller’s house, also still standing, was built in 1748. The miller, who often returned home after a day’s work covered with flour, was known to the neighborhood as the “ghost of James Street.”

In the 1860’s, there were “sixteen busy shops” along the Norwalk River. By 1923, the number had dwindled to four or five. By 1912, all the mills in Silvermine, except for the Buttery Sawmill, had closed. The Buttery Sawmill continued to operate until 1955 when it was undermined by the “hundred year flood”.

The slow demise of the mills and the subsequent poverty of the area preserved Silvermine and it was the beauty of that 19th century landscape, and its affordability, that attracted artists.

They, in turn, restored the old mills to residences and artists’ studios.

### THE ARTISTS’ COLONY—EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The nucleus of the Artist’s Colony was formed around Solon

Borglum, sculptor; Richard B. Gruelle, landscape artist; his son, Johnny Gruelle; Addison Millar and Carl Schmitt, both of whom were painters from Warren, Ohio and George Avison, a writer, illustrator and landscape painter.

Their friend, Clifton Meek, who had been a cartoonist, bought an anvil for fifty cents at auction and went on to found the Old Forge, establishing a parallel profession as a metal crafter. His observations mirror those of the other Silvermine artists and artisans in that the landscape reflected an almost forgotten, deeply New England way of life. “I shall always be grateful for a kind destiny that directed us to this peaceful haven with its rolling, haze-shrouded hills, its ever murmuring stream and silent millponds...”

Austin’s Mill closed by 1912 and his home was sold to illustrator and cartoonist, John Cassell. The Blanchard Fur Factory was used as a studio by Richard Gruelle and his son, Justin, and also as temporary living quarters for Johnny Gruelle (who wrote Raggedy Ann) and his family until the latter could build a house at the upper end of the millpond. The painter, Bernard Gutmann, built a large white house on the hill by the Borglum Bridge, which crosses Blanchard millpond, which later was the home of the writer Vance Packard. Carl Schmitt lived on the opposite bank of the river and Solon Borglum a little farther down the road. All of these homes are in the Wilton section of Silvermine today.

A separate building (by the Inn at Gray Barn) on the property of the Red Mill, standing between the mill proper and the bridge, was moved and converted into a home for the artist Frank Hutchins. Before that happened, it was used for many years as the Village Room, the scene of parties, dances, home talent plays and social gatherings of one kind or another. Across from the Tavern was a blacksmith shop. It became a dance hall on Saturday nights and an Episcopal church on Sundays.

There were stores along Silvermine Avenue: Frank Buttery’s Country Department Store; Hyatt Gregory’s store (the “Pink House”—which is now yellow) selling meats, groceries, homemade root beer, and stronger beverages in the cellar; a barber shop and Mrs. Lowden’s combined Post Office and grocery, which was blown up one 4th of July by a powder keg kept for shooting off the celebratory cannon.

Only Guthrie’s business still remains a shop (the Silvermine Market). The rest became houses or were carted away. As the century progressed, the original Art Colony went on to found the Silvermine Guild and the fine artists became different

kinds of artists, like John Vassos (graphic designer), Armstrong Sperry (illustrator), Lily Pons (opera singer), and Evan Hunter (writer).

The Theatre in the Woods became an attraction in the 1930’s and drew up to 2,000 people to the terraced amphitheater on Belden Hill from as far away as Buffalo, New York.

As you walk and enjoy the lovely hilly, curved country roads, please be aware of the traffic. While residents love to walk and enjoy Silvermine at a leisurely pace, many drivers don’t appreciate that country roads are not meant to be speedways. There are few sidewalks in Silvermine, in keeping with the rural character of this beautiful neighborhood, so please pay attention to traffic. Please enjoy the flora and fauna, the many antique homes and ancient stone walls, streams, ponds and waterfalls. This is Silvermine. Welcome!

*Narrative by Anne Carbone, Leigh Grant & NASH 2004  
Edited by Kaitlin Latham, 2016*





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