

HANOVER HIKE OF THE MONTH

October – Camp Brook Valley Loop

An easy hike in the Balch Hill/Oak Hill neighborhood

Hiking distance: 2 miles

Elevation gain: 270 feet

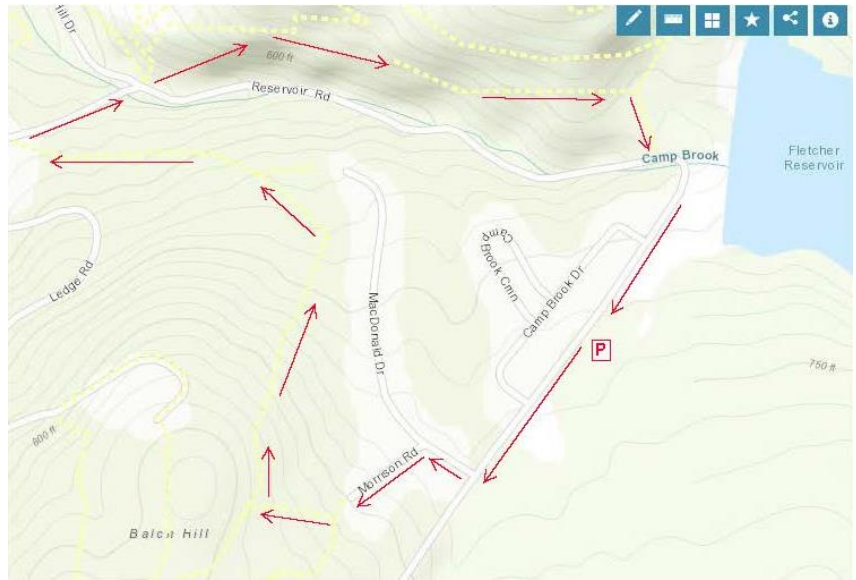
Time: 1 ¼ hours

Driving directions:

- **From Downtown Hanover and the Green**, drive E on E. Wheelock St. and up the hill 1.7 miles to Grasse Road. Turn L onto Grasse Road.
- Park at the public ballfield parking area at 41 Grasse Road, outside the fence at the water treatment facility.

What you should know:

- ❖ Today's hike takes you on a loop that tours the east and north slopes of the Balch Hill Natural Area from neighborhood lanes and returns on the historic Wolfeboro Road, on lands owned by Dartmouth College and the Town of Hanover.
- ❖ Dogs are welcome if under your control. Please pick up after your pet.
- ❖ Archery season begins Sept. 15 and it is wise to wear blaze orange until Dec. 15.



BRIEF HIKING DIRECTIONS

- Turn L onto Grasse Rd to MacDonald Dr.
- Turn R onto MacDonald Dr. and L onto Morrison Rd.
- At far end of cul-de-sac, take steps up to trail
- Turn R on the Garipay Trail
- Take sharp R onto the Maple Trail
- Turn L on Dot Strong Trail; at private drive, turn R
- Turn R onto Reservoir Rd; cross to Wolfeboro Rd.
- Take Wolfeboro Rd for 15 min
- Turn R onto smaller path; cross brook
- Turn L onto Reservoir Rd and Grasse Rd and return to your car.

THE FULL STORY

- Turn L onto Grasse Rd and walk along the shoulder past Camp Brook Dr. to MacDonald Dr. At this season, asters, goldenrod, and white-flowering turtlehead decorate the drainage ditch by the road. You might hear Canada geese announcing their flight south (let's hope they didn't linger on nearby Fletcher Reservoir).
- Turn R at MacDonald Dr into a neighborhood developed for Dartmouth faculty and staff housing in the early 1990s. In fall, old apple trees hint at the history of this land, an orchard on the Garipay Farm.

- 5 minutes' walk from your car, turn L onto Morrison Rd and walk up the short lane to the cul-de-sac and trailhead sign.
- You can thank the Upper Valley Trails Alliance's High School Trail Corps and the Hanover Conservation Commission for the friendly steps at the trail entrance. Built in 2019 on Grasse Rd Homeowners' Assoc. land, they lend easy access to the Balch Hill Natural Area trail system.



- It's just a few paces to the junction of the Hunter East (L) and Garipay Trails. Turn R onto the blue-blazed Garipay Trail, named for the farm family that most recently owned this land. At this season, the many small drainages off Balch Hill are dry, but at wetter times of year, the wooden crossings are most welcome. The split log one was built by Hypertherm volunteers in 2019 and the lumber one by a Conservancy volunteer a few years earlier.
- A low stone wall follows the trail at R; could this be a relic of the sheep days in the mid-1800s, when the entire hill was open pasture and orchard?
- 5 minutes' hike from Morrison, the Garipay Trail rises to meet the Maple Trail. Turning L would bring you to the summit with its beautiful views – if you have 10 minutes to spare, it's worth the detour. For this trip, take the sharp R turn, cross the stone wall, and follow the yellow-blazed Maple Trail. You're now on town land, bought from the Garipays in 1978 with help from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.



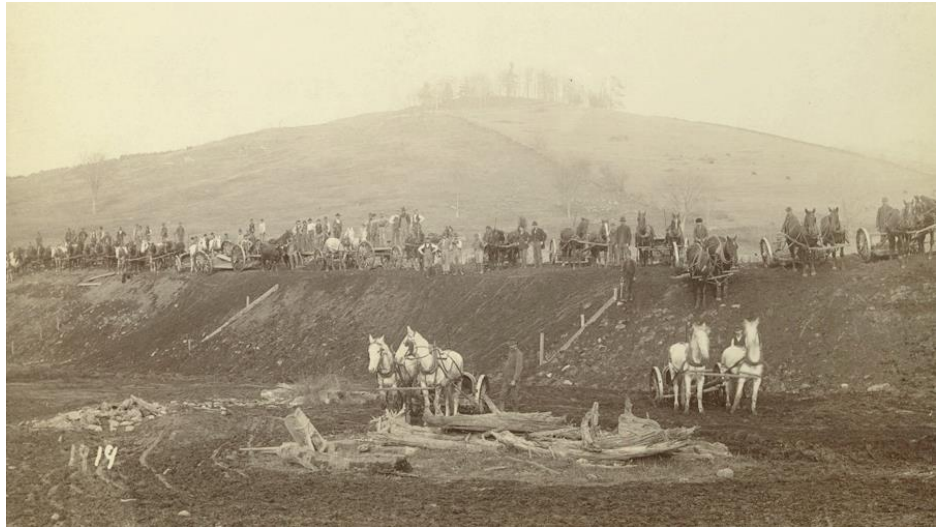
- 2 minutes later, look for deer research plots at R. A small sign explains their purpose.
- Watch for color underfoot, not just among the maples overhead. It's mushroom time!
- The entire E side of Balch Hill suffered blowdowns from the Patriot's Day Windstorm in 2007. At one point on the Maple Trail, you'll see the "undersides" of 5 downed trees in a row, with their boles all pointing W away from the source of that wind. Eventually, the root masses will melt back into the landscape, leaving the "mound and pit" (sometimes called "pillow and cradle") micro-topography typical of wind-influenced forests.



- 10 minutes' hike from the Garipay Trail, the Maple Trail enters more open coniferous forest and onto another piece of Dartmouth land, where the college kindly granted a trail license to move the trail onto a more sustainable path. By now you've gathered that the Hanover Conservancy, Hanover Conservation Commission, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, and Dartmouth are closely cooperating partners on Balch Hill.
- A few minutes farther, look for a yellow Wildlife Safety Zone sign as the trail swings L and then out to the wide Dot Strong Trail. A glance to the R confirms this is a sewer line connecting two neighborhoods. Bicycles are allowed on the flat, comfortable path. Dot Strong was an ardent conservationist who lived nearby on Reservoir Road.
- Turn L on the Dot Strong Trail and enjoy the easy 0.3 mile walk to Reservoir Rd. In 5 minutes, reach the metal gate posts at the edge of town property. Continue a few paces to the private drive at 29 Reservoir Rd (you're allowed!), turn R down the drive, and note the trailhead sign at R – in case you'd like to try the loop counter-clockwise sometime.
- Turn R onto Reservoir Rd. As you walk along the shoulder, look down into the forested ravine at L, listening for Camp Brook as it falls from the Fletcher Reservoir down to Storrs Pond. The brook has only this short distance to cool off in the shade of the hemlocks on its banks before reaching the pond. While smaller brooks run dry at this season, controlled releases from the reservoir keep water in the channel.
- Cross the brook; look for the brown/yellow Wolfeboro Rd trailhead sign, just R of the Storrs Pond sign.
- Take the Wolfeboro Rd trail up and around the metal gate. Five steps in, and you're on the clearly discernable, original route of the Wolfeboro Rd. Our forebears chose a good path - it is safely out of the way of Camp Brook, which washed out Reservoir Rd a few years back.
- Walk up through the hemlocks that shade the valley of this brook. You can imagine the relief of Royal Governor John Wentworth, after several days' ride on the new road in 1772, as he made his final descent toward his destination, Dartmouth College's second commencement. He had ordered the cutting of this

road, linking his home in Wolfeborough with Hanover, two years earlier. At a public meeting on July 30, 1770, a committee of Hanover citizens was appointed to "...run a line from near the southwest corner of Hanover to the Great Pond, or Governor's seat, at Wolfeborough, and view the situation of the land and convenience for a highway, and make return the first Monday in October next." Members were paid four shillings and sixpence per day and spent ten days surveying the route. In October, they gained approval to lay it out from the College to the Canaan line. Hanover landowners were assessed a penny and a half per acre to raise the 120£ needed to complete the road.

- The old road moves steadily up the side of the valley, past some large old pines that are still too young to have been here when the Governor passed through. Two Oak Hill trails join at L; continue straight.
- At this season you can hear birds flitting in the branches overhead, preparing to join their migrating brethren following the nearby Connecticut River south.
- 10 minutes' hike from Reservoir Rd, the canopy opens up and the trail is crowded by young white pines eager to fill the space. This is your cue to watch for a less worn trail at R. (The Wolfeboro Rd continues with two detours through the Trescott Water Supply Lands, over Moose Mountain, and on to the Lakes Region.)
- Turn R on this smaller path and head downhill for 5 minutes among the brash and brushy white pines. As you approach Reservoir Rd., note the barbed wire and sign on a big pine at L, marking the boundary of the restricted area around the Fletcher Reservoir and its dam. Just beyond at R are two study plots helping the Hanover Biodiversity Committee measure deer browse pressure on Trillium, a native wildflower. One plot is fenced from deer and the other, marked with blue flagging, is not.
- A small footbridge leads over the natural channel of Camp Brook, nearly dry at this season, and soon you pop out on Reservoir Rd just as it curves into Grasse Rd. The Fletcher Dam looms above at L. Constructed in 1893, this is the first of two dams built on Camp Brook to provide safe drinking (and fire-fighting!) water to downtown Hanover and Dartmouth College. This image shows the many teams of horses and men employed in building the dam. We aren't certain, but we believe that the white horses in the foreground are standing on what would eventually be flooded land behind the dam, and that the hill in the background topped by the tuft of trees is Balch Hill.
- Follow Grasse Rd to return to your car at the public parking area just beyond the ball field and swings.



*This Hanover Hike of the Month has been
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*The Hanover Conservancy, New Hampshire's oldest local land trust,
is a private, non-profit membership organization independent of
the Town of Hanover. Find more Hanover Hikes of the Month
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October 2019*