Introduction to Trekking in Sturbridge

Welcome to Trekking in Sturbridge, a monthly article on trail and open space related activities that are taking place in the Sturbridge area as well as related information on how to enjoy the outdoors safely with occasional offerings on regional and national trail perspectives. These articles have been written by Tom Chamberland, who has spent over 12 years leading area Corps of Engineers trail projects, serves as the chair of the regional 4 town trail committee and is an associate member of the Sturbridge Trail Committee. These Monthly articles have appeared in the *Sturbridge Times* Magazine, a monthly publication mailed to every mail box in Sturbridge.

As a way of introduction, let’s look at how the Sturbridge Trail Committee is organized, how it works in relation to other town committees and boards, a review of some of the trail projects that are currently on going (2010) and how you can help.

The Sturbridge trail committee was reorganized and re-authorized by the Board of Selectmen in July of 2009. Prior to that time a “regional” trail committee had been appointed with a limited scope of working solely on the regional Grand Trunk Trail. The reauthorization gave the trail committee additional members and duties of developing and constructing trails on the town’s open space parcels. At this same time the Board of Selectmen also created the Recreation Trails Master Plan Steering Committee, to develop a town wide recreational trail master plan, more on this committee and their progress will be a topic for a future article. Prior to the July 2009 action the Regional Trail Committee, working with the Public Lands Advisory Committee (PLAC) and the Conservation Commission developed initial plans to start building trails on the Heins Farm Conservation lands and the Leadmine Mt Conservation lands (AKA Camp Robinson Crusoe property). The current Trail Committee consists of 5 members and 5 associate members. It is currently chaired by Randy Redetzke, and has a page on the town’s website with more information.

General trail development criteria was agreed to by the Trails Committee and the Conservation Commission using nationally accepted sustainable trail and universal accessibility guideline design standards to govern how trails were to be designed and built for maximum enjoyment by town residents and sound environmental protection policy. On the Heins Farm lands three trails were laid out to be built, The Pond loop trail, a ¾ mile walking trail to be built to meet the recently enacted Federal Accessibly standards (there are no state trail ADA standards), the .5 mile Cabin loop trail and the 1.9 mile Stafford Turnpike trail design to be more multiple use trails. On the Leadmine Mt property, 7 trails were initially determined for construction, they are the Arbutus Park Trail, the Old Growth Trail, the Camp Robson Crusoe trail, the Red, white and blue trails and the Western ridge trail. I will cover more on these trails in detail in a future article. You can also review previous *Sturbridge Times* articles on some of this trail development. The Sturbridge trail committee also has continued working on completing the 6 miles of the Grand Trunk Trail, more on this trail initiative in a future article too.

In working on all these trails, the trail committee obtained permission from the Conservation Commission, which holds the responsibility of the care custody and control of these properties as well as jurisdiction under the Wetlands Protection Act. The trail committee works closely with the Conservation Agent who guides the trail committee thru the approval process.

 The three trails on the Heins Farm lands are now complete. Final grading and surface application on several small sections of these trails are all that remain to be accomplished. To date some $70,000 in donations, volunteer labor and costs have been accrued to build the trails. Of this amount, the actual cost to the town has been less than $10,000.00.

On the Leadmine Mt Property, in addition to the approvals by the Conservation Commission, the Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MADF&W) holds a Conservation Easement and although trails are allowed under this easement, MADF&W does have to review and approve their construction. Over the past several years, bridges have been built or rebuilt, with assistance from the Tantasqua Regional Vocational Carpentry class and other volunteers, trails have been cleared, grants have been obtained and funding provided by the Community Preservation Committee to purchase needed materials, as work continues to bring these four trails to completion. Due to the overall size of this property, the plan developed allows work to be phased in numerous sections and years and with approved design criteria of wide, multiple uses, universally accessible design trails to facilitate the maximum accessibility by all onto this property except for the Old Growth and a section of the Camp Robinson Crusoe trail. The Trail committee has recently put forth a proposal to the Conservation Commission and MADF&W that will allow for the completion of the 2.2 mile Arbutus park trail, the ¼ mile Old Growth trail, as well as the next ½ mile section of the western ridge trail.

There are several ways you can become involved and volunteer in these trail efforts. One way is to become involved with the Sturbridge Trail Committee. The committee meets on the second Thursday of the month 7 PM on the 2nd floor of the Center Office Building. Becoming informed of all that the trail committee does, and determining where you can best fit in to help is a great way to participate. A Second way is to participate on one or more of the four volunteer trail day events. Trail volunteer day events are posted on the Kiosk’s and are on line at sturbridgetrail.org

 For more information and to get on our email notification list send Randy Redetzke an email at rredet@charter.net There is also a local Non Profit group which has been formed to assist in developing and enjoying Sturbridge Trails, *The Friends of Sturbridge Trails*  or FrOST, They are still building, but they have a page on Face book, Check them out!

Another way to become involved with the Town’s trails is to “adopt a trail” This program is administered thru the Conservation Commission. The adopt a trial program allows families or community groups and organizations to “adopt” a section of trail and perform appropriate trail maintenance to that section, typical maintenance includes a somewhat routine walk of the trail removing fallen branches, leaf removal, trash and litter pick up.

As noted there is a lot more to cover about what is going on with Sturbridge trails. I hope by this very brief introduction I have tweaked your interest and you will take some time to go out and explore what our community has to offer on its open space lands. The Town of Sturbridge web site has maps and brochures on these properties. If you can’t find the answer to your question feel free to contact Randy or myself at: tchamberland@town.sturbridge.ma.us

So let’s go out and start trekking Sturbridge!