

## TRAIL CUTTING IN THE FOREST ABOVE THE HUNTING SWAMP – 8/20/2019

At 8:00 am on Tuesday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, Martha Butterfield arrived at the entrance to the Town Loudon's Hunting Swamp property on Lovejoy Road to spend some time moving more decayed tree and brush cuttings that lay east of Pine Island Brook.

She was joined at 8:30 by Deb Eastman-Proulx, Denis Proulx and Sandy Blanchard as they continued their weekly trail cutters' work session. They walked together along the trail through the Hunting Swamp, over the bog-bridging the trail cutters had completed in July, continued on the recently-completed trail along the dug canal and the dryer trail and arrived at the junction where the 'fern hill trail' intersected with the 'lower farm trail'. That marked the first point where a "you are here" map was planned to be placed at the crossing to show where the 'main trail loop' began. They then walked north along the 'lower farm trail' and arrived at a spot where that trail intersected with another short section of trail that would serve as a connector or 'short-cut' between the 'lower farm trail' and the 'upper forest trail'. It was at that spot where another "you are here" map would also be placed.



Denis worked his way up the trail as it headed west, chain sawing away larger materials, while Martha, Deb and Sandy followed behind him clearing away the cut up materials. Both Sandy and Deb always carried with them a variety of tools, and Sandy was using her hand saw, while Deb used her sawzall to cut away branches and deadwood on that section of the trail. Martha was still recovering from her shoulder injury and worked primarily as a guide that

day, but she also used her loppers to cut smaller undergrowth and jutting branches. As always, she made it her job to take photos of the others at work, but time in the woods passes quickly, and all too often one can become engrossed in trail cutting instead.

It wasn't very far before the group had reached the end of that 'short-cut trail' and arrived at the intersection of the 'upper forest trail' that had been previously cleared by them on August 8<sup>th</sup>. The group spent a short time discussing the need for arrow markers, showing which direction to take, as well as a "you are here" map to prevent hikers from getting lost. From the 'short-cut trail', they turned right on the 'upper forest trail' and continued uphill



for a short distance before heading downhill toward the 'lower forest trails'. They soon arrived at a crossroad that would require another "you are here" map plus arrow markers showing the trail to the right as it looped back to the east, a trail straight ahead that leads northwest into the Hunting Swamp and another trail that heads southwest and leads to the 'steep trail'. With her trail cutting experience, Deb suggested the path to the northwest ought to have brush removed to access it more easily, and Martha made a mental note of it for further clearing, as it could be used in the future as a trail for snowshoeing in the Hunting Swamp, located north of them.

The group cut through some small hemlock brush in the way and followed the logging trail as it headed to the southwest. They soon arrived at an area where another arrow would need to be placed, as the trail took a sharp left toward the 'steep trail' where they'd be cutting next. The group headed up the hill, clearing the trail as they went along.

Denis approached a large tree that had fallen across the way and swiftly cut it up, then lifted the heavy pieces out of the way as Martha hurried just to catch up with him. Meanwhile, Deb and Sandy worked their way along the trail behind Denis, carefully removing other cut pieces out of the way, lopping off saplings and cutting off jutting branches along the trail.



Martha headed further along the trail, making sure that she'd properly located the markers she'd previously placed within the dense forest to guide the group's way. She'd snowshoed in that area the previous winter while placing pink ribbons when the snow-covered ground appeared smoother, but the rocky and uneven terrain became much more apparent in the drier summer months.

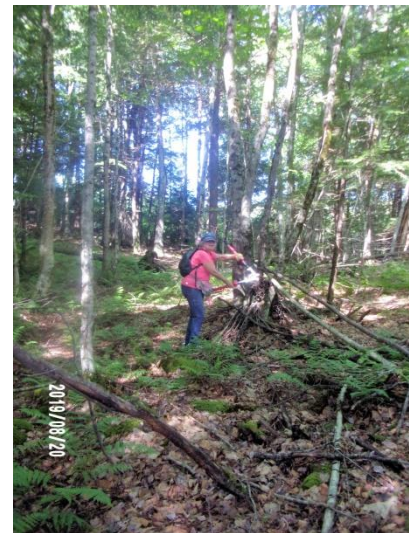
She also appreciated Denis' experience in trail cutting and his suggestions that some of her markers might be better placed to make the trail easier to follow over a smoother area. It's always best when more than one person scouts the proper location of a trail, and the more people who walk through an area and study it, the better the trail will become.



They soon arrived at a small stream where hikers can cross over it by stepping on moss-covered rocks and continue up the hill. Denis then noticed a spot off to the left where Martha had placed a pink ribbon. In the winter when she'd marked it, she'd thought of making the trail meander a bit more, but Dennis and she found it to be a bit too rocky, so the trail was moved more to the right.



It didn't take all that long for the four of them to catch sight of the light shining through the trees beyond the western stone wall that marked the boundary between the Town's land and private property on the other side. The photo to the right gives an idea of the steepness of the terrain and the sky beyond it.



The group continued to make their way over the rocky ground and found a bit less cutting was needed, as the area had been logged years before, and the trees became more widely spaced. The steepest portion was toward the end, as the trail switched back toward the southeast and continued between some large rocks along the way. Many large, dead branches had to be cut, as they obstructed passage.

Soon they reached a broken down section of the stone wall that bordered the 'north highland trail, another intersection for a "you are here" map, as well as arrow markers pointing right, left and forward up a shortcut to the 'south highland trail' that Bob had cut the previous Wednesday. The group proceeded to clear the last section of the 'north highland trail' as it headed toward the western boundary.

At that point, Denis needed to stop for a few minutes while he made adjustments to his chainsaw, and the women continued to cut a new trail southeast through the extremely dense evergreen forest. Martha had difficulty the week before as she tried to locate the ribbons she'd placed there, and she decided to go on ahead to find the spot where the trail had been cut the previous Wednesday and then work her way back to meet up with Deb and Sandy, as they continued to cut their way forward. By then, the battery on Deb's sawzall had run down after performing much hard work that morning. Deb then used her handsaw to continue her work. Meanwhile, Sandy used her handsaw to cut away a large limb of a tree obstructing the path and mightily flung it to the side.



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With Sandy's help, Deb sawed long and hard on the remaining roots of a small tree and finally got it removed. A little later, Denis had fixed his chain saw and went through the area to clear out larger pieces that couldn't be removed by hand. By then, the work they'd set out to do that morning was completed, and they headed back down the 'south highland trail', eventually reaching the entrance a little after noontime.

The map on the preceding page shows the entire trail system in the western region of the Town's property. The dark blue dotted lines show the August 20<sup>th</sup> work completed on the 'short-cut trail', the 'steep trail' and the northwest portion where the 'north highland trail' connected with the 'south highland trail'.

The remaining red area in the extreme northwest has not been cut and appears there only because Martha Butterfield recently hiked in that area, using her cellphone app, "map my walk". The red line on the left is roughly shown as the west boundary between the Town's land and private property, but the Town's property extends further north into the swamp than is shown by that line. While exploring that area, she continued through the forest, crossing over a short section of swamp, and eventually connected to the 'steep trail'. In the future, that section might become a trail, but it isn't currently part of the trail system.

Also on the map is a possible extension further south along the 'upper farm trail', as it runs gently downhill between two stone walls and stands on higher ground above the former Lovejoy Bed & Breakfast that used to be the Lovejoy Farm. It offers a potential view of Oak Hill from a short path to an even higher area, accessible through a break in the stone wall on the right. The view would make a scenic addition to the trail system, but it's yet to be cleared, as it's blocked by a large mass of trees that fell during a windstorm years ago. To make that section available to hikers, removal of much dead wood would be necessary by using heavy equipment; and permission to cross over private property to work on that area would be needed from the abutting landowner who has a dirt driveway that leads uphill to the 'upper farm trail'.

The trail cutters' labor ended a little before 12:15 after three hours and 45 minutes, a combined total of 17.5 hours worked by four people that week, including travel to and from the site. All of the heavy chain saw work, cutting up larger trees in the way of the trails in the western region, had thus been completed.

## **What Lies Ahead**

The group plans to return later on to do a further clean up of the trails where debris still remains in the way and to also to begin the process of blazing the trails with different colored markers, adding signs with "*you are here*" maps and placing arrows in any spot

where the trails take sharp turns. The various trails also need to be named unless the group is content with the 'descriptions' already provided here.

Yet to be decided is what will be needed in the form of markers, signs and arrows along the trail.

Here are some rough estimates of what would be needed:

- Determine how many markers would be needed to cover just under three miles of trails. Three miles = 15,840 feet. So as an example, if markers were to be placed every 50 feet or so, then the number of markers appearing in both directions would amount to roughly  $316 \times 2 = 632$  markers. If the markers need to be placed closer together, then more markers would be required.
- Five or six distinctive colors would be needed for different trails, either by the method of scraping bark and painting a mark or by nailing plastic trail markers. As an example, the color white could start at the trail entrance and continue all along the entire 'main trail loop' as it follows the 'lower farm trail', but a second orange marker could be added to the white marker along the higher 'fern hill trail' portion, marking those areas as distinctive. The 'north highland trail' could be marked in light blue, while the 'south highland trail' could be marked in yellow. The 'steep trail' could be marked in bright red. The 'short-cut' trail and any other short connector or dead end trail (like the future north swamp trail or the view of Oak Hill) could be marked in a pale green.
- At least 10 maps showing "*you are here*" at 10 intersections
- At least a dozen wooden directional arrows painted white would also be needed.

As it had rained on Wednesday and was muggy on Thursday, the conditions were too wet for Martha Butterfield to return to the forest to walk along the recently cleared trails and take additional photos. But in a few short days, the conditions will be cooler and drier, making for a more pleasant working experience.

Martha Butterfield 8/22/19