

The PRISM

the newsletter of the Blackstone Canal Conservancy
<http://www.blackstonecc.org>

No. 45

June, 2014

April Walk Through

On Sunday, April 6th, a group of seven of us met at Riverbend Farm to car shuttle to Plummers Landing and walk back. The weather was a perfect April day for such a walk. We began by discussing the canal in general and its place in history and then the specifics of Plummers Landing and Church Street Lock #26. We then proceeded south along the towpath to the gravel road crossing where the roadway, the sewer lines, and the towpath south were discussed.

We then crossed the canal and followed the current sewer line easement roadway south along the west side of the canal. On reaching the northern breach, the negative effects of the breach were discussed along with the plans for bridges in area. We also noted increased recent scour of the roadway and the river's and canal's high level with spring run off.

The next stop was at the downed trees that trap floating trash. This will be a site of the watershed association's Earth Day Cleanup. Here we noted that the wheel and tire that had been left behind by the fall clean up had disappeared and that the bank west of the root ball of the downed tree was much more deeply eroded. We also noted fresh trees down just south and that there was fresh erosion of the bank.

From this point south to the overgrown field, we saw fresh tire tracks, apparently from a pick up truck entering from the sand pits to the west.

Proceeding through the overgrown field, we crossed the first footbridge over the usually dry old flow between the canal and the marsh further south. This showed signs of recent water flow. Reaching the canal, we crossed the old farm causeway and proceeded south along the towpath.

On reaching the water flow on the left, north of the second bridge, we observed the tire and wheel that had been at the trash raft a half mile north, now wedged at a downed tree. I expect that this tire will move on when water levels drop so that it can pass under this tree. The tire is now about the farthest from any road it can be.

We continued south to Goat Hill Lock #25. Here the features of the lock were explained along with the fact that the water is much deeper than expected due to the back effect of the dam at Hartford Ave. We also discussed the dam between the lock and Goat Hill and the large basin above. Also noted was the feeder from the river to the east that enters the canal a little south of the lock.

The hike was concluded by following the trail over the shoulder of Goat Hill, noting the feeder, the stone cut like a loaf of bread for lock masonry, and the site of Milepost 27.

Blackstone, MA Bikeway Meeting

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation held an update informational meeting on the Blackstone Bikeway in Blackstone on April 3rd. Dan Driscoll, the DCR Director of Recreational Facilities Planning and Patricia Domigan, PE, Senior Project Manager at Vanasse, Hanger, Brustlin, Inc., presented an overview on the entire project and an update of the Phase 1A work in Blackstone, Millville, and Uxbridge. They also answered all questions from the audience.

Basic points presented were that work is continuing on the six bridges in Blackstone between St. Paul Street and Factory Pond; that the new Main Street Bridge, the Church St. Tunnel, and the Triad Bridge will be out for bids before the end of spring and in construction soon after, and that the trail surfacing between St. Paul St. and Route 146A will then follow along with parking lot improvements. They reported that the time line has stretched out from a fall, 2014 completion to a fall, 2016 completion due to the need not to have two contractors working in the same area and the same staging sites. There was concern expressed with the stretched out schedule.

They also reported that studies are still underway on the route from St. Paul St. to the state line with the elevated route over the canal and Canal St. and the two arch viaducts being very expensive. An alternate route crossing Canal St. at the depot parking area and then following Farnum St. at grade level is being considered. This route requires a new bridge over the canal, grade crossings of the very busy Canal St. and St. Paul St., and passing through a residential area with already narrow streets. An extensive study has been done of the problems and possibilities, and I was promised a copy by Dan Driscoll.

On the question of a crossing of the river at the state line to link up with the Rhode Island portion of the bikeway, it was reported that Rhode Island was handling the required bridge. However, while a bridge in Rhode Island will serve the Blackstone Bikeway, it would not serve the Southern New England Trunkline Trail, which coincides with the Phase I section of the Blackstone Bikeway west of the river. But, the former railroad bridge across the river and Rte. 122 just north of the state line was destroyed by a flood in 1969. The piers of the former bridge and the fills at each end remain.

Concern was also expressed by the equestrian folks that the bridges now being rehabilitated and the Triad Bridge will not be suitable for horses and that horses will only be allowed west of the Triad Bridge. The equestrian folks had previously expected to be able to ride from Douglas to Franklin.

It was also reported that public meetings will be held this summer and fall on the Phase 2 designs between Rte. 146A and Riverbend Farm.

The presentation from the meeting is posted on the DCR web site.



As viewed on April 9, 2014, the Kane Court bikeway bridge in Blackstone has been returned to its site after being rehabbed and repainted elsewhere and now awaits decking and handrails.



The bikeway Blackstone River Bridge in Blackstone with most of the decking installed and some of the handrails completed. on 4/9/14

Membership

Membership in the Conservancy is open to all that are interested in the Blackstone Canal, its history and its preservation. Annual dues are:

Student: \$7	Adults: \$10
Family: \$15	Organizations: \$25

Applications and dues (payable to the Blackstone Canal Conservancy) should be sent to the Membership Secretary; Blackstone Canal Conservancy, 16 Ballou Road, Hopedale, MA 01747-1833



View east across the Blackstone River from fill at site of missing railroad bridge. Pier in river is slanted to the west. Pier on far (east) bank appears to be solid. A footbridge here would need two spans and a total length of about 330 feet, but could span the river with no in water pier.



Aerial view of former railroad bridge site at Rte. 122 and Castle Hill Way, Blackstone

BRWA Clean Up

On Sunday, April 26th, the Blackstone River Watershed Association conducted its Earth Day clean up of various sites throughout the Blackstone Watershed. As usual, one of the sites was the raft of floating debris in the canal south of the breach south of Plummers Landing. In addition to the usual floating junk and tires, much floating lumber and one old door were removed.



Lumber removed from the canal on the BRWA clean up. This has since been removed by DCR personnel.



The remaining raft two weeks after the BRWA clean up.

Work Days

The next work day is planned for Saturday, July 12th. Meet 9 AM at the west parking lot at Plummer's Landing, Church St., Northbridge. The plan is to work on clearing debris in the dry bed of the canal. Volunteers are requested to bring loppers, bow saws, brush cutters, and work gloves. No power tools will be used. Dress appropriately for the weather and ground conditions. Expect to get muddy.

Please volunteer to help on any work day you can make time available. **You** can help make a noticeable difference! The more people present, the more that we can do to improve the canal and adjacent trails.

Rail Trail Meeting

On April 16th, the Franklin & Bellingham Rail Trail Committee and the Franklin Odd Fellows sponsored a talk by Craig Della Penna on rail trails at the Franklin Public Library. Mr. Della Penna is a noted speaker on rail-to-trail issues and is very effective in their advocacy.

In addition to his very informative talk, Mr. Della Penna recommended several books as follows. They are Getting There, The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the American Century, by Stephen B. Goddard; Outside Lies Magic, by John R. Stilgoe; The Geography of Nowhere, by James Howard Lunstler; Divided Highways, by Tom Lewis; The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell; Joyride, by Mia Birk; Pedaling Revolution, by Jeff Mapes; Stations, An Imagined Journey, by Michael Flanagan; & Freakonomics, A Rogue Economist Explor4es The Hidden Dide of Everything, by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. All are available used on line.

Wanted

- 1) The volunteer services of an experienced surveyor with the needed equipment to determine the close location of the sites of Milestones 26, 27, and 29 along the towpath from the known location of Milestone 28 despite the current watered gaps in the towpath. Also, determine the elevation of the top of the breast wall at Goat Hill Lock and where that elevation lies at Church Street Lock.
- 2) The help of some one with a winch equipped jeep or truck to pull trees out of the canal on work days to allow for their cutting up and disposal.

Canal Calendar

Members knowing of canal related events are requested to submit them to the editor so that they may be included.

July. 12th: Blackstone Canal Conservancy work day, 9 AM,
Plummers Landing west parking area, Church St.
Northbridge, MA

May 17th Workday

The May workday was preceded with a forecast of heavy rain, which did occur the night before. This apparently scared off any volunteers. But, by the start time at 9 AM, the sun was beginning to show and the weather improved all morning. Nevertheless, with the help of a DCR employee with a chain saw, we cut up some of the downed timber that we were not able to clear at the February workday. We also did preliminary marking at the site of the proposed northern footbridge.

June 14th Workday

The June workday began as the May one had with a threat of showers. But, none occurred. The heavy rain of the day before did make for humid conditions, but the water level in the canal was surprisingly low.

We began at the planned northern bridge site, removing all of the small growth and a large heavy log lying along the berm side canal bank. The log was cut into a few pieces and then dragged into the woods on the other side of the access roadway. With this site prepared, we returned to the work site at the gravel roadway that we had been clearing in our winter and May workdays.

Here, we first removed several branches on the berm side that we had cut off of a large tree across the canal. We had not been able to remove these away from the canal in February, due to deep snow. This freed up the top of the tree that was in the water across the canal. So, we were then able to use rope to drag it onto the towpath side, before cutting it up into a few pieces that we could then drag into the woods away from the canal and pathways. This effort completed the clearance in this area.

Transportation Bond Bill

The Massachusetts House of Representatives has passed a Transportation Bond Bill that includes items of interest. One item provides funding to study the reestablishment of the Blackstone Canal along Harding Street in Worcester. Another item provides funding to build a tunnel along the Southern New England Rail Trail under Prospect Street on the west edge of Franklin. The tunnel will allow the trail to pass under Prospect Street on the level where a bridge once stood. The bill now goes to the State Senate for their consideration.

Blackstone Bikeway June 15th Update

An inspection of the bikeway in Blackstone on June 15th showed that progress had occurred. The bridges over the Blackstone River, Kane Court, and the long Factory Pond Bridge were completely decked and railed. Decking and railing work on the shorter Factory Pond and St. Paul Street bridges were still underway. Work had not yet begun on the Main Street Bridge and Church Street Tunnel.



The longer Factory Pond Bridge looking east on 6/15/14



The shorter Factory Pond Bridge looking west on 6/15/14 showing the deck and railings under construction



The Kane Court Bridge on 6/15/14



The Canal Street Bridge on 6/15/14 with deck & railings

Blackstone Canal Conservancy
16 Ballou Road
Hopedale, Ma 01747