

## HANOVER HIKE OF THE MONTH

### July – Mink Brook & Gile Hill

*A loop hike through two vastly different worlds.*

Hiking distance: 2.1 miles

Elevation gain: 220 feet

Time: 1 1/2 hours

#### Driving directions:

- You can drive to the take-off point at Gile Hill OR walk from DHMC on medical center campus trails.
- From downtown Hanover, take Lebanon St./Route 120 south to the first light after Greensboro Road, at Medical Center Drive. Turn R at the light, pass the gas station, cross the bridge, and take the first R to Gile Drive.
- Turn immediately L into the gravel parking area encircled by large stones, and park. This is your starting point.
- Today's hike is a loop through the Mink Brook Nature Preserve and adjoining Gile Hill area, encircling the 800' rocky knob highlighted on the map at R.



#### What you should know:

- ❖ This is a moderately challenging hike, if only because it uses every sort of path you can imagine – from wide and paved to narrow and rocky, flat to steep – and everything in between. Wear sturdy shoes!
- ❖ You'll pass through surroundings that vary from a deep hemlock forest to sculpted grassy slopes between apartment buildings. It's good to know such wild places are so close at hand.
- ❖ Dogs are welcome but must be leashed while walking through Gile Hill and must always be under your close control. Please pick up after your pet.
- ❖ Bicycles are not permitted in the Mink Brook Nature Preserve.

#### HIKING DIRECTIONS

- To begin your hike, walk to the paved road to the Gile Hill development and turn L onto the paved sidewalk just beyond. Follow the sidewalk as it crosses the access road several times and continues down past the apartment buildings. When the sidewalk ends, continue a short distance to White Pine Oval. Take the nearer end of the oval – your destination is a crosswalk at the far end that leads you to a paved path. Along the way, notice a "wall" of stones inside a gabion cage, a stark contrast to the native boulders visible just beyond and the early stone walls you'll observe later on this trip.
- Walk past the wooden rail fence to a crosswalk where you'll take the wide paved path to Buck Road. Just as it curves L, note a steep sided trench at R, built to capture stormwater runoff from the paved areas and roofs. Before 2006, when the Gile Hill development was built, this entire hillside was a steep, forested jumble of boulders. It presented such an engineering challenge that it was the field site focus of a regional conference on stormwater management techniques.

→ The paved path ends at Buck Road near Route 120. Turn L and head down the hill on Buck Road, which was once the main road linking Lebanon and Hanover before 120 was built. In a few minutes, Buck Road swings L just before the narrow bridge that once carried it over Mink Brook.

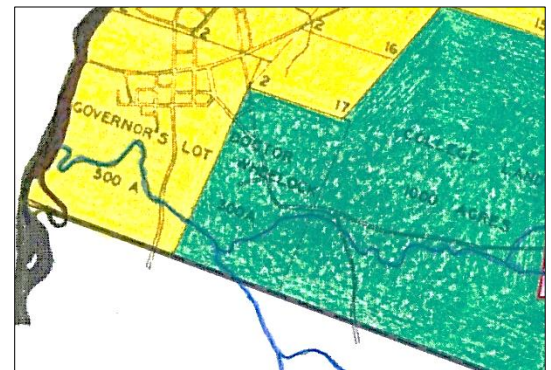
→ A few paces beyond the turn, look for the Wheelock Trail just before a fire hydrant.

→ Named for Eleazar Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth College (more about him in a minute), the blue-blazed trail begins as a narrow, rocky path threading among rocks and roots close to Mink Brook. You're greeted by the sound of the tumbling brook and the cool sweet air of the protective forest, a stark change from Buck Road and Gile Hill. The Upper Valley Land Trust owns this land on the south side of the brook; you'll pass beneath UVLT's office perched at the top of the bank. UVLT was instrumental in protecting this parcel and the larger Mink Brook Nature Preserve in 1999, working hand in hand with the Hanover Conservancy (then known as the Hanover Conservation Council).



→ Five minutes from Buck Road, look for a rocky ledge on the far side of the brook where the water spills over a small falls. Amid the foliage above, you can make out the stone wall of an old mill structure. Watch your step among the tangle of roots across the trail. There's a better view of the falls from below. You're looking at the reason why Dartmouth College is in Hanover and not somewhere else! In the late 1760s, when Rev.

Wheelock was searching for a town to locate his college, colonial governor John Wentworth and the proprietors of newly-founded Hanover and Lebanon joined together to offer him 2,000 acres surrounding this brook. This, the largest stream in Hanover, has an 18 square mile watershed, thus guaranteeing a good flow, and this falls offered a promising spot for a grist mill. This was essential gear for grinding grain to make flour to bake bread to feed hungry young men. The deal was sealed, and in 2019, Dartmouth celebrated its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, all thanks to Mink Brook. (After a first mill failed, Israel Woodward built this mill for Wheelock in 1771-1772).



*1778 map of SW Hanover showing Mink Brook and college and Wheelock holdings*

→ But we digress. The Wheelock Trail continues into a cool glen shaded by hemlocks and becomes a wider path. Soon it heads up to a break in the canopy and bears R across land owned by Wheelock Terrace. Here, the sewer line passes under your feet on its way to the wastewater treatment plant at the mouth of Mink Brook.

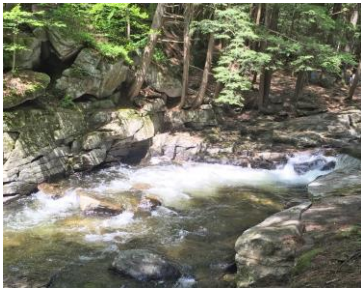
→ Enter the woods once again at a small sign (TRAIL ->). In a few moments you'll encounter a low stone wall marking an early boundary; today it announces that you have arrived at the Hanover Conservancy's Mink Brook Nature Preserve. A remnant of barbed wire clings to a tree at L, and HC's even more contemporary boundary marker, a 4' plastic square, hangs on a tree at R. This stone wall marks the ancient property line between the 300 acre Wheelock parcel and the 1000 acre Dartmouth College parcel of land. That easterly property line makes a series of erratic westerly jogs as it runs north over the top of the hill and descends the northerly side. This reflects the fact that in 1771, after Wheelock had established his first mill on Mink Brook, it was found to be located not on Dartmouth property as the College Trustees had intended, but rather on Wheelock's private property. Therefore, to appease the Trustees, the original property line was adjusted westerly, giving more land to the College.

→ Continue as the path becomes level and wide among the hemlocks. The brook's floodplain may be flat, but you're aware of steep, high slopes both across the brook and to your L. Soon they begin to crowd the path as steep ravines appear at L. What's going on here? You are actually hiking along what was once the bottom of glacial Lake Hitchcock. This frigid lake covered the Connecticut River valley from Middletown, CT to Littleton, NH after the river's waters were trapped by a dam of debris dropped by the glacier as it melted. Thousands of years later that dam broke, leaving us with the beautiful winding Connecticut River of today. While the lake was in place, however, soil washing in from the uplands settled on the lake bottom. In still water, such as that quieted by a veneer of ice, the finest particles of clay sink to the bottom. When the lake drained, Mink



Brook's braided waters flowed down through the newly exposed sediments, slicing deep channels through them on their way to meet the river. These old channels are now the steep ravines that surround you.

- About 15 minutes' walk from Buck Road, you reach a beautiful rocky gorge. The trail briefly becomes indistinct on the slope but picks up later. Take a moment to visit the water's edge and discover a lovely pool behind a low dam. This dam was built in the 1920s to create a swimming hole for a seasonal cottage once owned by the Tanzi family. The cottage is now gone, but a nearby private residence remains on the opposite bank. Continue west on the Wheelock Trail.

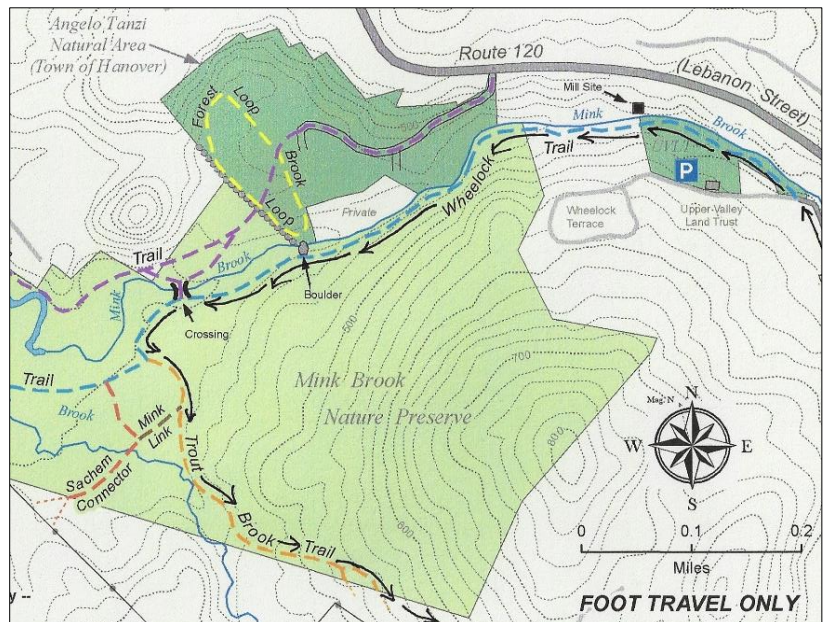


- Four minutes' walk past the gorge a flat terrace appears at L; this is part of the old glacial lake bed, formed when the lake had partially dropped.

- Two minutes later, you arrive at a dramatic spot where an enormous boulder guards the brook. The footing is tricky here. Climb below the boulder to admire its sheer face, but please resist the temptation to climb it. A look toward the brook may reveal woody debris tossed here by high water. A nearby tree shows the scars of two strands of barbed wire, two and three feet off the ground, presumably set 150 years ago to protect grazing sheep from falling into the water.

- Just beyond the huge boulder is a very old stone wall with hemlocks growing from it. Scan the hillside at L to marvel at another partial wall of larger boulders. This land has clearly been used for many, many years.

- Five minutes' walk past the boulder brings you to a recently abandoned stream channel. Before Tropical Storm Irene, Mink Brook ran through this now nearly dry sandy area, but the August 2011 surge tore a new channel slightly north, where it now flows except in times of very high water. The trail heads toward the log crossing built in 2009. Just before the bridge are signs of erosion that began with Irene and continues today – a hemlock hangs out over the water, its roots exposed, and on the far side, the brook is scouring the north bank. Nearby at L, ferns occupy the swale of yet an earlier abandoned channel. This is a pretty busy place!



- At the log crossing, you have a choice of exploring trails on the north side of the brook. If you do, please cross the log one at a time. A sign at L indicates that you have come from Buck Road and are headed toward Lebanon. Continue straight on the Wheelock Trail; it soon begins to swing away from the brook.
- Just past a dead tree at R, look L for bright pink “whiskers” marking a study plot of Trillium. This study, conducted by the Biodiversity Committee of the Hanover Conservation Commission, is following survival of this native wildflower under heavy deer browse pressure.
- A few steps further, a trail comes in at R. Take this for a few yards back to the streambank. Plans for a 32-lot housing development on this land included a road and bridge across the brook at this point. In 1999, to save this land as a refuge for the community – both human and wild – the Hanover Conservancy and Upper Valley Land Trust worked together to purchase the property. Over 500 households contributed, with Dartmouth College providing the major gift that ultimately made it possible to protect this land. Today, the 112-acre preserve is owned and managed by the Hanover Conservancy with help from volunteers. Conservation restrictions held by UVLT guide the preserve's management.

- Return to the Wheelock Trail, trying to visualize this place as a residential subdivision and yourself standing on a paved road leading to driveways, garages, mailboxes, landscaped yards, and houses with dogs and cats.
- A few steps bring you to another junction, where the Wheelock Trail turns R and crosses a drainage over stones placed to allow both feet and water to pass. Here, you stay straight and continue on the orange-blazed Trout Brook Trail, a flat and gently winding pine-needle strewn path.
- At R, pockets of ferny wetlands adorn the forest floor. It is easy to imagine how useful they are as sponges during heavy rains, holding back stormwater and protecting the brook from flooding and erosion.
- Five minutes' walk from the would-be subdivision bridge, arrive at another junction where a trail at R leads to Sachem Village. A small sign reminds that bicycles are not permitted at the Mink Brook Nature Preserve due to a condition placed on the College's major gift that protected the land. The trail begins to climb as the mild music of falling water is heard.
- Two minutes further, arrive at a small but picturesque waterfall on Trout Brook. At its foot are twin boulders, each wearing a rakish wig of moss and ferns. During a study of wild brook trout habitat by the NH Fish and Game Department and Trout Unlimited in 2012, biologists agreed that the protected forest in this area provides extremely high quality habitat for wild brook trout. (The trout are small, and deserve to live and grow another day.)
- Keep the brook company for a short while, but watch for orange blazes as the trail swings L and heads up and away. Through the trees at L above is a flattish area where millet was grown by the Stone family when this land was part of their farm in the 1960s.
- The Trout Brook Trail now heads steadily up, with Trout Brook singing away below to the R.
- Seven minutes' walk from the waterfall, you reach the height of land on the trail and emerge, blinking in the sudden change of light, into the clearing for a huge powerline. Needless to say, you've found the southern boundary of the nature preserve, which is also the boundary between Hanover and Lebanon.
- Take a moment to adjust to the sharp contrast and then continue on the path, which bears L and down toward the power line. Coarse rock and gravel mark the route, which soon plunges up again, sometimes quite steeply, through clover, daisies, briars, coltsfoot, and 5' white pines. It's difficult to imagine that this area once looked exactly like what you just hiked. Replacing towering hemlocks with towering metal poles makes a big difference to everything beneath them!
- About 10 minutes from the woodland's edge, you arrive at another height of land affording a view of an electric transformer station below at R. Continue on the path, heading slightly L toward a gap in the trees and a yellow gate. Just beyond the gate is Trailhead Lane; turn R to reach the parking area where you left your car. If you walked from DHMC, turn R again at Medical Center Drive.



**HANOVER  
CONSERVANCY**  
*Protecting land & water in our community*

*The Hanover Conservancy, New Hampshire's oldest local land trust, is a private, non-profit membership organization independent of the Town of Hanover.*

6/26/2019