



NEWTON
CONSERVATORS

SUMMER ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

Newton's land trust working to preserve open space since 1961

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Walking Newton's Aqueducts

By Andreae Downs



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Sudbury Aqueduct

For several decades, Newton residents have enjoyed an off-road trail system, recently expanded by the extension of the river trails along the Charles. Most of the trails through the center of Newton are along the tops of aqueducts.

As Doug Dickson (former Conservators president) noted in his 2006 commentary about the aqueduct trails in the Newton Conservators April/May newsletter:

“For passive recreation, the trails along the aqueducts are rich with ever-changing views, the tranquility of nature and mostly level trails. Birds and other wildlife, shade trees, wildflowers, vines and other plant-life abound along the paths. The hustle and bustle of life quickly fades as the warmth of the spring sun or the cool of dappled shade or the rustle of drying leaves washes over the senses.”

Two aqueducts cross Newton and serve as both foot paths and sheltered wildlife trails — deer, coyote, wild turkeys and other fauna use them to navigate safely from greenspace to greenspace. The oldest, the Cochituate aqueduct, was constructed in 1845 after a growing Boston realized that Jamaica Pond could no longer meet its clean water needs.

The aqueduct brought water from a tributary of the Sudbury River, which was dammed to create Lake Cochituate, through Natick, Wellesley and Newton to the Brookline Reservoir (open for walking just off Route 9).

But, as Boston continued to grow, in part because of the influx of Irish fleeing the potato famine, so did its need for water. By 1870 a new source was necessary, and the Sudbury was dammed and tapped again, and the Sudbury Aqueduct, flowing from Framingham to the Chestnut Hill Reservoir, was built between 1875–78.

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Echo Bridge

The Sudbury's western parts in Newton — beginning with the lovely and iconic Echo Bridge over the Charles River at Hemlock Gorge — are mostly above ground and run on property owned by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), behind (and in Upper Falls in front of) residential property. The eastern parts (east of Lyman St.) were tunneled (4,635 feet!) under privately-owned property. The MWRA does not own the land over the aqueduct there.

As Boston and its suburbs continued to grow, additional sources were built, including eventually the Quabbin Reservoir, 1926–1946. This excellent water — which last year won a national taste test — is transported to our taps using deep tunnels or pipes. Some run under Washington Street, for instance. Their addition made the Cochituate redundant, and by 1952 it was taken off line.

In 1955 a state law gave Newton control of all the surface except right-of-way needed for access to the Weston Aqueduct. Over time, the surface became a walking path, except for parts sold off by the city to private entities. The Cochituate aqueduct is currently used to convey sewage from Wellesley (about 25% of their flow), pumped in from the middle of the town, and some from Newton's Quinobequin pump station. At the top of Varick Hill Road, there is a buried headworks, and from there the sewage flows by gravity across Newton to the Commonwealth Golf Course, eventually connecting to the MWRA sewer main at Tremont St. in Brighton.

By contrast, the Sudbury was most recently used as backup water supply in May 2010, when a catastrophic break in the MetroWest Water Supply Tunnel at the Charles River meant that the metro-Boston area's water supply was interrupted. Since then, the Sudbury Aqueduct has been cleaned and repaired and remains an emergency water supply while the MWRA constructs additional water mains to ensure redundancy — mostly to our west.

In the meantime, the Authority has started granting permits to open the surface of the Sudbury and other aqueducts to municipalities who wish to use them as many of Newton's residents do — as linear parks.

Every other municipality on the Sudbury has started the permit process (see links below for those which have already completed it). Newton's sections have a few “no trespassing” signs and gates partially blocking access and will until Newton applies for a permit formally “opening” the Sudbury trails.

It is clear, however, that the Conservators' tradition of taking tours of the water supply system has encouraged walking even on short segments of the aqueduct.

As far as I could establish using current members' memories, the Conservators started offering tours of the aqueduct trails under Nick Yannoni, Conservators president (1986–



Cochituate Aqueduct

88) and an amateur water system history buff. Yannoni mapped the aqueducts in 1984–85, which may also have been when he started the tours. By the early 1990s, Peter Kastner was leading these tours, followed by Doug Dickson. Tours have been led by Henry Finch on both foot and bicycle since the mid-1990s. Check the walks section of future newsletters for listings of Henry's tours.

To walk the aqueduct:

An interactive map is on the Conservator's website: <http://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=6486453>, and turn-by-turn instructions for two walking loops, including photographs also: <http://www.newtonconservators.org/longwalkaqueducts.htm#eastfromeliot>

To explore further:

- www.mwra.state.ma.us/04water/html/hist1.htm
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudbury_Aqueduct
- April/May 2006 Newton Conservators Newsletter
- www.mwra.com/projects/access/aqueducts/aqueducts.html
- news coverage from 2013: www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/west/2013/07/13/trespassing-signs-fall-towns-start-opening-mwra-aqueducts-public/WAmqyJbrqejAiV7RagKzll/story.html#comments

- news from 2014: www.metrowestdailynews.com/article/20140420/News/140429711
- and framinghammatters.blogspot.com/2014/09/the-sudbury-aqueduct-continues-from.html Wellesley trails using the Sudbury Aqueduct: www.charlesriverlink.org/
- More on how the water supply also preserves wilderness:

voices.nationalgeographic.com/2015/05/15/where-public-tap-water-begets-wilderness/

Andreae Downs is executive director of the Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA and a Waban Area Councilor. She walks the aqueducts regularly. ■

What's On Our Website

Do you go to our website to learn about upcoming events? Do you turn to NewtonConservators.org to read about recent developments in preserving open space or the city's plan to purchase Waban Hill Reservoir? Do you check out our website when you're trying to decide which city park to visit?

Our website, NewtonConservators.org, is a good source for all of that information—and much more. Webmaster Dan Brody keeps the information on the site up to date and also has added a wide array of related features and sources.

First, a reminder about the organization of the website: when you go to the website, you'll notice that the list of contents on the left side is divided into two sections. The top green section contains all the information about Newton's parklands; the yellow section lists information about the Newton Conservators and related resources.

Our focus this month is on the fourth item in the yellow section: Guides and Books

Summer is the perfect time for taking walks—and for reading at the beach, and this section of our website can help you with both activities.

The first two items on the list are our own books. The first is our beloved Trail Guide, which describes 34 conservation areas in Newton, featuring parks, ponds, gardens, trails, canoe launches, nature guides, rock climbing, scenic views, handicapped access, geological features, and bird watching areas. The guide also contains photos, driving directions, interesting historical details, and an overall map of showing the locations of the 34 natural areas. The second is our Almanac, a month-by-month presentation of the trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns, butterflies, birds, and animals that can be found in our open spaces.

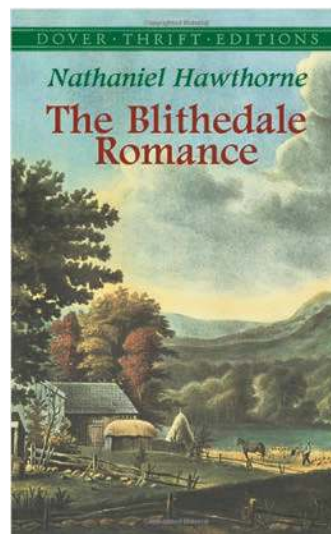
Next, you'll find a listing of guides for walks throughout Massachusetts and then a variety of books related to conservation that members have enjoyed. Many of the

listings include links for buying the books from the publisher or a bookseller.

Do you know of other guides or books that should be added to this collection? If so, please notify Dan at websitemgr@newtonconservators.org.

FEATURED BOOK

The Blithedale Romance by Nathaniel Hawthorne



Early in June, the Conservators received a request from a writer interested in information and a tour of Brook Farm. Have you ever visited Brook Farm in West Roxbury just over the VFW Highway from Newton's Saw Mill Brook Conservation Area (and less than 4 miles from the center of Newton)? It is the site of the 1840s Brook Farm experimental commune of Transcendentalists including Hawthorne, Dana, Greeley, Margaret Fuller, and others.

The Blithedale Romance is set at Brook Farm, and the novel is partially grounded in Hawthorne's own experiences there and the people who lived there.

Meet the memorable characters Zenobia, the beautiful feminist reformer; Miles Coverdale, the poet and not-entirely-trustworthy narrator; Hollingsworth, the philanthropist without a heart; and the frail Priscilla. You probably never have thought of a Hawthorne book as a beach read, but this dark romance just might change your mind. ■