

# Gaylord Trail at Hardscrabble Road

power line, the Gaylord Trail enters mature forest, and stone walls line this part of the trail.

On older maps, the road is called North Nelson Road. The name change to Hardscrabble Road occurred only in 1971. What prompted this name change is, however, not known.



## Trail Location

The *Gaylord Trail* at Hardscrabble Road is accessed from Rowley Hill Road. The trailhead is located where the asphalt ends and the gravel road begins. Land along and adjacent to this trail and the Fitch Basin Extension is owned by the Town of Sterling, Sterling Land Trust, Town of Clinton, the Department of Conservation and Recreation and private landowners.

## Unique Features

The Gaylord Trail at Hardscrabble Road is a pleasant and quiet trail on a wide old road. The trail initially passes wet and swampy areas, but after crossing the

## Length and Difficulty

The trail is only about 1.5 miles round-trip. From the trailhead at the lower end of Hardscrabble Road to the turn-around point at Upper North Row Road, there is about 150 feet of elevation gain. This old road trail is rated *easy*.

For the more ambitious hiker, there is a substantial extension to Fitch Basin, 1.9 miles round-trip. In addition to its length, this extension also has some quite steep hills. The Fitch Basin Extension is rated *moderate*.

## Why Gaylord Trail?

Jack Gaylord was born and raised in Sterling and owned the property at the trailhead. After serving in the US Marine Corps, he joined the MA State Police as an undercover narcotics agent. He spent his retirement at his Hardscrabble Road Farm, breeding Yorkshire, Hampshire and Landrace pigs. He worked with the Sterling Conservation Commission, agreeing to a land swap as well as a land sale to the town. He passed away in September, 2014.

## Parking

Currently, there is only limited parking on the shoulders of the paved part of Hardscrabble Road. It is expected that better parking will be available in 2017.

## Allowed and Prohibited Trail Activities

Passive recreational activities allowed on the trail: Hiking, hunting, nature observation, snow shoeing and cross-country skiing. Motorized vehicles are prohibited. Dogs are allowed; for the health of other pets, wildlife and people, please pick up after your pet.

## Description of Gaylord Trail at Hardscrabble Road

**0.00 miles:** The beginning of the dirt road defines the trail head. The first part of the trail passes bog and swamp to the left (i.e. west) and is often wet. Then the trail continues gently uphill.

**0.24 miles:** Intersection with power lines. The Fitch Basin trail extension (described below) starts here.

**0.27 miles:** Trail continues gently uphill.

**0.43 miles:** Stone-lined cellar hole or remnant of a foundation.

**0.58 miles:** Trail to the right, crossing the stone wall, will reach Upper North Row Road (in about ¼ mile) and continue on the other side of the road.

**0.70 miles:** Road off to the left, onto private property.

**0.74 miles:** Trail has reached Upper North Row Road, defining the turn-around point.

## Fitch Basin Trail Extension

**0.00 miles:** At the intersection with power lines, turn right and continue moderately steeply downhill. Trail is somewhat rocky and uneven.

**0.12 miles:** Trail crosses a major wet area; created by a small stream feeding into the Fitch Basin. The wet area is passable to the left, on a grassy, somewhat uneven berm. Trekking poles can be helpful here.

**0.23 miles:** Trail begins a moderately steep uphill

**0.30 miles:** Shortly after reaching the crest of the hill, turn sharply right onto an initially indistinct trail that continues gently downhill into the woods.

**0.47 miles:** Trail makes a slight left turn and crosses a stone wall. A few steps further, turn right onto a wider trail.

**0.53 miles:** Trail junction; follow trail to the left.  
**0.70 miles:** Trail reaches the Fitch Basin; observe side trail from the right. While this is a possible turn-around point, the trail description will continue to the point where the trail leaves the Fitch Basin.  
**0.72 miles:** Bridge over spillway, possibly the location of the former gate house. After this point, the trail becomes narrow and somewhat overgrown; watch out for poison ivy.  
**0.83 miles:** Trail leaves the Fitch Basin, which defines our turn-around point. Ahead is a yellow gate, installed by the Town of Clinton, to prevent vehicular access from Heywood Road.  
**0.94 miles:** Bridge over spillway.  
**0.95 miles:** Trail leaves Fitch Basin.  
**1.12 miles:** Turn right at trail junction, to continue on the outbound route.  
**1.18 miles:** Outbound trail comes in from the left, providing the option to choose this shorter route back. The trail description follows a slightly longer route (by ¼ mile), by continuing straight ahead.  
**1.28 miles:** Observe small trail to the right.  
**1.45 miles:** Trail leaves the forest, meets the Power Line Trail. Make a left turn to continue a long uphill.  
**1.60 miles:** Observe junction with outbound trail; trail begins a steep downhill.  
**1.77 miles:** Back to large wet area. Then a moderately steep uphill.  
**1.90 miles:** End of Fitch Basin Extension.

### Flora and Fauna

A shallow pond and wetland is found at the beginning of the south trailhead of Hardscrabble Road trail. Note the pointed stumps, evidence of beaver activity in years past. Dead trees are a place to look or listen for woodpeckers and nuthatches questing for grubs and insects. In late summer, meadowsweet shrubs in the wet areas are covered with white blooms lending a light fragrance to the air. Watch for green, pickerel or leopard frogs around the water's edge and spot aquatic insects skimming across the water.

As you continue to stroll up the road, note the stone walls (and some poison ivy patches) lining the trail. Hardwood trees such as red and white oak, red maple,

hickory, and even a few American chestnut sprouts are common. Smaller tree species such as sassafras (the mitten tree) and striped maple are part of the mix with a few patches of mountain laurels here and there.

In the damper areas or humid days, you may spy a red eft crawling across the way or a slug leaving its silvery trail on the leaf litter.



Look carefully at openings in the stone walls where scat (droppings) from foxes, deer, coyotes or raccoons might be seen. A pile of acorn shells or nibbled pine cones indicate that gray or red squirrels were feasting.

Check the young forest habitat opening on the right on the steeper part of the trail just before reaching the power line cut. Blue-winged Warblers with their "Bee Buzz" call and Eastern Towhees singing "Drink your tea!" can be heard here and on the shrubs under the power lines.

Beyond the power line, note the stands of tall white pines. These sun-loving trees sprouted in what were once abandoned fields. Note that the understory of young trees is hardwoods, which will be the next stage of forest succession when the pines eventually die. Hay-scented ferns and interrupted ferns line the sides of the old roadway (beware of some poison ivy), while mosses and lichens cover the stone walls. In winter it is easy to spot tracks of deer, coyotes and bobcat crossing gaps in the walls.

### Acknowledgments

The *Gaylord Trail at Hardscrabble Road* was established in collaboration with the Sterling Conservation Commission, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

### Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)

OSIC was established in 2003 as a permanent town committee, to broaden awareness of and enhance public access to significant open space, cultural and recreational resources.

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