

The PRISM

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

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Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park

In December, the US Congress passed legislation to authorize the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park as part of the 2015 Defense Authorization Bill. According to the bill, the park includes the Blackstone River State Park in Lincoln, RI; the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark District in Pawtucket, RI; the Slatersville Historic District in North Smithfield, RI; Ashton Historic District in Cumberland, RI; Whitinsville Historic District in Northbridge, MA; Hopedale Village Historic District in Hopedale, MA; the Blackstone River and the tributaries of the Blackstone River; and the Blackstone Canal. What all that means specifically is still to be worked out. In addition, the bill adds Auburn, MA and parts of Providence, RI to the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and authorizes funding for the corridor for six more years.

If you want to read the actual legislation, go to the Defense Authorization Bill, Section 3031 which is on pages 1199 – 1209.

Blackstone Talk and Cleanup

The Blackstone Historical Commission is planning a talk on the Blackstone Canal by Dave Barber at the town offices on St. Paul St. at 1 PM on Saturday, February 7th. The talk is intended to be a lead in to a March 28th work day from 8 -12 AM cleaning up the canal along Canal St. in Blackstone. Meeting point for the work day is at the town hall, 15 St. Paul St., Blackstone. After the work, there will be a cookout for all volunteers.

This section of the canal runs from the river at the Saranac Dam to the Rhode Island border (and on through a corner of North Smithfield, RI). In addition to cleaning up the canal, it is intended to remove brush to expose views of the historic 1851, twin arch St. Paul Street bridge.



December 13th Workday

The December workday was cold, at about freezing, but clear and sunny. We proceeded south to our usual work area where our small group brushed another 50 yards or so along the berm side of the prism. We could not cross to the towpath due to deep flowing water in the middle. But, we did get very close to the breach in the berm at the southern of the towpath bridges. The next time we should be able to complete this area and jump south of the water prism.



The 1851 St. Paul St. bridge viewed from the south showing the overgrowth in the canal.



The St. Paul St. bridge viewed from the north with undergrowth blocking the view of the right arch. Also shown is the later concrete sidewalk.



The canal in Blackstone looking north from St. Paul St. with Canal St. on the left.



The view south along Canal St., Blackstone with the canal on the right and the SNETT bridge B-13-008, as yet not rehabilitated, across the middle.

SNETT Study

In November, a status study of the 22 mile Southern New England Trunkline Trail that runs from Grove St. in Franklin, MA to the Connecticut state line in Douglas was released. This study was paid for by a federal Recreational Trails Program grant procured by the Bay State Trail Riders Association. The study and its appendices are available through the Friends of the SNETT web site. The study was done in conjunction with the Friends of the SNETT, an organization of trail clubs and communities. The study outlines the present conditions, but does not make proposals for the future.

Blackstone Viaduct

One of the major unsettled issues with the SNETT & Blackstone Greenway is the Blackstone Viaduct. The viaduct runs at an elevated level in the Waterford neighborhood of Blackstone, MA across the Blackstone River floodplain from a bridge that was destroyed by a 1968 flood crossing the river

and Main St. at Castle Hill Way. From the river, there is then a long fill close to the state line between two sets of athletic fields followed by a seven arch masonry and concrete viaduct, then a second, short fill, followed by a one arch masonry and concrete viaduct and a third, short fill. The viaduct terminates in a two span unrestored, steel bridge B-13-008 across Canal St. and the canal. After the steel bridge, the route crosses a short, elevated area and then the recently restored St. Paul St. steel bridge to reach the planned parking lot at the former depot site.

What to do about the viaduct and the missing bridge remain unresolved. But, the route is the best through the area for both trails. The two concrete and masonry viaducts have early twentieth century, reinforced concrete encasing earlier masonry arches. The state of the hidden masonry is unclear. The future possibilities include rehabbing the concrete and masonry at a hard to determine cost, replacing with a precast structure of similar appearance, or replacing with a different structure.

On the east end, there is a need for a new bridge crossing the river, a small private property (in the air) and then Main St. to the end of Castle Hill Way. An existing pier and a pier base remain on the east shore, but new abutments would be needed. The bridge itself can be lighter and narrower than the original railroad bridge as it will have lighter loads. It should be possible to avoid replacing the pier in the river that was undermined by the 1968 flood and destroyed the original bridge.



The seven arch section of the Blackstone Viaduct from the studies.



The damaged, in river pier from the original bridge. The undermining of this pier caused the removal of the bridge and closing of the rail line to Franklin.



The north side of the intact east bank pier.



The remainder of the west abutment of the original bridge.

SNETT Notes

During recent exploration parts of the SNETT, on two occasions in November on Sunday afternoons, groups of four

wheel, off highway vehicles were encountered. The first was next to the east side of Rte. 146A at the Allen St. parking area in Uxbridge. Two weeks later, a second group was encountered just west of Rte. 146 where the side trail from Colonel Drive joins the main trail. None of these vehicles had registration numbers as required by state law and they were travelling on the SNETT which they are prohibited from doing.

At the recent meeting of the state parks friends groups, it was requested that similar encounters be reported to the Massachusetts Environmental Police using the report form on the main page of their web site.

Another disturbing note is the “youtube” video “Massachusetts Trunk Trail Yz205F”. On this 2012 video, you can watch a group of unlicensed trail bikes roar along the SNETT from Monroe Ave in Douglas west into the state forest, then branch off on the Titanic railroad grade before crossing Wallum Lake Road travelling more trails illegally in the state forest before running up and down Southwest Main Street. In the sequence, you can see the bikers passing walkers on the SNETT near Southeast Main St., Douglas. They are not stopped by the gates and rock barriers. As the trail is improved, it is hoped that pedestrian and bicycle traffic will work to eliminate illegal use as it has done on the bikeway in Rhode Island.

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

Future Work Days

The next work day is planned for Saturday, March 28th from 8 -12 AM cleaning up the canal along Canal St. in Blackstone. Meeting point for the work day is at the town hall, 15 St. Paul St. The plan is to work on clearing debris along the canal. 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.

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.

SNETT Progress

The town of Bellingham has begun work clearing the SNETT between Center St. and Lake St. and then installing a water main in the alignment between Center St. and just short of Lake St. to connect with its Cross St. well field. On completion of the pipe installation, the contractor will regrade the SNETT and surface it to the standards desired by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. This routing of the water main saves the town about a mile of pipe and gets the SNETT rebuilt at no cost to the state. A win – win situation. DCR is also investigating using funds that had previously been allocated to improve this section to instead improve the section between Lake St. and Prospect St., Franklin.

Also, after the inclusion of funds in last fall's environmental bond bill to build a tunnel at Prospect St., discussions are underway of how to get the site surveyed.

Along the SNETT

Walking along the SNETT in its present condition canal be difficult due to the “whaling” that is present from trail bikes and other off highway vehicles. But if you look carefully, there are many details to see such as the numerous cut stone culverts. Another overlooked detail are the rail stands that used to hold spare rails. These are pairs of brackets welded from old rail that are spaced to hold two pieces of 33 yard long rail. One pair has been observed about 0.6 miles west of Fox Run Road in Bellingham. Another is just east of Center St., Bellingham. There should be more.



A culvert under the SNETT west of Fox Run Road, Bellingham



The set of spare rail supports about 0.6 miles west of Fox Run Road, Bellingham



The set of spare rail supports just east of Center St., Bellingham



The SNETT looking east at Railroad St., Bellingham.

Canal Calendar

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

February 7th: Blackstone Historical Commission is planning a talk on the Blackstone Canal by Dave Barber at the town offices on St. Paul St. at 1 PM

March 28th: Blackstone Canal Clean Up, 8 - 12 AM, 15 St. Paul St., Blackstone, MA

April 19th: Blackstone River Watershed Association Earth Day Clean Up, 1 PM, Riverbend Farm, 287 Oak St., Uxbridge, MA

Blackstone Canal Conservancy

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