

TRAIL CUTTING IN THE FOREST ABOVE THE HUNTING SWAMP – 8/14/2019

At 8:30 am on Wednesday, August 14th, Bob Lyon, Deb Eastman-Proulx, Denis Proulx, Sandy Blanchard and Martha Butterfield arrived at the entrance to the Town of Loudon's Hunting Swamp property on Lovejoy Road to continue their weekly trail cutters' work session on what could be called the 'highland trail loop' in the hilliest area of the forested western region that once was part of the former Batchelder Farm, dating back to the 1790's, and the Lovejoy Farm that followed it.

The Town's Hunting Swamp parcel, shown in the center of the map on the right, consists of 135.05 acres, and the north and south-central regions, shown in the greyer areas on the map, have wetter areas typical of a swamp. In contrast, the higher and drier region, shown in green, sits mostly on the west side of the map where the 2.6 mile main trail system has recently been completed. The 'highland trail loop' portion the trail cutters were working on that morning is the highest region on the Town's property and is located in the left central side of the map. It's separated from private properties on the extreme west and south and separated on each side by stone walls.



That morning, Bob had gone on ahead to scout out the higher region for chain sawing the new trail, while Denis spent some time removing more material from the decaying pile of cuttings near the entrance. As Deb walked along the main trail, she used her sawzall to cut anything that might snag on a hiker's clothing, and as she, Sandy and Martha walked up the 'fern hill trail', they tidied up any areas there that needed more attention. Each time the trail cutters walked the trails, they would notice more details that needed cutting, pruning and straightening out. Trail maintenance never ends.



The 'highland trail loop' is accessed by two breaks in the stone wall that borders the 'upper farm trail'. Bob had entered the first opening to the 'south highland trail', as shown in the photo on the left, and began clearing the trail with Denis' assistance. Martha hurried over to join Bob and Denis, as they studied the best areas for cutting the trail. Familiar with the area, she'd walked it a few times before and placed orange ribbons along what seemed like

a good path to travel, but she welcomed Bob and Denis' input and trail cutting experience on the best route. Her physical work on the trail was somewhat limited that day because she'd injured her shoulder a few days before.

Deb used her sawzall to cut jutting branches near the entrance, as shown in the photo to the right, and she and Sandy followed Bob and Denis, as they worked their way along the trail. A little beyond the stone wall entrance, the trees were well-spaced and had grown to a healthy size, having been logged some 17 years prior, so in that area not a lot of cutting was required, as can be seen in the second photo.

As Sandy and Deb walked the trail after the men had cleared the way, they moved the cut up logs and rotted wood off of the trail. They also cut saplings growing underfoot with their loppers, while Deb used her sawzall on any trees with jutting branches along the route. As the group moved uphill toward the west, the ground became more uneven, and the trees grow denser.



In plotting the trail a few days before, Martha planned to guide walkers along areas that would show interesting quirks of nature like the photo to the left where she stood next to a tree with its roots grasping a rock.

In the photo to the right, Dennis assessed the amount of dead branches that would need to be cut from the large hemlock tree that grew next to where the trail would be cut. There were still traces where an old logging trail had existed, but rocky conditions determined where the trail would best be placed.



The group worked together to remove a large tree's many overhanging branches.



The trail continued uphill in a westerly direction and ran parallel to the stone wall on the south that marked the edge of the Town's property, as seen in the photos on the right, showing Bob at work and Sandy, Deb and Dennis walking the trail.

About a hundred feet from where the south stone wall intersected with the stone wall boundary on the west, the trail was flagged to veer to the right and head gradually downhill to the north.

The forest became increasingly dense in that area, as years ago a logging operation halted a few hundred feet away from where a house on the other side of the stone wall is located, affording privacy for the owners. Accordingly, the new trail continued far enough away from the western boundary to remain out of view of the home.

The trail zigzagged through the trees, avoiding a low lying area Martha had noticed became wet when she hiked there during the previous spring. The 'highland trail loop' is located in a narrow triangular area bounded by four stone walls, so laying out the trail to make it an interesting walk, while keeping the loop as wide as possible, was a challenge in planning. In laying out the 'south highland trail' portion, she also wanted to avoid being too close to the northern portion of the loop. Even so, as the group hiked down the 'north highland trail' sometime later, Denis had noticed the orange ribbons that marked the 'south highland trail' a few



hundred feet away, and the group discussed using a different color for each section to avoid confusion.

As the proposed trail headed through an area of dense young hemlocks, Martha temporarily lost view of her orange markers, and Bob glanced at his watch and noted time was growing short. So it was agreed that the group should concentrate on working on the 'north highland trail' section as they headed back downhill toward the east, and they'd leave the dense area in the northwest corner to be worked on at a later date.

The 'north highland trail' closely follows a stone wall on the north that forms a barrier to a steep fall off to the low-lying forest below that's also part of the Town's property. Less work was needed on that section, as its path is well defined, but several trees of varying size had fallen across the trail and needed to be cut up by Bob, as shown in the

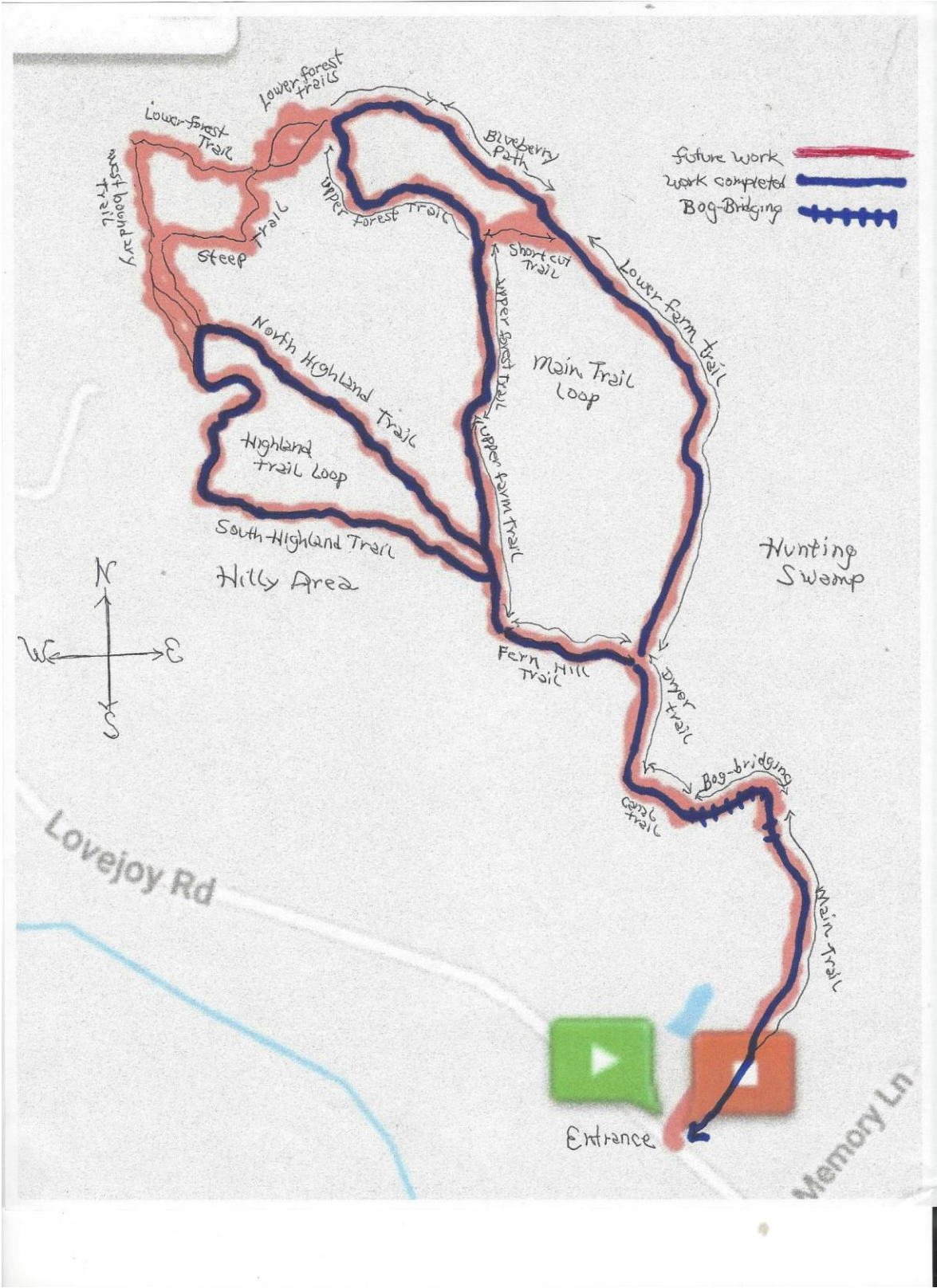


photo to the right. The group continued working as they headed down the trail, while Sandy moved Bob's cut up logs out of the way, Deb trimmed obstructing branches with her sawzall and Denis neatly cut back brush with a hacking tool. Once the group had reached the end of the 'highland loop', they made their way back to the entrance off of Lovejoy Road.

Over a four-hour period, the group had worked their way around all but the small northwest corner area of 'highland trail loop'. Before they parted ways at 12:30 pm, Bob mentioned he'd be away the following week, and the group discussed doing another sweep along the trail system to clear away more branches, stumps, rotted wood and small brush that obstructed easy walking, as well as working on the 'steep trail' in the northwest portion of the Town's property.

The large map on the next page shows the main trail system in the western region of the Town's property. The Loudon trail cutters had begun their work there in winter-like conditions on March 20, 2019, and the dark blue lines on the map represent the work they'd completed as of August 14, 2019. The lighter red lines show areas of potential.

The 'steep trail' in the northwest portion of the trail system, marked in red on the map, is yet to be cleared, but that section is shorter than the 'highland trail loop' and may possibly be cleared in one session. The map shows it to be a loop, but it doesn't have to be. When Martha hiked that area one morning using the *Map My Walk* app, she also followed the stone wall boundary to the far left as it headed down the hill, then she hiked back through the forest to connect with the original 'steep trail'.



If the 'steep trail' were to become a loop instead of a single trail, the entire length of the trail system in the western region would be a little over three miles with that loop added. If the western boundary walk isn't added, the length would be about 2.7 miles. Another short section shown in pink is a 'short-cut trail' that needs a slight amount of branch trimming. It can serve as a connector trail between the 'lower farm trail' and the 'upper forest trail'.

The trail cutters' labor ended at 12:30 after four hours, a combined total of 22.5 hours worked by five people that week, including travel to and from the site.

On the following Wednesday, Martha Butterfield returned to walk along the recently cleared trail and took the following images, showing the improved conditions along the 'highland trail loop', starting with the 'north highland trail' and ending with the opening to the 'south highland trail'.





Martha Butterfield 8/17/19