



HANOVER HIKE OF THE MONTH

April – Mink Brook Nature Preserve

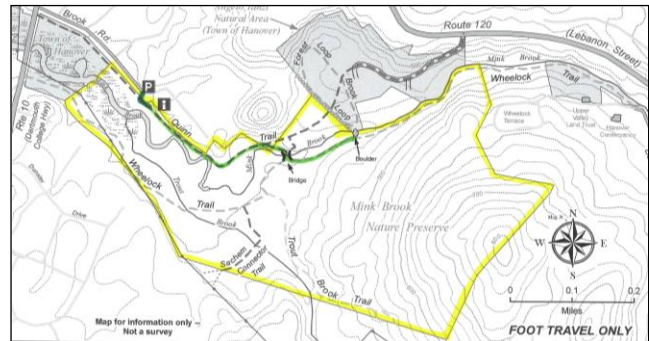
An easy, nearly flat walk along Hanover's largest stream. This is a perfect hike for Mud Season, when most trails can be soft and vulnerable as frost leaves the ground.

Hiking distance: 0.8 miles round trip

Time: approximately 45 minutes

Driving directions:

- From downtown Hanover and the Green, drive south on Main Street (Route 10) 0.5 miles to Brook Road, turning left just before Route 10 crosses Mink Brook.
- Follow Brook Road for 0.1 mile to a sharp bend.
- Park here near the trailhead gate. A bicycle rack is provided (foot travel only in the Preserve).



What you should know:

- ❖ Dogs are welcome but must be under close control (better yet, leashed); please pick up after your pet.
- ❖ The Preserve is the home of at least one bear, who usually emerges from her den with cubs in April (another reason to leash your dog). If you happen to encounter a bear, do not run but speak softly to it and move away slowly. Mother bears are as protective of their young as we are.

HIKING DIRECTIONS – route outlined in green

- Take a moment to check the kiosk display and pick up a trail guide. Note the map outlining Mink Brook's 18.5 square mile watershed.
- Hanover's largest stream, Mink Brook begins high on Moose Mountain in Mill Pond, gathering waters from other headwater streams and flowing through Etna Village, where it once powered a number of mills.
- With the kiosk at your back, look for a tall many-branched tree with rough bark – a bear babysitting tree! The photo at right was taken here in April, 2011 by a Mink Brook neighbor.
- Begin your walk down the Quinn Trail, named for a Hanover family that helped protect this land in 1999. This part of the trail follows a buried sewer line, making it one of the few trails that is stable and dry enough to hike at this time of year.
- After a minute's walk, you'll come to an open area close to the brook. Look for the dramatic red stems of red osier dogwood near the waterline. This handsome native shrub is a great choice for wet areas, as it tolerates flooding and its white berries offer high quality food for wildlife later in the year.
- You'll notice occasional sewer covers, reading "Hanover Sewer 1976." While they seem out of place on a woodland walk, we can forgive the intrusion when we consider that the building of this sewer line to collect waste from hundreds of Hanover homes meant the transformation of Mink Brook and the Connecticut River from pretty but noxious open sewers back to the safe, clean waters they are today.



- Just past wooden steps from a nearby house, turn right onto a small path. The slender, low green plant here is scouring rush or horsetail. A handful of this primitive native plant was useful for cleaning pots when our forebears had dinner dishes to do. Silica stiffens the stem joints, helping to get the job done.
- Bits of flagging mark areas where invasive plants are being monitored and treated.
- Return to the Quinn Trail. As you proceed, you'll get a good view of Mink Brook as it winds through its low, flat floodplain, the space it can fill when it is carrying a lot of water.
- Here and there you'll notice mesh "sleeves" standing about 2-3' high. These protect some of the 2000 native tree and shrub whips the Conservancy planted a few years ago to replace the infestation of buckthorn, honeysuckle, and Japanese knotweed that grew up when farmland here was abandoned.
- At an old apple tree, the Quinn Trail bears left and a path continues straight through young pines. In the 1990s, a 30+ lot subdivision was laid out for the 112 acres of today's Preserve. A road to serve the subdivision was to cross the brook on the route of this path. Give a cheer for the 450 donors, the Quinn Family, and Dartmouth College for recognizing the natural value of this place and stepping up to help the Conservancy and Upper Valley Land Trust protect it. The Hanover Conservancy now owns and manages the land, with conservation restrictions in the deed from UVLT.
- Stay on the Quinn Trail, taking that left by the apple tree. Note a large pine with exposed, gnarled roots on the left, clinging to a steep bank. The College once removed clay from this bank, laid down thousands of years ago under the still, frozen waters of glacial Lake Hitchcock, to provide a surface for tennis courts.
- About 10 minutes from your car, you'll approach another clearing and notice you can hear the brook for the first time. The brook sings as it tumbles over rocks and riffles on its natural path, and has not yet reached the point where it is captured by Wilder Dam on the Connecticut River, a few miles downstream. This elevation varies from 380'-385' above mean sea level, depending on operations at the dam. Wilder Dam may be far out of sight, but it controls the character and movement of Mink Brook here in the Preserve and of other tributaries as far north as Haverhill NH and Newbury VT, 45 miles upstream. The Hanover Conservancy is closely following re-licensing of this dam and current studies of how it affects erosion and sedimentation, fish, wildlife, invasive species, and even archeological sites.
- At the clearing, you'll see remnants of dead honeysuckle and buckthorn across the brook. In fact, you've passed more than a few places where these look pretty ratty! The Conservancy has been working with Full Circle Forestry to knock back invasive plants on the Preserve, with major funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and help from the Hanover Lions Club. We're working to cut the dead wood down and restore the beautiful natural floodplain forest here (help and contributions welcome).
- It's time to cross the brook. Bear right off the Quinn Trail at a big three-trunked pine tree onto a blue-blazed trail to the bridge.
- Our beautiful log bridge was crafted in 2009 from a nearby tree. Cross it with care (please don't bounce). This year we must repair its south end at an estimated cost of \$1100. Note the lovely large flat-topped rock in the brook below.
- After crossing, turn left onto the Wheelock Trail toward Buck Road. Plan to return another day to explore trails to the right, which can take you to Lebanon's Sachem Field, Indian Ridge, and Boston Lot Lake.
- Just upstream of the log bridge, you'll see evidence of erosion on the streambank. Stay on the trail and avoid the edge. Tropical Storm Irene sent such a heavy flow through this area that it shifted the stream channel, and the old channel (south side) is now just a flood chute. Heavy rains on frozen ground in February of 2016 caused the brook to deposit a new load of sand and gravel here, showing just how powerful water can be. The Conservancy planted willow stakes on the far side to try to slow new erosion there; you may see willows leafing out in the streambank.
- Walk through the cool hemlock forest. Ice floes deposited by the brook in February and early March lingered here near the shore long after sunnier places had warmed up.

→ 15-20 minutes from the gate, you'll come upon dramatic boulders scattered up the hillside and, in some places, arranged in low walls. We are not certain of the history here, but we do know that Eleazar Wheelock built a gristmill on Mink Brook upstream of this spot. In fact, Mink Brook's waterpower is the reason Dartmouth College is here in Hanover! The canny proprietors of the newly organized town offered Wheelock 2,000 acres surrounding lower Mink Brook, along with a likely mill privilege, if he would site his proposed college here. He took the bait and the rest, as they say, is history!



- However – long before Eleazar appeared on the scene, this has been an important place in the cultural history of our region, and these stones have something to do with the story. The Abenaki believe that the first Abenaki came from stones. The large ones here are significant because they are imposing and become very warm in the sun.
- Through the millennia Mink Brook, or Mosbasak Zibosiz in the Abenaki language, has been a key part of local Abenaki village and subsistence grounds. From the time of Dartmouth's founding, Abenaki and other Native families lived in this area to support their children who were enrolled in Moor's Charity School and the College. Abenaki families have lived nearby to this day. This spot has long been known as a “woman's place,” and when Wheelock arrived to raise his college, Abenaki grandmothers met with his people to lay out their rules for how the land would be used.
- The Wheelock Trail leads you to your destination on this hike, a massive boulder at the stream's edge that may have been dropped by the glacier on its travels. Stop and take a look around...this is indeed a powerful place. You'll see hemlock roots cascading over rock faces and patches of the small but hardy rock polypody fern clinging to these inhospitable surfaces.
- Turn around for the four-minute walk back to the log bridge. On your way, note the steep ridges on the left that mark ancient channels for Mink Brook. This region was once inundated by the frigid waters of glacial Lake Hitchcock, and the clay/silt lake-bottom sediments were easily sliced by the rushing waters of the brook after the lake receded.
- Cross the log bridge again, keeping an eye out for the elusive namesake of the brook, the mink. A member of the lithe weasel family, mink live near water and prey upon small fish, crayfish, and other aquatic delicacies. If you get a good look, you'll see its distinctive white chin. (At right: carrying its young)
- Turn left on the far side of the bridge at the sign for the Quinn Trail.
- Follow the brook downstream, listening as its natural noisy chatter calms to a quiet murmur as it enters the pool behind Wilder Dam.
- Return to the gate after checking the woods for bloodroot and other emerging wildflowers.



Note: The Hanover Conservancy is seeking volunteers for our Mink Brook Stewardship Committee, to advise us on managing the preserve, monitor trails, and help out with occasional work parties. We also warmly welcome donations to our Mink Brook Stewardship Fund to help maintain the Preserve. Get in touch at info@hanoverconservancy.org. For more about the Mink Brook Nature Preserve, visit www.hanoverconservancy.org/lands/mink-brook/.

The Hanover Conservancy, New Hampshire's oldest local land trust, is a private, non-profit membership organization independent of the Town of Hanover. Visit us at www.hanoverconservancy.org.