

THEY SAID IT COULDN'T BE DONE! THE CLEARING OF THE RANGEWAY 11-13-2019

On Wednesday morning, November 13, 2019 at 9:00 am, seven members of the Loudon Trails Committee, all of them retired residents of Loudon, met at the parking lot leading to the Lovejoy Trails for the purpose of cleaning up a short, new trail they called the Rangeway. It consisted of an old farm trail bordered by two widely-spaced stone walls that began behind the Lovejoy Farm and continued uphill through the forest where it connected with the White Trail Loop recently cut by the Trails group.



Those who met that day appear in the photos to the right: the top photo shows Nancy Huckins, Craig Mabie, Denis Proulx, Sandy Blanchard, Deb Eastman-Proulx and Bob Lyon. The second photo shows Bob, Denis, Craig, Sandy and me, Martha Butterfield.



Although it turned out to be a brutally cold day, nobody wanted to stand around long, as they were anxious to head out on the main trail to complete their task. Each one was well prepared and dressed in bright orange, red or yellow with several layers of warm clothing. It was only 14 degrees with an icy breeze, as the group made their way up the left side of the White Trail Loop and reached the hillside leading to the Rangeway where they began their work.

As mentioned in my previous report of November 6th, Bob Lyons had made an excellent start on the Rangeway on Saturday, November 2nd, having cut away many trees that had fallen probably 15 years ago during a severe thunderstorm, accompanied by a strong microburst that swept through parts of Loudon during a hot, humid summer day. Thus, much of the way along the former farm trail had been blocked to all but difficult passage all those years since.

The photo to the right shows the hillside where the start of the Rangeway meets up with the White Trail Loop on the lower left side of the photo. That new trail heads southward in the direction of Lovejoy Farm and connects at the bottom of the hill with the property of a newer home on Lovejoy Road that sits next to the Lovejoy Farm building, which is now



owned by Jim and Stacy McNeil. Their property lies to the south and west of the Town's land.

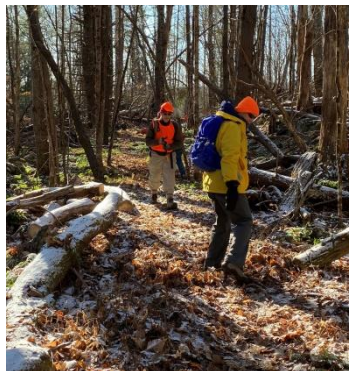


Several months earlier on March 20th with snow still remaining on the ground, some members of the Trails Committee, along with Dave Emerson and Joe Egan, ventured out to a very different scene. They were still at the scouting stage, figuring out the best areas where future trails could be cut through the forest. One area of interest that day included the eye catching stone walls along the Rangeway where some of the group ventured as far as they could before they encountered the massive blowdown of many large trees. At that time, the bleak, ice encrusted scene seemed to be insurmountable, and the group discussed the remote possibility of asking permission from the nearby landowner to allow a bobcat to come in from Lovejoy Road to help with removing the downed trees. But without that option, they were doubtful that clearing the area could ever become a reality.

But on a frigid day almost ten months later, Bob Lyons and Denis Proulx were on their way to getting that job done with their chainsaws. They hiked swiftly up the hill that morning and made it to the Rangeway before the others, as they were headed directly to the area where Bob's chainsaw had run out of gas during his previous work session.



Soon they were cutting much further down the trail, removing all but the one remaining large fallen tree, while the rest of the crew picked up loose branches and logs further up the trail, heaving them over the east side of the stone wall closest to the downside of the hill. All of them managed well as a team while I took photos of them at work, as I'd be writing the follow up report of what they'd accomplished.



I'd seldom seen a gathering of people work faster or more efficiently than that group did that morning. I had a hard time getting good shots of them in action, as they were swiftly going about their tasks. I occasionally did my part

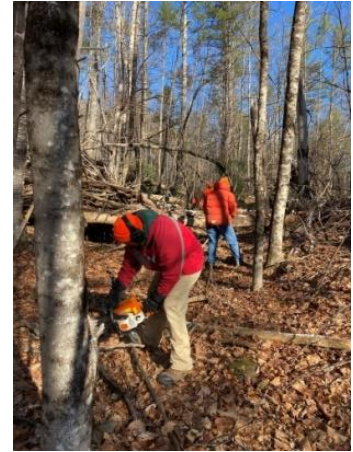
in the clearing, but my chief goal was to gather photos for my story so that one day people could look back and see what happened there a long time ago. The following images speak louder than my words possibly can:



The height of the fallen trees had almost completely blocked the view of where the trail would come to an end. But after much cutting and clearing, it soon became apparent that only one large tree remained across the trail (as shown in the photo below) before a wide, open, mostly cleared stretch of the trail came into view. The back yards of the houses on Lovejoy Road were now close by, and the lower portion of the trail appeared to have already been groomed, presumably by the owner of the property that abutted the Town's land. It seemed like a good indication that the land owners might be interested in the trails, and we wanted to touch base with them. As it turned out, I had to write them a letter, as I had no phone number to reach them and I failed to connect with them when they were home.



Concerning that last barrier, we were immediately faced with a dilemma. If we removed the one remaining tree that crossed the trail, the entire way would then be open enough for vehicles such as ATV's, which were not allowed on the Town's conservation land, to pass through the opening. Thus a decision was made to cut a narrow opening toward the far side of the tree to allow only foot traffic to pass through there.



I'd originally thought that our trail would probably have to end at the point where Bob had stopped working on Nov. 2nd and that we might be able to cut a short side trail through the nearby break in the stone wall for a view of Oak Hill, but that idea was wisely abandoned because we weren't sure of the boundary line and didn't want to create any trails near to the neighbor's property further up the hill.



But now that we'd cleared most of the existing farm trail, we were also immediately concerned about the privacy of the abutting land owners, as we hadn't known ahead of time how open that end of the trail would be. We discussed putting up a sign with words like 'trail's end – private property', but it would take some time to create it and put it up. Then Deb Eastman-Proulx mentioned she had business in Concord that afternoon and would check with one of the State agencies to see if there was any signage available for that purpose.

At around 10:30 Craig Tufts joined us, as Sandy had told him about our plans and he agreed to come out and measure the length of the trail and map it for us. He also ventured up the hillside with Craig Mabie to determine where the boundary line was located and found that it was someplace between the stone wall at the top of the hill and the stone wall on the west side of the old farm trail. They then confirmed what had already been suspected -- that there would be no room to create a loop trail in that area.



But Sandy happened to notice an opening in the east stone wall almost directly across from the opening I'd first noticed in the west stone wall, suggesting that farm animals, such as sheep, could have crossed from one pasture to another. Like the opposite wall's opening, it probably had a wooden gateway that opened to a lower pasture. The land sloped fairly



sharply downhill and offered the possibility of creating a future loop trail which could lead down through the lower forest and connect to the White Trail Loop. It wasn't that far from the fallen tree we left across the trail, so instead of a dead end trail, a loop could lead hikers back a different way.

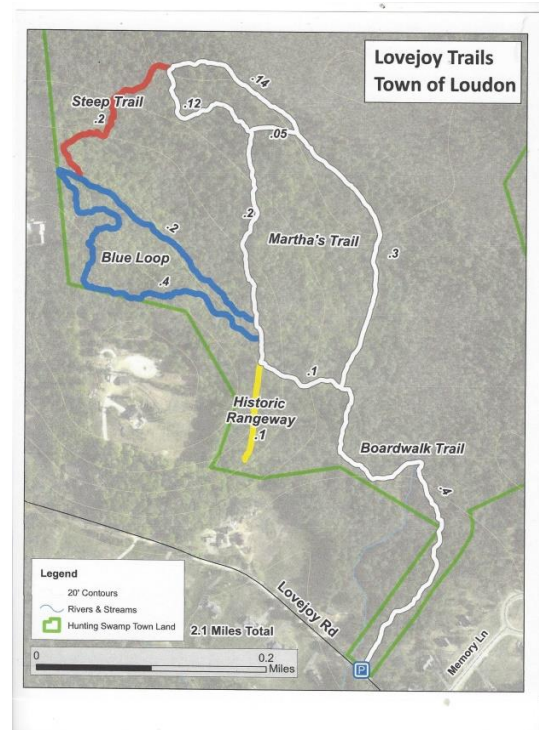


Some of us then took a walk further down the trail to locate the Conservation Commission's boundary marker, which Bob is shown pointing out in the photo. The trail we walked had been swept cleanly by others who were there before us who must have appreciated that area as much as we did.

Once the marker was located, we then headed back up the trail to resume our clearing work. After Bob's chainsaw had run out of gas, he continued to move branches and logs for a while, and then he left sometime around 11:00 am. Craig Tufts planned to return to his office and told us he'd send us a revised map with the added length of the trail included. His map is shown on the right. The yellow line shows where the Rangeway was added. He later wrote us the following: *"The new Rangeway trail is about 450 feet long. Out of respect of the property owner, that length ends it about 65' shy of the Conservation Commission marker we found on the tree. That distance is still within sight of the property boundary. The total mileage including the rangeway is 2.06 miles, which I rounded up to 2.1."*

A little after 11:00 am, Craig Tufts departed, along with Craig Mabie. And because Denis Proulx still had some gas left in his chainsaw, he continued to do some additional cutting back of protruding logs, while the rest of us also did some cleaning up. We then headed back to the parking lot, having reached there about 11:45 am. Sandy and I then drove over to the house of the owners of the property that abuts the Town land, but we found they weren't home that day.

Later the next day, I learned from Sandy that the State doesn't offer the kind of sign we were looking for, and by then it was too late to pick up one at the hardware store. So early Friday morning, I planned to go out to get what I was looking for, but before I left the house, I saw an email from Craig Mabie to Sandy and me wondering if we had any "no trespassing signs". He happened to check a posting on Loudon's Facebook



page that someone was observed having used that trail on Thursday and walked right through the back yard of the Lovejoy Farm and out onto Lovejoy Road. Discussion ensued, and people were wondering why signage wasn't there to prevent that kind of thing from happening.

Needless to say, I hustled over to the hardware store as quickly as possible and picked up two 'no trespassing – private property' signs. I then immediately hiked up the Rangeway and affixed them to two areas where they were sure to be seen by hikers along the way. Later on, I posted a comment on the Facebook page that signs were put up that day and I apologized that they weren't up the day we'd cleared the trail.



While I was busy nailing up the signs, I surprised a hunter on that same trail as he explained he was trying to help locate a deer that had been wounded earlier that morning by one of his companions, a young, less-experienced hunter. I saw that three hunters were there searching through the fallen leaves with grave expressions on their faces, as they were understandably very concerned over what had happened. I said nothing to them but thought it odd that they remained in that one area, not far from the boundary line and scouring the ground without moving on to a different spot.

I quietly left them there, and as I walked up the trail I noticed several blood spots along the way, as the terrified, wounded deer had bounded down the Rangeway, probably in the direction of Lovejoy Road. Maybe it was only slightly wounded and ran far away, or maybe the hunters found their prey, but I will never know the outcome.

So that Rangeway trail we'd just cleared two days before had found some action in a very short time.

Martha Butterfield 11/17/19