

RI THINGS TO DO

# Rhode Island's newest treasure: A trail of giant trolls

Three more of Danish recycling artist Thomas Dambo's gigantic troll sculptures, made from reclaimed materials, have been unveiled in the Ocean State

By **Edward Fitzpatrick** Globe Staff, Updated August 25, 2025, 6:00 a.m.



A giant troll takes shape in the woods of the Arcadia Management Area in Hope Valley, R.I. Three wooden trolls are being built to complete a Rhode Island Troll Trail. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF



**E**XETER, R.I. — An estimated 5 million people a year come to see the 159 giant troll sculptures Danish recycling artist [Thomas Dambo](#) has built throughout the world using recycled wood.

Dambo figures that must be comparable to the number of people who fill stadiums to see the New York Knicks games or [Taylor Swift concerts](#). “But my show and my stadium are built from trash, and the audience built it,” he told The Boston Globe on Friday.

On Sunday, Dambo unveiled his three newest trolls in Rhode Island:

“Young Boulder,” sitting on a boulder overlooking Browning Mill Pond in the state’s Arcadia Management Area, on the Exeter/Hopkinton line.

“Iver Mudslider,” riding a mud worm (actually a berm) in Ryan Park in North Kingstown.

“Mrs. Skipper,” hunkered down beneath a 28-foot lifeboat near the Spooky Bottom Dock off the East Bay Bike Path in East Providence.

They join the two trolls that he built in [Charlestown’s Ninigret Park](#) last year, creating a Rhode Island Troll Trail, and giving this little state a big troll presence.

And they will be added to the worldwide collection found on Dambo’s [TrollMap](#), which shows trolls as far away as China, South Korea, and Australia, and as close as Vermont and [Maine](#).

Dambo uses recycled and reclaimed wood, plus found objects, to create the trolls.

“I think it’s beautiful and important for us to try to reuse and recycle the resources we have in the best way,” Dambo said. “A lot of our problems come from us humans being too wasteful. We are filling our houses, our gardens, our oceans, our rivers, and our landfills with all different types of trash.”



A volunteer screws a oak stave from a recycled whiskey barrel into place. The staves are resistant to insects and rot. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF





Volunteer Kim Maschin, of Johnston, R.I., works on making earrings for the finished troll. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Dambo said he has heard that Rhode Island's highest point is the Central Landfill. Actually, the highest point is 812-foot-high [Jerimoth Hill](#), in Foster. But his point is that humans are building mountains of trash when they should be finding new uses for what they have instead.

"The biggest problem is we are drowning in trash," Dambo said. "But everyone knows that one man's trash is another man's treasure."

He said he bought the lifeboat for the East Providence troll for \$500 on Facebook Marketplace. "It shows we can make a big beautiful thing to bring out millions people with just a \$500 scrap metal lifeboat," he said.

Dambo said just about everything people buy nowadays ends up as trash, and people are buying more than ever. "We have to remember we live for such a short time, unlike trolls,

which live for 100,000 to 200,000 years,” he said. “They can see the impact humans have on the world.”

Dambo said all the trolls are part of an overarching fairytale that he is creating, and the original concept called for creating six trolls in Rhode Island that are part of a chapter about a “[thunderstone](#).” He said he hopes to return next year to write the final part of that chapter.

He said “Little Boulder” is sitting on a rock, holding a staff with a bird house at the end. He said birds help trolls see by scouting the area and bringing back information.

Rennie Simmons, a volunteer from North Smithfield, R.I., chars oak staves from recycled whiskey barrels. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

On Thursday, the whirr and buzz of drills and saws filled the woods around Browning Mill Pond as volunteers cobbled together “Young Boulder.”

Julian Lynch, a master troll builder, explained that he was using curved slabs from oak whiskey barrels to fashion the troll’s beard. He said Dambo often highlights things that people take for granted — such as the abundance of stones in Rhode Island.

“Thomas was very inspired by the stones,” he said. “In Denmark, there’s not very many rocks. There’s no bedrock. It’s just a sand island.”

Lynch said the trolls help draw people out at a time when many are becoming more isolated.

“The world’s becoming more and more digital, and the trolls are an analog way to get into nature and meet people and community,” he said. “That’s why we involve volunteers on everything we do. We want to build the community around the trolls — bring people together and get them off of their screens and into the forest.”

In Rhode Island, more than 240 volunteers helped build the three new trolls, he said, explaining that each troll had eight volunteers a day for 10 consecutive days.



Meg Lettieri, of Hebron, Conn., volunteered to help build “Young Boulder” along with her sister, Rennie Simmons, of North Smithfield.

Lettieri said Thursday was her first official day after retirement from 30 years as a school teacher. “I wanted to do something fun on my first day that everybody else was back at work,” she said. “I’m a big outdoors person. I like to hike. And I love to help people. So this was something fun to do because I don’t really know what my next purpose is.”

Lettieri said trolls will feed people’s sense of adventure.

“They want to go and hike and see something unique, and the fact that it stands for recycling in our environment — I love to preserve environment,” she said. “It shows that you can make something beautiful out of things that aren’t.”

Rhode Island Commerce, the state’s economic development agency, has provided \$515,000 for the five trolls as part of its [Placemaking Initiative](#). That includes \$200,000 for the East Providence troll, \$132,500 for the North Kingstown troll, \$132,500 for the Arcadia troll, and \$50,000 for the Charlestown trolls.

“Master Troll Builder” Julian Dylan Lynch drills on the troll beard. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Members of the Wallace and Schmidt families made the trip on a “Troll Hunt” to watch the construction. BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Rhode Island Commerce spokesman Matthew Touchette said Dambo’s trolls have proven to be popular throughout the world.

“We saw an incredible opportunity to build on the popularity of the trolls in Charlestown to create a troll trail and have them appear throughout the state,” he said. “A lot of people see our size as a negative, but our small size has a lot of benefits, as well. We are able to have people view all these trolls in a day.”

Louise Bishop, president of the South County Tourism Council, said 6,300 people visited Charlestown’s Ninigret Park when the first two trolls were unveiled there last year — four

times more than usual — and 67,000 visited between the May ribbon cutting and July 30 last year. She said a geolocation company reports that visitors came from all over, including Michigan, Ohio, North Carolina, and Canada.

“You have people coming and they see everything else, staying a couple days at hotels, dining, and seeing other sites,” Bishop said. “That is the whole point of this being the Rhode Island Troll Trail — that we share the assets of the state with our visitors.”

North Kingstown recreation director Chelsey Dumas-Gibbs said, “As a recreation director, the drive for me was to put something into nature where families can be excited about going outside and exploring.”

People will be able to hike to the trolls, and she envisions artists finding inspiration from the sculpture, and even doing yoga with a troll.

Dumas-Gibbs noted Dambo weaves stories around each troll, but she also hopes each visitor creates their own story. “I am hoping they can create their own magic with it,” she said.

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