

Rockwell Trail

This trail is situated at the crest of a fifty-acre plot of land donated in 1999 to the Colebrook Land Conservancy by the Eggers family, descendants of the Colebrook Rockwells, for the preservation of the western approaches to Colebrook Center and as an educational tool for the people of Colebrook.

Although only .44 of a mile long, and an easy trail to hike, its rewards far outweigh what you might expect from a much longer trail.

After the first 100 yards, the trail splits, forming a loop. You may proceed on either the right or left trail.

This land has been used for only three purposes since the 1760s: harvesting trees for making charcoal and timber for lumber, stone quarrying and sheep raising.

The last time it was lumbered was in the 1980s (timber will never be cut here again); the larger pieces of slash from this operation are still evident. The small trees that are trying to regenerate as a result of this timber cutting are a good example of an intermediate forest. In a few years most of them will have died as a result of aggressive competition for the limited amount of sunlight. When a more mature forest is established much of the underbrush and small branches that litter the ground will be gone, resulting in easier walking and better views.

If you choose to take the right hand trail, near the top of a small rise there are two points of interest on your right: the large white pine, which survived the timbering because it does not contain a straight bole, hence yielding a small amount of usable timber in relation to the amount of effort in harvesting the tree. Lumbermen refer to such trees as “wolf trees”; in this case a wolf pine. A few feet behind this tree begins a cliff that will continue for the next two or three hundred yards. This is the area that was quarried during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and evidence of this operation remains in the form of a rock that defied the best efforts of the quarrier to split it in half. The metal objects embedded in the stone are called plug and feathers; two tapered pins (feathers) are inserted into a hole drilled in the stone and the plug is pounded between them, causing the pressure to split the stone. If the quarry man miscalculated the grain of the stone, the feathers and plugs were lost, as seen here.

As you gaze down upon the massive boulders at the base of the escarpment, note that some of them are covered with a short, dark-leaved fern named Common Polypody. These ferns don't like competition, and often blanket rock surfaces spurned by other vegetation.

There are two things to be observed about the Beech trees. Some have smooth gray bark. These are healthy specimens; the ones having bark with deep striations are dying with a disease that is killing off the Beeches just as the Chestnut blight has eliminated the American Chestnut. The other point of interest is the deep scarring around the base of several Beech trees. Porcupines eating the bark caused this. This often causes the death of a tree if the bark is removed all the way around.

Near the farthest end of the trail, shortly after the trail reverses direction, note the four chunks of white quartz lying on the ground. We are not sure, but there is a strong possibility that Native Americans could have gathered these inclusions in the bedrock and set them aside to be used at a later date for making weapon points. An arrowhead of

what appears to be the exact composition as these stones was found on Chapin Road some years ago.

The land descends from here, and as it levels off you will see a broken tree trunk with small hemlocks growing from its upper surface. One end is five feet above the ground, and looks very much like a camel's head. Close observation will reveal a virtual miniature garden of plants and mosses growing on its upper side. A few more yards brings you to a large boulder on the left side of the trail. The flat surface facing you is the result of quarrying (note the drill holes). In the spring there is a colony of Pink Lady Slippers near this boulder.

Shortly before rejoining the main trail, notice the stand of Striped Maples, most of which are on your left. Some of these have a circumference of two feet - giants of their species. The largest specimen in the state grows in White Memorial Reserve in Litchfield and has a girth of about 30 inches.

The Colebrook Land Conservancy asks you to please be careful when stepping over the several moss-covered logs that have been left across the trail. Close inspection reveals them to be covered with very delicate and beautiful plant life.

The majority of trees that will be encountered along this trail include Ironwood, Rock Maple, Red Maple, Striped Maple, White Pine, Hemlock, Beech, Black Cherry, White Birch, Yellow Birch, Black Birch, Red Oak, White Ash and Basswood (you may find others).

Depending upon the season, some of the flowering plants along the trail are Pink Lady Slipper, Trillium, Wintergreen, Indian Pipe, Sorrel, Gill-over-the-ground, Red Clover, White Baneberry (doll's eye), Lamb's Quarters and many varieties of mushrooms.

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