

Nashoba Conservation Trust Spring 2021 News

Conservation Corner

Ken Hartlage

If you've driven along Canal Street and River Road this Spring, you might have noticed a crop of white tubes rising from the ground on the corner lot opposite Gardner Farm. That lot is owned by NCT and is part of the Keys Farm Conservation Area, and inside those white tubes are chestnut saplings. The saplings represent the start of an agroforestry pilot project NCT is conducting with farmer and Pepperell native, Jordan Keating. Agroforestry, which incorporates trees and perennials as sources of nuts and fruits, is a growing and sustainable agricultural practice, as it sequesters carbon, increases biodiversity, and reduces soil erosion and stormwater runoff. In the fall, we'll work with Jordan to plant more chestnuts, as well as pawpaws, hazelnuts and persimmons. And that's just the start of things, so stay tuned for more updates as the year progresses.

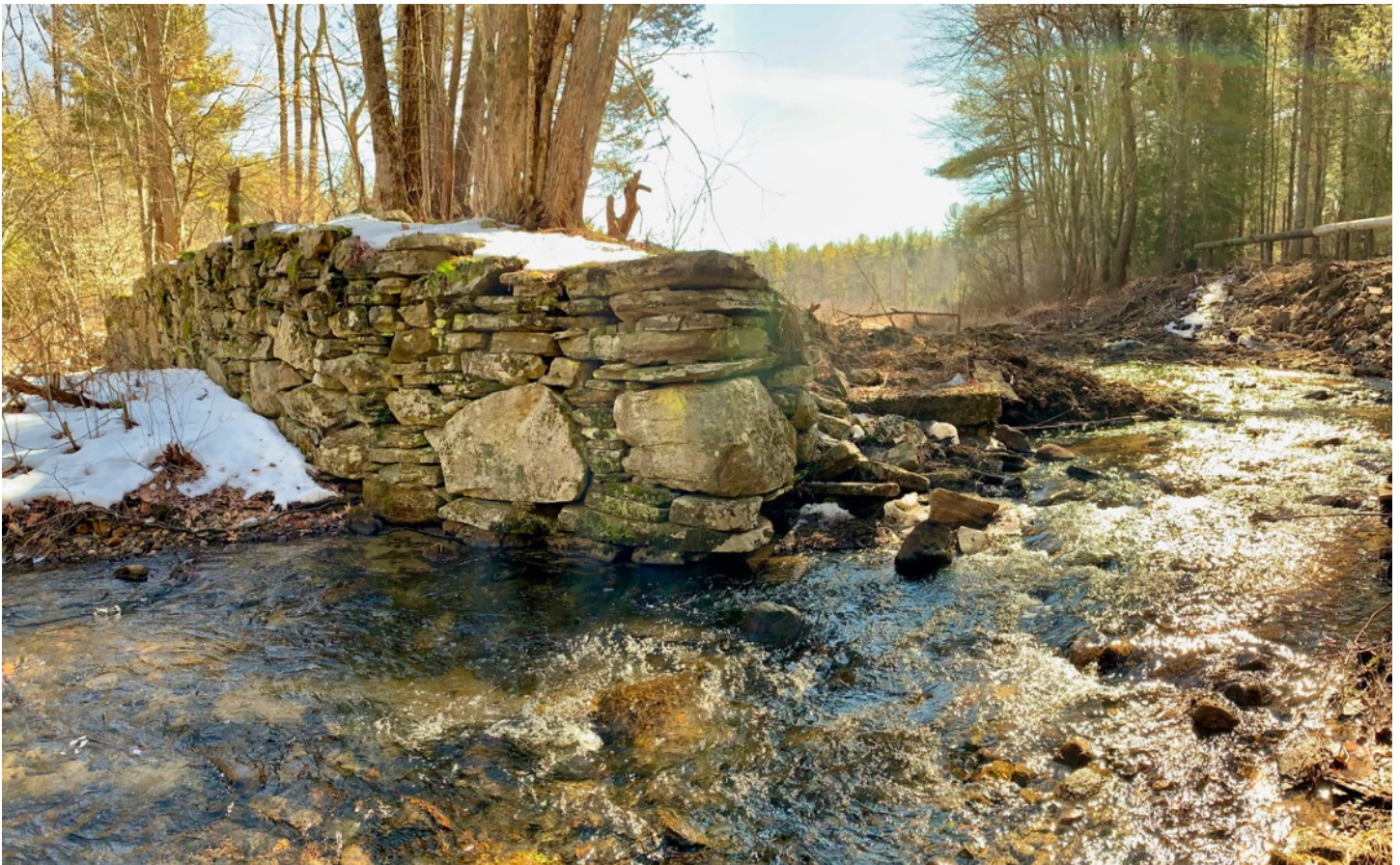


The Shattuck Dam at Day Woods

Linn Clark

In 1973 and 1976, Nashoba Conservation Trust received two generous gifts of land from Ted and Mimi Day - a total of 34 scenic acres spanning Gulf Brook just below Lawrence Street consisting of meadow, woodland, and marsh. A cart path on the west side of the brook leads to an old stone dam where a sawmill used to operate. The last person to operate a mill on the Day property was Bill Henry Shattuck, whose story is best told by Trescott Abele*, which was recorded by Bart Calder in the Nashoba Conservation Trust's newsletter in 1977:

“Some 250 years ago, Gulf Brook was dammed up to create Mention's Pond * and furnish power for a sawmill. Henry Mention operated a mill here until about 1870. At about the time of Henry Mention's death, the mill burned and Henry's widow sold the property to her nephew “Bill Henry” Shattuck. To get control of the property, Bill Henry swore not to take a drop until the mortgage was paid. Rather than re-build Mention's mill, Bill Henry built a new dam and mill some distance downstream from Lawrence Street so as to have a larger millpond. *continued on next page...*



The Shattuck Dam at Day Woods (continued)...

Linn Clark

The story goes that Bill Henry was a real worker. When the new pond filled with water, he worked 24 hours a day cutting logs into lumber. Just one year after taking over the business, Bill Henry paid off the mortgage and ended his drought. However, Bill Henry kept at it, and for years he and his helper, Dan Parker, did the work of five men. Only once did Bill Henry hire a third man, whose job was to keep his corncob pipe lit. Bill Henry didn't have time!

Trescott reports that the mill, which operated from the 1870's until shortly before Bill Henry's death in 1929 was filled with belts, pulleys and handmade wooden levers to shift the belts. One lever let the water into the mill race. Another applied the belt to the shaft of the wheel to supply power to the main pulley in the mill. Another supplied power to the saw. Still another operated the carriage to bring the logs against the saw or to send it back for another load.

It was said that when Bill Henry died, Jimmy Sartelle prophesied that the mill would never be run again as no one but Bill Henry could understand his homemade mechanisms. This was at least partly correct, as the mill burned within a year of Bill Henry's death. Mill artifacts remain, and many were seen during the Trust's dam reconstruction in 1976."

Thanks to the digitization of various town and state records, we now know that the "Mention" mill was actually owned by George Mention, not Henry. We also know that when Henry Shattuck purchased a portion of what is now the Day parcel in 1893 from Mssrs. Willoby & Smith, the deed included a "sawmill and the buildings thereon, also mill's machinery, belting, shafting, etc." We didn't want to let a few additional facts get in the way of Trescott's entertaining story, so we thought it best to contribute those points after the fact. Although the Shattuck sawmill is gone, remnants of the old stone dam remain, which can be seen from the new viewing area NCT is creating at the site.

*Trescott Abele 1901-1995 gentleman farmer, teacher, outdoorsman and town moderator

*Mention's (aka Menshun's) Pond dam collapsed April 27, 1993. There are several unmarked trails that lead to the dam and old mill site off Lawrence Street and the Jeff Smith Trail.

Westside Trail Walk

Pat Rice

For several years before the pandemic, I lead natural history walks sponsored by the Pepperell Conservation Commission and the Nashoba Conservation Trust. I hope to do more of these walks when it is safe to be together again, now I'm thinking September, but we'll see.

But spring is here and plants flowering and leafing out, and showing who they are, and we want to get out and enjoy our trails and nature in town. I'm using the hope that other people would like to know what's going on with the plants along our trails to get out on them myself. I'm going to pick a trail and tie orange flags to particular plants (or sometimes near them) with the names on them and sometimes some natural history observations. Because the flags are picking up on time sensitive points such as flowers or early leaves I'll leave the flags out for about 2 weeks, then remove them from any given trail. I will plan to highlight which trails have labels at any given time on the website.

Mostly I will be noting changes in season of our native plants. But, I'll also note some of the invasive plants with comments on their effects on the native plant communities.

General observations:

TICKS: just be careful to check yourself after a walk. Spraying insecticide on your clothes can deter them, but check anyway.

Poison Ivy: The oils are present year around, don't grab the branches, roots or stems. Wash with a good soap after exposure.

Not all the early flowering flowers are on any given trail. Bloodroots and marsh marigolds can be seen from the old railroad trail near the Prescott St bridge (crossing the Nissitissit River). Park at the pull off and go SE (it's MassWildlife property, open to the public). Walk towards the river, both types of spring plants are on the west side, marsh marigolds down by the water.

West Side Trail (flagging April 9-25(ish)) to the south

Off of River Road, sort of opposite the town forest parking area. On the town trail maps
as #5 Walent Property/Westside Trail

drive down the dirt road past the signs for the West Side Trail and park in the grassy loop

[Pepperell Trail Guide](#)

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Westside Trail Walk *continued...*

Pat Rice

For the West Side Trail, I only put up flagging as far south as the open water. The trail continues to Rt. 119, with plants and occasional animals along the way. Flagging up on April 9, I'll leave it through about April 25. I haven't tagged everything interesting, look around as you go!

Around the parking area are young white pines and other shrubs size plants that are signs of succession – plants moving into areas that were clear not too many years ago.

1. Between the parking lot and trail: some large white pines with hairy poison ivy vines. Flagging not on the poison ivy! Keep in mind that the oils in poison ivy are always there – don't grab these to look more closely. Poison ivy is native and belongs here (but we should be cautious around it). Birds like the white fruits and in eating and eliminating the seeds spread the plants around



2. On the south side of the drive there are many invasive shrubs, Morrow's honeysuckle. It is growing in previously disturbed areas where its early leafing out gives it an advantage over many of the native species that evolved to leaf out slightly later, with late frosts that damage early leaves selecting for cautious plants.

3. Winter identifiable plants are still among the easiest to recognize now. There are clubmosses providing low ground cover along the trail.

4. When you get to the wetlands on either side of the trail look for large leaves of skunk cabbage, one of the early natives to emerge, and to provide forage for bears and other animals.

5. Look for white birch along the trail, a sign of young forest, these native trees don't grow well in shade, they usually start in open sun. Even as they start to die, they provide habitat for many animals and fungus. This tree has bracket fungus and holes from woodpeckers looking for insects inside the tree.

6. Look for fallen trees, particularly in the wetlands. Their tip ups provide a diverse habitat for other species, deeper water where they emerge and root masses where annuals may find transient low competitive sites for quick growing.

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Westside Trail Walk *continued...*

Pat Rice



Fallen tree



Witch hazel fruits

7. There are good populations of wintergreen (teaberry) along the trail, some still have red fruits from last year.
8. The fall flowering native witch hazels have dried remains of the flowers on the stems where the dry fruits will develop.
9. Beaked hazel (a nice native shrub) has been flowering for a while, with separate male catkins spreading pollen into the air and small red female flowers that capture pollen and then produce the fruits.
10. A different native clubmoss, running or common clubmoss adds diversity to the forest.
11. When you get to the open water areas, the plants are different than many in the forest, these grow in the sun, and many only grow in full sun. And there are aquatic plants. Look for amphibian egg masses in the edges of the trail, even though there are fish in the open water these frog, toad, or salamander parents laid eggs in the possibility that some would survive in the shallow areas. Other animal signs here are beaver cut trees, shallow holes where turtles have laid eggs (and often had them excavated by raccoons, skunks, or other hungry predators. Turtles bask on downed trees and stumps in the water.

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Westside Trail Walk *continued...*

Pat Rice

12. The islands next to the trail support a lot of birds, somewhat protected by the relative isolation on the islands.

13. Look around the ponds for red blushing trees along the edges, red maples in flower and fruit. Look up in the marshy parts of the woods to see the red maples as well, with some of their flowers dropped to the ground.

14. There are many native plant species along the open water, but there are also abundant invasive species here. There are remnants of last year's growth of purple loosestrife, barberry with its early leaves, and what I suspect is a non-native iris (it will have yellow flowers, and really does get into all sorts of backwaters where I'd expect natives to prevail). I'll be looking for this when it flowers.



Japanese barberry, a non-native shrub that starts its leaves out earlier in the spring than native shrubs. It grows along stream sides and on moist soil, sun or shade.



An iris, probably the non-native that will have yellow flowers. Our native iris is purple. Both grow in wetlands. The non-native yellow iris is considered to be invasive and take up habitat that would otherwise support native species.

This is as far as I flagged this year. The trail continues a lot further. Explore!

Upcoming Events

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, planned NCT events are on hold until further notice

Volunteers

Volunteers are always needed and welcomed for all the activities that NCT participates in. If you would like to become involved, please contact Pat Peavey at 508-320-2492



Support NCT with your donations

The NCT offers the following levels of membership:

Individual - \$35

Family - \$50

Sponsor - \$100

Patron - \$250

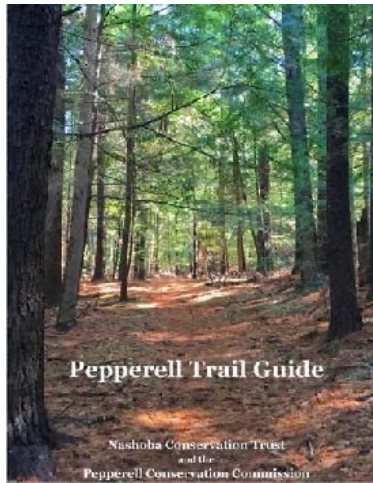
Benefactor - \$1000

All memberships include subscription to the NCT Quarterly Newsletter. Visit the website at nashobatrust.org to donate or mail your check to:

Nashoba Conservation Trust
PO Box 188
Pepperell, MA 01463

Pepperell Trail Guide

The Pepperell Trail Guide describes sixteen conservation area and almost 20 miles of trails, some of which pass through or alongside some of Pepperell's most stunning natural areas, including the Nashua and Nissitissit Rivers, Heald Pond and Gulf Brook Ravine. Visit the NCT website at www.nashobatrust.org to download a copy.



NCT Gear

Our new website makes it easier than ever to order NCT tshirts and window decals. Visit the NCT website at nashobatrust.org and get an NCT tshirt or window decal delivered right to your mailbox!



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