

Produced by THE LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
OF ACTON, MASSACHUSETTS



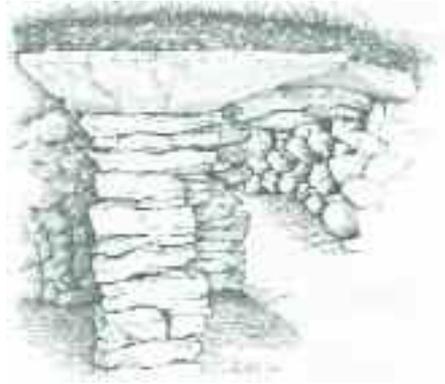
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Interior of Nashoba Brook Chamber
 Drawing by Tom Tidman

*The Acton Conservation Trust is a private, non-profit organization that provides education to landowners about various options for land preservation. It also may hold conservation restrictions and accept tax-deductible contributions to be used for open space preservation. ACT is one of more than 130 land trusts in Massachusetts and is a member of the Massachusetts Land Trust Alliance. For more information about ACT, including how to become a member, go to our web site at <http://www.actonconservationtrust.org>.

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*Jack-in-the-Pulpit
(Arisaema triphyllum)
Drawing by Heather McElroy*

Hikers and Nature Lovers,

Welcome to our colorful new trail guide. Since the first printing seven years ago, a great deal of change has occurred in Acton's natural environment as well as on our conservation lands. This time frame also represents seven years of participation by the Land Stewardship Committee in maintaining and planning enhancements for our lands. The guidance and know-how, not to mention hard work, provided by this amazing group of volunteers have made Acton's conservation lands into an extraordinary resource. It should come as no surprise that this guide is also a product of the stewards' expertise.

Since the formation of the Land Stewardship Committee in the fall of 1995, we have expanded our trails by more than three miles and increased Acton's total conservation land to over 1650 acres. Acton's natural environment has experienced rapid change, due in part to a recent population explosion of beavers in our riverine ecosystems. As a result of this environmental change, many bird and mammal species able to live in and around the beaver ponds have been reintroduced. Some rerouting of trails has become necessary.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of leading many nature walks through the diverse and beautiful conservation lands of Acton. Whether it be a kindergarten class at the Arboretum, where my most challenging question might be, "What's the biggest thing here that could bite me?" or a walker gracefully slipping off a boardwalk into three feet of swamp muck, it's always an adventure. Acton's conservation lands are blessed with examples of many diverse habitats found in New England, from delicate peatlands to pine barrens, each maintained by our stewardship team. I hope you are able to find the time to explore these lands and enjoy the beauty and solitude that comes free of charge.

Sincerely,
Tom Tidman
Director of Natural Resources



*Twelve-spot Skimmer
(Libellula pulchella)
Drawing by Gigi Hopkins*

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The aim of this field guide is to facilitate an accessible and enjoyable experience for Acton's residents on the more than 1650 acres of conservation land the town now owns. For the best use of this guide, a few preliminary explanations may be helpful.

Maps All maps are not presented to the same scale, nor do they have the same compass orientation on the page. We compromised with the conventional presentation to make the maps fit our paper size. For appropriate orientation, see the town map on the inside front cover.

Legends Each map's legend displays only the icons used on that map. Blazing colors used for the trails are indicated, along with mileage for the main trail. Kiosks  are weather-protected notice boards that provide information about the property, including maps, as well as general information about the Land Stewardship Committee. Parking  areas are specified.

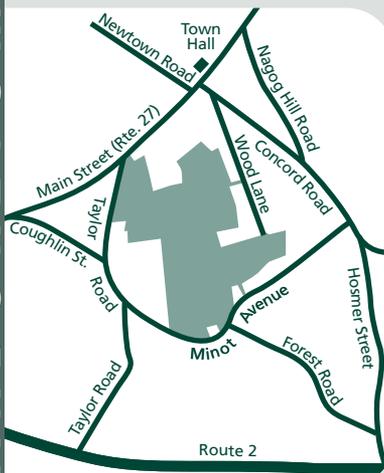
Trail Systems and Blazing The trail system for each property comprises a main trail, access trail(s), and secondary trail(s). Trails are blazed with small rectangles of paint applied to trees at appropriate intervals along the trail in both directions. Main trails are usually loops; a few are straight-through. Both types are blazed yellow. Access trails, which connect a street entrance to the main trail, are blazed red. Connector trails between two contiguous properties are also blazed red. Secondary trails—either smaller loops outside the main trail or crossover trails within the main loop—are blazed blue.

Bay Circuit Trail This trail is an evolving recreational trail corridor that currently passes through 21 towns in eastern Massachusetts, linking parks and open spaces surrounding the metropolitan Boston area from Plum Island to Kingston. At present, approximately 150 miles are open. When completed, the trail will be 200 miles long and pass through 50 towns and cities. In Acton, the BCT passes through Nashoba Brook, Spring Hill, and Stoneymeade conservation lands and is marked by white blazes and BCT-logo patches at the trail junctions.

Vernal Pools Any small pool resulting from snowmelt or runoff that collects in a natural depression and dries up for part of the year may be a vernal pool if it has any obligate species breeding in it. These pools are vital to the breeding cycle of several species of amphibians and insects that form the base of a significant portion of the food chain. The significance of vernal pools is recognized by the state's wildlife agencies, and the pools are protected by law. A formalized program, administered by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, provides a means of certification that places restrictions on the development potential of the surrounding land as well as the upland corridor through which the species must travel to reach the pool. The Land Stewardship Committee sponsors a certification program to help protect our rapidly diminishing and increasingly fragmented open spaces.

Web Site The Land Stewardship Committee maintains a web site that includes the maps and property descriptions contained in this field guide along with information about the Committee's activities and links to other organizations

(<http://www.town.acton.ma.us/LSCOM>).



Location

Acton Center, on the east side of Main Street (Route 27), south of Town Hall

Entrances

- East side of *Taylor Road*, south of its intersection with Main Street  
- End of *Wood Lane*, off Concord Road at Congregational Church  
- North side of *Minot Avenue*, at Forest Road

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Wide, smooth trails in Orchard Loop and Wildflower Loop; narrower woods trails along Highland/Bog Loop; wet areas spanned by boardwalks; minor changes in elevation throughout

ARBORETUM

The Acton Arboretum features many gardens and ornamental trees and shrubs, although much of its acreage consists of woods, meadows, old apple orchards, a glacial esker, wetlands, two ponds, and a bog. Much of the area adjacent to Taylor Road is open and handicapped accessible, with gentle grades, graveled paths, benches, and picnic tables.

The land, successively owned by the Craigs, Reeds, Tuttle, and Bridges, was acquired by the town in 1976–77 and formalized as an arboretum in 1986. Since then, it has been developed by the Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc., assisted by the Acton Garden Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, and town staff. Landscaping firms and other local businesses have donated services and materials.

Three major loop trails, along with interconnecting paths, allow enjoyment of the property's diverse areas. The unblazed trails are shown in color on the map using the conventions applied to other Acton conservation properties. One access trail runs parallel to Taylor Road and connects the parking lot via the sidewalk to the Town Center green. A hosta garden, with numerous marked cultivars, lies along this trail together with a swale garden, a daylily collection, crab apple trees, and native shrubs. On the eastern side of the Arboretum, two other access trails, from Wood Lane and Minot Avenue, lead to the Highland/Bog Loop.

The two loop trails closest to the Taylor Road entrance, the Orchard Loop and the Wildflower Loop, share a common inner trail. Both loops are handicapped accessible. The Orchard Loop, beginning at the Taylor Road entrance, forms a circuit of the northwesterly, most open, portion of the Arboretum. Perennial beds are located in this area, together with a small man-made pond and the remnants of an old apple orchard replanted with young trees. The trail has gentle grades, a crushed stone



base, and benches along its length.

In the northern portion of this loop, situated around the old Craigin house foundation, is a typical 1700s herb garden, with medicinal, culinary, and strewing herbs. An old granite horse-watering trough, dated 1878, has been placed near the foundation. Also nearby are a butterfly garden, an arbor, and a nut tree collection. Picnic tables, a drinking fountain, and a stone reading circle add to the area's usefulness.

The Wildflower Loop, southeast of the Orchard Loop, traverses both swampy lowlands and upland forest. The trail passes an extensive wildflower garden, fern garden, and two small farm ponds and crosses a small brook. An old quarry with a partially cut granite stone showing the cutter's drill marks lies along this route. In summertime, the two ponds, are solid green with duckweed and alive with frogs and turtles. On the westerly side of the Wildflower Loop, a small inner loop features rhododendrons, a Japanese larch, and two dawn redwoods.

From the northeasterly corner of the Wildflower Loop, the yellow trail leads to the Highland/Bog Loop, which lies in the Arboretum's southeasterly portion and traverses 30 acres of its highest and lowest land. Following old farm roads, cow paths, and foot trails, it comprises a variety of forest types, succession growth, and geological features. Inconspicuously scattered by the trailside are the 'Forest Stones,' a collection of 22 field stones each inscribed with a single word, retained by popular demand after the 1995 Environmental Sculpture Exhibit.

Along its southwestern portion, this trail follows the top of an esker, a long, narrow, raised gravel ridge left by a receding glacier. The dry glacial gravel supports only pitch pines and oaks. The esker constitutes a drainage divide between the wetlands on the west, draining southward, and the bog on the south, draining eastward. From the esker, the trail crosses a quaking bog, with its specific plant community, along a winding boardwalk and then turns northerly to eventually rejoin the Wildflower Loop.



The Herb Garden
Drawing by Heather McElroy

In 2002, an 11-acre parcel adjacent to the Arboretum's southwesterly corner was donated to the town. Encompassing a red maple swamp and some wooded upland, it has an unimproved trail passing through it from the Highland/Bog Loop's esker to the Wildflower Loop.

BULETTE LAND / TOWN FOREST



Location

Parallel to northeast side of Route 2, off Newtown Road, near Littleton boundary

Entrance

- At gate on east side and close to end of *Bulette Road*, off Newtown Road: **(P)** at end of road **(K)** at end of access trail

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Gently hilly terrain; mostly dry walking conditions, except in southerly portion of loop trail, near wetlands

Bulette/Town Forest Conservation Land includes 22 acres of Town Forest (the smaller of two such tracts in Acton). The remainder of the acreage is wetlands, and, except for a glacial esker along which a secondary trail allows viewing of the marsh, this portion is unsuitable for trails. Most of the Town Forest acreage is upland woods, predominantly oak and white pine enhanced by a scattering of beech trees, and it is this area that the trail system covers.

The trail system's moderately long red access trail leads to a yellow loop trail, which is bisected by one blue secondary trail and an unblazed portion of fire road. The red access trail is a fire road passing between wetlands on the east and, on the west, large slabs of cut rock and boulders remaining from the widening of Route 2. Shortly after taking a sharp easterly turn, this access trail crosses a tiny tributary of the Grassy Pond Brook and passes through a stone wall, where it intersects the yellow loop trail. The information kiosk is located at this intersection. The trail system also includes a second blue trail, outside the main loop trail, that follows the top of the esker that separates the upland from the marshy area in the property's southern portion.

From the intersection, a walker can either continue eastward along the fire road, which forms part of the northerly portion of the loop trail, or turn southeast onto the loop trail going in the opposite direction. The southerly route follows a narrow footpath that winds through attractive upland forest conspicuously dotted with large boulders and rocky outcrops present throughout the upland area.

The northerly portion of the loop trail follows the fire road eastward to a junction where the fire road turns southwesterly and the blue crossover trail begins, going southeasterly. At this junction the loop trail leaves the fire road and



loop trail: 0.7 mile

acreage: 39

map: page 34

turns onto a narrower forest path, soon turning southeasterly and going downhill into a graceful wooded basin with lovely ferns throughout. The fire road south of the junction is represented on the map as an unblazed dotted track.

Within the loop, and paralleling the fire road, the seemingly redundant blue crossover trail allows a hiker to traverse the rim of a small escarpment that overlooks the lower basin through which the loop trail passes. Lovely views, as well as interesting rock outcrops, may be seen all along this trail. Some of the rock is geologically very ancient.

At the most easterly point in the basin, where the loop trail turns west, the blue esker trail leads off to the east and then south. It passes along the top of the esker until it smooths out into the edge of the southern wetlands. After crossing a damp area, the trail turns northwest, crosses the Grassy Pond Brook tributary stream and, following a gas line easement that parallels Route 2, eventually joins the access trail. Though the distances along most of these trails are short, the views and interesting terrain make all trails well worth the walk. No other parcel among the Acton conservation lands has rock formations so attractively situated within lovely woodland.



Stone Wall
Drawing by Tom Tidman



Location

Northeastern Acton, off Pope Road, toward Concord and Carlisle

Entrance/Connectors

- Gravel woods road off westerly side of *Pope Road*, south of *Spencer Brook Road*
- Ⓧ for campers with permits, at parking lot 0.2 mile beyond front gate; all others outside front gate
- Ⓧ at inner parking lot
- From Spring Hill Conservation Land via red connector trails

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Level to gently hilly; fairly smooth terrain with a few wet areas

CAMP ACTON

Camp Acton Conservation Land was formerly owned by the Boston Minuteman Boy Scout Council. It adjoins the Spring Hill Conservation Land and, together with the Nashoba Brook Conservation Land, comprises over 400 acres of wildlife habitat that form Acton's largest protected natural area. Each property has its own yellow loop trail, separate entrances, kiosk(s), and parking. Two short red-blazed trails connect the Camp Acton loop trail to the easterly side of the Spring Hill loop trail. It is possible to complete a circuit of nearly 6 miles through these three properties while crossing through dense woodlands from Pope Road on the east to Route 27 on the west. Refer to the composite map on page 48.

Camp Acton is the only Acton conservation land able to accommodate picnicking or overnight camping. Seven relatively level campsites that are stone free and dry remain from the Boy Scout ownership. Each has space for several tents and is maintained free of poison ivy, brambles, and other undergrowth. Within easy access of the inner parking area, each site is located in a woody setting that allows some privacy and is equipped with a picnic table and stone campfire ring. Short paths off an old woods road lead to each site. Permits are required for camping and may be obtained from the Natural Resources Office in the Town Hall. No sanitary facilities or water are provided. Close to the parking area is a large fieldstone fireplace. However, it is not suitable for any type of fire in its current condition.

Just beyond the gate at the inner parking lot the yellow loop trail begins, proceeding via a continuation of the red access woods road from the Pope Road entrance through an impressive grove of 100-year-old white pines. One of the larger campsites (number 1 on the map) is situated on a knoll to the east of this woods road not far from the parking area. The grove's



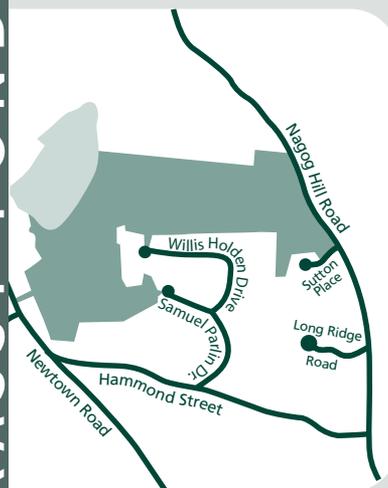
high canopy filters the light that reaches the brushed-out ground beneath. A crop of young pine seedlings flourishes here and creates an effect of light, feathery growth beneath the towering canopy. Surrounding the grove, a forest of pines mixed with hardwoods, including oak, white birch, maple, and several large yellow birches, provides diversity.

The original woods road, dating from the Boy Scout occupancy, proceeds in a northwesterly direction for approximately half the distance to the property's boundary with Spring Hill Conservation Land. This woods road gradually narrows to a footpath. A short distance beyond the last campsite (number 7), the two red connector trails from the Spring Hill loop trail join Camp Acton from the south and west. At this intersection, the Camp Acton loop trail jogs briefly to the north and then heads eastward, roughly paralleling the woods road as it returns to the inner parking lot. Along this easterly section of the loop trail, the walker may enjoy several different habitats, including wetlands and a small stream.

Along the northerly boundary, which has recently been home to a goshawk nest, extensive wetlands (comprising about 20 percent of the total acreage) support mature vegetation typical of such areas, red maple being the predominant species. Flowing out of the wetlands is a picturesque little stream, unnamed, which cascades over low rocky drops for a short distance directly alongside the yellow trail and then flows under the access road before eventually joining Spencer Brook. In the property's southeasterly corner, the loop trail passes by the base of a small moss- and fern-covered rocky outcrop. The Camp Acton property has an isolated vernal pool along its southern boundary, just west of campsite number 2.



Screech Owl (Otus asio)
Drawing by Tom Tidman



Location

Northwest of Acton Center, between Nagog Hill Road and Newtown Road, toward Littleton

Entrances

- Southwesterly side of *Nagog Hill Road*, 1.25 miles from Acton Center: Ⓟ; Ⓢ at end of meadow
- Northeasterly side of *Newtown Road*, west of Lincoln Road Ⓢ Ⓢ along access trail
- End of *Willis Holden Drive*, off Hammond Road via Samuel Parlin Drive

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Largely level from Newtown Road, including long boardwalk segment; from Nagog Hill Road slopes downhill toward pond; quite stony; trails occasionally wet in some places

GRASSY POND

Grassy Pond and Nagog Hill Conservation Lands are contiguous properties, each with its own self-contained trail system. The conjoined properties contain 255 acres within which a more than 3-mile circuit can be made by using the 0.2-mile red connector between the two trail systems. This connector leads into the Nagog Hill Conservation Land directly across Nagog Hill Road from the main Grassy Pond parking lot.

Grassy Pond Conservation Land comprises diverse habitats and ecosystems. These include the pond and its associated wetlands, two small streams, a vernal pool, a boulder field within moist woodlands, a large meadow, and forest vegetation of white pine, hemlock, and northern hardwoods. These latter include white ash, red and white oak, and some beech. In the spring, the white blossoms of dogwood trees may be seen scattered through the woods. Mosses are abundant in this moist forest, covering many stones and tree stumps.

This property's trail system consists of a yellow loop trail that makes a circuit of the long rectangular upland portion, together with one blue crossover trail and three red access trails. The blue trail is a shortcut between two sides of the main loop and intersects the loop trail on its southerly side at the junction with the red access trail from Willis Holden Drive. The primary access trail enters from the Nagog Hill Road parking lot, passing through the northerly end of the meadow. The red access trail from Newtown Road is quite long and passes over a 425-foot boardwalk across the wide wetlands at one of the pond's two outlets. The walk along this boardwalk is worthwhile for the opportunity it provides for viewing wetlands species that are generally inaccessible to foot traffic.

Grassy Pond itself formed in a kettle hole that resulted from the glaciers' retreat; it exhibits bog characteristics around its perimeter.



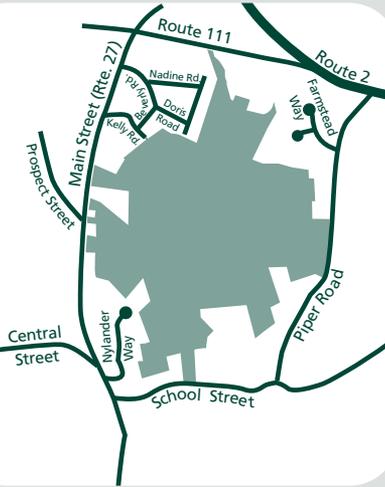
Nowhere is the pond more than 15 feet deep, although the level has fluctuated since the late 1990s due to beaver activity. The gradual invasion of the pond's shoreline by plant species that thrive in very wet and highly acidic habitats will cause continuing shrinkage of the open water through an ever-quickening process of succession. Leading this advance are pitcher plants, leatherleaf, highbush blueberries, larches, and red maples. A blue spur trail off the yellow loop trail leads down to the water's edge, where a wooden pier with observation platform reaches into the pond. Provided with benches and surrounded by bog species, this viewing platform is open to excellent views and allows appreciation of the bog's characteristics. Grassy Pond and nearby Nagog Pond, which is accessible from Nagog Hill Conservation Land, each demonstrates a different phase in the natural life cycle of ponds.

An understory plant that is prevalent on the Grassy Pond land is the vase-shaped witch hazel. Along the southerly side of the loop trail, there is a small grove of young hemlocks close to a fairly large vernal pool. The trail passes through the hemlocks and then skirts an impressive boulder field.

The large meadow adjacent to the Nagog Hill Road parking lot, kept open by seasonal mowing, contains several birdhouses suitable for bluebirds, which frequently nest there. The Grassy Pond land provides good habitat for many birds, including pileated woodpeckers, which enjoy the hardwood forest. Owls, warblers, and many species of songbirds may also be seen. There is evidence of deer and coyotes, too. The many stone walls and remains of other stone structures speak of the historic uses of this area.



Swamp Azalea (Rhododendron viscosum)
Drawing by Heather McElroy



Location

South of Massachusetts Avenue (Route III) and east of Main Street (Route 27), between Kelley's Corner and South Acton Center

Entrances

- North side of *School Street*, behind South Acton Fire Station  behind fire station  at top of meadow
- East side of *Main Street*, at Prospect Street  
- End of *Kelley Road*, off Main Street
- West side of *Piper Road*, at Oakwood Road
- From Discovery Museums parking lot, east side of *Main Street*

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Mostly hilly, quite rocky; occasional wet areas in easterly portion of property

GREAT HILL

Great Hill Conservation and Recreation Land is a large property, diverse in topography, vegetation, natural features, and uses available to the public. Unlike Acton's other conservation lands, Great Hill has a large open area, located behind the South Acton Fire Station, that has been developed for recreational uses. In addition to the main soccer field, there are barbecue grills, picnic tables, and a jungle gym. A smaller soccer field, located to the west of the main field, may be accessed directly from the fire station parking lot via a short trail through marshy woods and wetlands. North of the main playing fields, a large meadow with bluebird nesting boxes slopes up to the edge of the woods, where the conservation land trail system begins.

To the west of the open area, a marsh that existed when the property was acquired has been dredged to create a small pond suitable for skating in winter. This 'new' pond, with its limited bottom sediment and low nutrient value, has attracted a variety of plant and animal species that are characteristic of the beginning stage of a pond's evolution. Cattails, smartweed, and duckweed grow thickly around its edge, and sunfish and largemouth bass, which feed on the frog population, are well established.

Because of the property's size and central location within surrounding residential areas, this conservation area is very heavily used. Its size has resulted in a complex trail system with seven red accesses and several blue secondary trails. The yellow loop trail's most heavily used accesses are behind the fire station, at Main Street, and at Piper Road. The access that enters from the southeast side of the playing fields passes through private properties along School Street. The private segment of this access is unblazed but open to the public. Secondary trails within the loop trail are either

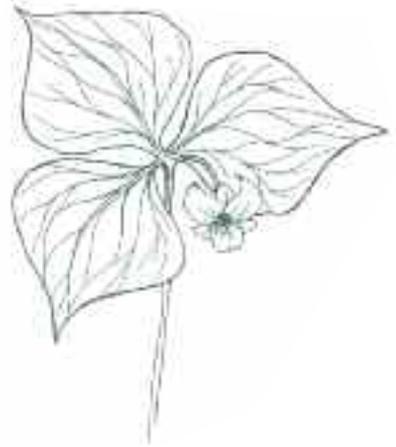


blue or red, a departure from other trail systems. The interior red trail is an access to the summit, which, at 350 feet above sea level, is the highest point in Acton and, in the winter, offers limited views of the surrounding area. The blue trail that leaves and rejoins the main trail on the westerly side of the property allows access to and from the Discovery Museums parking lot.

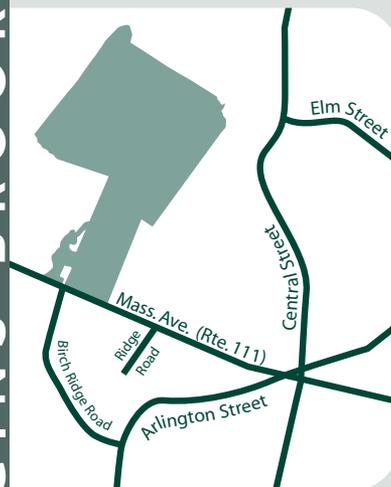
The topography of this conservation land varies from extensive wetlands in the eastern portion to wooded uplands north of the open field. A zone of softwoods on the periphery of the 30-acre red maple wetlands near the Piper Road entrance contains some magnificent old white pines. Gradually, as the trail winds northward and then ascends via the interior red trail toward the summit, this growth gives way to various hardwood species that dominate the climax forest. Its mix of ash, hickory, beech, sugar maple, and red and white oak provides habitat for songbirds, such as scarlet tanagers, red-eyed vireos, redstarts, and ovenbirds, as well as several varieties of owls. Other smaller wetlands are located to the north and west of the hill. Two small brooks drain from the hill into these wetlands.

Great Hill hosts a variety of plant species, many of which are different from those growing on other Acton conservation lands because of the less acidic soil on the north slope. Here one may find doll's eye, golden Alexander, purple-fringed orchis, and nodding trillium. Readily seen along many of the trails are other beautiful small plants, including lady slippers, fringed polygala, and pyrola.

Three brook crossings via wooden bridges or large, flat step-rocks, and many stone walls that mark boundaries from the Agrarian Age 250 years ago add to the property's charm. Evidence of probable Native American use may be seen near the Piper Road wetlands area in a bowl-shaped depression in natural bedrock thought to have been an Indian grinding stone. Another landmark of note is an enormous erratic boulder, known as Wass Rock, located on the steep slope in the northwestern portion of the parcel, just west of the Kelley Road entrance.



Nodding Trillium (Trillium cernuum)
Drawing by Heather McElroy



Location

Northwest of West Acton Center on Boxborough boundary, between Massachusetts Avenue (Route III) and Central Street

Entrances

- North side of *Massachusetts Avenue*, at Birch Ridge Road, 0.5 mile west of West Acton Center

- West side of *Central Street*, 0.4 mile north of West Acton Center at Elm Street playing field, 0.1 mile

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Mostly level; some frequently wet areas, particularly along access trail from Massachusetts Avenue and northern segment of blue loop trail

GUGGINS BROOK

Guggins Brook Conservation Land is a predominantly low-lying, frequently wet area notable for three brooks that contribute to its attractiveness. Guggins Brook, flowing east from Boxborough through abutting Acton Water District property, forms a southern boundary of the property. Inch Brook, flowing north out of the southern wetlands, converges with Guggins Brook beyond the northeast corner of the Water District land. From this confluence the combined waters flow north and east parallel to a segment of yellow loop trail and eventually converge with Fort Pond Brook, which forms the northeastern boundary of the property.

Guggins and Inch Brooks flow under trails via several culverts and boardwalks throughout the trail system. Interestingly, short portions of both brooks have two different streambeds. The straighter channels were created during the 1930s as part of mosquito control projects. Some original streambeds are still visible and some still carry water. These are identifiable by their older stone culverts with no metal, or by their meandering courses.

The property's trail system differs from the usual model applied to most Acton conservation properties. Two loop trails, one yellow and one blue, combine to allow a 1.0-mile circuit of the property to be made following the outer portions of both loops. Passing through the central and westerly portions of the property, the yellow loop trail alone allows a shorter walk through areas drier in wet seasons than the blue loop. It is also more scenic. The blue loop trail follows the property's northern and northwestern boundaries. Two short blue trail segments cut across bulges of the yellow loop.

One red access trail, from Central Street, passes through an open meadow beside Fort Pond Brook via an easement granted by the adjacent residential community. The other red access trail, from the Massachusetts Avenue



loop trail: 0.5 mile

acreage: 56

map: page 38

entrance, follows the edge of the wetlands in the south, crossing into the Water District land for a short distance. Small boardwalks and the application of wood chips and 'corduroying,' a practice of laying logs of uniform length side by side into a muddy base, have decreased the trails' seasonal muddiness. This conservation land is not suitable for either horses or mountain bicycles.

One of the property's most scenic areas is the cool, quiet hemlock grove through which the northeasterly segment of the yellow loop trail passes. The reverse portion of this trail follows the top of a raised dike—created by mosquito control projects—that forms one bank of the quietly flowing water of Guggins Brook. Ringing the hemlock grove are tall white pines, beneath which large cinnamon ferns are prominent along with hay-scented, interrupted, and royal ferns. Highbush blueberries and the vase-shaped witch hazel, whose spidery yellow flowers bloom in the fall, are common understory bushes. Part of the southerly portion of the main loop trail passes through a small meadow, kept open by periodic mowing. The occasional apple trees found on the property are remnants of the orchards once common throughout Acton.

Other trees found throughout the property include red maple, oak, and big-tooth aspen. Shrubs and vines include lowbush blueberry, Concord grape, and, less fortunately, a number of invasive species. Among these are buckthorn, oriental bittersweet, purple loosestrife, Japanese knotweed, Japanese barberry, and winged euonymus, also known as 'burning bush.' Walkers should take care to avoid the flourishing poison ivy and small patches of greenbriar.

Look for an American elm sapling, planted and staked just beyond the junction of the access trail from Massachusetts Avenue with the yellow loop trail. This little tree is a new, blight-resistant variety known as 'Valley Forge,' released in the late 1990s by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is one of a number of specimens planted in carefully chosen locations throughout the town by a public-spirited resident who is attempting to restore this beautiful native tree. American elms have been almost destroyed by the elm blight introduced into the U.S. around 1930.



Wood Turtle (Clemmys insculpta)
Drawing by Tom Tidman

Within Guggins Brook land, sightings have been made of the rare wood turtle, listed on the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species web site as a species of special concern. Deer, coyotes, beavers, owls, and grouse are found there as well. A good example of an effective beaver pipe has been installed in the old stone culvert that is the third upstream of the four Guggins Brook culverts.



Location

Southwestern Acton, close to Stow boundary, between Stow Street and Mount Hope Cemetery woodland

Entrances

- Cul-de-sac on *Robbins Street*, off *Stow Street* (P) (K)
- End of *Billings Street*, off *Robbins Street* (P)
- West side of *Prescott Road*, off *Robbins Street*

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Level to slightly hilly; uplands mostly dry; blue trail on west side seasonally interrupted by wetlands

HEATH HEN MEADOW

Heath Hen Meadow Conservation Land, comprising wetlands, streams, meadows, and upland woods, together with Heath Hen Meadow Brook, which forms its northern boundary, take their name from a once-abundant, partridge-like relative of the prairie chicken that became extinct early in the 20th century. The brook rises in Stow, picks up the Muddy Brook tributary at the western boundary, and merges with Fort Pond Brook in an extensive wetlands along the eastern boundary.

The main entrance is from the Robbins Street cul-de-sac via a short red access trail which joins the yellow straight-through trail at its midpoint. From its southern end at the Billings Street cul-de-sac, the trail winds through woods of mature white pines behind the houses on Billings Street, passing two prominent vernal pools. After intersecting the red access trail, the main trail continues through two meadows and another small woodland before reaching its northern terminus at Heath Hen Meadow Brook.

One of the property's two blue secondary trails leaves the westerly side of the main trail near one of the vernal pools along the Billings Street segment. From there it winds through moist woodlands along an esker, and ends seasonally at the edge of extensive wetlands that make up two-thirds of the property. When frozen during the winter, the wetlands may be crossed to a small island—probably originally an extension of the esker—that the trail encircles. When accessible, this island is an excellent place for viewing the marsh birds that inhabit the broad marsh.

The other secondary trail leaves the main trail at the southern end of the upper meadow and rejoins the main trail north of the lower meadow, near the Heath Hen Meadow Brook crossing. This blue trail passes through the remains of a former apple orchard and, for most of its distance, runs close to picturesque stone



walls. The red access trail from Prescott Road intersects this blue trail where it turns east. Both red and blue trails follow part of the remains of an old carriage path. Some of the stonework in this area appears to have lined this carriage route.

A footbridge built by Land Stewardship volunteers spans Heath Hen Meadow Brook, joining Heath Hen Meadow Conservation Land with Mount Hope Cemetery woodland beyond, also town-owned land. A portion of the loop trail through this woodland skirts the edge of wetlands, while a shorter inner loop passes through upland woods. These trails are unblazed, and the only permitted public access to them is from Heath Hen Meadow Conservation Land. On the upstream side of the bridge a large, seemingly permanent beaver dam has significantly increased the extent of the pond and wetlands above it. Below the dam, the streambed is narrow but can be reached by canoe from a put-in at the Martin Street crossing of Fort Pond Brook near Jones Field.

Heath Hen Meadow is home to a variety of wildlife including beaver, skunk, raccoon, opossum, deer, ducks, partridge, and an occasional blue heron. The meadows and surrounding woods provide habitat for numerous species of songbirds and raptors, as well as insects and amphibians.

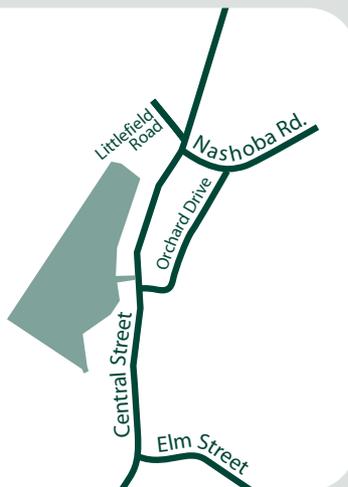
The Overlook Trail is a very rough, unimproved trail that passes along the narrow corridor of conservation land surrounding the wetland perimeter of Meadow View subdivision. This corridor



Heath Hen Meadow Brook Bridge

Drawing by Heather McElroy

intersects Heath Hen Meadow Conservation Land trails via two connectors, one near the brook crossing, and the other at the easterly side of Prescott Street opposite the red access trail into Heath Hen Meadow. The Overlook Trail is unblazed because of its unfinished condition. The trail occasionally runs along the top of a stone wall separating the conservation corridor from the backyards of the houses within the subdivision. However, the trail is passable and offers excellent views of the extensive wetlands at the confluence of Fort Pond and Heath Hen Meadow Brooks, with fine opportunities for marsh-bird viewing along its length.



Location

North of West Acton Center on Boxborough boundary, off Central Street

Entrance

- West side of *Central Street*, 0.3 mile north of Idylwilde Farm



Terrain/Trail Conditions

Almost level, easy terrain; trails near brook may be wet

JENKS LAND

Most of the Jenks Conservation Land is a broad sweeping meadow, once part of the apple orchards that were extensive throughout Acton. A yellow loop trail makes a circuit of this attractive meadow, which is a favorite haunt for birdwatchers. One local resident has recorded over several years 170 species of birds in this property, of which the most notable are the blue grosbeak, black-capped vireo, chat, and golden-winged warbler. At the highest point in the meadow, several apple trees have been planted alongside the numerous older ones that still dot the meadow. Birdhouses for songbirds have also been erected here. A short blue trail bisects the meadow at this rise, providing the stroller with a panoramic view of the meadow and marshlands, and also with the excitement of watching the hectic flight of bluebirds.

From the small parking area on Central Street, north of the entrance to Idylwilde Farm, the red access trail begins beyond the barrier gate. This trail leads slightly downhill through a narrow corridor bordered with tangled shrubs and berry bushes to two concrete culverts through which Fort Pond Brook flows. Along this corridor there is a beautiful vista of marshy edges with typical wetlands vegetation surrounding the lower pond.

Fort Pond Brook, visible from the meadow's high point, flows from north to south along the eastern portion of the meadow, meandering first through a broad marsh. After broadening out into a small pond, the brook narrows through the two culverts below which it widens again into a larger pond that provides homes for numerous species of ducks and songbirds (particularly red-winged blackbirds). This is the same brook that eventually forms the northeastern corner of the Guggins Brook Conservation Land, beyond the Idylwilde Farm field.



loop trail: 0.5 mile

acreage: 30

map: page 40

Between the culverts and the junction with the loop trail, on both sides of the access trail, blue secondary trails follow the bank of the streambed and afford scenic views of the surrounding marshland upstream and of the large pond downstream. These side paths, through mostly wooded areas, are well worth taking, both for the good views of the brook and ponds that they provide and for the chance to observe species of both vegetation and birds not commonly seen elsewhere. The most prominent grass growing by the brookside is foxtail millet, whose seeds are eaten by many birds, and which, elsewhere in the world, is grown for human consumption.

Notable along the western portion of the meadow is a wide, quite massive stone wall, now largely obscured by a tangle of vines and bushes. This wall not only separates the Jenks Conservation Land from farm fields on the other side, but also marks the boundary with Boxborough. At the most northerly point of the loop trail there is a large blackberry patch on the inner side of the trail.

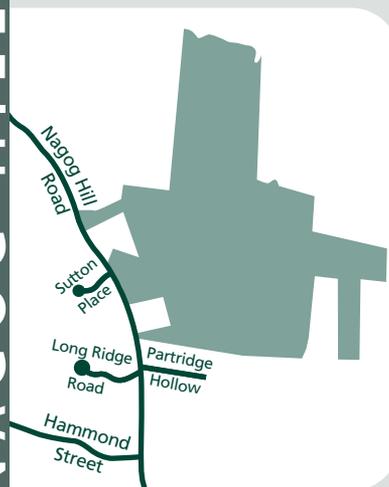
To the southwest, the MBTA commuter railroad line crosses the Jenks property. On the westerly side of the railroad bed is a small, 7-acre triangular-shaped extension of the conservation land that is noteworthy primarily for two small vernal pools close to the brook's larger pond at the south end of the railroad embankment.

Accessible by a secondary trail, this area may be visited by crossing the railroad bed via a narrow path that leads away from the loop trail at its southwest corner. Walkers crossing the tracks should use caution as trains no longer blow whistles.



Yellow-Spotted Salamander (Ambystoma maculatum)

Drawing by Tom Tidman



Location

North of Acton Center on easterly side of Nagog Hill Road, toward Littleton

Entrances

- Easterly side of *Nagog Hill Road*, 1 mile from Acton Center



- Easterly side of *Nagog Hill Road*, 1.25 miles from Acton Center, across from Grassy Pond Conservation Land parking area



Terrain/Trail Conditions

Moderately hilly, with trails generally leading downhill toward Nagog Pond; some rocky segments; on southwesterly segments of loop trail, frequently wet conditions

NAGOG HILL

Nagog Hill and Grassy Pond Conservation Lands are contiguous properties, each with its own self-contained trail system. The conjoined properties contain 255 acres within which a more than 3-mile circuit can be made by using the 0.2-mile red connector between the two properties.

Nagog Hill Conservation Land, bounded on the north by Nagog Pond and on the west by Nagog Hill Road, is a predominantly wooded, hilly property with areas of wetlands in its central and southerly portions. Much of the property was once cleared farmland, as evidenced by the many stone walls that lace the land and the occasional field juniper, a shrub that sprouts only in the open, still growing in the woods. Further evidence of farm use is seen in the old orchards.

The trail system comprises a meandering yellow loop trail, which follows the property's perimeter, three blue secondary trails, and two red access trails, one from the Nagog Hill parking lot and the other from the Grassy Pond parking lot. In its northerly portion, the main trail leads generally downhill through mixed woodlands towards Nagog Pond. There, a short unblazed spur trail leads off conservation land to the edge of the pond, one of the Commonwealth's 'great ponds.' Rights to this pond were granted by the state legislature in the 1800s to the Town of Concord, which continues to use it as a water supply. A sweeping view of the large expanse of open water to the west, frequently occupied by flocks of water birds, may be enjoyed here.

Two parallel blue secondary trails cross through the center of the main loop trail, providing shorter circuits. The wetlands at the property's center, largely unseen from the trails, drain into Nagog Pond along two seasonal streams crossed on short segments of boardwalk. From the main trail, just east of the



meadow, a third secondary trail continues eastward for a short distance beyond a sharp turn in the main trail, before turning north through a majestic white pine grove of cathedral-like quality and rejoining the main trail.

An interested observer may wish to visit the large vernal pool, one of several within this property, on the south side of the large open meadow behind the Hi Bid Farm horse corral. This pool provides breeding habitat for several important species of amphibians including yellow-spotted salamanders as well as insects that begin their reproductive cycle here in the spring. The open meadow, one of very few in Acton's conservation lands, is covered seasonally with blooms of clover, Indian tobacco, lady's thumb, yellow wood-sorrel, spotted touch-me-not, goldenrod, aster, wild geranium, beggars-tick, and milkwort.

Beyond the meadow's easterly entrance to the woodland, the main trail soon turns northerly at a large rectangular stone pile, which may be the ruin of a structure built in earlier times by Amerindians or the result of colonial and later farmers' field-clearing activities. Because of the open understory here, this is an excellent place to observe such stone features. Also look for flowering plants in season such as wild oats, lady slipper, starflower, Canada mayflower, wild sarsaparilla, pipsissewa, rattlesnake-plaintain, wild lettuce, silverrod, whorled loosestrife, violet, and several kinds of asters. Further along the loop trail, north of a footbridge crossing, look for an interesting geological feature, a large glacial erratic boulder called Egg Rock, located on the southwesterly side of the main trail.

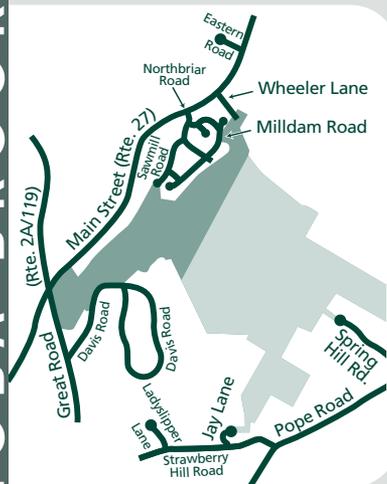
Walking uphill away from the pond on the western side of the loop trail, one follows an old cart track. After passing the western termini of the two inner loop secondary trails, the hiker will arrive at a junction, marked with a wooden sign, where the connector trail

leading to the Grassy Pond Conservation Land begins. South of this junction, the loop trail passes through very different habitat, characterized by low shrubs, berry bushes, small grassy areas, and an old apple orchard with entwining bittersweet choking several trees. The trail crosses the previously mentioned wetlands, spanned by boardwalk, back to the lower parking lot.



Egg Rock

Drawing by Heather McElroy



Location

North Acton on easterly side of Main Street (Route 27), toward Westford and Carlisle

Entrances/Connectors

- End of *Wheeler Lane*, off Main Street (P) (K)
- North side of *Davis Road*, off Great Road, west of The Arbors (P) (K)
- East side of *Milldam Road*, at junction with *Northbriar Road* via Main Street
- From Spring Hill Conservation Land via red connector trails

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Variable, from fairly smooth and wide to narrow and stony or crisscrossed by tree roots; minor hilliness on southeasterly section of loop trail; occasional wet areas, even in upland sections

NASHOBA BROOK

Nashoba Brook Conservation Land is one of three contiguous conservation lands totaling over 400 acres of preserved wildlife habitat that form Acton's largest protected natural area. Each property has its own yellow loop trail, separate entrances, kiosk(s), and parking. Two short red-blazed trails connect the Nashoba Brook loop trail to the westerly side of the Spring Hill Conservation Land loop trail. It is possible to complete a circuit of nearly 6 miles through dense woodlands from Nashoba Brook's Route 27 entrance on the west to Camp Acton's Pope Road entrance on the east. Refer to the composite map on page 48.

Nashoba Brook Conservation Land is a very scenic area owing to the unspoiled Nashoba Brook, which runs through it from north to south. The streambed provides diverse riverine habitats—still water, marshland, and small rapids—each attracting its particular complex of species. The upland habitat is varied as well, with stands of softwoods and hardwoods, lower brushy vegetation, and small streams that make their way toward the main brook.

This land is notable for its abundant and varied stonework, both historic and prehistoric. Most prominent is the exceptional stone masonry associated with the foundations and sluiceways of two early mills, two earth-filled dams, and the many stone walls that crisscross the property. Less prominent is the enigmatic corbelled stone chamber, built into a hillside, that is referred to as the 'Potato Cave' by those who believe colonial farmers built it for the storage of root crops. Others assert that Amerindians built such chambers, which are found throughout the Northeast, for ceremonial and astronomical purposes.

Two main entrances, at Wheeler Lane and Davis Road, mark the termini of two approximately equal sides of an elongated yellow



loop trail. This trail parallels the brook on both sides and crosses it twice: once north of the Pencil Factory Site kiosk and again close to the Wheeler Lane entrance. Nashoba Brook Conservation Land may also be accessed from Milldam Road and via either of two red connectors coming from the Spring Hill yellow loop trail. One blue crossover trail connects the two sides of the loop trail near the educational kiosk.

The Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) follows the west side of the loop trail from Wheeler Lane and, after crossing the brook, backtracks along the main trail's upland portion to the first red connector into the Spring Hill Conservation Land. North of the Wheeler Lane entrance, the BCT follows Route 27 northerly to the Acton Sportsmans Club, where it continues into Westford on the abandoned railroad bed. BCT-logo patches and white blazes mark this trail at the junctions.

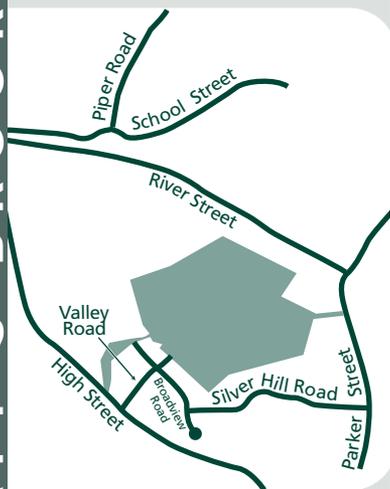
Beyond the field at the Wheeler Lane parking lot, a red wood building and stone sluiceway mark the site of the old Robbins Mill, one of at least four mill sites along the brook. During the 1700s and 1800s various kinds of mills operated along Nashoba Brook. The northernmost of these, at the end of Wheeler Lane, in 1738 comprised "a dwelling house, barn, grist mill, and saw mill." North of the building is Robbins Mill Pond and dam, below which is a short rapids. South of the parking area, an old cellar hole marks the beginning of a double-walled serpentine 'avenue' with overarching trees, through which the main trail descends to the brookside over rocky terrain.

Beyond this stonework, the brook widens into a marshland for a short stretch before returning to a well-defined streambed. After crossing a sturdy footbridge, the trail leads to the property's second mill site, where Ebenezer Wood, a competitor of Concord's Thoreau family, operated a 19th-century pencil factory. A four-sided kiosk at the site presents information about the history and ecology of the area. Here, the brook forms a small waterfall at the ruined dam.

The remainder of the loop trail, after passing the Davis Road entrance and crossing a small field beyond the parking lot, proceeds easterly through mixed upland forest. The trail crosses several tiny seasonal streams and wet areas on short boardwalks or stepping stones and passes the two junctions where red connector trails lead into the Spring Hill Conservation Land. Before crossing the Wheeler Lane bridge, the trail makes a sharp descent almost to the brook's bank.



Robbins Mill Pond Dam and Rapids
Drawing by Heather McElroy



Location

Southeast of South Acton Center, between Parker Street and High Street

Entrances

- West side of *Parker Street*, 0.2 mile south of railroad crossing 
- Gravel road at end of *Brewster Lane*, off High Street via Audubon Drive 
- End of *Valley Road*, off High Street

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Hilly, especially in southern portion; gentler terrain in northern portion; occasional stony and wet conditions

PRATT'S BROOK

Pratt's Brook Conservation Land comprises wetlands, forested uplands, a blueberry 'barrens,' two brooks, and a small pond with nearby vernal pools. The trail system consists of a yellow loop trail, three blue secondary trails, and three red access trails. The loop trail roughly follows the property's perimeter. One secondary trail passes the two vernal pools and small pond below the railroad bed, while another is a crossover between the northern and southern lobes of the loop trail at the southern border of the barrens. A third blue trail winds through oak and birch woodlands between the Seniors' Park and the barrens.

The most heavily used access, from the Parker Street entrance, follows a narrow conservation corridor between homes, passing an abandoned stone-lined well before arriving at the loop trail in a stately stand of old white pines.

Proceeding clockwise along the loop trail from this entry point, one passes through uplands wooded predominantly with white pine, red oak, and pitch pine, with occasional specimens of hornbeam (ironwood or blue beech), notable for its smooth twisted bark. The trail soon reaches a footbridge across the small outlet stream from Tenney Circle Pond that meanders through the property's southern portion before joining Pratt's Brook. The loop trail, which then passes over a series of hilly shoulders that slope down into the wetlands, is here particularly suitable for experienced cross-country skiers. Prominent in this wetlands is a variety of fern species, including cinnamon, royal, Boston, hay-scented, sensitive, and interrupted, together with skunk cabbage and red maple.

Pratt's Brook, which bisects the property, enters as a briskly flowing stream that soon spreads out into multiple channels through the broad wetlands before plunging down a rocky



slope to join Fort Pond Brook just outside the property's southeastern boundary. Soon after passing the Valley Road access, the trail crosses the upstream segment of this brook via a sturdy footbridge. After traversing a boardwalk over muddy wetlands, the trail passes through a stand of old hemlock and beech, crossing two stone walls along the way.

Beyond the second wall, the loop trail intersects the crossover trail from the easterly side of the loop trail and continues on the westerly side of the property up a gentle gradient to the Brewster Lane parking area. A 2-acre park adjacent to this parking area, developed by two Eagle Scout candidates for the enjoyment of residents of the contiguous Audubon senior community, is supplied with benches, a picnic table, and bluebird houses. Plantings of wild grasses, native wildflowers, ground covers, and a young, disease-resistant elm tree enhance this little park.

A winding blue trail with gentle gradient (in anticipation of future handicapped-accessibility) leads from the easterly end of the park into the blueberry barrens. There, it connects with an unmarked path across the barrens. Blueberry bushes cover this area and extend into the surrounding woodlands of gray birch and oak. A few stands of mature pitch pine and red oak along the barrens' southerly boundary give this area the feel of Cape Cod. The barrens—one of a few actively managed open areas in town—is thought to have been created by frequent burning from sparks off passing trains before the diesel era.

Beyond the Brewster Lane parking lot, the loop trail passes a kiosk and slopes gently down toward the easterly side of the barrens, which it parallels before turning east toward the ford at the downstream crossing of Pratt's Brook. A notable historical feature, this ford bridge was constructed with massive stone slabs laid side by side and supported on rock stacks. Recently repaired by Land Stewardship volunteers, the bridge now more nearly resembles the ford bridges used in earlier times to allow free flow of all stages of water while permitting foot, horse, and wagon traffic to pass on a solid surface.

A pleasant side trip may be taken along the blue trail that intersects the main trail just north of the ford and rejoins it below the Brewster Lane kiosk. This secondary trail passes between the small pond below the railroad bed and the vernal pools that drain into it during

spring high water levels. The pond also has significant vernal pool characteristics. Over several years, a great horned owl has been seen near these watering places, and the area is believed to be home to one or more coyotes, small groups of white-tailed deer, and a red fox.



Blueberry Barrens with Red Oak and Pitch Pine
Drawing by Tom Tidman



Location

Northeastern Acton, off Pope Road, toward Concord and Carlisle

Entrances/Connectors

- Cul-de-sac on *Spring Hill Road*, off Pope Road (P) (K)
- Cul-de-sac on *Jay Lane*, off Strawberry Hill Road (P) in Strawberry Hill Road lot, at Jay Lane
- From Camp Acton Conservation Land via red connector trails
- From Nashoba Brook Conservation Land via red connector trails

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Mostly level terrain with good walking conditions, but with frequent stony stretches

SPRING HILL

Spring Hill Conservation Land is the middle property of three contiguous conservation lands totaling over 400 acres of preserved wildlife habitat that form Acton’s largest protected natural area. Each property has its own yellow loop trail, separate entrances, kiosk(s), and parking. Two short red-blazed trails connect the easterly side of the Spring Hill loop trail to the Camp Acton loop trail, and two other short red-blazed trails connect the westerly side of the Spring Hill loop trail to the Nashoba Brook loop trail. It is possible to complete a circuit of nearly 6 miles through dense woodlands within these three conservation lands while crossing from Pope Road on the east to Route 27 on the west. Refer to the composite map on page 48.

Spring Hill Conservation Land can be reached by four short internal red trail connectors from the two abutting properties, or via red access trails from each of the two entrances. The access trail from the Jay Lane entrance is the longer, being a full mile. Descending from Strawberry Hill, this trail passes through a predominantly upland area with extensive stands of beech, unusual in this region, and hemlock that extends into the hemlock-swamp lowlands. The trail continues across low, level terrain where the flora include a thicket of water-loving sweet pepperbush, whose fragrant white blossom-spikes scent the air in mid to late summer. After crossing a short boardwalk, this access trail, paralleling old stone walls for most of its length, joins the main Spring Hill loop trail close to the property’s main entrance.

The second red access trail, from the Spring Hill Road entrance, joins this conservation land’s lengthy yellow loop trail near the Jay Lane access and the two connectors from Camp Acton. Used extensively by hikers, bikers, joggers, and cross-country skiers, this loop trail forms an irregularly shaped double ‘U,’



loop trail: 2.5 miles

acreage: 231

map: page 44

with the inner 'U' skirting both sides of a long, narrow wetlands area. A 70-foot boardwalk on the trail's innermost curve crosses the most interior part of this wetlands. Two blue secondary trails that transect the loop trail make possible shorter circuits of this property, whose loop and access trails are longer than most such trails. One of these, just east of the boardwalk, connects the loop trail's inner and outer curves at their midpoints, while the other provides an even shorter circuit at the easternmost curve of the yellow trail, near the Spring Hill Road entrance.

The longest Acton segment of the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) passes through the Spring Hill property, crossing its boundary with Nashoba Brook Conservation Land via a short red connector marked with a sign, and passing along the Jay Lane access trail to the road. Between these two points, the BCT follows the more easterly portion of the yellow trail, and is marked in the woods with BCT-logo patches and white blazes at the principal junctions. On the map it is marked in white. The BCT connects with the Nashoba Brook Conservation Land on the east and with the Stoneymeade Conservation Land, via Strawberry Hill Road and Pope Road, on the south.

Largely buffered from the sound of traffic along Route 27 by the Nashoba Brook Conservation Land, Spring Hill is a pleasant, quiet, relatively level woodland area covered with a deciduous woods of red and white oak, red maple, and black and white birch. A scattering of beech, larch, hemlock, and white pine may be seen throughout. On the forest floor is a distinct community of ground covers, including ferns, mosses, partridgeberry, princess pine, and several other members of the club-moss family, all of which are indigenous to wet or heavily shaded areas. The understory vegetation is dominated by high- and lowbush blueberry and swamp azalea.

Geologically, Spring Hill is uncharacteristic of most of Acton's conservation lands (including the adjacent

Nashoba Brook and Camp Acton lands) in that it is almost without rock outcrops, ledges, or large boulders. However, there are numerous glacial rock gardens scattered throughout the property.



Woodcock (Scolopax minor)
Drawing by Tom Tidman



Location

East Acton on Concord boundary, off Pope Road

Entrances

- Northeastern corner of *Stoneymeade Way*, off Pope Road
 ⓘ; ⓘ along trail
- From Concord's Annursnac Conservation Land, via Strawberry Hill Road

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Gently rolling; fairly even footing; trail may be wet in low spots

STONEYMEADE

Stoneymeade Conservation Land, abutting conservation land in the town of Concord, preserves one of the two largest remaining open fields in Acton, but it also includes a small stream, a vernal pool, stone walls, and bordering woods. The field is kept open by mowing late each fall to prevent forest succession from occurring. The vista from the field encompasses a small pond, edged with big tooth aspens, the historic Stoneymeade Farm with paddocks and stone tower, a number of newer houses, and forestland on the far edge of the field. Much of this vista is in Concord, but the boundary between the two towns is seamless, enabling both towns to enjoy this tranquil open area.

A sign marks the main entrance into Stoneymeade Conservation Land from Stoneymeade Way. A short walk through the woods along a wide, level path leads to the open field that makes up most of the conservation land that is easily accessible to the public. The trail along this corridor is yellow-blazed, but the blazes cease at the entrance to the field, except for one blaze on the large, centrally located oak tree surrounded by ledge in the grassy area. The trail, however, is shown on the map as yellow along its length.

At the oak tree, the trail branches. The main trail follows the southerly branch, continuing via a well-worn track through the field grasses to the boundary with Concord. The northerly branch leads to private property, where a sign marks the boundary of the conservation land. The main trail forms part of Acton's segment of the Bay Circuit Trail. It connects directly with Concord's Spencer Brook Trail through the abutting Annursnac Conservation Land to the south and, via Stoneymeade Way, Strawberry Hill Road, and Jay Lane, with Spring Hill Conservation Land to the north.

Horses with riders coming from and

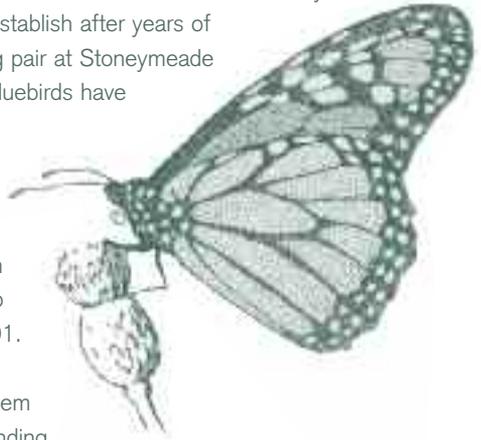


returning to the nearby Stoneymeade Farm use this north-to-south trail, which also forms part of 'The Hunt.' Sponsored by the Old North Bridge Hounds, 'The Hunt' takes place twice a year, in the spring and again in the fall, beginning at the horse farm and completing a local 6-mile circuit to Concord's Estabrook Woods and back.

Stoneymeade Farm is a Revolutionary-era homestead built in the early 1700s. The Brooks family owned and operated it for three generations. Seth Brooks, who fought in the Battle of Lexington and Concord, in which Acton's Captain Isaac Davis was killed, brought Davis' body back to Acton. In 1885, the stone tower was built to store water. The original barn is a classic 19th-century barn, but Stoneymeade Farm now also includes the prominent yellow horse barn to the northwest. By the end of that century, the buildings were used as a summer country estate.

This conservation land is home to many species of birds. Among those that have been observed raising their young here are scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, yellow warbler, red-eyed vireo, warbling vireo, gray catbird, song sparrow, eastern bluebird, tree swallow, and, occasionally, bobolink. Red-winged blackbirds nest beside the marshy margin of the pond. Chickadees, robins, and titmice make Stoneymeade their year-round home. The concerted efforts of the Acton Bluebird Recovery Program to encourage bluebirds to reestablish after years of decline resulted in a successful nesting pair at Stoneymeade in 1999. Since then, several pairs of bluebirds have nested there each year.

The Bluebird Recovery Program maintains 20 nesting boxes on Acton conservation lands, out of a total of 100 town-wide. A threefold increase in successful bluebird fledges, from 58 to 156, occurred between 1999 and 2001. The program monitors nesting boxes between April and August, checking them from once a day to once a week depending on the predation threats. The program's volunteers build and install boxes, and will advise landowners on appropriate placement and address other problems. Brochures on this program can be picked up from the pamphlet table in the solarium in the Acton Library.



Monarch Butterfly (Danaus plexippus)
Drawing by Gigi Hopkins



Location

East Acton, parallel to northern side of Route 2, 0.8 mile west of rotary at MCI in Concord

Entrances

- West side of *Wetherbee Street*, at wooded edge of farm field (D) at roadside (K) at edge of wooded upland
- From Hosmer Street church parking lot, off east side of *Hosmer Street*

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Gently rolling; fairly even footing; trails dry

WETHERBEE LAND

Wetherbee Conservation Land's most prominent feature is the farm field along Route 2 that is bordered on the east by Wetherbee Street. Formerly part of the farm of the same name, this 31-acre field is now the only actively farmed agricultural field that belongs to the Town of Acton. Bordering edges of the field not used for silage crops for the neighboring prison system's beef herd are excellent examples of small grassland habitat, now the rarest ecosystem in Massachusetts. Here also, State Police exercise the horses stabled on the other side of Wetherbee Street. The remaining 41 acres, which extend to Alcott Road and Berry Lane on the north and west, consist of meadow, marsh, and woodland. This upland portion is accessible by the farm-vehicle road that skirts the woods along the field's northern edge.

The loop trail system is located within the parcel's wooded portion. In addition to the access trail from Wetherbee Street, a second access trail enters the woodland from the parking lot belonging to the Hosmer Street church. The yellow loop trail is bisected by one short blue crossover trail. Another blue secondary trail makes possible a side tour through the southeastern portion of the woodland, close to the field, passing along a stone wall for most of its length.

Just beyond the northwest corner of the farm field, a small, sloping, short-grass meadow, accented with crabapple trees, provides an attractive approach to the upland loop. South of this meadow lies a marshy habitat that in turn feeds a tiny north-to-south stream and vernal pool that separate the woods from the field's western edge. The property's back section, further to the west, is wooded with secondary growth typical of New England upland, and features red maple, black and red oak, and white pine, with a scattering of ash, big tooth aspen, sassafras, hawthorn, and sumac. In the

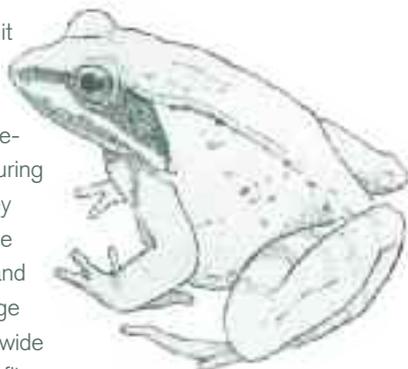


woods, old stone walls still define early boundaries. One of these, running north-to-south, is colonial or older; the others are more recent.

Despite the property's proximity to the busy Route 2 corridor, the area is rich with many species of animals—particularly birds—and the vegetation, insects, rodents, and amphibians that support them. In addition to the upland tree species, the more moist areas produce highbush blueberries, skunk cabbage, grapes, and many ferns and mosses. Lowbush blueberries and many species of wildflowers, including whorled loosestrife and licorice bedstraw, also flourish here. The field-edge vegetation includes viburnum and trumpet honeysuckle.

These varied and rich habitats attract and support white-tailed deer, coyotes—occasionally heard 'singing' in the early morning—and garter snakes. In the spring, wood frogs and peepers send up a noisy clamor from two vernal pools (one on abutting private property). Breeding field birds include savannah sparrow, vesper sparrow (on the state's list of threatened species and first seen here in 2002), swamp sparrow, red-tailed and sharp-shinned hawk, indigo bunting, and eastern bluebird. Breeding upland birds include hermit thrush, scarlet tanager, red-eyed and warbling vireos, cardinal, robin, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, and white-breasted nuthatch. Coursing over the field during the summer, both barn swallows and chimney swifts gather the abundant insects. In fall, the bare field attracts flocks of American pipits and killdeer and is a favorite roosting area for large groups of crows. The field grasses attract a wide variety of dragonflies, damselflies, and butterflies.

In addition to walking, the area is suitable for cross-country skiing, as well as horseback riding, snowshoeing, and tracking/birding. When the summer growth has died back, the field is used for a variety of activities, including Boy Scout meets, dog obedience training, rocketry contests, kite-flying, photography, and stargazing. This is a prime area for watching the Perseid and Leonid meteor showers in August and November.



Wood Frog (*Rana sylvatica*)

Drawing by Gigi Hopkins



Location

North Acton, northeast of Great Road (Route 2A) and northwest of Main Street (Route 27), toward Westford

Entrances

- Cul-de-sac on *Nagog Park Drive*, off Great Road (P) (K)
- Two entrances on west side of *Quarry Road*, off Main Street (P) (K) at northerly entrance
- *Captain Handley Drive*, off Harris Street (P) (K)

Terrain/Trail Conditions

Mostly level with minor ups and downs, especially near Quarry Road; varying trail conditions, from twisting, stony woods paths to wide, smooth trails that include some segments with crushed stone, wood chips, or asphalt surfaces; some wet spots in northerly portion

WILLS HOLE / TOWN FOREST

This conservation land comprises Wills Hole Conservation Land and the contiguous Town Forest. In its southerly portion, it surrounds now unused granite quarries. The property's most unusual feature is Wills Hole, a pond and quaking bog ecosystem in the westerly portion. The easterly portion, much of it strewn with rocks and boulders, includes 49 acres designated as Town Forest, where stands of red and white oak, red maple, and white pine formerly provided firewood for town residents.

The two areas are now seamless, with a trail system that makes a circuit of both properties. The yellow loop trail can be reached by four red access trails; one blue crossover trail bisects the loop. A pedestrian walkway, packed with crushed stone, passes through this conservation land between NARA Park and the Nagog Park Drive cul-de-sac, where overflow parking is available for NARA Park events.

The Nagog Park Drive entrance provides the most direct route to the Wills Hole pond and bog. This portion of the loop trail traverses the top of a glacial esker, a sand and gravel ridge deposited by a stream that flowed beneath a melting glacier. The curving form of this narrow, raised landform, with steeply sloping sides, signifies its glacial origin. Below the esker on both sides are flat, shrub-filled bog and wetland areas, extensions of the Wills Hole habitat.

The esker is a drainage divide: water on its easterly side flows into Nonset Brook; water on the westerly side flows southward to Wills Hole Brook. Both streams eventually empty into Nashoba Brook. The esker terminates at a small hill covered with an old grove of white pines. Immediately to the west is a 170-foot winding boardwalk that leads to the edge of the open water of the Wills Hole pond.

Wills Hole is a classic quaking bog. At its center, it is an open pond, but ringing the open water is a mat of floating sphagnum moss,



loop trail: **1.9** miles

acreage: **90**

map: page **47**

which, in turn, is ringed by a slightly upland zone of dense shrubs and trees. These include black spruce, larch, and swamp azalea. Quaking bogs are unusual environments that support unique plant life because the bog waters are typically acidic and poor in the nutrients that most plants can utilize. The result is the growth of carnivorous plants that trap and digest insects and small animals to obtain the needed nutrients. Plants of this type found at Wills Hole include the pitcher plant and the sundew. Other non-carnivorous plants on the sphagnum mat include American cranberry, leatherleaf, sheep laurel, and swamp loosestrife. All these plants can be observed from the boardwalk. Visitors should not step off the boardwalk onto the fragrant bog mat.

Beyond the white pine grove at the entrance to the bog's boardwalk, the loop trail continues its circuit of the property, passing close to two subdivisions off Harris Street in the southern part of the property. Between these developments and NARA Park, evidence of the old quarries, which are now private property, can be seen in the occasional jumble of large boulders to the northwest side of the trail.

After skirting the quarry area, the trail turns north. It first passes one of two access trails from Quarry Road and then one end of the blue crossover trail, which links the loop trail with the pedestrian walkway close to the Nagog Park Drive cul-de-sac. The loop trail here becomes stony and twists through a densely forested area before passing the second access trail from Quarry Road. A kiosk is located at this junction. The trail then crosses the pedestrian walkway between NARA and Nagog Park Drive. On the far side of the walkway, the trail skirts a wetlands area with a tiny pond before completing the remainder of the circuit back to Nagog Park Drive.

The easterly portion of the property is laced with a tangle of unblazed paths and a cart track used in an earlier period to bring stone from the quarry. Careful observation of the blazes is advised.



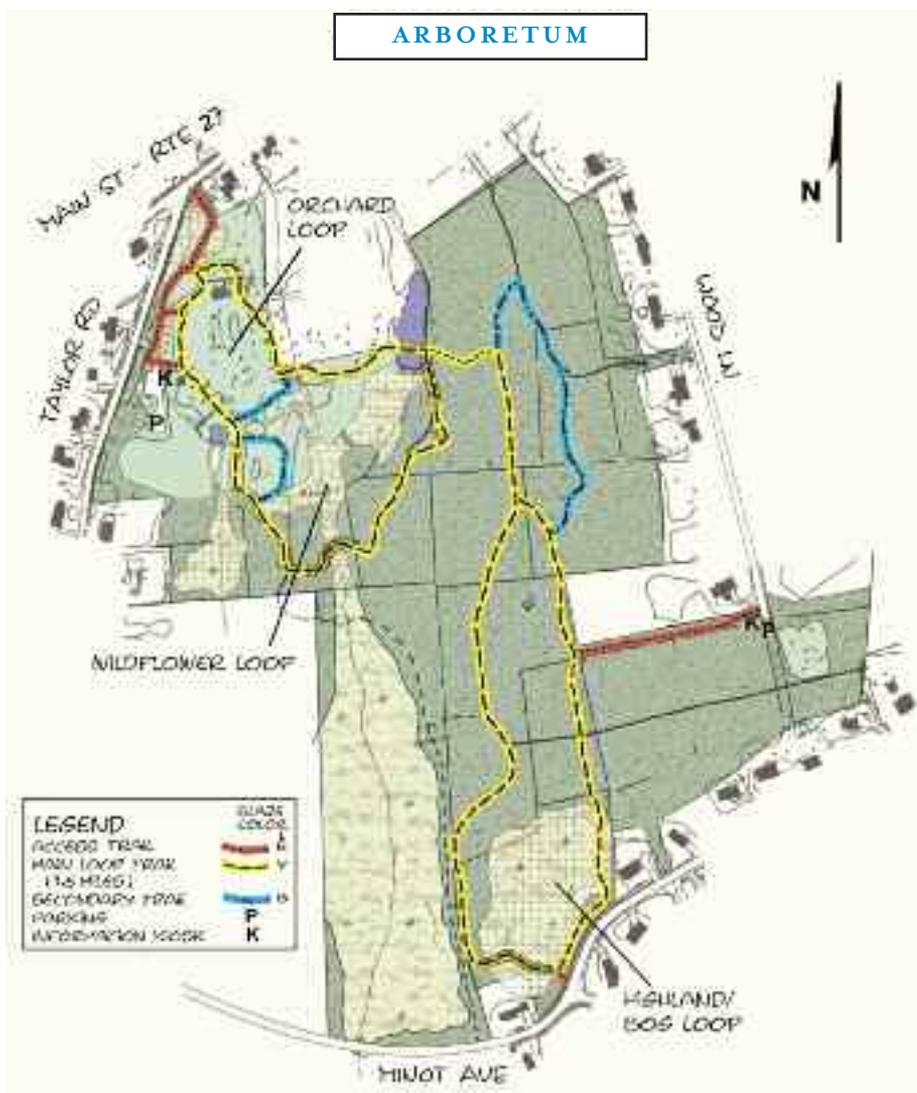
Pitcher Plant (Sarracenia purpurea)

Drawing by Heather McElroy

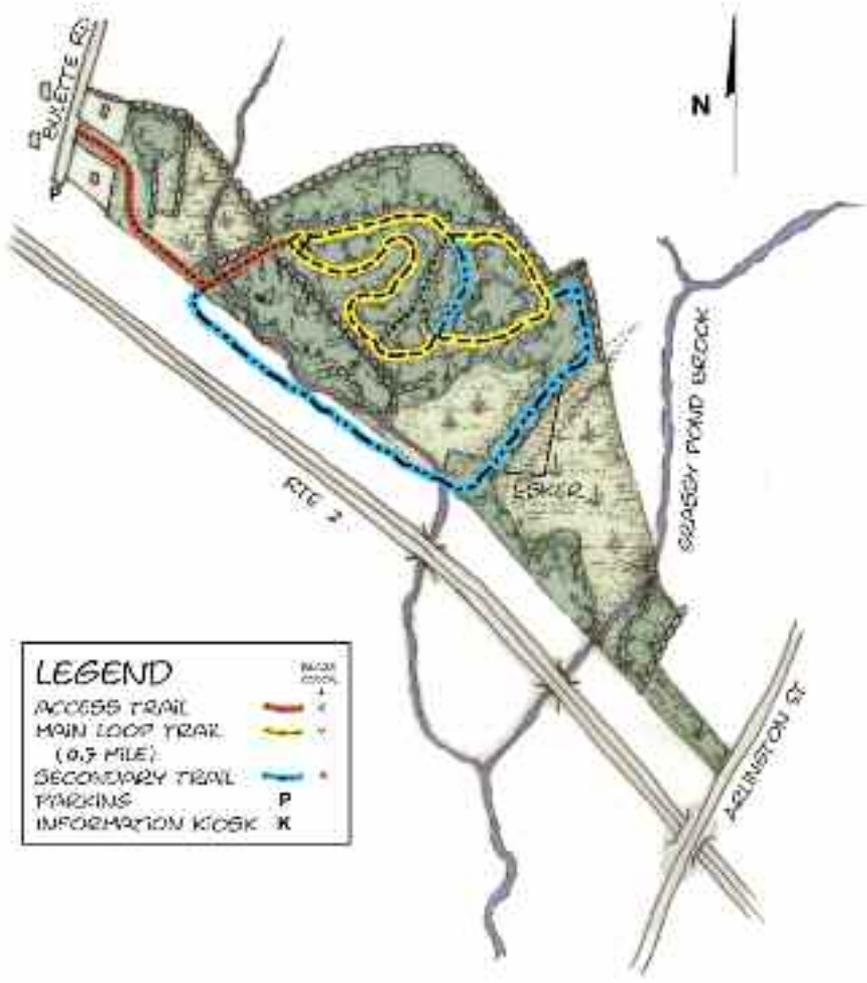


Arboretum Stone Wall and Brook
Drawing by Tom Tidman

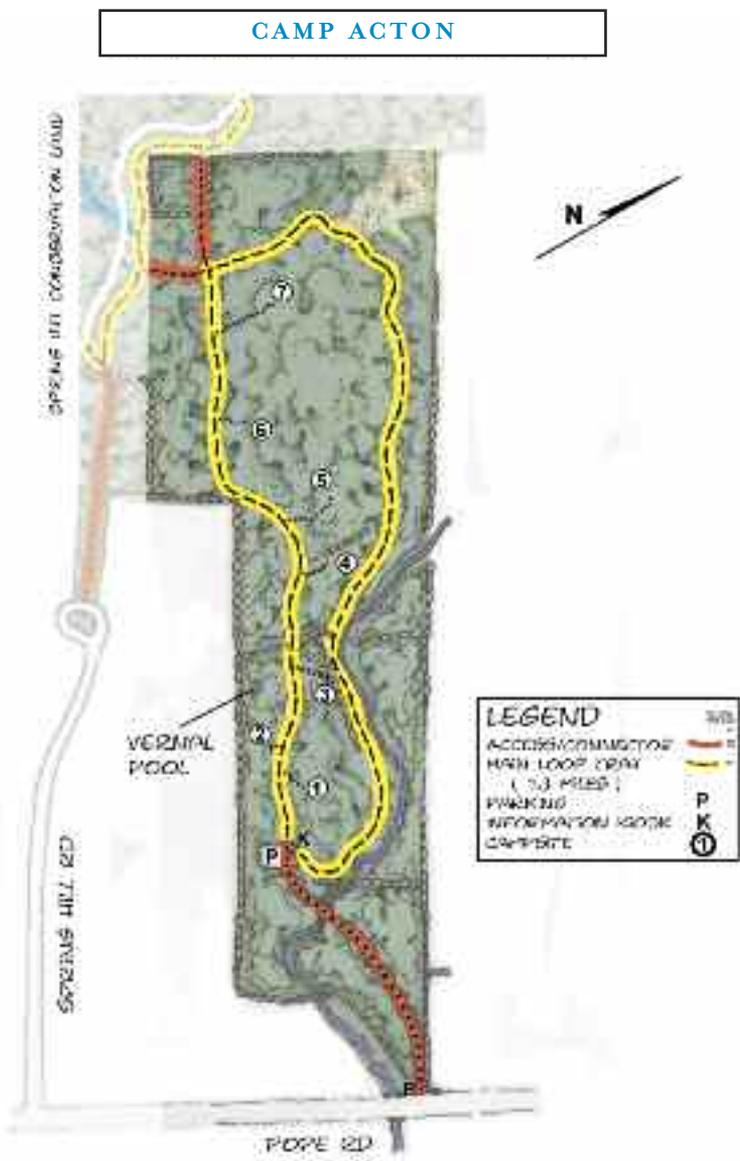
ARBORETUM



BULETTE LAND / TOWN FOREST

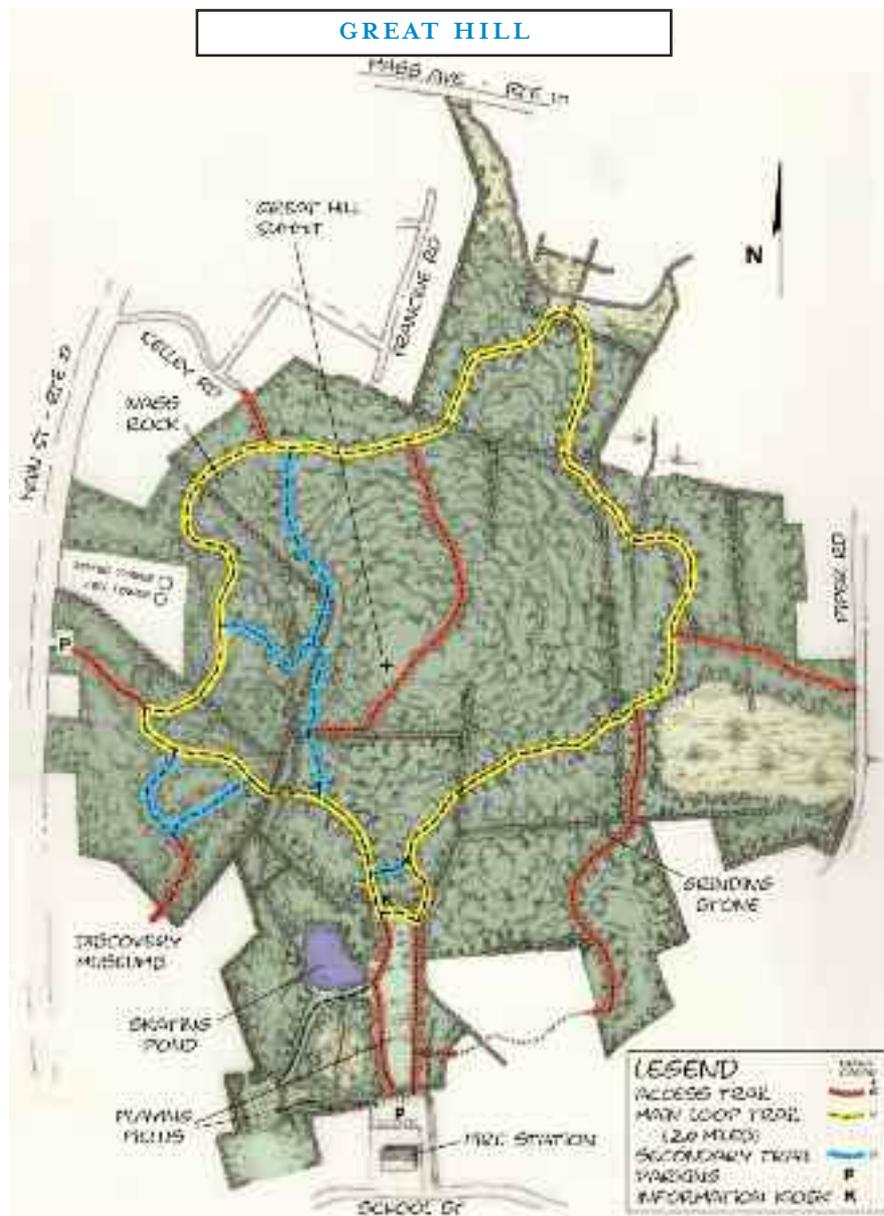


LEGEND	
ACCESS TRAIL	+
MAIN LOOP TRAIL (0.7 MILE)	+
SECONDARY TRAIL	+
PARKING	+
INFORMATION KIOSK	+

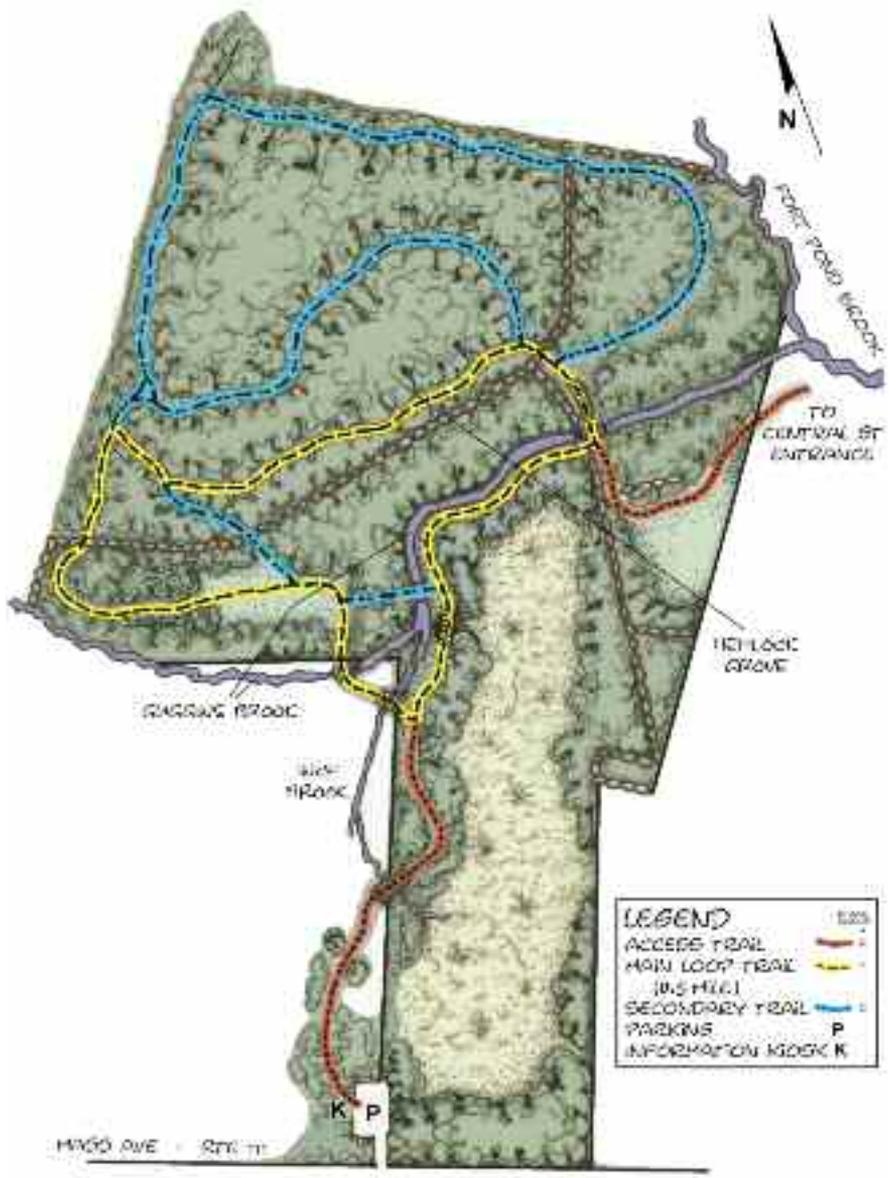


GRASSY POND

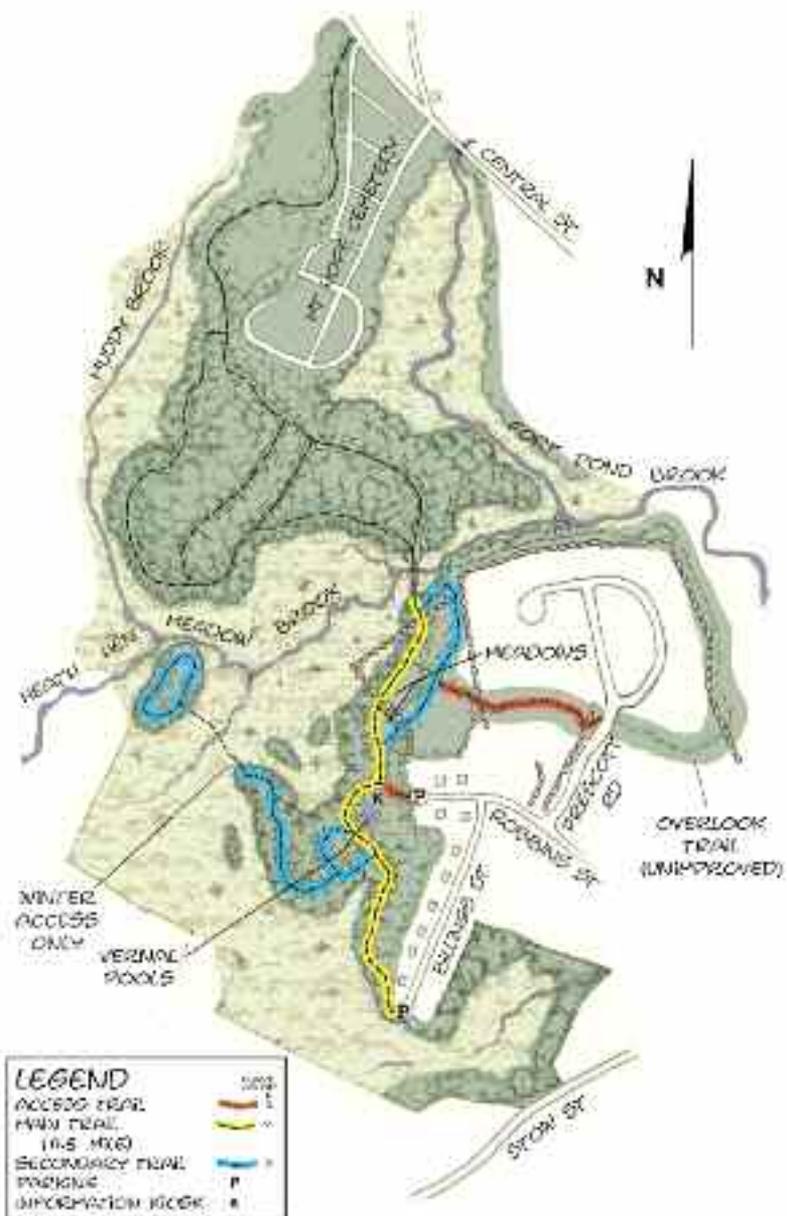




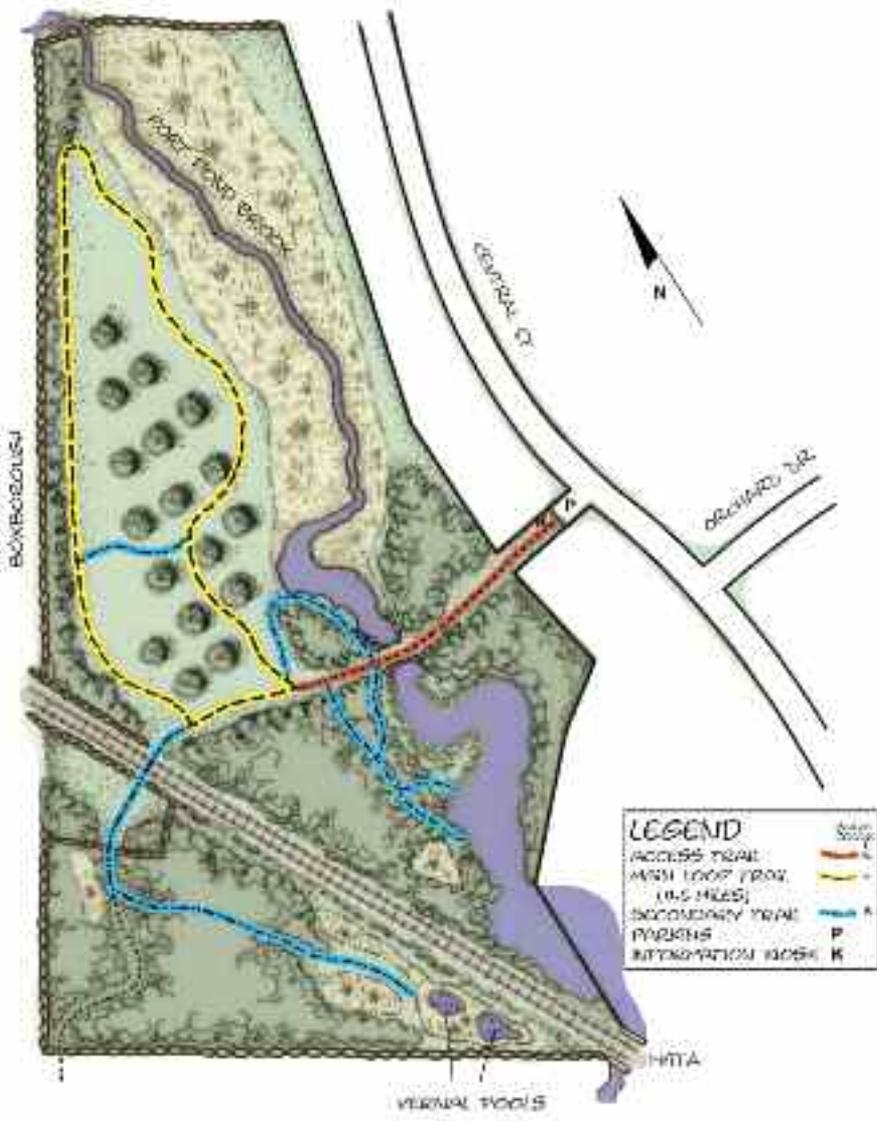
GUGGINS BROOK



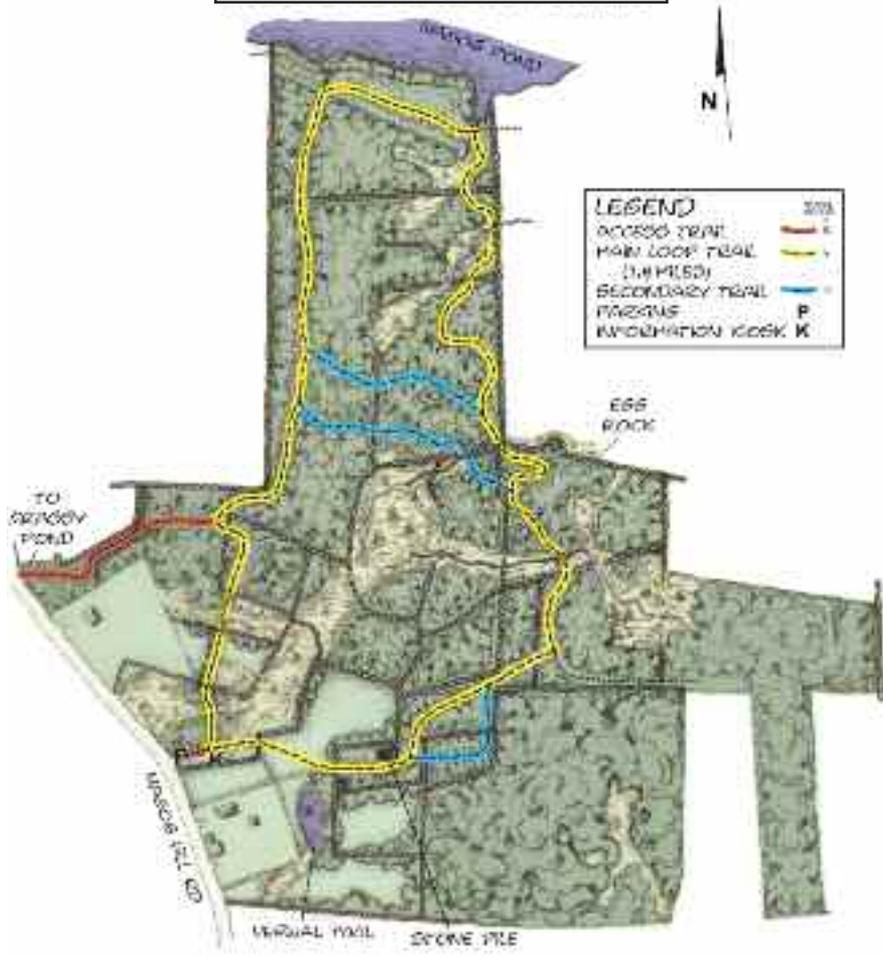
HEATH HEN MEADOW



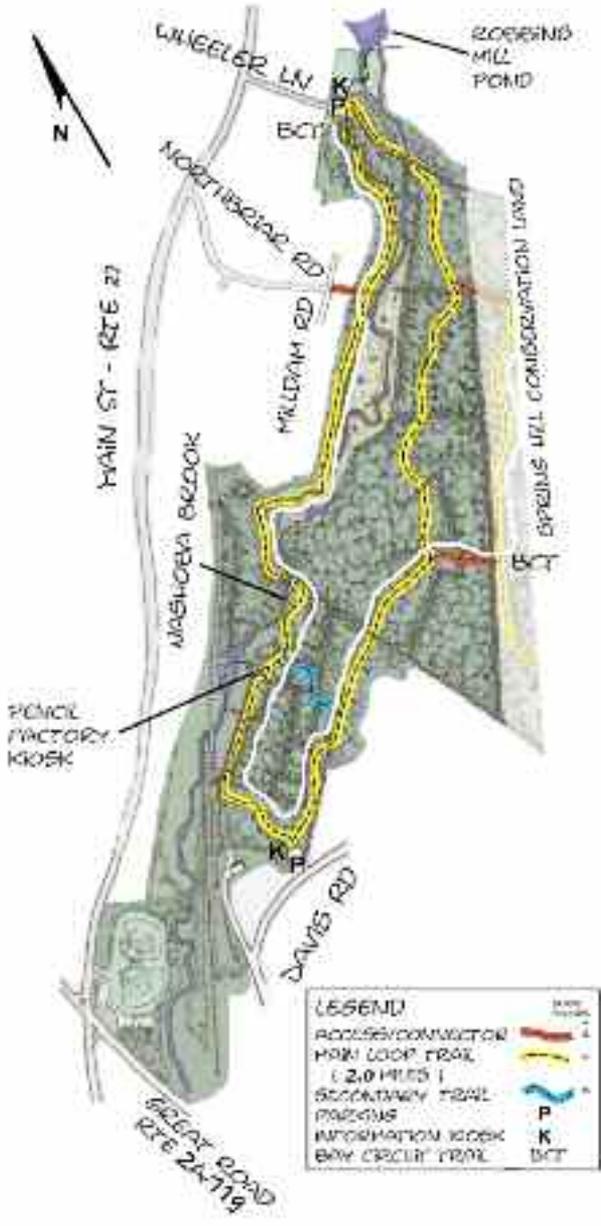
JENKS LAND



NAGOG HILL



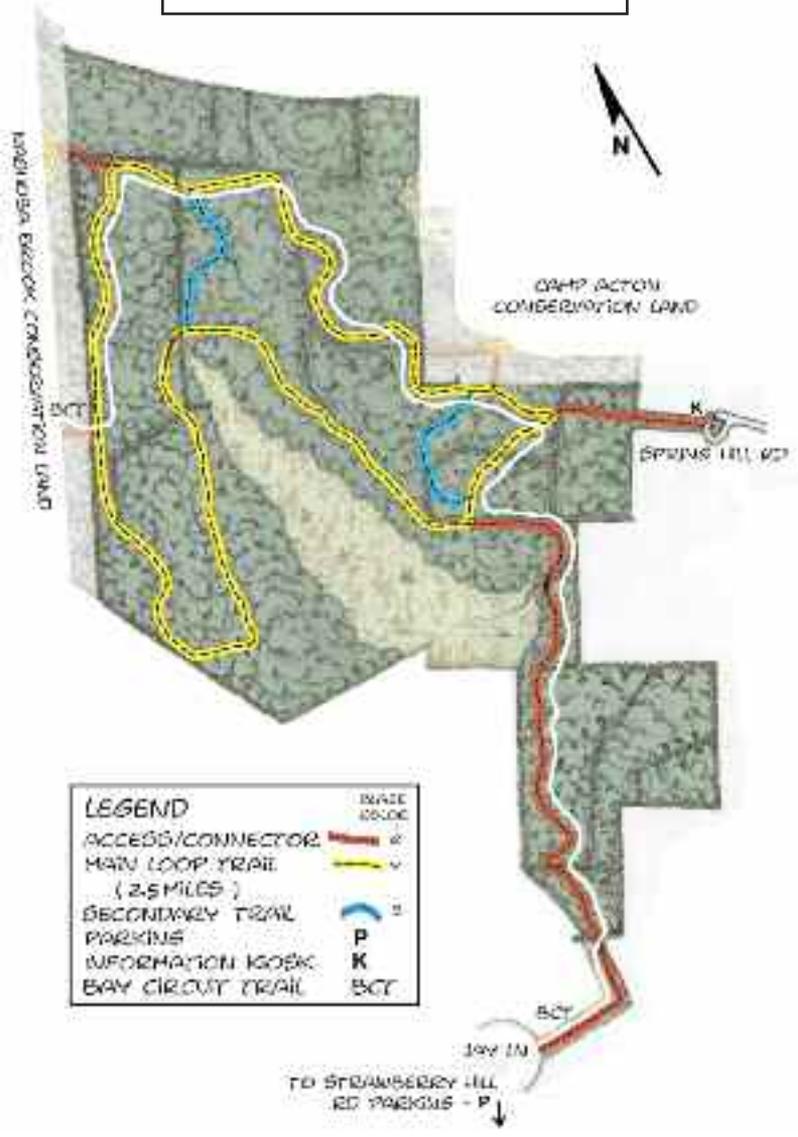
NASHOBA BROOK



PRATT'S BROOK

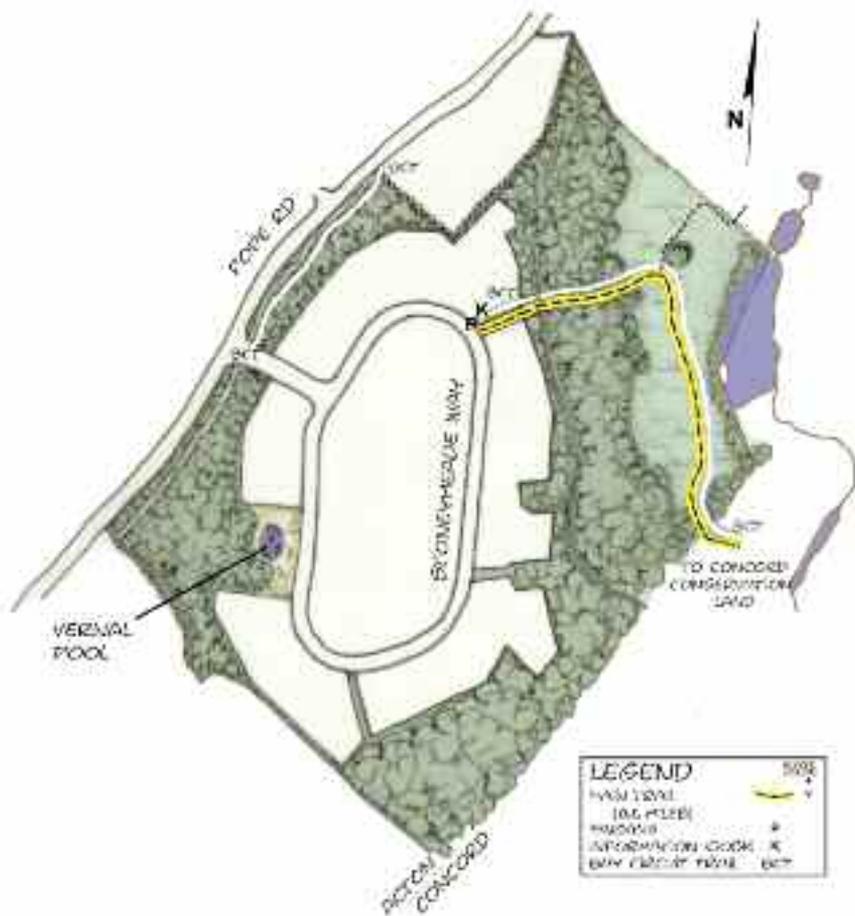


SPRING HILL

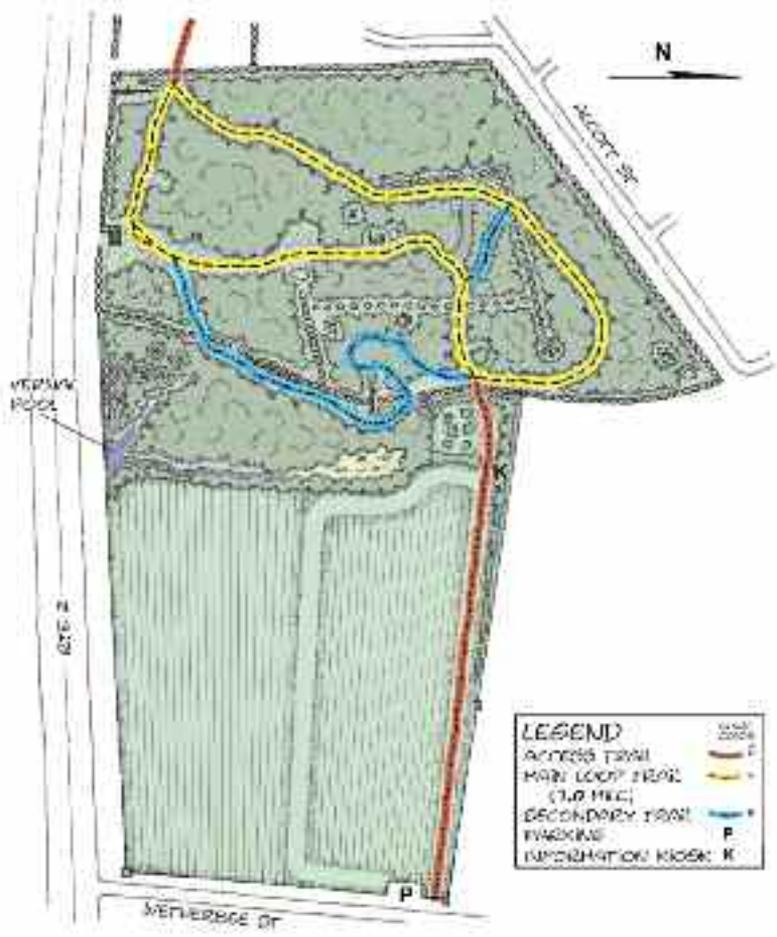


LEGEND	
ACCESS/CONNECTOR	Red line
MAIN LOOP TRAIL (2.5 MILES)	Yellow dashed line
SECONDARY TRAIL	Blue dashed line
PARKING	P
INFORMATION KIOSK	K
BAY CIRCUIT TRAIL	BCT

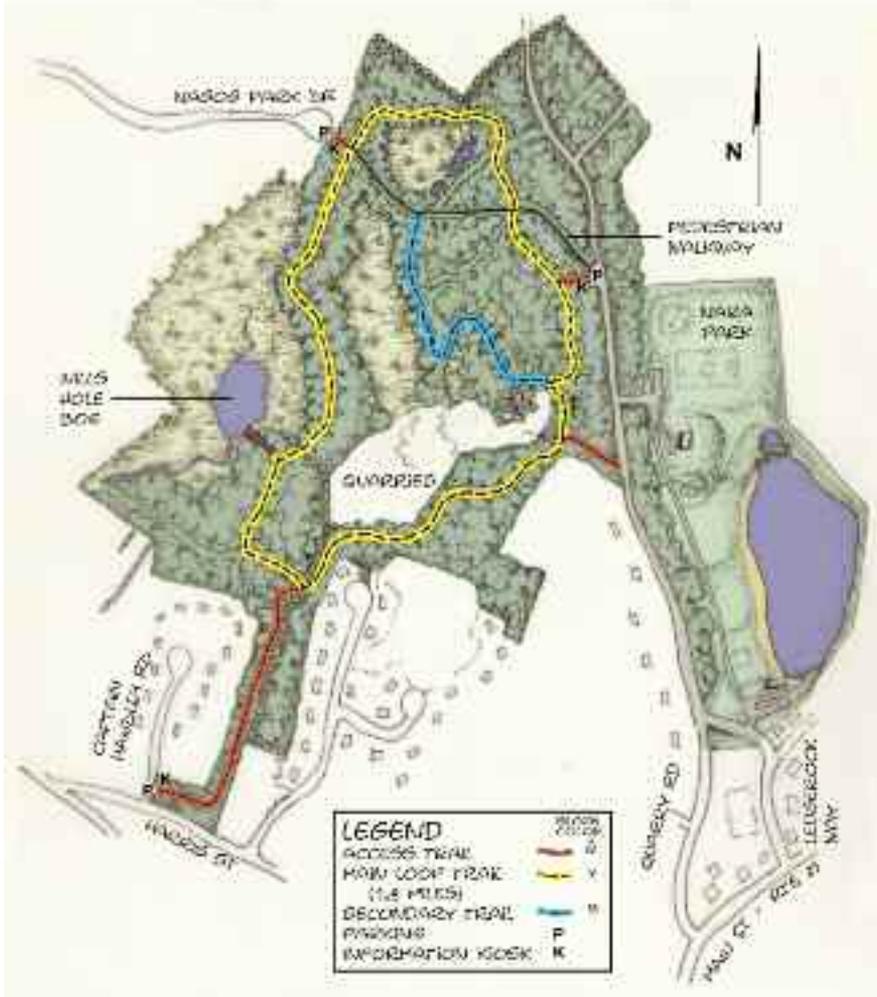
STONEYMEADE



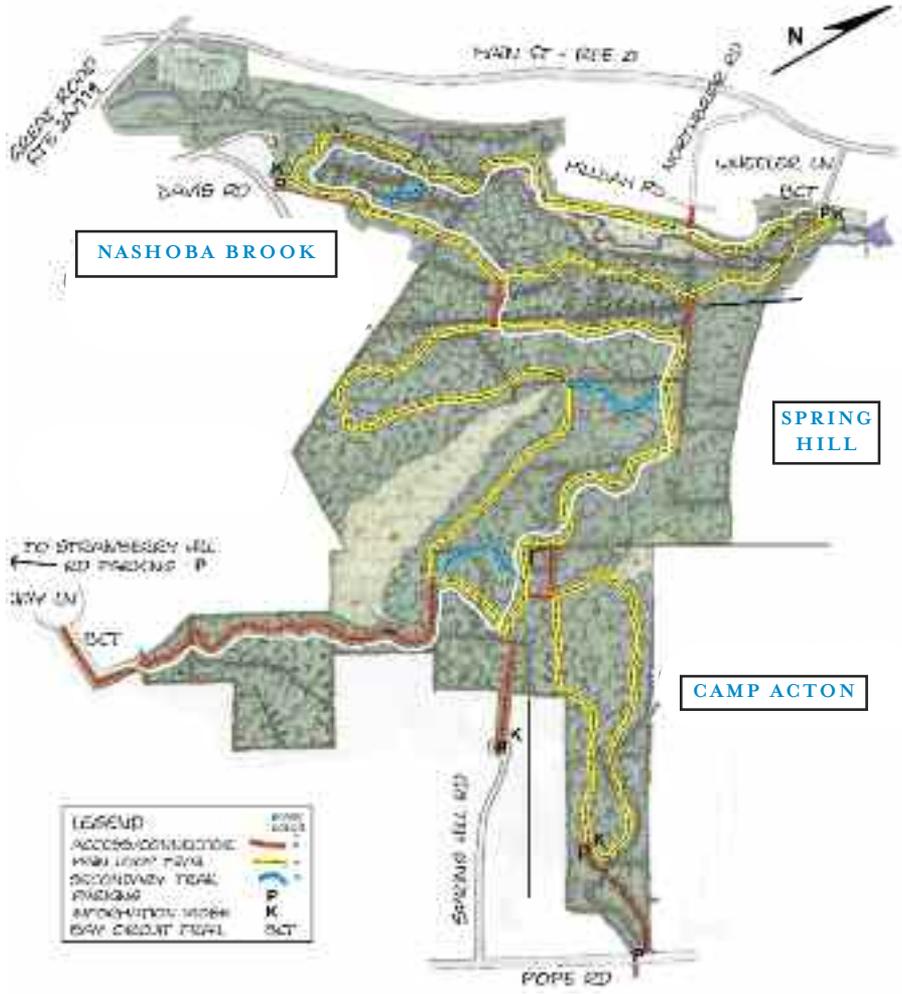
WETHERBEE LAND



WILLS HOLE / TOWN FOREST



NASHOBA BROOK / SPRING HILL / CAMP ACTON



NASHOBA BROOK

SPRING HILL

CAMP ACTON

LEGEND

Access/Commuter	Red line
Main Loop Trail	Yellow line
Secondary Trail	Blue line
Parkway	Purple line
Amphitheater	P
Key Point	K
Boundary Point	SCT