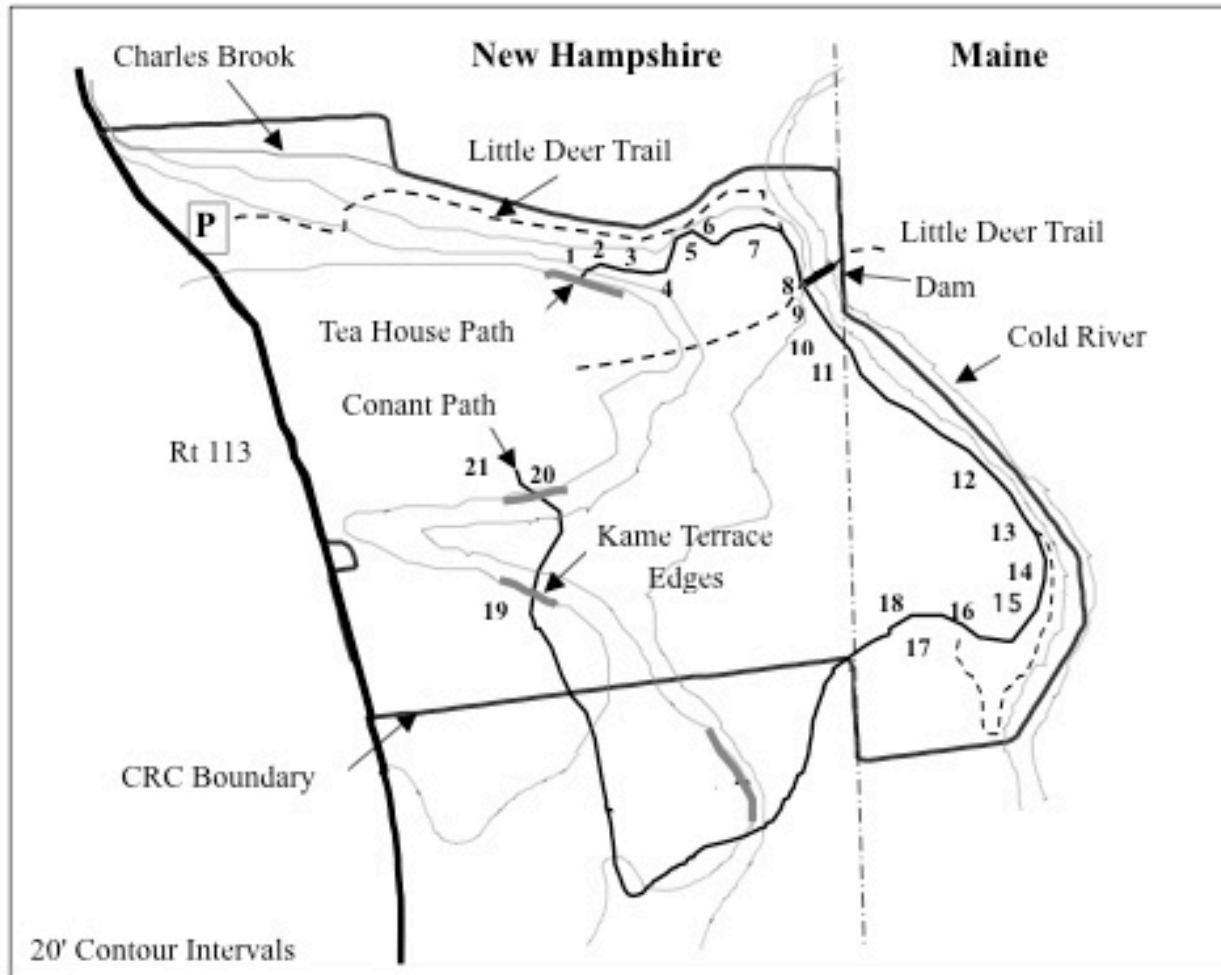


AMC Cold River Camp



Map by Bob Crane, 2011

NATURE TRAIL

Numbers on posts beside the trail

Key:

- 1 Tea House Path
- 2 Non-native Plants
- 3 Success Story
- 4 Transition Zone
- 5 Prior Human Presence
- 6 Charles Brook
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The Tea House Path (1)

The unblazed Tea House Path begins between Big Birch and Hemlock cabins and descends from the terrace created by the last glaciers down to the bedrock at the dam. In the final centuries of the last Ice Age the climate slowly warmed and

the glaciers covering New England melted back, leaving behind deposits of sand, gravel, and rounded rock. These deposits formed Kame terraces, and the main camp area is situated on one. Over time, the brooks flowing into Cold River slowly cut their way through the terrace, forming steep-sided ravines.

Non-native Plants (2)

Note the day lilies and vinca along the path. These non-native (alien) plants are overrunning nearby native species. Across a wide area of our country, alien plants such as Japanese barberry, purple loosestrife, burning bush, phragmites, and Japanese knotweed are threatening many of our native plants.

The path now veers to the right.

Success Story (3)

Here the area was logged in 2007 to provide views and improve the circulation of air around the cabins. Now sunlight can reach the ground – and that has changed the conditions for growth. Plants and shrubs that require more sunlight to develop are able to take advantage of the conditions. As they grow, they will shade the ground enough to prevent the young sumac and blackberries from growing well. Instead, more shade-loving plants will start to grow again. This process is called “succession.”

Note the presence of cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) in the wet area on your left. These are “Indicator Plants” for acidic wetlands.

Transition Zone (4)

We now enter a transition zone; an area between the sunny, recently logged area, and the forest. Notice how some of the shade loving wildflowers, such as Clintonia and partridgeberry, are struggling to survive in the newly created sun lit areas.

Prior Human Presence (5)

There are three man-made features near this spot, indicating that humans have been here in the past.

It’s hard to miss the Tea House, for which this path was named. In CRC’s early days, the crew served tea here to the ladies while their husbands climbed Baldface! This Tea House, built in 1984, replaces the earlier one.

The second sign is a granite block used to mark the original Chatham town line.

The third sign of previous use by people is the barbed wire. Notice how the tree has grown around the wire. In New England, the presence of barbed wire, granite markers, stone walls and foundation holes, along with lilacs and apple trees in the woods are indications that the land had been cleared for pasture and homes.

Charles Brook (6)

Charles Brook drains the high slopes of the Baldfaces and will soon join Cold River. The brook carved the south wall of the ravine where you are standing. With the energy of its motion, it has eroded the sand and gravel from the base of the terrace and washed it downstream. Pause for a while on the wooden seat overlooking the ravine and relax to the soothing sound of Charles Brook.

Ravine Floor (7)

Descend to the floor of the ravine, turn right at the intersection with the Little Deer Trail, and walk downstream along Cold River toward the Chester Pool and Dam. Note signs of past flooding along the river edge.

Chester Pool and Dam (8)

In 1923, W. R. Chester provided almost \$1,800 to construct the Chester Pool and Dam, commemorating his and his wife, Mabel’s deep interest in Cold River Camp. Mabel was one of the original camp committee members. The Dam underwent extensive rebuilding in 1984-85.

In the early 1800’s, the Baker gristmill was located on Cold River near the present pool and dam. Millstones from this mill are located at the Camp gate on Route 113, the birdbath near the Lodge, and the Pool.

The Little Deer – Big Deer Trail crosses the Dam. There the Leach Link Trail begins on the left, providing access to Shell Pond Rd. or a quiet walk along Cold River. Ahead, the Little Deer – Big Deer Trail climbs moderately 550 feet in less than a mile to the summit of Little Deer Hill, passing open ledges with views towards the Baldfaces. To reach the summit of Big Deer, continue on for another 0.7 mile and 450 feet elevation gain. These trails provide hiking opportunities for another time.

The yellow blazed, Chatham Trails Association (CTA) 0.8 mile Conant Path begins on the CRC side of the Dam. (Here, one can return to CRC quickly by following the old road straight ahead and uphill.) For a longer hike along Cold River, continue straight ahead for a short distance and look for the “Conant Path” sign on the left. Just before the Conant Path turns left, note on the right side of the old road, a “nurse stump” with a red spruce tree growing out of it. A “nurse log” is close by. All coniferous trees decay from the outside in since their heartwood is very resistant to decay. Slowly, moss covers the stump or log, seeds lodge in the moss, take root, and sprout. Look for additional “nurse stumps” and “nurse logs” as you walk along the trail.

Conant Path (9)

This path honors Theodore Conant, Chairman of the first CRC Committee and provider of the initial funds for the purchase of CRC property. This section of the trail hosts a large variety of woodland plants, such as Clintonia, trillium, wintergreen, partridgeberry, trailing arbutus, Indian cucumber, goldthread, and common wood sorrel.

Pillow and Cradles (10)

Here are examples of “Pillow and Cradle” or “pit and mound” topography. Pillows form when a tree is blown down and uprooted. The root structure forms a pillow after some years of decaying. In wet areas, trees will take root on the pillow because it is above the ground water and provides a better habitat for growth. The depression, adjacent to the pillow where the root came out is the “Cradle”. This feature can be used to determine the direction of the prevailing winds, the age of the forest and the incidence of hurricanes in the area

Beech Bark Disease (11)

Looking around the forest, you may have noticed that most of our beech trees do not have the smooth gray bark for which they are noted. Unfortunately, the Beech Bark disease, that was accidentally introduced from Europe into Nova Scotia around 1890, has seriously affected many of our native beeches. The bark is attacked and altered by Beech Scale, an insect that burrows into the bark providing an opening for destructive fungi.

Granite Memorial Bench (12)

Rest on the granite memorial bench and listen to Cold River as it continues its journey to the Saco River.

Returning to Earth (13)

The process by which a tree becomes soil is slow. Looking closely at the “Turkey Tail fungus” and under what is left of the tree’s bark, you may find the white threads that the fungus uses to break down the tree fibers for nourishment. The “Turkey Tail” produces spores that will create more white threads or hyphae.

The larvae of many insects are able to digest the cellulose of wood and use the tree both as food and home. Look for little holes and lines that look like trails – these are indicators that insects have been at work.

The Forest Canopy (14)

Tip your head back and look straight up. What do you see? If it’s summer, your view of the sky is blocked by the branches and leaves overhead. Together, they form the forest canopy.

The canopy acts like a large umbrella, shading everything below. The trees that make up the canopy have a strong influence on what can grow underneath, because some trees cast more shade than others. And, of course, some trees don’t lose their leaves in the fall and so shade the ground all year round. How many different kinds of trees can you find in the canopy here? How will this area look in the winter?

Where Have All The Flowers Gone? (15)

While many green plants carpet the ground, if you are here in July and August, you will not see many flowers. Have you wondered why? Look overhead – there’s the reason – the forest canopy!

Flowering requires energy, and the ultimate source of that energy is the sun. Nature has devised the perfect strategy for plants that live in deciduous forests - they bloom in the spring, before the leaves on the trees overhead have fully developed. So, long before guests arrive at CRC, most woodland flowers have bloomed and produced their fruit, which contain the seeds of the next generation.

Dinosaur Plants (16)

Look around - do you see the small green plants that look like miniature Christmas trees? 250 million years ago ancestors of these little clubmosses covered the earth. They were some of the first land plants to develop separate roots, stems and leaves, but they do not produce flowers or seeds. Instead, they reproduce by means of spores.

Look closely at these little plants – can you find some with “candles” at the top? These are the parts that hold the spores. In the autumn, the yellow spores puff out and are blown away by the wind.

Wetland Indicator Plants (17)

Certain plants are “indicator species” or marker plants that identify certain habitats. The presence of Indian poke or False hellebore (*Veratrum viride*), a native wild flower with large, bright green leaves spiraling along the stem and ending with an 18” to 24” long flower cluster of star-shaped yellow green flowers, indicates rich, wet, alluvial sites.

Trees with Rectangular Holes (18)

On the right hand side of the trail, high up in a dead red maple, there are large, rectangular holes. Pilated woodpeckers made these holes for two reasons: food and nesting. Owls and raccoons will take advantage of empty pilated woodpecker holes. Insects can now burrow below the tree bark and spores of fungi will be able to take root.

There are many connections like this in the world of nature. It is all part of the complex relationships called “the web of life.”

The Conant Path Continues on Private Property

Until now, the trail has been on CRC’s property. Since we are now on private property, we will not have any numbered posts until we are back on CRC’s land. Along the way there are features we should take note of.

A number of stumps, all about the same age and with flat cut off tops show evidence of prior logging in the area.

There are also cut logs that were left behind after the logging operation ended.

Jewelweed and turtlehead indicate rich, wet sites while haircap moss indicates coarse, dry or bedrock substrates.

As you ascend the ravine, note the changing landscape. Further along you will be able to enjoy a view of the Baldfaces and Eastman Mountain across a field. The open ledges on the Baldfaces are a result of a great fire in May 1903, which spread from Wild River Valley over the Baldfaces, consuming trees and duff on 10,000 acres. While the fire destroyed the water retaining capability of the forest floor, it provided excellent growing conditions for blueberries. These mountains form part of the watershed for Cold River.

Kame Terrace (19)

Back on CRC property, we are descending and ascending a Kame terrace, which is a long flat ridge, composed of glaciofluvial sediment. This feature forms along the margin of a valley glacier where the glacial ice meets the valley's slope. Sediment is deposited by laterally flowing meltwater streams.

Original Camp Buildings (20)

You are now nearing the end of the Tea House - Conant Path Loop Nature Trail. The cabin on your right (Cox) is one of the four original buildings of the church camp "The Ledges" and was built in 1909. The other original buildings are Conant Lodge, the Library and the Office. When the AMC purchased the camp in 1919, the property consisted of the four original buildings plus the Tower, Chapel (Barracks), tennis court and a cold spring on 38 acres of land.

Blueberry Fields (21)

The blueberry fields are periodically burned over to discourage trees from encroaching. While for many years these small plants have provided our guests with blueberries for muffins, pies and pancakes, many of us enjoy eating the blueberries right in the field!!!

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You have now completed the Tea House Path – Conant Path Nature Trail Loop. Stop by the Conant Lodge for a cool mug of lemonade and browse through the nature library located in the Lodge. If you have questions or are looking for additional information, please speak to the naturalist leader at CRC.

Suggested Readings:

Reading the Forested Landscape. A Natural History of New England by Tom Wessels, Brian D. Cohen, and Ann H. Zwinger, 2005

Changes in the Land, Revised Edition: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England by William Cronon, 2003

North Woods: An Inside Look at the Nature of Forests in the Northeast by Peter Marchand, 1992

Copies of this nature trail guide and additional information on the Natural History of the AMC Cold River Camp are available from our website:

<http://www.amccoldrivercamp.org/>



The Tea House Path – Conant Path Nature Trail Loop

Prepared by the CRC Education and Conservation
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Appalachian Mountain Club Cold River Camp



Drawing by Peg Birch