



Clay Brook Trail

Lyme, NH

Uses: *Bird-watching, hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing. Part of the trail is shared with equestrian users.*

Description:

This three-mile trail extends from the eastern boundary of the [Lyme Town Forest](#) westward across Route 10 and Clay Brook to Breck Hill Road. A trailhead parking area on Route 10 offers a starting point for a number of hiking options:

- Hike west on gentle terrain through a mix of fields, forest, and shrubby wetland along the meandering Clay Brook to reach Breck Hill Road – a distance of 1.5 miles. From here, the Edgell covered bridge is just a short 0.4 mile hike to your right (north) on River Road.
- Birdwatchers will find the area around Clay Brook -- just a short walk from the trailhead parking area -- to be rich habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- Or head eastward up the steep southwest slopes of Kenyon Hill to connect with the Lyme Town Forest Trails.
- For a longer through-hike, start at the Town Forest trailhead on Orfordville road and hike west all the way to Breck Hill Road – a distance of about 5 miles.

The Clay Brook trail runs through several conserved parcels – Ann Griswold’s property abutting the Town Forest, the former Graf property with 30 acres on the east side of Route 10 and another 123 acres on the west side of the road, and the Ramsden and Swan properties on Breck Hill Road. Key to this growing corridor of conserved land and the development of the trail was the vision of former landowners Leonard and Irene Graf of Lyme. The Grafs sold the property to UVLT in December of 2000 in what is known as a bargain sale – accepting a reduced price for the assurance that it would be protected in perpetuity. The Land Trust placed permanent development restrictions on the land before selling it to Lyme’s Ray Clark of Recreate, Inc. Ray restored the late 18th Century cape, Yankee-style dairy barn, and corn crib before selling the property to a new owner.

Partners in the construction of the trail and trailhead parking area have included the Lyme Conservation Commission, the [Connecticut River Joint Commissions](#), and the [Upper Valley Trails Alliance](#), as well as many community volunteers. We are also grateful to the neighboring landowners who have allowed the trail to cross their lands.

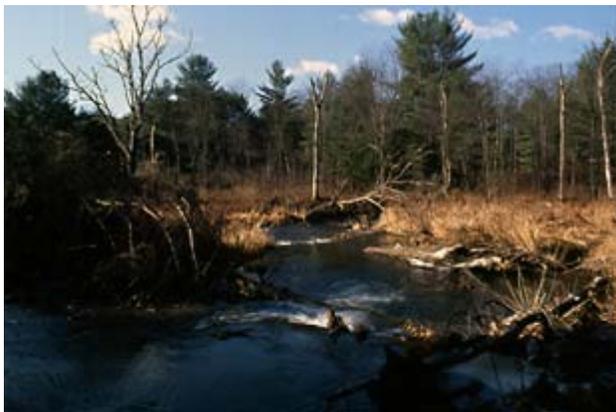


Photo #1, slide by Jerome Robinson: Clay Brook in Spring

Directions:

From the Lyme village Common, head north on Route 10 for 3.3 miles, past Post Pond and the North Thetford Road. Clay Brook parallels Route 10 on the left, and after a series of rolling curves, the road straightens out and goes through a sharp dip. A house and barn will be on your right, a field on the left. Trailhead parking for both the east and west segments of the trail is at the north end of the field.

Exploring Clay Brook Trail:

Before heading off on the Clay Brook Trail, take a moment to admire the more than two-hundred-year-old farmhouse and outbuildings on the east side of the road. The Lyme Historians highlighted this historic property in their Fall 2003 publication. Present owner, Ray Clark, estimates that the **wood frame cape** may date from as early as 1785, based on the style of paneling and clapboarding and presence of many hand-wrought nails in the original construction.

The Clay Brook Trail begins on a section of Route 10 known as the Orford Road that, over a thousand years ago, was a part of an **Abenaki Indian** trail from the Connecticut River, following Clay Brook to an ancient village known as Ordanakis, near Post Pond, and continuing southeast along Grant Brook along roughly the same track as today's Dorchester Road and Grafton Turnpike as far as Canaan. The local Sokokis band of the Abenaki relied on the fertile soils of the Connecticut River valley for growing the corn, beans, and squash that were staples of their diet. The rivers and surrounding forest provided the fish, game, and other wild foods that supplemented the agricultural harvest.

Leaving Route 10 and entering white pine forest at the edge of a large field, the Clay Brook Trail descends into an area that, ten thousand years ago, was covered by the waters of **Lake Hitchcock** - a long, narrow band of glacial meltwater dammed behind glacial deposits at Rocky Hill, Connecticut, and stretching as far north as St. Johnsbury, Vermont. The fine glacial sediments laid down on the lakebed formed today's rich agricultural Dartmouth and Hitchcock silt loams and also the clays that were used in forming the bricks still found in a number of local historic structures.

The undulating trail parallels Clay Brook, with occasional views of the brook through the trees. The trail is narrow and has some short steep sections. The forest floor is a soft bed of pine needles with patches of mosses, wood fern, and partridge berry (*Mitchella repens*). In spring, look for **wildflowers** along the trailside, including trout lily, purple trillium, and bloodroot.



Photo #2, slide by Jerome Robinson:
Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) along
Clay Brook Trail

Fisher (*Martes pennanti*), one of the largest members of the weasel family, inhabit the area and travel the Clay Brook Trail. Fishers eat snowshoe hare, small rodents, and larger prey such as raccoons, as well as nuts and berries. The fisher is one of the few predators to successfully prey on porcupines. It repeatedly attacks the porcupine's face while avoiding its quills. When the porcupine is tired and dazed, the fisher flips the animal and attacks its unprotected throat or belly. Fishers are not often seen, but look along the trail for their dark, lumpy scat - which is sometimes full of porcupine quills!

Turning right, the trail crosses the Brook over a bridge. The riparian habitat along the brook is home to a wide variety of birds and wildlife, including an active **beaver** population. Look for both green and great blue herons, eastern kingbird, yellow warbler, and common yellowthroat, among other bird species.



Photo #3 slide by Jerome Robinson, caption:
Beaver dam, Clay Brook



Photo #4, slide: Open fields and edge habitat

Maps of the area beyond the brook 50 years ago show extensive land under cultivation. Today, some of these once-productive farm fields are in various stages of abandonment and regrowth, while others are being reclaimed. Where former fields are in succession back to woods, wildlife abounds. Bears frequent the plateau area of young white pine forest. This area also has a number of vernal pools, small ephemeral springtime ponds that serve as key habitat for a variety of amphibians. The edge habitat between fields and forest provides cover for grouse and woodcock. In addition this area is annually stocked with pheasant for a local hunt. Hikers should take note to wear blaze orange during hunting seasons.

West of the fields the trail descends steeply (skiers take caution!) to a bridge crossing a tributary of Clay Brook and into a lovely, dense forest dominated by **eastern hemlock** (*Tsuga Canadensis*). Such a healthy, mature stand of hemlock is of special value, as so many hemlocks in other parts of the northeast have succumbed to infestation of the hemlock woolly adelgid, a non-indigenous insect pest that has caused extensive tree mortality and decline.

The trail soon meets up with a T-junction at an equestrian trail with a stone wall marking the boundary of the Graf parcel. The Clay Brook Trail takes a sharp right, turning northeast and paralleling a set of ledges that provide a possible denning habitat for bobcat. The trail splits into a small loop at the end, turning back southwest again at a stone wall at the far end of the loop.

For a visit to **Edgell Covered Bridge**, follow the "To Breck Hill Rd" sign, pass through an opening at the corner of two stone walls onto UVLT conserved lands owned by the Ramsden family. Stay parallel to the wall on your right. This trail section stays quite muddy and is currently rough for the next 500' - though the trail ahead is quite level and dry. You might need to jump between rocks and logs to keep your feet dry as the soil in this trail section is often saturated with water draining down from Breck Hill and trickling out as seeps in the hill side. At the end of the wall you'll arrive at an opening to a field on your right, at this point the trail turns left and travels upslope across a brown carpet of hemlock needles and hollow hummocks (undersurface waters has washed away some of the soil from beneath the roots) At the edge of the hemlock forest, cross over another stonewall and continue upslope through mixed forest where deer tracks can often be seen following the trail.



Photo #5, Edgell Covered Bridge

The trail crosses a farm road and continues slightly upslope through a pine forest (recently thinned) before reaching a power line. Step across yet another stonewall (it's obvious this trail crosses many areas that were once productive farmland) and continue through the Swan's pine forest, passing between two large white quartz boulders before reaching mixed managed forests and views of open fields on your right. The forest floor is thick with young hardwood saplings, especially white ash - beginnings of the next generation of timber. The trail parallels the fields then crosses a farm road, and begins to head upslope past a large boulder (glacial erratic) and ledgy outcroppings to meet level ground next to Breck Hill Road where foundation and

brick remnants of an old building cover the ground at the top of the slope. Look to the east and you'll see Kenyon Hill.

At Breck Hill Road turn right and go 0.4 miles to the covered bridge where you'll find ample room to park a car if you're planning a one way trip from Orfordville Rd.

East side trail to Lyme Town Forest:

From Route 10 follow along a fenced equestrian field to the edge of the forest, crossing a stone wall and following an old farm road before heading along a short section of hemlock ridgeline. Continuing downslope from the ridge you'll cross a small seasonal brook, cross through a raspberry rich meadow and follow a series of meandering skidder roads and footpaths to reach the upper slopes of Kenyon Hill. On your way you'll pass through fern filled meadows, follow the edges of several large rock walls and skirt the edges of ledgy outcroppings before reaching the Waterfall trail at the Lyme Town Forest.

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: Trail maintenance is the responsibility of the UVLT and its volunteers. In addition, the [Lyme Conservation Commission](#) has partnered with the UVLT for stewardship events in the past.

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 Stewardship Director Jason Berard (603-643-6626)
to report trail maintenance needs or recommendations.