



Grant Brook Trails

Lyme, NH

[Johnson Loop Trail Map](#)

[Big Rock Trail Map](#)

[Lower Grant Brook Trail Map](#)

Uses: *hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing, bird watching*

Description: Grant Brook falls 2,500 feet from its source on Smarts Mountain, through the villages of Lyme Center and Lyme; delivering run-off gathered from its 10 square mile watershed to the Connecticut River. The Grant Brook corridor is a rich riparian plant and animal habitat, of historical interest, and with excellent recreational possibilities. Several trails follow the last stretch of the brook, skirting along rock walls and pastures with wonderful views of surrounding hills; passing through beaver meadows, mixed hardwood and softwood forests, and open fields. Three areas of protected land with trails are described below:



Photo #1: *Misty morning at the mouth of Grant Brook*

Exploring Grant Brook Trails:

In the winter of 1767-1768 Benjamin Grant came up the Connecticut River on the ice, hauling his great millstones to set up Lyme's first gristmill on a swift-running stretch of brook not far inland from the river. According to the Lyme Historical Society's 1976 history, *Patterns and Pieces*, the mill was essential to the town's survival and to establishing Lyme as a proper community of consequence, no longer merely a pioneering settlement. Two hundred and twenty years later, Benjamin Grant's great-great-great grandson, Clyde Grant, placed a conservation easement on nine acres along the brook bearing his ancestor's name. And a decade after that, the citizens of Lyme and the Upper Valley Land Trust worked to protect the rest of his estate and a number of other properties that together conserved the entire 1½ mile stream corridor from Lyme village to the Connecticut River.



Photo #2: *Pastoral scene on original Grant easement*

Continued efforts through to the present have protected several other riparian buffer areas along Grant Brook - all part of a long-term Grant Brook Conservation Project that has brought together the resources of private citizens donating funds, land, conservation easements, and time; as well as organizations from the local, including the Lyme Conservation Commission and Lyme Foundation, to the federal, with a generous grant from the North American Wetlands Council to protect land around the mouth of Grant Brook. UVLT has been a partner throughout, coordinating these diverse partners in a truly cooperative, broad-based conservation effort.



Photo #3: *Hikers on Lower Grant Brook Trail, 2002*

The lowland hardwood forests and wetlands of the Lower Grant Brook properties are particularly rich habitat for both plants and wildlife. The area contains deep deposits of lake bottom sediments deposited 10,000 years ago at the bottom of Lake Hitchcock - a long, narrow band of glacial meltwater that was dammed by glacial deposits 140 miles to the south. Farther upstream are found huge Ammonoosuc volcanic boulders of mineral rich amphibolite. The quality of the soils, abundant water, and the different slopes and aspects provide a variety and a richness of habitat that are rare in New Hampshire. This ecologically diverse area caught the attention of the New Hampshire Audubon Society, which entered into a partnership with UVLT to manage the southern, Lyme Hill part of the Lower Grant Brook property as an Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary.

The area supports over 300 species of vascular plants, including a number of state-listed threatened or endangered plants. Two plants found in a 1999 survey – the large toothwort and stiff gentian – are species that had not been reported in New Hampshire for over 100 years. An outcrop of amphibolite boulders harbors a rare species of walking fern. In addition, a 1999 bird survey identified more than 60 bird species. Among the bird species two – the Yellow-throated Vireo and the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – are “southern riparian” species at the northern limit of their geographic ranges, and found almost exclusively in habitats such as this one, which are quite limited in distribution. Wetland bird surveys on May 18, 1999 also detected four species of frogs: American toad, spring peeper, greater grey treefrog, and green frog. Large mammals noted include beaver, white-tailed deer, black bear, porcupine, and coyote.

North of Route 10, in an area behind the Lyme Common, is the Big Rock Nature Preserve, made up of 23 acres of land generously donated to the Town of Lyme by the Greenwood, Bircher, Strout, and Guyre families. Here Grant Brook meanders through shrubby wetlands and beaver ponds fringed with cattails and high-bush cranberry, passes floodplain forest, and takes diversions into channels dug by industrious beavers. A century ago this land was mostly cleared. The brook was open and unshaded; along its banks were close-cropped sheep pastures, an apple orchard, and a stone wall-lined lane leading to a country store. Today the forest and other stream-side vegetation serve as a riparian buffer protecting the quality of the water in Grant Brook, capturing sediment from storm water runoff and filtering pollutants before they can corrupt the stream. The shaded stream is cooler and able to provide more oxygen and cover for cold-water fish and their food than it did a century ago. Adjacent to the brook are silty-bottomed wetlands created by beaver and hosting a variety of wetland wildlife, including otter, mink, and moose. Bear visit the rocky knoll above the brook and deer winter over in the hemlocks and dense forest to the south.



Photo #4: *Beaver lodge, Big Rock Preserve*

Reminders of the past are seen in the stone walls crossing the now-forested property, the occasional apple tree, and several large “wolf trees” – trees whose spreading lower branches indicate that they once grew in the open - perhaps along the edge of a field. Freed from the necessity to compete for light, the wolf trees



branched out, unlike the surrounding younger trees that have grown straight-stemmed, racing one another upwards to achieve a place in the sun of the forest canopy. Wolf trees are often ungainly in shape and riddled with cavities, and thus of little value for timber harvest; however these very features make them valuable habitat for squirrels, birds, and other wildlife.

Photo #5: *Wolf Tree, Big Rock Preserve*

The farthest upstream property so far protected under the Grant Brook Conservation Project is the former Johnson property. Sitting up high on the side of a hill above Lyme Center and facing south are the sloping fields, pastures, and forest lands that once belonged to Louise Johnson. At age 87 and with diminishing eyesight, Mrs. Johnson could no longer live in the small white house on the property, but she remembered fondly the years of living there with here

husband “enjoying this view, this life in the country.” “Our children learned about nature here,” she said. “I wanted to pass along the opportunity to enjoy this place – the way we have – to future residents.”

Photo #6: *View from lookout on Johnson Loop*

Mrs. Johnson’s legacy protects much more than a fine view and life in the country. The fields and forests are home to a diversity of plants and animals, including goshawk and partridge, deer and spring peepers. The hay in the fields feeds local farm animals and supports local farm business. The timber from the woodland will go to a local mill from time to time, carrying on yet another traditional use. These same pastures most likely once grazed sheep that supplied



wool to the Franklin fulling mill, a wool-processing business built in 1795 on the banks of Grant Brook just northwest of the junction of Dorchester and Franklin Hill Roads. And timber from the property may well have been used in the business that supplanted the fulling mill in the late 1800’s, a “sawing and turning” shop producing chair legs, ladders, and ox-yokes. In addition, the property’s hemlocks would have been handy to the tannery established in 1846 just downstream of the “sawing and turning shop.” The tannery was associated with yet another sawmill just across the brook – the tannery using hemlock bark in curing leather, while the sawmill processed the wood from the stripped trees. The cascade here is still known as Tannery Falls and the basement of the tannery is now buried under Dorchester Road. A photograph of the tannery taken in 1899 and reproduced in the Lyme Historians’ *Patterns and Pieces* is shown here.



Photo #7, Lyme Historians *Patterns and Pieces* p. 22: *Tannery, established 1846*

Link:

Lyme Town website, with maps:

www.lymenh.gov/Public_Documents/LymeNH_BComm/pdf/BigRock.pdf

Trail Use Guidelines

- Carry out what you carry in.
- Stay on the trail and use only designated trailhead parking areas.
- Stay off trails during spring melt, when soils are soft and easily eroded.
- Be respectful of other trail users and be courteous to trail neighbors.
- Control your dog(s). Do not allow dogs to disturb livestock, wildlife, or sensitive natural areas. Pets are not allowed on some trails.
- Close farm gates behind you.
- For your safety during hunting seasons, wear blaze orange.
- Follow [Leave No Trace guidelines](#).

Trail Maintenance: UVLT, in collaboration with local volunteers maintains the Lower Grant Brook Trail. The [Lyme Conservation Commission](#) maintains both the Johnson Loop Trail and the Big Rock Nature Preserve Trail.

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.