

Sweet Pond State Park – an Abenaki perspective

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*Sweet Pond State Park
2763 Sweet Pond Rd
Guilford, VT 05301*

Synopsis:

Today's Sweet Pond is in the Keets Brook watershed, tributary to Couch Brook and Fall Brook, and ultimately the Kwenitekw (Connecticut River). These waterways provide secondary access to the medicine spring and the east-west Wana skatekw trail, from Kchi Ôwdi, the primary trail north from Mskwama kok/Great Falls, a significant fishing place. Bountiful upland hunting and plant gathering is available along these connecting interior pathways in the low hills.

Full narrative:

Sweet Pond is, for the most part, not a natural pond - it is an impoundment of Keets Brook, created sometime before 1800 by Nathan Millett, and used as a mill pond subsequently. There may have been a much smaller natural pond before the dam was built, it's hard to say... the elevation changes are subtle so it may have been more of a swamp or, more likely, a beaver pond.

Early settlers originally called it Spicer Pond. I believe this was in tribute to Daniel Spicer of nearby Bernardston, MA who was killed nearby in 1784 on Belden Hill in the Yorker (Guilford was primarily Tory-allied) vs Vermont Republic skirmishes, which became quite violent in these parts. Ethan Allen didn't help things. The name Sweet Pond is much more recent, from a family that owned a summer place adjacent to the Pond from 1928 onward.

Keets Brook flows into Couch Brook, which flows into Fall Brook, a tributary of the Kwenitekw - meeting it immediately below the Great Falls at Peskeompskut/Mskwama kok (today's Turners Falls, MA). In terms of Abenaki usage, Fall Brook parallels VT Rt. 5 (and the Kwenitekw) for a few miles flowing from due north in today's Vermont. What is now Rt. 5 is known to have been a

primary N/S Native trail - it was used by the French and Native forces as they approached and retreated from the well-known 1704 Deerfield Raid. The Great Falls, of course, was a tremendously significant gathering place for Abenaki and their kin, thus targeted with its own share of misery, at the 1676 Massacre when 300 native people were killed by colonists under Capt. Turner.

As mentioned, Couch Brook splits off Fall Brook, flowing from Guilford in the northwest through a narrow passage and Keets Brook (thus Sweet Pond) is a tributary of Couch. It is my estimation that Couch and Keets would have been a sub-trail, allowing otherwise-restricted access into the interior and meeting with another main E/W trail along Broad Brook, in today's Guilford Center. There is a well-known mineral spring there also. This Broad Brook trail was a part of the first British-utilized path in Vermont, what was called the Scout Path (circa 1724 onward) that ran from Fort Dummer in Brattleboro to Fort Morrison in Colrain, MA. This was the British colonial frontier. Above it was no-man's land - Abenaki country.

My conclusion: there is no known Abenaki name for the pond itself, as it most likely did not exist pre-Contact. However, it would be appropriate if any such new sign made some worthwhile mention of the Native context there. I will add the observation that Abenaki naming practices are not necessarily pinpointing a bounded spot, as English/Western conventions do... tit for tat. They tend more toward context, an area or landscape that is seen in relationship to what is happening there, i.e. natural features, cultural usages. So, describing the Sweet Pond area in terms of its familiarity to the local Abenaki is completely in the spirit of H.880.