



Renfrew Mill

The 1864 woolen mill built by S.G. Birmingham in Dalton was destroyed by fire four years later, and rebuilt in 1870. The Renfrew Manufacturing Company of North Adams, bought the mill and retooled it to produce cotton yarn. Today the building is a condominium.



“Happy to be on the trail. Wonderful sound of running water. Peaceful, relaxed.”

“A treasure right in our backyard. Thank you.”

“Trail is awesome! Will be using it often.”

“Walking in a Robert Frost poem. Thank you!”

The Old Mill Trail

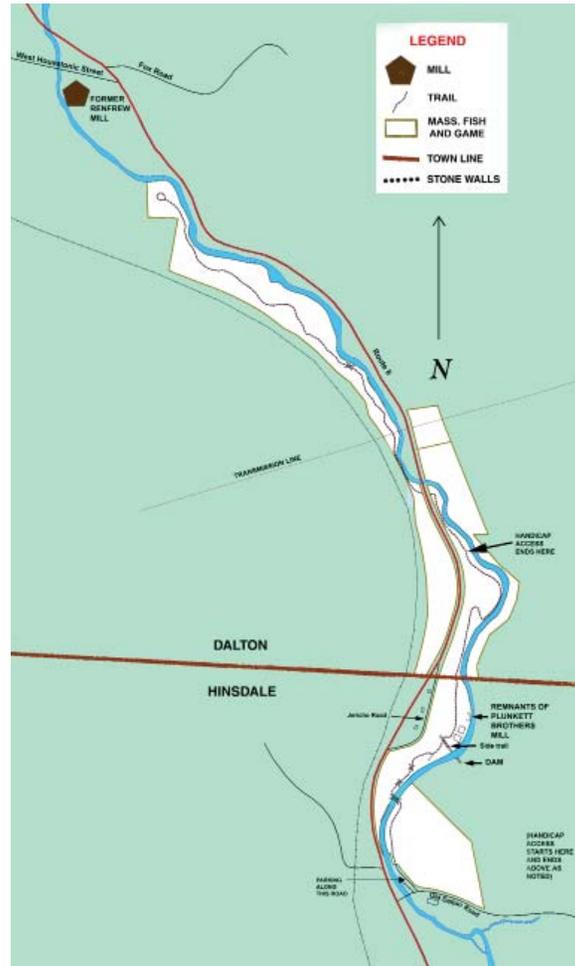
Special appreciation is extended to Crane and Company for originally donating the use of this land so all may know its history and enjoy its natural beauty.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game that now manages this property. Hunting is allowed on the property, so wear orange clothing during hunting season. We also want to gratefully thank all the volunteers who worked tirelessly to create this trail and keep it maintained.

If you would like to be involved in helping to maintain this trail please contact the Berkshire HVA office. This partnership between private companies, public agencies, local school involvement, and countless hours of volunteer labor demonstrate the value and love of the river and its surrounding lands. Now others may share and enjoy this beautiful area by walking the trail they helped create.

Historical photos (from *Picturesque Berkshire*, 1893) courtesy of Peter White of Hinsdale, Massachusetts with permission of the Berkshire Athenaeum

Color photos by Dennis & Chris Regan



**HOUSATONIC VALLEY ASSOCIATION
CONNECTICUT OFFICE**
P.O. Box 28
150 Kent Road
Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754
860-672-6678
E-mail: conn@hvatoday.org

BERKSHIRE COUNTY OFFICE
P.O. BOX 251
1383 ROUTE 102
South Lee, MA 01260
413-394-9796

E-mail: mass@hvatoday.org

NEW YORK OFFICE
P.O. Box 315
19 Furnace Bank Road
Wassaic, NY 12592
845-789-1381

E-mail: toniahva@hotmail.com

www.hvatoday.org

BROCHURE FUNDED BY THE BERKSHIRE TACONIC FOUNDATION,
LEE BANK AND CRANE AND COMPANY

Welcome to the Old Mill Trail



Exploring the nexus of history and nature

This trail connecting the communities of Dalton and Hinsdale, blends nature's beauty with the history of the local nineteenth century textile mills. Along this scenic trail are the stone foundations, breached dam, and penstock remains of a massive mill complex. This unique blend of history and nature makes a walk on the Old Mill Trail a memorable adventure and hopefully inspires appreciation and understanding of the river's importance to the character, health, history, and economy of the Housatonic riverside towns.

“WOW – Beautiful Trail! I never knew such beauty existed right here! Thank you, trailmakers.”

*As you use the trail, please remember –
take only pictures, leave only footprints.*



The East Branch headwaters of the Housatonic River originate at Muddy Pond in Washington and Hinsdale, then meander through the “Hinsdale Flats,” managed by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game. It continues downstream through Dalton and eventually connects with the main stem of the Housatonic in Pittsfield. The unique habitat of the ‘Flats’ prompted the state to designate it as an “Area of Critical Environmental Concern” (ACEC) in 1992.

The Old Mill Trail travels for 1.5 miles along the East Branch, with approximately three-quarters of a mile handicapped accessible. Planning for the trail began in 2000 and the trail’s grand opening ribbon-cutting was in 2010.

trees that prefer moist, cool ravines near the water. In turn, their shade encourages growth of shrubs such as hobblebush with white flowers in spring and Canada yew, a low-growing needled evergreen. Cottonwoods, ash, willow, and silver maple along with shrubs such as honeysuckle and gray-stemmed dogwood tolerate the unstable environment within the floodplain where their roots may be drowned for weeks at a time or buried in sandy sediment.

Habitat

The plant communities create specific wildlife habitat. Barred owls and red squirrels, chickadees and brown creepers favor groves of evergreens. Songbirds such as song sparrows share the floodplain with voles, hawks, and muskrat. Other wildlife, such as mink, coyote, bear, deer, and pileated woodpeckers can be seen in many riverside habitats.

Early settlement

Native Americans used this area for fishing and hunting for about 10,000 years before the arrival of the Europeans in the 1700s. The Mahicans, who were the last tribe to live here, called the Housatonic River, *Hoo-es-ton-nuc* – “the place beyond the mountains.” However, disease, wars and the European demand for land ownership gradually forced the native Americans out of the area.

European settlement began in earnest after the end of the French and Indian War in 1759. Early settlers harnessed the river’s swift current for water power. The



Penstock remains

From the breached dam downstream, the original penstock parallels the trail. This penstock, which is a large pipe encased in cement, carried the water from the dam, downstream to the mill which then powered the textile machinery.

first dam, built of timbers, was constructed in Dalton in 1794.

Water power

Tributary springs percolate through layers of bedrock and alluvial soil before flowing into the river, filtering almost all dissolved minerals, making the water perfect for manufacturing textiles and high quality paper.

Spinning and weaving of textiles and paper-making led to the use of multiple water wheels within the same factory. Zenas Crane, one of the pioneers of this technique, used it in the mill he constructed in Dalton in 1801. Other mills in the area followed in the late 1800s.

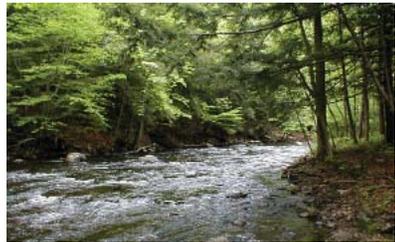
Mill remains

Stone foundations of many mills are all that remain along the riverbank. The C.J. Kittredge & Sons Mill is southeast of the riverside trail at the juncture of Route 8 and the East Branch River. The Plunkett Brothers Woolen Mills is in the southern section of the trail off Jericho Road. A spur trail near the Plunkett Mill ruins leads to a site by the remains of the old millpond and dam. These ruins include a breached dam, stone foundation and the remnants of an impressive penstock.

The Renfrew cotton mill, now Old Stone Mill Condominium, is located in Dalton at the junction of Housatonic Street and Route 8.



Then . . .
and Now
A boy fishes on the riverbank of the East Branch in Dalton, circa 1890. A little way downstream from that site — the river as it appears, today.



Landscape

The rocks strewn throughout the riverbed are fragments of ancient bedrock formed hundreds of millions of years ago. Glaciers left behind large boulders scattered throughout the forest creating the rounded hills along the river. The last Ice Age deposited tons of sand and gravel, sometimes hundreds of feet deep, making up the hills along the riverbanks. Retreating glaciers created the river valley.

Vegetation

The plants growing along the trail include Hemlock



Plunkett Brothers Mill ruins

Charles H. Plunkett built a series of profitable woolen mills along the East Branch in the mid-1800s, owned in partnership with others including Plunkett’s brother-in-law Charles J. Kittredge, and Plunkett’s son Henry.