

**Take a Hike ...  
at Chestnut Hollow  
Nature Preserve!**

A recent sparkling blue sky, mid-spring day led to a fortunate decision to visit one of Hebron's open space gems, Chestnut Hollow Nature Preserve, off of Chestnut Hill Road. Upon entry into this gem, the visitor is immediately greeted by picnic tables, Jeremy Brook and historic features. Speaking of such features, what is this gated, carefully stacked, impressive square stonewall enclosure, I wonder? Let's check out the informational sign to find out! Well, this structure is the relics of an historic town pound used in the 19th century (established in 1821) to hold stray livestock ... cows, sheep and other farm animals. Pretty neat and evidence that the now forested preserve was once entirely farmland, devoid of forest cover. Imagine how difficult it must have been to gather the very large stones and assemble this approximate 4' to 5' high pen!

A glance across Jeremy Brook brings to view another impressive historic structure, a mill along the eastern bank of the brook. (After returning home from this adventure, a reading from the 2022 revised "Lost Mill Sites in Hebron, Connecticut" publication revealed that the mill was constructed in the 1740s by Ebenezer Fuller and added to by Horace Porter and family in the 1790s. The mill was one of the longest operated mills in town, milling corn and then grain. Much of the equipment from the former mill is preserved at Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts!)

Let's begin our hike. At the commencement of the trail is a large preserve sign built by students of RHAM that includes a map of the site. As discovered later, RHAM students improved and extended the preserve's trail system in 1999 and it remains easily traversed to this day! The narrow path winds its way southerly along the floodplain of Jeremy Brook, providing many picturesque views of this critical wetland ecosystem. So many native trees and shrubs thrive here ... red maples, yellow birch, willows, spicebush, highbush blueberry, alder, dogwood and winterberry. How many of these native beauties are you familiar with?

Onward we go with the path taking an uphill trek. Wow, a better view of the Jeremy Brook / Marsh! As the visitor continues this



*Chestnut Hollow Nature Preserve*

adventure, observe what species of upland forest trees have taken their place here. Red, white and black oaks, beech, black birch, white ash, hickories and ironwood. Would you recognize these species without their foliage? Not me! A lot to learn.

Taking a seat here amongst the dozens upon dozens of glacial erratics strewn all over the gentle upland slope, a bird haven becomes evident by the wide variety bird song. Out comes the phone and turning on of "Merlin" ... a smartphone app that identifies birds by their distinctive notes. What does Merlin hear? Let's be quiet and we'll soon learn. Red-wing blackbirds, not a surprise here! Merlin and I hear a Veery, such beautiful music. Woodpeckers, chickadees, Tufted titmouse, bluejays and crows all observed today. (Author's note: The 1987 "Salmon River Headwaters Guidebook and Habitat Inventory, Four-Mohegan Land Trust Properties on Four-Headwater Streams" publication notes wrens, cardinals, catbirds, towhees, orioles, yellow warblers and thrush also call this forest home as well as spotted salamanders, dependent on the preserves vernal pools).

Time to head back. Such a relaxing walk amid spring ephemerals and emerging colorful spring foliage. Hope you will consider taking in this adventure someday. But wait, forgot to mention an elder of the forest. An old growth white oak along the western edge of the trail, impossible to miss. It's massive arms, incredibly wide trunk, and great height invites one to give this elder a pause of praise and maybe even a pat or hug!

Frank Zitkus, OSLAC Secretary