
History

This trail runs past the old home farm of Stephen Osborn and the site of his sawmill on Bailey Brook. The Osborn family came to Packersfield (Nelson) in the early 1800s and established the sawmill around 1815. The trail includes the old town road built to the Osborn house in 1815. There is extensive stonework of building foundations and two wells, as well as remains of the millworks, including a partially destroyed dam and two stone piers which held the overshot wheel.

Overview

This guide covers the loop trail from the trailhead and parking area on Old Stoddard Road. Walk two tenths of a mile down Old Stoddard Road to a large rock on the right, where a black fly marker and yellow blazes mark where the trail leaves the road and follows Bailey Brook upstream. The trail runs up the brook to the site of the old sawmill, then away from the brook to the foundations of the Osborn farm and out the old town road back to the trailhead and parking area on Old Stoddard Road. The trail is 1.2 miles long.

Location

From Nelson village, take Old Stoddard Road 2.9 miles east toward Stoddard. The trailhead and parking area are on the right, (just past house #611 on the left.) There is a yellow black fly marker on a tree near the trailhead. Trail guides and a map can be found in the mailbox nearby.

Parking

There is parking for several cars at the trailhead on Old Stoddard Road. Be aware that the parking area can be wet and uneven.

Minimize Your Impact

This trail is for your enjoyment and for those who may follow you. Leave flowers, plants and natural objects as you find them. Preserve the past by not disturbing historic structures or cultural artifacts. Observe wildlife without impacting their quiet or their environment. Please carry out anything you may have brought along with you. Enjoy your time on the trail while respecting the private property it passes through.

Notes

This guide is accompanied by an addendum with more information about the natural and historical sights along the trail.

Trail Description

After you pick up your trail guide from the mailbox, return to Old Stoddard Road and walk east down the road two tenths of a mile toward Stoddard. The Old Stoddard Road is one of the roads in Nelson that predate detailed road descriptions. It was already here in 1767 when Joseph Stanhope built his log cabin on the road.

As you walk down the road, look for signs of damage on the telephone poles. Black bears often bite, claw, and rub utility poles on rural roads. Look for such sign on the first and fifth poles (#63 on the left and #67 on the right). Look closely — bits of hair often get caught on the wood as the bear rubs against the pole.

Leave Old Stoddard Road at the upright rock in the trail on your right. There is a yellow black fly marker on a tree. Follow the bright yellow blazes as the trail bears left down the hill before it begins to run along Bailey Brook. There is a view here of a waterfall and the wetlands beyond. If there is snow on the ground, there may be otter slides, and tracks of mink or other wildlife along the brook. Looking

out from this overlook, notice that most of the larger trees are either red oak or white pine. The smaller trees include red spruce and eastern hemlock. (For more information about these trees, see the addendum to this trail guide, note 1.)

The trail follows Bailey Brook for half a mile. As you follow the brook, you will see gnawed stumps left by beaver, and the oval holes and wood chips from pileated woodpeckers on the trees.

Just as the trail swings away from the brook, there is stone work along the opposite side of the brook, the purpose of which is unknown. As you stand looking toward this stonework, and past it across the wetland, you will see Holt Hill rising on the other side. This is a good place to take note of the plant life around you. Beside you to your left, next to the brook, is a patch of winterberry holly. On your right are lower shrubs, some of which are young beech saplings, others are witch-hazel. Behind you next to the trail is a black cherry tree marked with a yellow blaze. There are at least four kinds of ferns around you. (For more information, see addendum, note 2.)

As the trail leaves Bailey Brook, to the right off the trail ahead and marked with orange tape, is a circle of flat rocks, the purpose of which is unknown. Back on the trail, just past the bend, on your right a red oak has horizontal rows of pencil-eraser-sized holes. These are the distinctive sign of a small woodpecker, the yellow-bellied sapsucker. A few feet farther, another red oak on the left is also covered with sapsucker holes.

The trail follows an old woods road, then continues along a stone wall before crossing a small stream that flows into Bailey Brook. In this area you may notice sarsaparilla plants. (See addendum, note 3.) As the trail rejoins Bailey Brook, you can see a wetland on the other side, surrounded by pine trees. You will step through a stone wall that is

perpendicular to the wall that the trail follows. That stone wall goes to the edge of the brook and then continues on the other side. The trail then passes through another stone wall that runs to the brook.

Marker #1 At a bend in Bailey Brook you will see the waterfall up ahead and the footings of the old sawmill, established by Stephen Osborn, probably around 1815. At the top of the waterfall, there is a partially destroyed dam across the brook with a clear indication of where the wooden trough carried the water to the top of an approximately 15' diameter overshot wheel. The wheel was carried between the two large stone piers and the reciprocating saws operated in a building to the left of the piers as you look down from the dam. The dam created a small millpond, but not enough to store water for the dry season. The mill must have been seasonal. (For more historic information about this site, see addendum, note 4.)

You might want to explore the area above the falls before continuing on the trail. There is a small footpath that leads up to a pond and clearing above the mill where there was beaver activity in 2012. In winter you might see mink tracks here, in summer, perhaps a blue heron. Enter this path through an opening in the stones. It's marked with orange tape.

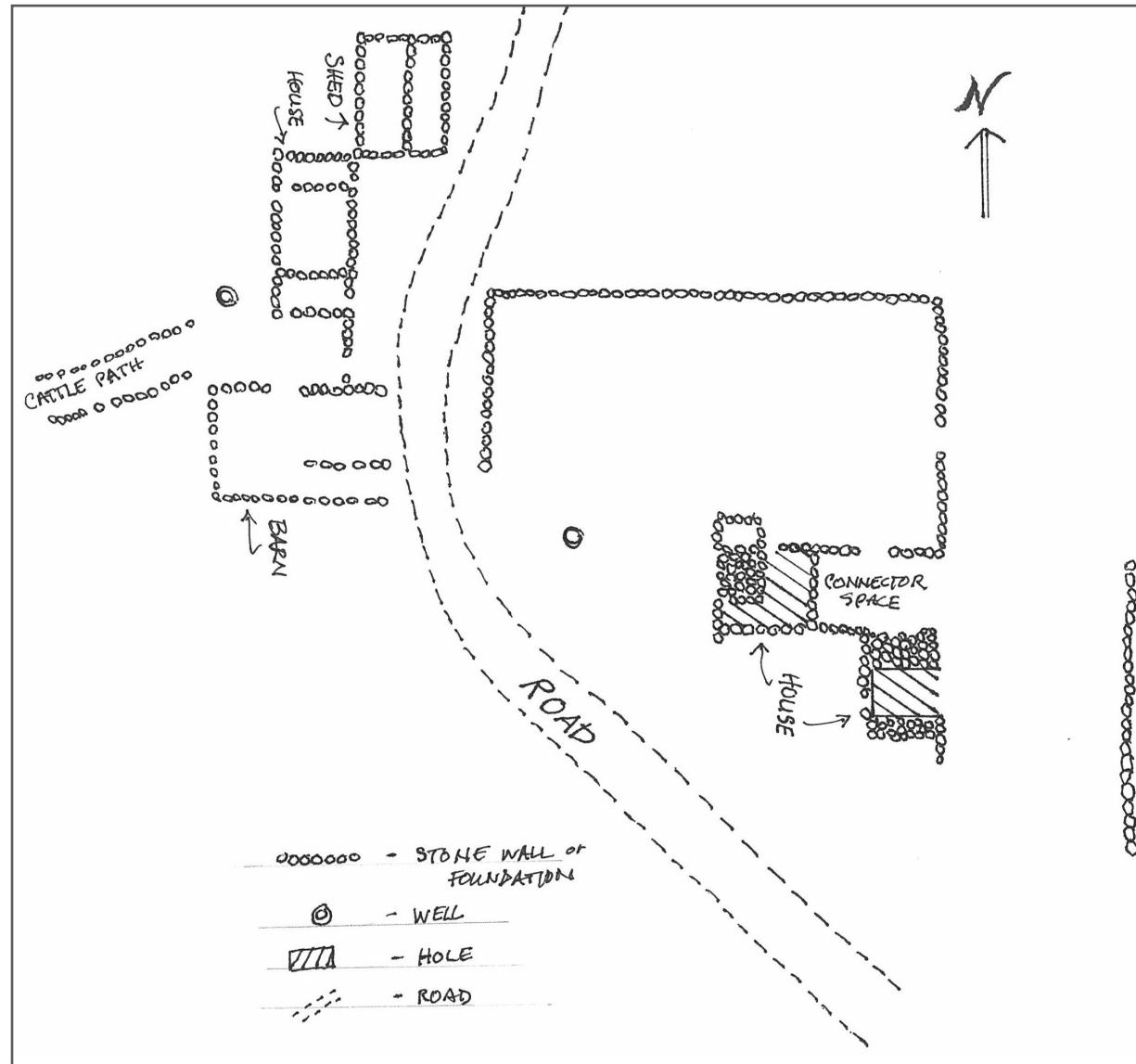
Return to the main trail above the waterfall and follow the yellow blazes as the trail leads across the old road and enters a stand of white pine. When you pass under these pines, notice the smaller trees along the path, striped maples and saplings of American beech. Notice the large black cherry tree and two large white ashes. (For more information about these trees, see addendum, note 5.) There are many unusually large trees along the way here. The trail rejoins the brook and then goes up hill between two stonewalls. This was probably a pathway leading stock down to the stream for water.

Marker #2 At the top of the rise you will find the site of the home farm of Stephen Osborn and an extensive array of building foundations. First you come to the site of perhaps a barn on your right and a house, with an old well, on the left. In summer, this area is covered with day lilies, not blooming now as they are in the shade as the forest has grown up around the old farm.

Marker #3 Further on, across the old road you come to the main house foundation on the left. The house was south facing and was large, extending beyond the cellar on all sides. There is a deep well nearby. Beyond the house toward the mill, there is also the foundation of a large barn on two levels. Pigs were perhaps kept on the lower level. Note the old bricks. You can look down the hill and see the sawmill site from the barn. You may notice that the stonework in the house and the barn is quite similar. (For more historic information, see addendum, note 6.)

After exploring the building foundations, return to the old road, turn right and follow the road back to the trailhead and parking area. The town established this road to the Osborn house in 1815 and discontinued it in 1922.

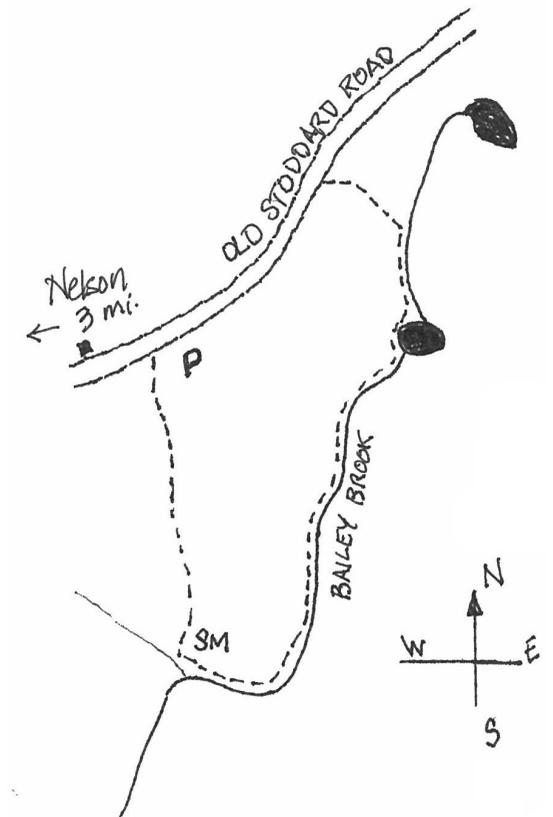
Osborn Home and Barn Site



BAILEY BROOK MILL TRAIL

Hiking Trail Guide

Produced by the
Nelson Trail Committee
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Bailey Brook Mill Trail Guide Addendum

Note 1 Looking out from the overlook of the waterfalls and the wetlands beyond, notice that most of the larger trees are either red oak or white pine. The smaller trees include red spruce and eastern hemlock, both evergreen with short needles. Spruce needles are square and sharp, while hemlock has softer, flat needles. All of these trees are found along the length of the trail.

Note 2 As you stand looking across Bailey Brook at the stonework along the opposite bank, this is a good place to take note of some of the plant life around you.

Beside you to your left, next to the brook, is a patch of winterberry holly. In late summer and early winter, until they are eaten by birds, this shrub might be covered with bright red berries. In spring these shrubs have small white flowers. This is a common wetland plant in this part of New England.

Beside you to your right are some lower shrubs. Some of these are young beech saplings, with long cigar-shaped buds and leaves with evenly spaced sharp teeth along the margins. Others are witch-hazel with more wavy margins on the leaves. Where the trail rejoins the brook at the upper end of the wetland, you will see many larger witch-hazel shrubs. This is one of the few plants that blooms in the fall, yellow flowers on the twigs in September and October.

Behind you next to the trail is a 10-inch black cherry with one of the yellow blazes. Look at the black, flakey bark. This is also a common tree in the area.

There are at least four kinds of ferns around you. The smallest and most numerous are the New York fern, with the fronds tapering narrowly at the tip and at the base. Three larger ferns seen here and elsewhere on the trail include interrupted fern, cinnamon fern, and bracken fern.

Note 3 After the yellow-bellied sapsucker holes the trail continues along the stone wall before crossing a small brook that flows down from the right. In this area, look for sarsaparilla, a small plant, usually about one-foot high, with a single stem coming from the ground that has three “branches” spreading out at the top. These branches (actually compound leaves) are lined with small leaflets. While sarsaparilla roots have been used for tea and herbal medicines, this is not the same as the sarsaparilla used in “root beer”, which is an unrelated plant with the same name. This plant is common in many areas along the trail.

Note 4 At a bend in Bailey Brook you will see the waterfall up ahead and the footings of the old sawmill, established by Stephen Osborn, probably around 1815. We know the site was a sawmill by the inventory of items upon the death of Stephen. The inventory included many wood working tools including saws, chisels, hammers, shavers, augers, planes, axes, a square and compass. Charles Bemis writing in 1913, reports that the mill produced tool handles for scythes, snaths (a type of small scythe), hay rakes, forks and hoes. The mill seems to have been a going concern in 1844, and the 1858 county map identifies the site as a sawmill. It seems that the mill closed or failed sometime during the Civil War. Wood was becoming scarcer in New Hampshire at that time and mill failures were common.

Note 5 After you leave the sawmill and enter the stand of large white pines, notice the smaller trees along the path, at first mostly striped maple, with its green and brown vertical stripes on the bark, giving way shortly to saplings of American beech with its smooth gray bark. After this section notice the 14-inch black cherry, with its black, flakey bark, on the right side of the trail. A few feet behind this tree are two white ash trees, almost two feet in diameter, with their vertical, diamond-shaped furrows and ridges in the bark.

Note 6 Marker #2 and #3 are the home farm of Stephen Osborn, who was born in 1771 and married Rachael Baker of Marlborough in 1792. They seem to have moved to Packersfield (Nelson) with a family of four children around 1799. They became members of the church in Packersfield in 1800. In the Packersfield tax roll of 1808, they had a horse, an ox, and two cows. A few years later Osborn was taxed for one half acre of tillage in addition to the animals. He was a modest farmer to say the least. He was not a land owner until 1815. It is likely that he leased the farm at first and built a modest house on the property then, perhaps the first farm consisted of the foundations and old well you see at Marker # 2, as the well on that site is more primitive. The property passed from the Osborn family to the Hart family in 1870. Parker and Elizabeth Hart occupied the place until 1901. The house was abandoned that year when they sold to Louis Cabot, who amassed a great deal of land in the area.