

#4: The Wolf Tree

Wolf trees (like the one in front of you) can be any species of trees with broad reaching branches. Here in New England, they are often surrounded by younger trees that grow tall and straight, making the wolf tree stand out even in the forest setting.

Wolf trees begin growing without competing with other trees, and so their branches spread wide capturing the plentiful sunlight. They were often intentionally left by farmers along stone walls to act as shade trees for cattle or as a boundary marker. When the surrounding crop or pasture land is abandoned, other trees seed nearby, and in time the forest grows up around the wolf tree. Those trees grow up to reach the sunlight, rather than branching out.

Some say the name “wolf tree” refers to the fact that the tree grew up all alone with no other trees around it - like the lone wolf. Others claim that, like a wolf preying on all of the smaller animals around it, the wolf tree preys on the plants underneath it by producing so much shade that the other plants can't grow. Though people disagree about the origin of its name, it's easy to agree on the beauty of these many-stemmed trees.

#5: The Grist Mill and the Community

A miller was an important and well regarded job in colonial times. It was demanding, requiring long hours during harvest seasons, with significant maintenance of the machinery, and the especially hard task of dressing the mill stones. This required lifting the two thousand pound stone by means of crowbars, wedges or a rudimentary crane, and sharpening and deepening the furrows with a chisel and hammer, as to increase the output and efficiency of the grinding. This grueling work usually lasted a day, and in busy mills, needed to be repeated weekly.

The miller of the town wasn't only a hard and determined worker, but a man of influence- he was in position to know of all the troubles of the townspeople, and act as a councilor, politician, and banker in addition to miller.

At Pynchon's original grist mill, the chief millers of this short-lived but thriving business were William Prichard and John Ayres. Before this mill was established and these men put it to productive use, it was a common site to see a cart pulled by oxen, creaking under the weight of many bags of corn, making the long trek between the Quaboag settlements and Springfield. Pynchon's mill strengthened this community by making it more self-sufficient, and more efficient as a result.

#6: North American Beaver

Castor canadensis

The second largest rodent in the world, Beavers are an iconic New England creature with a tumultuous history. Simultaneously beloved by children, intriguing to their parents, and infuriating to landowners who have to deal with them, they have been hunted, trapped, protected, turned into hats and coats, depicted in cartoons, and been nearly extinguished while playing a prominent role in early Native-European trade relations. In fact, William Pynchon (the father of John Pynchon who established the mill at this site!) made his family fortune by trading colonist produced goods with native tribes in exchange for beaver pelts, which he sold back in Europe for a tidy profit. His trading post ultimately became the city of Springfield MA!

Ironically, beavers now control this site, and are the sole up-keepers of Pynchon's long abandoned dam. The evidence of beaver activity on this property actually stretches back for decades. The standing dead snags (that can be seen from the hill by the powerlines) were killed by the rising water levels at least 30 years ago.

Typically, beavers will only inhabit a pond for 5-7 years. This is because they prefer to eat hardwoods, especially aspen, cottonwood, willow and dogwood, and will only eat conifers if they are truly desperate. Usually when the food supply gets that low, they move on to another site, which means the long-term evidence of beavers is cyclical.

Historical Background

The construction of Pynchon's Grist Mill began in the summer of 1669, and with the use of the towns resources, John Ayres and many other townspeople from Quaboag carried out the majority of the work. Although much of the work involving the millhouse, dam and pond was carried out by the town's inhabitants, all of the specialized portions of the mill needed to be produced by skilled craftsman from other towns.

The key part of the mill- the mill stones- were created by John Web Sr and Zachary Fields of North Hampton. These large stones measured 5 ft and 3 in in diameter. All of the iron work is said to have been manufactured by John Stewart, a blacksmith who lived in Springfield, “Two hoops of thundle head, two hoops for the shaft, two gudgeons, four bolts and keys, twenty little wedges for the gudgeons, two hundred fifty spikes, and a sledge and peck croe.” The complicated job of assembling all of these parts was left in the hands of Cornelius Williams of Springfield, the timber provided by Goodman Sikes of Springfield, and the carpentry for the mill was provided by the group of John Ayres, William Prichard, and Daniel Hovey.

Many hands were involved in making the materials used to create this mill, and even more people helped to put all of those pieces together. Pynchon's Grist Mill was the first grist mill in the Quaboag Plantation.

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Pynchon's Grist Mill Preserve Interpretive Brochure

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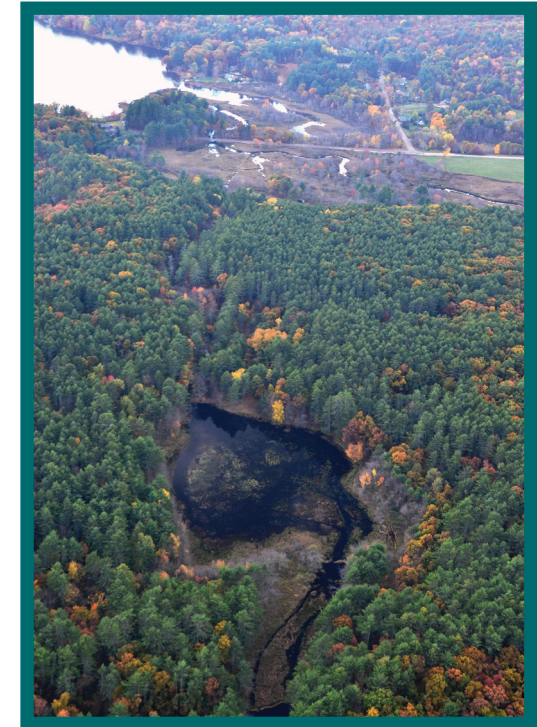
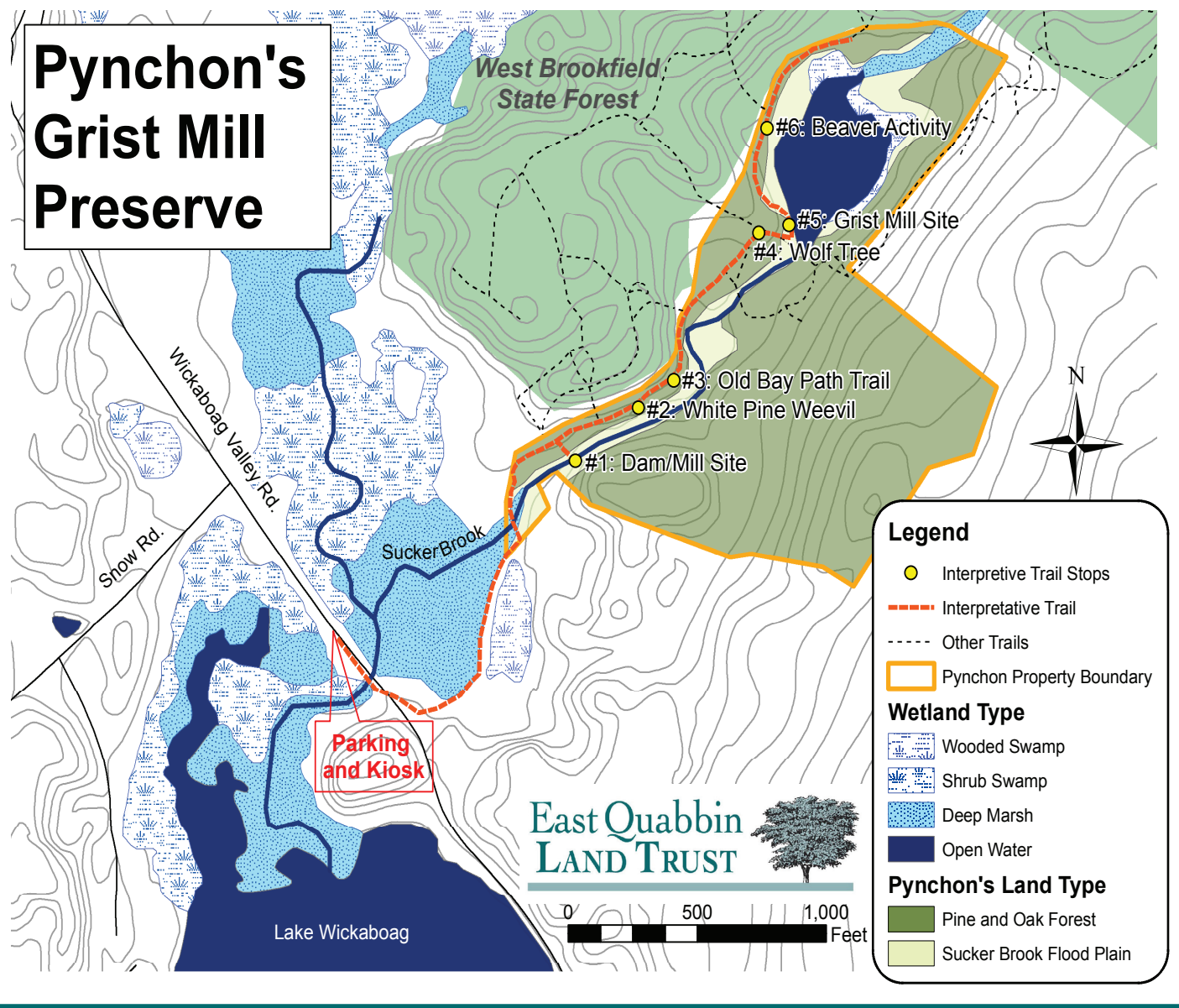


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Conserving the land, Preserving our heritage

Pynchon's Grist Mill Preserve



#1: Dam Site

Imagine the water from the Sucker Brook pooled up so high it has filled the valley around you and is lapping right up to the top of the embankment you are currently standing on. That is how this site looked in the early 1700's. None of the trees growing alongside the stream would be here, and bridging the gap between where you stand and the far embankment would be a sawmill building, delicately designed to

channel the water and use its power for sawing wood. In fact the entire embankment you just walked out on was constructed to pool the water ensuring enough pressure for the mill operators. Though the timbers of the mill itself have long since rotted away, this dam has endured through the centuries with remarkably little wear and tear, and stands here now as an indicator of lifestyles long ago abandoned, with needs we now take for granted.

During colonial times mills such as this one were as essential to life as grocery stores are for people living today. Saw mills were often the first things colonists would build in a new area, as they made the construction process infinitely easier, enabling development of everything from houses to churches to stores. Grist mills enabled people to grind their grain, a critical service for the making of bread and other dietary staples.

#2: The White Pine Weevil

Pissodes strobi

White Pine, a rapidly growing tree that can reach heights of well over 100 ft, grows in a variety of habitats, and is one of the most prominent canopy trees in New England. Producing soft, uniformly grained wood, white pine has long been sought after as a prime construction material, used for house framing, furniture, doors, cabinets, and boxes. During the colonial days, white pine was used for ships' masts, as pines generally grow tall and straight.

Looking around, you probably noticed that many of the pines here have multiple-trunks starting about 15ft off the ground, and therefore are not very straight at all. This is due to a curious pest called the Pine Weevil, which lays its eggs in the leading shoot of a young pine. When the



eggs hatch, the larvae eat the wood under the bark on that shoot, killing the shoot. The tree adapts by diverting nutrients into one or more side branches, which become the primary trunks over time. Though the damage wrought by the weevil doesn't kill the tree outright, it may shorten its lifespan and leaves a mis-shapen tree.

#3: The Old Bay Path Trail

If you look out across Sucker Brook, you will see the remnants of a roadway carved into the hillside opposite. That roadway is the Old Bay Path Trail. Though the basic trail had long been an important traveling route for the Nipmuc and other native tribes, the settlers adopted it in 1673 and constructed a more cart-friendly road, starting in South Barre, and stretching across the northern slopes of Pritchard's Hill, onto Devil's Elbow Road to Worcester and other eastern towns. The name "Old Bay Path" actually comes from a treatise by Levi Badger Chase, called *The Bay Path and Along The Way*, where he mislabels the highly used Nipmuc Trail as "Old Bay Path". Nevertheless, this trail connected many important Quaboag settlements from Menamesit to Ashquosh, and became part of the main traffic artery for settlers going from Massachusetts Bay to the Connecticut River settlements.



Visitors at the grist mill site standing by the sluice