

Trail Descriptions

Wetland Trail (0.5mi.) (red on the map)

Easy walking

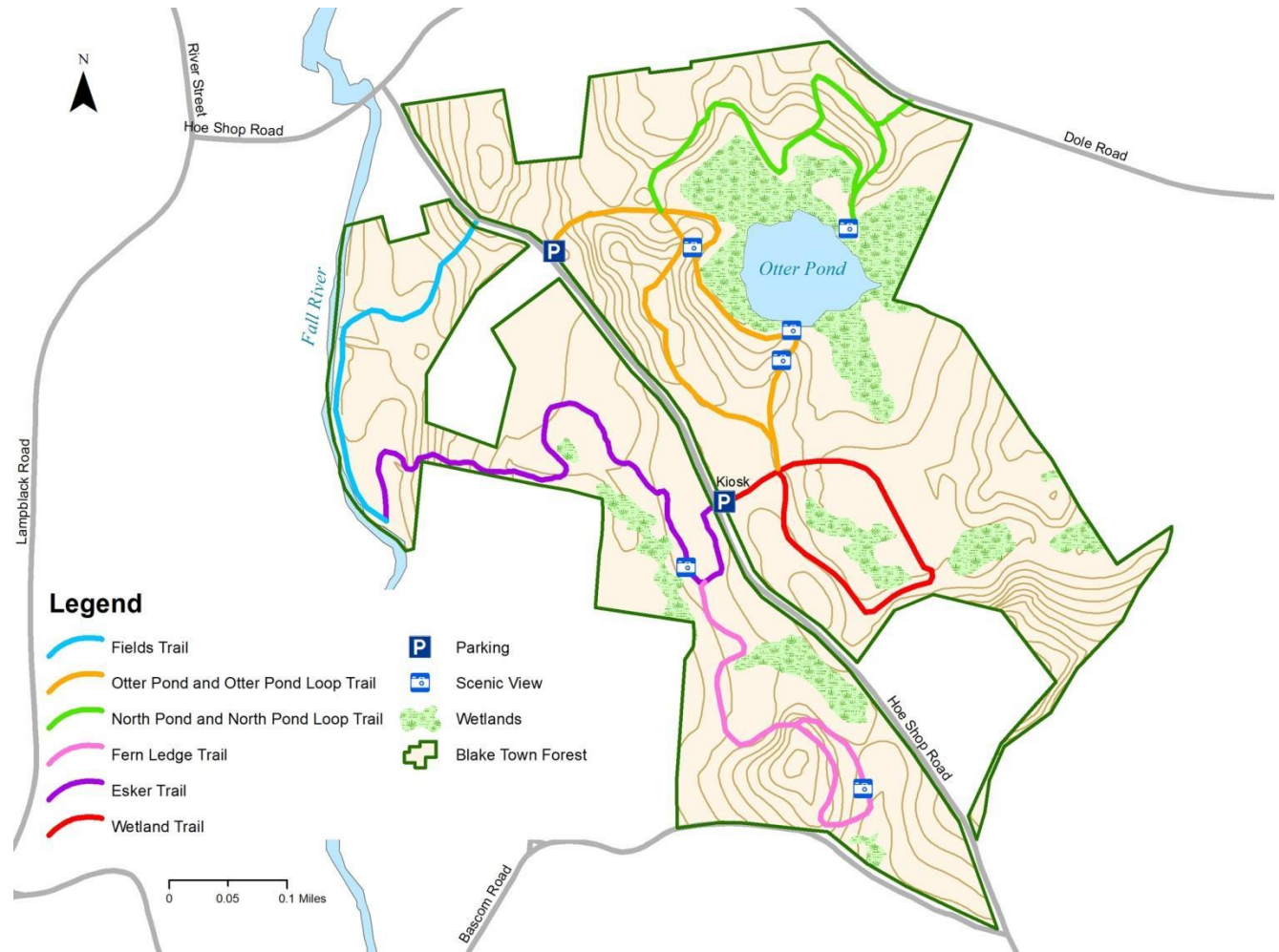
Starting at the kiosk parking area, walk behind the gate and proceed along the old access road. This trail is a loop that can be entered from either of two trailheads on the right side of the road.

From the trailhead further from the gate you can see a meadow to your left and a view down to Otter Pond. A home was once situated here, and you can find a large old sugar maple, a catalpa tree and a Chinese chestnut. The forest you traverse is made up of pine, hemlock, and hardwoods, with Mountain Laurel bushes an added draw when they flower in late spring.

Otter Pond Trail and Otter Pond Loop Trail (0.5mi. and 0.3mi., resp.) (gold on the map)

Includes hills

A short walk from the gate at the kiosk parking area takes you to the entrance on the left. Proceed up a piney woodland trail. The loop trail branches off from your left side before you reach the height of land, and it passes through forest that includes American chestnut saplings: remnants of great trees killed about 100 years ago by the chestnut blight. The loop reconnects to the Otter Pond Trail at a junction with the North Pond Trail. The Otter Pond habitat showcases waterlilies, cat tails and beaver lodges. You may see an otter or a beaver, waterfowl or a Red-tailed Hawk. Notice the beaver-carved hemlocks and beech, and on a steep hillside between the main trail and the loop, a stately stand of American Beech. If you continue out to the road, a



short, 1/10 mile walk takes you to the start of the Fields Trail (blue on the map)

North Pond Trail & Loop (0.5mi and 0.4mi. resp.) (green on the map)

Steep hill on main trail, hilly loop trail

From the junction of the Otter Pond and Otter Pond Loop Trails, this route takes you northeastwards. Near the first summit, an impressive, old American Chestnut snag leans by the trail.

The tree died c. the 1920's from introduced chestnut blight, but the wood is very rot-resistant. Before the blight, this species constituted about 1/4 of the trees in Eastern woodlands. Descending the hill, notice many tall, old pines with crooked trunks and numerous lower branches: signs they grew in full sunshine. You next enter a hemlock stand and the pond-side. A loop up the esker extends your forest walk (and connects to Dole Road).

Fields Trail (0.3mi. to the junction with the Esker Trail) (light blue on the map)

Easy walking after the initial short hill

On the west side of the road, 0.35 miles north of the kiosk parking area. Descend through woods to access the upper field. The trail crosses this field and then crosses a lower field to reach the bank of the Fall River. The path may be wet in high-water conditions. Enjoy the peaceful scene as you trace the river through a variety of trees including Black Gum. The trail ends at a clearing by the river where you can pick up the Esker Trail to loop back to the kiosk.

Esker Trail (0.6mi.) (purple on the map)

Several steep stretches

The trailhead is across the road from the kiosk on Hoe Shop Road. You approach and traverse an esker: a winding ridge of stratified sand and gravel, remains of our last glaciation 10,000-12,000 years ago. From the trail's high point, a wetland is visible downhill to the west. Old white pines provide nest sites for large birds, and denning sites for mammals. A single, old Sugar Maple at the property boundary (a "wolf tree") attests to a previous pasture that was there. **Please stay on the trail as it lies close to private property in places.** After crossing a bridge at the bottom of a hill, the trail enters the lower field, which you skirt to access the Fall River. You may extend your walk by continuing on the Fields Trail (blue on the map), or return the way you came.

Fern Ledge Trail (0.5 mi.) (pink on the map)

Steep stretches and rocky underfoot

The trailhead is on the left, a short distance in from the start of the Esker Trail. The trail dips, then rises,

and after a sharp right turn, dips again, skirting a vernal pool, then climbs through piney woods. A steep descent left brings you along the base of scenic outcroppings poking through the till, dotted with ferns. A right turn followed by a steady climb brings you back up through woods, the vernal pool, and your starting point.

Origins of the Blake Town Forest

Brother and sister, Clesson Blake and Ruth (Blake) Cook, born and raised in Gill, maintained a small farm and working woodlot on Mountain Road. Both strong proponents of conservation, they left their estates to be used for the benefit of land conservation in Gill. Chief among the projects supported by the Clesson P. Blake Trust and Ruth J. Cook Trust was the 2009 acquisition by the Franklin Land Trust of 173 acres on Hoe Shop Road owned by the estate of Acilio R. Sandri. After permanently protecting most of the land with a Conservation Restriction held by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Franklin Land Trust gifted 162.5 acres to the Town of Gill. Two building lots totaling 4.7 acres were added in 2017. This scenic and ecologically diverse property is now known as the Blake Town Forest of Gill.

Stewardship of the Town Forest is overseen by the Gill Town Forest Committee, in collaboration with the Town of Gill's Conservation Commission. The Committee was awarded a DCR Community Forest Stewardship Implementation Grant in 2016, enabling the Committee to establish and mark boundaries, to develop and mark trails, and to provide information to the public.

Brochure prepared by Gill Town Forest Committee of the Conservation Commission and Nora E. Hanke, 2018. Updated 2024.

Blake Town Forest Gill, Massachusetts

