Sandy Brook

Sandy Brook arises at York Lake, at an elevation of 1550 feet, in the township of Sandisfield, Massachusetts. It flows 5 miles southeastward through Massachusetts, traverses ½ mile of the northeastern corner of the township of Norfolk, Connecticut and merges 7½ miles later into Still River in southeastern Colebrook. During this short 13-mile stretch it drops some 1,015 feet, 662 of them in Colebrook.

There are three principal watercourses within Colebrook, which divide the landscape into separate watersheds. The greatest volume belongs to the West Branch of the Farmington River as it flows southward from Massachusetts through the northeastern section of Colebrook enroute to its ultimate conjunction with the Connecticut River at Windsor. The largest geographical watershed in town belongs to Sandy Brook, which, while carrying less water than the West Branch of the Farmington, drains a larger area due in part to its northwest-southeast orientation through the center of the township.

The third and smallest watershed is that of Mill Brook, which rises in Norfolk, courses through southwest Colebrook and eventually joins Mad River in Winchester. All three of these systems eventually merge into the Farmington River, which then, as previously stated, joins the Connecticut River and flows into Long Island Sound.

The uplands, which give birth to Sandy Brook, are near the southern end of Massachusetts' Berkshire Hills. These highlands are considered to be Connecticut's most rugged and picturesque region.

The most recognizable characteristic feature of this region is high, steep-sided plateaus, topped by streamlined hills and bedrock knobs, a gift of the Wisconsin Glaciation. This event impacted the New England region some 85,000 years ago, peaked 20-25,000 years ago and began receding some 16,000 years ago. Reforestation followed closely on the heels of the retreating ice and by 11,000 to 6,000 years ago, Paleo-Indians were hunting in what is now Colebrook.

Although the world is today believed to be approximately 4.6 billion years old, realistically for us in Colebrook at least, we need not go back further than 500 million, or $1/9^{th}$ of the total. The world at that time consisted of several continent-sized land masses with many smaller groups of islands scattered over its surface. Slowly geologic forces within the planet moved these landmasses about, until eventually they coalesced into one huge supercontinent. What was to become Connecticut was somewhere in its interior, subjected to intense pressure by the colliding continents which caused our pre-existing stone to become squeezed, subjected to intense heat and elevated.

200 million years ago, the continuing geologic engines within the earth began breaking up this supercontinent. Future Connecticut found herself on the edge of what would become North America. Our corner of northwestern Connecticut is the only part within the state that consists of the original, or Proto-North America geologic formations. Because of the cataclysmic events it had been subjected to, our basic stone became what is today defined as metamorphic, or altered, with some consisting of minerals which are harder than others and more resistant to erosion, while other, softer areas erode more rapidly.

In all the Earth's history, the one constant is the force called erosion; it is never ceasing, constantly wearing down anything that gained elevation over the surrounding terrain. Because of this, we can today state that the surface, which we call home, and

which seems to us to be forever unchanged, has in reality had 5 to 7 miles of material removed over the past 250 million years. In light of this, we must conclude that there is today no correlation between the present courses of rivers and those from which they are descended.

Colebrook does not contain any sedimentary rock, such as bracket us to the west by the marbles of the Housatonic River Valley, or easterly by the sandstones of the Connecticut River Valley. Because of the soft nature of these rocks, water action rapidly wears them downward. Rivers such as the Farmington and Sandy Brook have established courses dictated by the differences in hardness of various rock masses.

There was good reason why Colebrook and Barkhamsted comprise the last land in the state previously uninhabited. The original owners, called proprietors, were from Windsor, and for the most part considered themselves to be farmers, or tradesmen supporting the farming industry.

Because of the inherent difficulties imposed by the north-south ridges with their steep, rocky sides, our land surface was not pioneered until all other acreage was utilized. Once the virgin forest, or some part of it at least, had been removed and a rudimentary road system established, streams with the potential of producing waterpower could be harnessed. Sandy Brook, with 7½ miles lying within the boundaries of Colebrook, and with a drop of some 662 feet, provided some 10 mill sites, with several others on tributaries.

Historically, man's association with Sandy Brook can be traced to early Colonial times. A Boston merchant by the name of Sandie, or Sandy, had a contract with the British army to supply hay to their cavalry. He decided to utilize a large open area within the virgin forest in what is now western Massachusetts. This so-called intervail land had been created by the Native Americans as an area that would encourage animals and birds in their food chain, thus making hunting a much more manageable task. This particular open land had been created around a series of quite powerful and un-fluctuating springs, thus Sandie, the first European to utilize the hay produced by the native grasses, had his name applied to the map in the form of "Sandie's Field" and "Sandie's Brook", which have since acquired modern spellings.

In the waning years of the 20th century, evidence was uncovered near the banks of Sandy Brook indicating that a Paleo-Indian ceremonial site existed perhaps as early as 11,000 or more years before the present. This site, seen by, but not as yet investigated by the state archeologist, holds promise to be the largest pristine site within the state. In order to prevent contamination, its exact location must not be revealed until after a scientific investigation has been conducted.

As we embark upon the 21st century, Sandy Brook remains as she always has – providing a flow of unpolluted water for fishing, white water kayaking and other forms of recreation, as well as providing esthetically one of the premier streams within the entire region.

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