

Trail Partners

Town of Holden The Conservation Commission manages the 675 acre Trout Brook Reservation for conservation and passive recreation. The Recreation Department (508-829-0263) offers programming and schedules use of the lodge, picnic pavilion and rustic camping. The Department of Public Works maintains the facility.

Mass Wildlife Also known as the Mass Division of Fish and Wildlife is the steward of land traversed by the White Oak Trail. Contact them in West Boylston at 508-835-3607 or Westboro 508-792-7270

White Oak Land Trust was founded in 1978 to protect open spaces in Holden and neighboring towns and to share the joy of these open spaces with people of all ages. Projects are not limited to Holden. For more information on land conservation contact whiteoak-trust@hotmail.com or Box 346, Holden MA 01520

The Grant and Dresser families allow the White Oak Trail to cross their lands. Their care for the land and desire to share with their neighbors is a gift to the whole community.

Wachusett Greenways built the White Oak Trail with many volunteers. Founded in 1995, our mission is connecting the community with trails and greenways. To learn about trail clearing and tours contact WG, Box 121, Holden MA 01520 or www.wachusettgreenways.org

Trail Use Guidelines

On all the lands traversed by the Trout Brook-White Oak trails NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES are permitted. Accepted uses include hiking, cross country skiing, mountain biking, horseback riding, nature study, fishing, hunting and dog walking. Mountain bikers please help protect the trails by avoiding riding under very wet conditions. Dog owners please be respectful of other users and keep dog under control and remove droppings for trail aesthetics and to protect our brooks.

Trail Guide

Ida Nystrom, Larry Pistrang, Jim Rassman, Contributors Lindsay Nystrom photos, cover photo by Robert Price Mel Tews, Craig Fitzgerald (MDC), Dominic Golding, Richard Lent, mapping



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White Oak & Trout Brook Trail Guide

In 1859 Henry Thoreau made the following notation in his journal, "There is scarcely a wood of sufficient size and density left now for an owl to haunt in, and if I hear one hoot I may be sure where he is." Yet, after settlers spent more than two hundred years clearing and refiguring the landscape, the tide turned. What was once productive agricultural land reverted to forest. As farmers abandoned their fields, either to move



west to more productive lands or to urban areas where more work was available, pastures became overgrown. Shrubs were gradually replaced by pine forests, which in turn gave way to oaks and other hardwoods. The wild lands we appreciate and enjoy in New England today are the result of one hundred fifty years of forest succession.

Oral tradition has it that a family once operated a brick works in the Trout Brook area. The remnants of the dams of former mill sites are in evidence if you take the time to look. Before acquisition by the town of Holden, much of the area was operated as a day camp. But, forests are dynamic places. All of New England's forests have been greatly affected by human activities. Look at the species of trees – their form and scars give you clues of past activities that took place in their vicinity. You can learn the stories of the land around you by observation. Trees with low branches grew in open fields, while stands of pure pine indicate the area is abandoned pasture. Old sugar maples and oaks mark property lines or long grown over roads. Take the time to listen and learn to hear the stories that are all around you. This woodland, once the site of small farms and

rural industries, is now available for passive recreation and the enjoyment of everyone.

The cycle of land use has come full circle. Today everywhere we turn we see woodlands being

cleared for residential development. These lands, preserved here in a natural state, serve as an oasis. Walk the trails, picnic in the shelters, or fish in the pond. Follow the orienteering course, observe birds and wildlife, or seek out rare plant species. The list of activities you can pursue here is limited only by your imagination. The Trout Brook Reservation is a resource we can all treasure.



The Trout Brook Watershed

Cold, Governor, and Ball Brooks drain much of northern Holden and a substantial portion of Princeton, combining to form Trout Brook. The brook flows southeast through the Trout Brook Reservation and discharges into the Quinapoxet River, which eventually enters the Wachusett Reservoir in Thomas Basin. The Wachusett Reservoir is a primary water supply for 2.5 million people in the metropolitan Boston area, and is one of very few unfiltered surface water sources in the United States. Areas protected from development like the one you are enjoying today are one of the reasons that water quality remains high. The MDC Division of Watershed Management works hard to monitor and protect the water resources that make up the Wachusett watershed. Water quality in Trout Brook and the three feeder tributaries is very good. All four have among the lowest levels of fecal coliform in the watershed, and less than twenty-five percent of samples exceed the standard for Class A water (20 colonies per 100 mL).

White Oak Trail

This trail can be accessed from many points. Almost 4 miles in length, it can be walked in many variations to make a shorter or longer hike. A trail through this area was originally proposed by members of the White Oak Land Trust, and was later developed by members of Wachusett



Greenways, with construction beginning in 1998. The trail is dedicated to the memory of Rolf Larson, a tireless volunteer who was instrumental in seeing it to its completion.

Begin your walk at the parking lot on North St. About one half mile along you will see the tree which inspired the name of the Land Trust. As you approach, the majestic oak speaks to you. Its branches and scars tell a story to those willing to stop and listen. White oak is a slow growing, long-lived species and the size of this tree tells you it has seen many winters. Its short trunk and its low branches tell you that when this tree began to grow it was in an open site, not the forested condition we see today. Its many wounds tell of the ice storms, grazing animals and fire which have inflicted damage over the years.

Travel another half mile and you come upon a granite obelisk marked by an H on one side and WB on another. This marks the boundary between the towns of Holden and West Boylston. At one time twenty-three such stones marked each corner of Holden's perimeter. Town officials were required to perambulate the boundaries every three years, seeing that things were in order.

As you travel on you will notice changes in the landscape. An abundance of rocks indicates this may have been the site of a glacial drop. You may notice a spring bubbling from rocks beneath a thick stand of mountain laurel. Finally you come upon two large upright stones that local children named the "Dinosaur Rocks" They form a natural shelter of the type Native Americans or early settlers might once have used for shelter.

The trail takes a sharp left just beyond the Dinosaur Rocks and ascends to Old North Street. Note a right turn ahead marked by double yellow blazes, just

before a clearing where the owners are currently engaged in a forest management project. Stone walls and cellar holes indicate this was once a settled area. Old town maps show a boot shop in the area.

From this section you can return to North Street or continue on to Sterling Road. A right fork takes you past an old well, and through areas of hemlock and laurel to a junction. Turn left to reach the Blue trail, or turn right to get to Sterling Road. You leave the woods along an old road that was once used to take logs to the chair factories in Sterling.

Bob Elms Trail (Blue)

This trail (2.3 miles) was named in honor of long time Boy Scout leader Bob Elms in recognition of countless hours spent teaching young people outdoor skills and an appreciation of nature. Stone walls tell

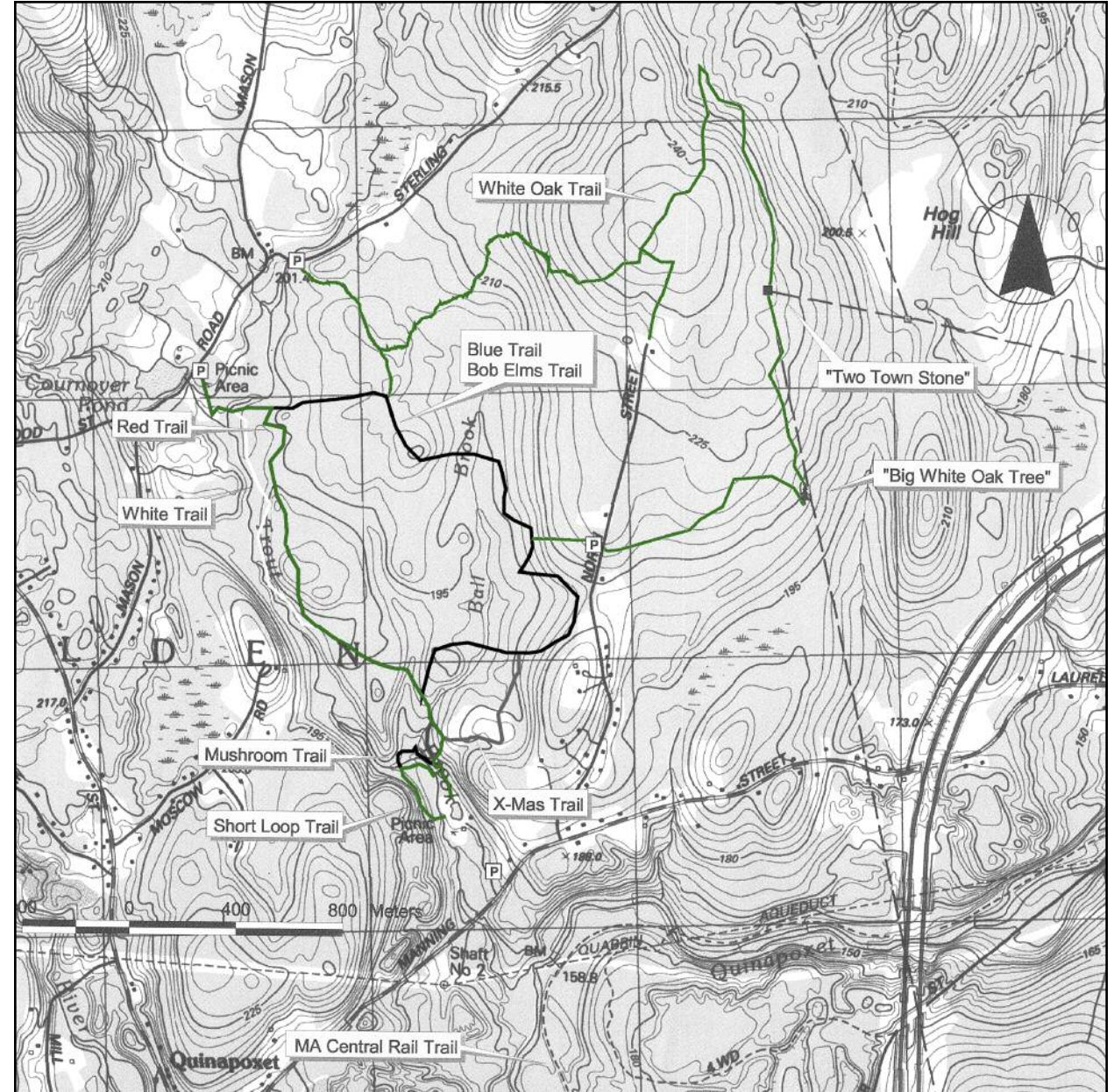


their stories along this trail. As you pass a corner, note the different kinds of wall construction. The large "double" wall probably enclosed a plowed field, while the connected, but smaller, "single" wall may have been fencing for pasture. The trail descends to a wet area featuring an extensive hemlock grove. Stands of these trees are currently being threatened by an invasive insect, the wooly adelgid.

Red and White Trails

These trails are best done as a 2 mile loop. The two trails separate at a meadow, where you can observe the signs of a recent burn. The plant species you see here need the sunlight this open area allows, while the brushy growth provides habitat for different species of birds and wildlife. In time this area will revert back to the mature forest that covers the rest of the Reservation.

Shortly after the trails connect at the northern junction you see signs of a different type of forest disturbance. The flooded area on your right is the work of an active beaver colony. Their dam and lodge are visible from the trail, as well as the pointed stumps that decorate the shoreline. Shortly before rejoining the red trail you cross a low stone wall. This appears to be an old dam. A short side path to the right leads to a site where a saw mill may have operated.



Short Trails

The Christmas Tree Trail (1/3 mile) leaves the combined Red, White and Blue Trails to navigate an old field last plowed in the late 60s and left with furrows still in place. It is maintained as an open meadow to provide habitat diversity.

The Short Loop (1/4mile) leaves the combined trails and follows the scenic west bank of Trout Brook to the remains of an old mill dam. It traverses the hillside and returns to the picnic area.

The Mushroom Trail (1/8 mile) crosses the top of the dam and loops back to rejoin the combined trails.