

Heath Hen Meadow Brook Woodland

Summary: A 45-minute tour of Heath Hen Meadow Brook and its surrounding forest and wetlands, plus views over Flagg Hill Pond and neighboring Shelburne Farm Orchard. Trails are level or gently rolling. Expect wet and muddy spots throughout the well-marked trail system.

Please note: Flagg Hill Pond (Stow) is private property, not part of the conservation land.

Trailhead Location: East side of Boxborough Road, just north of its junction with Packard Road.

History: The Heath Hen Meadow Brook Woodland was originally part of Shelburne Farm. Jean Lynch split off 48.9 land-locked acres which were purchased by the Town with self-help funds. Virginia Frecha gifted an additional 3.5 acres to provide access from Boxborough Road. The woods feature several well-marked and maintained trails that can be used for hiking or cross-country skiing.

Nature to look for: This property lies within the Heath Hen Meadow Brook watershed. Conservation lands and land protected through conservation restrictions provide approximately 500 acres of protected watershed corridor. This brook provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife between its beginning on this property and its confluence with the Assabet River. Within this conservation area, wetlands along the brook give way to upland habitat, including second growth hardwoods and stands of hemlock. The trails meander over the brook where beaver dams are found and along the edge of wetlands vital for the brook's long-term health. Look for species representative of wetlands such as ferns and skunk cabbage. The skunk cabbage can be found "flowering" in the snows of February, their bowl-shaped flowers actually melting the snow around them and their putrid scent attracting the first flies of the spring for pollination. Their leaves appearing from the soil, along with the song of the red wing blackbird, are welcome signs of the return of spring.

Several species of owl and a variety of hawks hunt these properties. Ruffed grouse and wild turkey live here and neo-tropical songbirds such as hermit thrush and ovenbirds pass through. Research done by Sudbury Valley Trustees has determined this brook's corridor to be one of the most important natural environments remaining in the Sudbury River's watershed because of its biodiversity. Enjoy the serenity of the quiet waters bubbling by, knowing the headwaters have been protected.

Suggested Route: From the kiosk on the east side of Boxborough Road, a level path with blue wooden trail markers leads to a boardwalk and railed footbridge over Heath Hen Meadow Brook. At a T-junction just on the far side of a stone fence, turn right, continuing on the blue trail.

Turn right onto the pink-blazed trail, with the brook to your right. Just before a stone fence by the edge of an orchard, the pink trail turns sharply left and runs roughly parallel to the orchard, then turns away to thread between close-growing white pines. At a trail junction turn right, back onto the blue trail.

Continue on blue past a trail junction. At a second junction in a wide clearing, detour right to climb a short but fairly steep rise to a fine view of Shelburne Farm Orchard. Return down-slope to the blue trail and turn right to continue in the same direction.

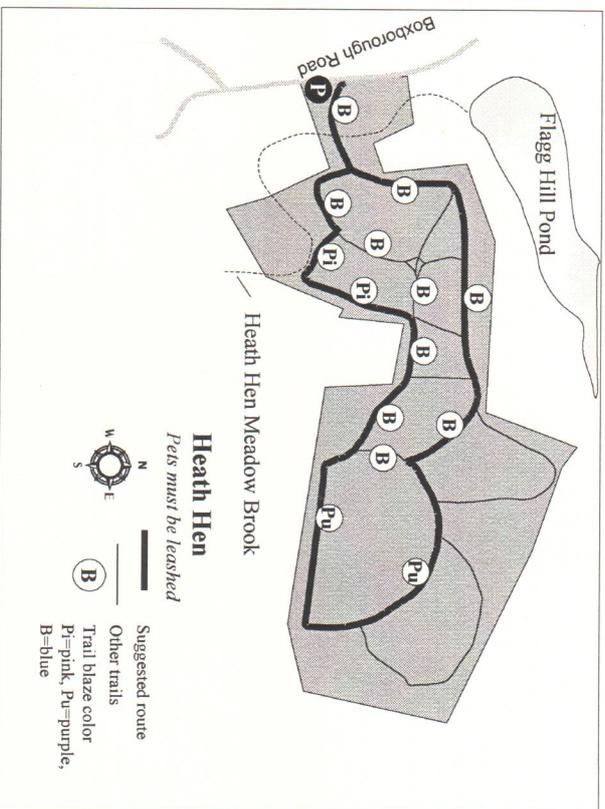
At the next junction, bear right to stay on blue. As the orchard's tall wind-making machines (for frost prevention) become visible, turn left on a narrow, purple-blazed trail. Where the trail meets a wide track leading to the orchard on the right, turn left and back into the forest, still on the purple trail.

The trail passes into a wetland area, with various side trails heading off to the right. At a Y-junction, bear left to continue on the purple trail. At the next junction, turn right on the wide blue-blazed trail.

The next major junction lies near the edge of Flagg Hill Pond. The trail to the right leads only a short distance before becoming flooded. Turn left instead, continuing on the blue trail through a stone fence gap and along the shore of the pond.

Several other trails angle away to the left, then the blue trail curves left to run parallel to a stone fence on the right. Just before the trail curves away from the pond for good, look across the water and you may be able

to spot a beaver lodge rising from the grasses. Where your trail curves right to join a path coming in from the left, you also continue to the right.
As you approach a stone fence, double blue trail markers indicate that you are almost back to the entry trail. Turn right through the stone fence, crossing back over the footbridge and boardwalk to return to the trailhead kiosk.



Rather than conquering the land, I had learned to let the woods teach me, feeling a renewal of my spirit from the stillness and the beauty that was waiting in the outdoors.

Michael Tougas