

Two Places Trail

Great Meadows
& Saunders Pastures

Trails with Tails

INTRODUCTION

Two Places Trail features once-upon-a-time early farm pastures, and a long-time-ago meadow. The colonial farm's pastures, over which this trail passes, date back to the 1740s. The meadow, formed during the last ice age, has been here since that glacier receded, roughly 15,000 years ago. Just by walking this trail you will learn much about both.

History and natural beauty await your
curiosity and appreciation.

Important notice about dogs. Both pastures and wetland areas along this trail provide rich habitat for nesting wildlife, consequently, dogs, even good dogs, must be on short leads from April 1st to September 1st. Thank you.

THE PASTURES

Stonewalls define various uses early farmers gave to their land, such as; land that could be worked with a plow, marginal land that could grow grasses, and to define boundaries between neighbors. However, the most important purpose of the stonewalls was to create areas to confine livestock.

THE MEADOW

Beavers keep this meadow tree-free by flooding it. Due to their work, Great Meadow is a sanctuary for wildlife rivaling the finest in New Hampshire.

POINTS OF INTEREST

#1 Upper Pasture

As recently as 1990, this pasture was an open hay field. Soils in fields left unattended soon return to forest. This field's grasses are losing the battle to trees.

#2 Two Apple Trees

Seeds dropped here by wildlife – bird? fox? bear? deer? raccoon? moose? – or even ants that might have carried seeds underground giving life to these trees. (The field's grasses lose again.)

Listen. Hear any field sounds?

Anything catch your eye? Point to it.
Ask questions.

#3 Black Gum Tree (Tupelo)

These trees are remarkable for several reasons. They tend to send branches outward in twists and turns. Their twigs grow at right angles from their bases. Their leaves have a waxy finish and turn an eye-catching red in the fall. Mammals and birds relish the fruit. One characteristic really sets them apart: Black Gum Trees outlive all other trees in our forest. It is believed that the oldest trunk in this group of black gum was growing here before the Pilgrims landed in 1620, perhaps before 1500! There are Black Gum saplings growing here.

Can you point out the Black Gum saplings?
(There are seven.)

#4 Great Meadow View

In the valley below flows Buxton Brook. The vast beaver meadow is the largest such wetland in New Boston. A farmer standing here 100 years ago would have seen this meadow surrounded by fields.

#5 Entrance to Lower Pasture

Enjoy the view. You are in the company of a 125 ± year old White Oak Tree just to your left, and the oak grows in the company of a 100 ± year old Black Cherry tree.

Listen. Any bird song?
Wind sounds or motions?

Look. A wildflower? A butterfly?
Pretty clouds?

#6 White Oak and Black Cherry Trees

You are under the long stretched branches of another ancient White Oak Tree; 150 ± years; again accompanied by an elderly Black Cherry.

Why is most of the oak's massive
architecture of branches on the
pasture side of its trunk?

#7 Crossing Point

Here the trail leaves the Lower Pasture and takes you into an 80 to 100 year old forest. Loggers cut many trees in this forest several years ago. When sunlight floods forest soils that had previously been in the shade, seeds from surrounding adult trees then take root. As a result you will be seeing thousands of saplings now competing for sunlight. Only a few will become adult trees, ready again to be harvested five to eight decades from now.

#8 Great Meadow's Edges

Wet soils around meadows can grow only certain grasses, bushes, and trees, but those key plants provide cover and food for a select group of insects and animals.

Listen for sounds coming from the edges.

Listen for sounds coming from
Great Meadow.

Touch the graceful grasses and
ferns growing here.

Eat the blueberries you find.

(Soft voices fit nicely along this sensitive edge.)

#9 Gap in the Stonewall

The Story of Great Meadow pamphlet told of early farmers using nutritious meadow grasses for their cows and oxen. A single farmer used each gap so they could gather meadow grass, load their wagons, and haul the forage home. Beavers made the mound of mud by the meadow's edge. They apply their scent (musk) to mark their territory.

#10 View

Here the edge opens up a view of Great Meadow to the west and south.

Listen for frogs...

One of Great Meadow's strangest voices come from its Great Blue Herons. You may see one as they come to the meadow to spear fish.

Watch for other birds flying over the wetland.

#11 Stonewall Reading

Each stonewall had a purpose, so every stonewall has a story that can be read. Why was this wall built here? Answer: It separated the wet soil along the meadow's edge from the high, dryer soil in the Lower pasture. Small stones in walls indicate soils were plowed. Each year, freezing and thawing soils bring more rocks to the surface, so those new stones would have to be carried away. All the stones, large and small on walls, were always found on the downhill side of every field. Why?

#12 Two Views

The Lower Pasture to the left (north), and, Great Meadow's panorama to the south. The beaver lodge is to the left of the two boulders seen along the distant shore.

Listen. Watch.

#13 Sensitive Meadow Edge Area

Many birds nest here, some in thickets just above ground, some in thick grasses, and others like Hermit Thrushes and Ovenbirds nest right on the ground.

Touch the graceful ferns and
notice their differences. Touch the mosses.
See more than one species.

(A place to be quiet.)

#14 Stonewall Story - Two

At the triangle of walls here (on the pasture side), see a place where tons of small stones have been taken off fields once plowed during 200 years of farming activity here. The mass of stones looks more like a mound of earth, but look carefully.

#15 Stonewall Story - *Three*

The forested land to the left of the trail was once plowed by generations of farmers. The stonewall to the right tells that story: Fields were plowed across slopes to stop erosion. Farmers always flipped the angle of the plow blade so the furrow of soil turned down hill. Over many years gravity and erosion would move the soils downslope. How does the stonewall tell that story? When the wall was first built, the height of land was the same on both sides. Today the soil on the once plowed field side is much higher than the soil on the meadow side.

#16 American Beech Tree

Second oldest living tree along this trail; estimate between 200 to 225 years. Beechnuts are many times more nutritious than acorns and other forest mast. They are the first choice of every animal that eats such food. A disturbing fact:

American Beech trees are threatened by disease. See the fine swamp in the background.

#17 Pasture Soils to Forest Soils

The legacy of the last glacier deposited many types of soils across the land. Early settlers searched for soil types that, once cleared of trees, could be plowed and planted with crops. Such areas were few here in New Boston. Most of our land was left covered with stones, boulders and great chunks of broken ledges. Those areas could not be plowed but their soils can regrow, again and again, the finest hardwood forests in the world.

Look.

See the fine variety and health of the trees.

Can you identify any?

#18 Boulder Ridge Area

Again the glacier's story can be seen here. Along this ridge, which lies between two seasonal streams, you will see fractured slices of stone that have come to sleep here. Porcupines often stop at such places. How can you tell? Farther, across a quiet, forest stream, you will be in the company of another family of ledges.

#19 Old Logging Road

When this part of the forest was harvested recently, all its logs were skidded along the ground and piled in the Upper Pasture. Log dragging disturbed the soil here, but created perfect habitat for a wide variety of weedy plants to grow. Such places attract many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and insects

Listen. Any birds? Look.

See any wildflowers being pollinated by insects?

Please come back to Two Places Trail.

You will find something worthwhile—
every time.

