



Bicknell Brook Loop Trail & Colette Trail

Enfield, NH

[Trail Map](#)

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing*



Photo 1: *Bicknell Brook along the Colette Trail*

Description: The Bicknell Brook Loop Trail and the Colette Trail in Enfield, New Hampshire follow Bicknell Brook along its downstream course to Crystal Lake. From cascading waterfalls to open beaver wetlands to climax forest to a lake environment, these trails offer a wide range of habitat diversity. According to Alan Strickland, a primary player in their creation and maintenance, these connecting trails are especially unique because it is so unusual to find a major stream in New England that is still largely undeveloped. The Bicknell Brook Loop Trail and the Colette Trail allow the public to enjoy this small wonder along its 2.5 miles of relatively easy terrain.

The Colette trail was created as a memorial to Colette Drape, lover of the outdoors, Dartmouth graduate, and daughter of property owner Robert Drape. In 1991 at age 30, Colette was tragically killed in a car accident in France. The trail is a special memorial to a talented and passionate person. Thanks to the [Town of Enfield](#), various owners of abutting property, and a number of private easement grantors who conserved portions of their land under the Upper Valley Land Trust, a permanent trail corridor has been established. As a result, Bicknell Brook will retain its natural beauty for generations of users into the future

Directions:

Follow Route 4A past the Shaker Village to Enfield Center. From the general store, continue for approximately 3 miles and turn left onto Grafton Pond Road. Trailhead parking is less than a half-mile on the left. For a shorter hike, another trailhead pull-off is located on Boys Camp Road, approximately 2 miles from the general store on 4A, on the left after a bridge.



Photo 2: *Recently abandoned beaver dam and lodge*

Exploring the Bicknell Brook Loop Trails & Colette Trail

Deeply intertwined with these trails' natural diversity in terrain and habitat is the **hydrology of Bicknell Brook**. Visitors will notice the juxtaposition of flat and open grassy areas where the stream follows a lazy course along muddy banks with steeper areas of water rushing over rocks and through shady forest. The stream continues its course over waterfalls on either side of Boy's Camp Road and eventually discharges into Crystal Lake.

While Bicknell Brook has been relatively undisturbed by humans,

it has undergone much change as a result of **beaver activity**. Beavers are the only species other than humans to drastically alter ecosystems to suit their needs. Beavers use the natural topography of the land, choosing flat areas below which to build their dams and increase wetland habitat through flooding. Once the resources of the area—namely the beaver’s winter food supplies of bark—are exhausted, the beaver ceases to maintain its dam and moves on. Abandoned dams are evidenced by a lack of fresh mud and sticks to keep the dam from leaking and the water levels from dropping. Several abandoned beaver dams and occasionally an active dam and lodge are visible along the Colette Trail.

Natural succession is at work at the abandoned beaver sites: sediment fills in on the once-flooded area, creating a wetland marsh. The beaver wetland is succeeded by a shrubby swamp and eventually the development of a wet-sited forest. This process could take decades or more. There is quite a contrast between the habitats upstream and downstream of beaver dams along Bicknell Brook.

Although undeveloped for the most part, Bicknell Brook owes its current state to humans, as well as beavers. The stream houses the site of a **former sawmill** just downstream of Boy’s Camp Road and the Butman Bridge. Mr. Butman constructed a hydro-powered mill circa 1821. The mill was likely active throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Approximately one-fourth mile upstream of Boys Camp Road and the former mill site, the trail passes over the remnants of a stone wall. This was a retaining wall that created a **millpond**. The water was held back to be released by a sluice gate when power for the mill was needed. Evidence of the sluice gate exists in the form of a rock-lined hole which likely held a post to raise and lower the gate. The hole is currently covered by a rock so curious hikers will not fall in.



Photo 3: Remnants of the stone retaining wall



Photo 4: Basal scar from logging activity

Also at the old mill site is evidence of small-scale **granite quarrying**. The extent of the quarrying is debatable, but rectangular slabs of granite in the stream bed along with evidence of drill holes and remaining metal wedges speak to its existence. Most likely the quarrying was for the purpose of harvesting material locally with which to build the mill. It is fascinating to note that some of the cascading waterfalls are not completely natural and flow over rectangular ledges cut in these operations.

Logging is another human activity that has taken place along Bicknell Brook. There is evidence of logging activity throughout the past several decades in the form of open, grassy clearings riddled with the large stumps of harvested trees. Openings from former logging roads leading in the direction of Boys Camp Road are also visible, along with basal scars on the bases of tree trunks that were created by logging skidders dragging downed trees through the forest. These scars exist where the bark has been knocked off, and the inner wood of the tree trunk is exposed.

After a **disturbance** such as logging, the course of **forest succession** begins. Disturbances can be the result of natural processes, human action, or a combination of both. Examples include storm blow-downs, forest fires, tree blights, logging, or

clearing for farmland. In the first stages of forest succession, the species that gain a foothold in the altered habitat conditions are pioneer or early-successional species. These may include sun-loving tree species such as red maple, aspen, and white pine. As time passes, certain species that are superior competitors gain dominance and the forest becomes one of late-successional or climax species. The Colette Trail has several areas of rich climax forest. Here large hemlocks, spruce, and other shade-tolerant trees create a canopy that filters out much of the sunlight. As a result, there is minimal undergrowth.



Photo 5: *Stilted roots of a hemlock*

them, appear to have grown down to the forest floor from the top of a large boulder.

In the ongoing drama of forest succession, many things can aid in the survival of a particular individual. Downed pines can become **nurse logs** and are a prime spot for seedlings to take root and be protected from other under-story competitors. Moss-covered rocks can work in the same way. Visitors should note the substantially-sized trees growing out of the remnants of these nurse logs. Also look for hemlocks that appear to be growing on stilts in late-successional areas. These trees likely began life growing on a downed log or rock which eventually rotted or was washed away in a flood. Similarly, there are several birch trees along the trail whose roots, in search of water or because the earth has been eroded from around

Throughout the course of disturbances and succession, Bicknell Brook and its surrounding area have remained relatively pristine. The area is in a similar state to that in which the Winnepesaukee tribe of Native Americans found it as they passed through on the historic Mascoma-Aquadoctan trail—or to that in which the Shakers who settled the area at the end of the eighteenth century found it as they explored their new home. Independently of one another, Alan Strickland of the Enfield Conservation Commission and Robert Drape, a property owner along Bicknell Brook, both recognized this value and wished to preserve it. With the help of the Enfield Conservation Commission, the Upper Valley Land Trust, and a memorial fund established by the Drapes in Colette's name, the two men worked together to make the Colette Trail what it is today.

In the words of Robert Drape, "It was a joy to be with [Colette] on a ski slope, in a canoe on Crystal Lake, or hiking in the woods. It seemed appropriate that a permanent memorial be established for Colette that could provide the opportunity for subsequent generations to enjoy the serenity and beauty of a wilderness area." The Colette Trail succeeds in fulfilling this goal.



Photo 6: *Colette Drape, 1990*



Photo 7: *View of Crystal Lake*

Trail Maintenance: The “trail manager” is the Enfield Conservation Commission. However, the UVLT is ultimately responsible for trail upkeep.

While these trails are available for community use free of charge, their maintenance depends on the good stewardship and financial support of users. Donations for the trail program may be sent to: Trails, Upper Valley Land Trust, 19 Buck Road, Hanover, NH 03755, or [donate online](#).

Please contact UVLT Vice President Stewardship [Pete Helm](#) (603-643-6626) to report trail maintenance needs or recommendations.