

AMITY POND NATURAL AREA

Pomfret, Vermont



Before using the shelters and trails, a few points of history and interest may help one to understand the purpose and philosophy of the area.

The former owners of this land, Elizabeth and Richard Brett, felt that there were too few places in our world which are both accessible and free and from the noise, the trappings, and the confusion of our economic and technological culture. Without going to some far place, a family could not camp out without being constantly aware of machines; a man could not walk without hearing and smelling off-road vehicles; for the same reason it was not safe or pleasant to snowshoe or ski.

Thus, the owners were impelled, within the limits of their resources, to take a step to provide a natural environment for quiet relaxation and enjoyment by people who walk, ski, or snowshoe, and want to take their pleasure out of the sight, sound, and smell of this betic world. Amity Pond Natural Area (see map) is the result. The property was given to the State of Vermont to be used as a natural area. Except for emergency and maintenance, all machinery is forever barred.

The land is a fairly typical example of upland Vermont. Once heavily timbered; it was cleared for pasture; it has been heavily grazed and just as ruthlessly logged, both having been done through need, ignorance, and heedlessness for the future.

The habitat suits deer, hare, grouse, and a wide variety of what are sometimes called "small deer." There are three brooks, some swampy places, and many outcroppings of a dense limestone which permit the presence of ponds and water sources at the height of land. The flora is varied, composed of northern hardwoods, some softwoods, and variety of ferns, grasses and shrubs. Too many deer have obliterated most of the browse plants-Canadian yew, hobble bush, and other native viburnums and dogwoods. Deer have also all but eliminated ash and maple seedlings. Fields and pastures show the first stages of succession as they are being invaded by raspberries, blackberries and popple. To counteract this, meadows are kept open for views and to provide edge areas for wildlife.

There are a number of historical traces-sugar arches, fences, an abandoned road and an interesting legend which accounts for the name of the area. It is said that two young ladies attending the East Barnard school vowed eternal friendship, but one married a Barnard man and one married a Pomfret man. In the days of no telephone, keeping in touch could be a problem, so they solved the problem by picking, by mail, a set summer day. Each would trudge up the hill with her lunch basket to spend the day with her friend by a tiny pond at the height of land. This became known as Amity's Pond, so they say.

Before describing the trails, a word about them and the shelters is necessary. The trails are made wide for ski touring and for easy maintenance. Where possible, they are fertilized, seeded, and mown in order to better stand the summer traffic. Each shelter has a fireplace and a water supply. An attempt has been made to protect the privacy of the people using the shelters and to create some amenity- an open meadow, a water feature, or a lovely view. For

the protection of the place and of its mood, a few simple sensible rules:

NO MOTORIZED MACHINES OR MOUNTAIN BIKES ON TRAILS
NO RADIOS
FIRES ONLY AT SHELTER FIREPLACES.
USE DEAD OR DOWNED WOOD ONLY
OVERNIGHT CAMPING ONLY IN SHELTERS (NO POTABLE WATER IS AVAILABLE IN THE NATURAL AREA)
DO NOT PICK, CUT, OR DAMAGE FLOWERS, PLANTS OR TREES.
STAY ON THE TRAILS.
CARRY OUT WHAT YOU CARRY IN;
LEAVE NOTHING BUT YOUR FOOTPRINTS.

The principal Area entrance is on the Allen Hill Road. Leave your vehicle at the edge of the road and enter on foot.

A small plantation of red pine will provide privacy some day. Just to the west of the entrance is the Amity Pond Shelter. A short spur trail passes a permanent pond. The shelter faces a temporary pond which is part of an experiment in water conservation.

If you do not plan to use this shelter, stay on the main trail which turns north for a short way, goes west to the height of land, and turns south to pass Amity Pond itself. From here one can see Acutey, Killington, and Pico. In the winter, the Rochester Mountains are visible to the west.

The trail to the Sugar Arch Shelter is the right fork at the foot of the grade below the pond. It turns and twists through some low grade hardwoods. A poor site is responsible for the tree quality. About a mile from the sign on this trail, the land flattens, forming a small bench. This is the site of the Sugar Arch shelter, a nice grove of

hemlock, and a meadow. The spur trail to the shelter is in the southeast corner of the meadow. The shelter lies in an attractive and secluded spot near a tiny brook. A wading pool has been made in the brook bed. The main trail proceeds in a westerly direction towards the Broad Brook Volunteer Fire Association Fire House in East Barnard. This part of the trail is quite steep and it is crossed by the power line which serves the village. A small brook flows parallel to the trail.

From this trail is possible to see the buildings of the Hawk's Hill Demonstration Woodlot. This experiment in intensive woodlot forestry and wildlife habitat improvement is maintained by the New England Forestry Foundation with a resident forester.

The trail ends in a meadow. One has the choice of crossing the meadow, the road, and proceeding over private trails to Hawk's Hill or walking south on the road to the western entrance to the Area.

This entrance is marked by the blue and orange Sky Line Trail markers. The trail crosses the brook, turns briefly south, and then climbs in a generally northeastern direction. About a mile from the entrance is a short crossover trail to the Sugar Arch shelter.

The main trail proceeds through a mixed forest cover to the southern end of the Amity Pond meadow. There is a "dry" pond nearby. One can follow the Sky Line Trail markers to Suicide Six ski tow or return to the main Area entrance.

There may be a question about the value and purpose of these dry ponds. They are an experiment in water conservation. The ponds have wildlife value as well. They are designed to be empty in the fall to hold back the snow melt and the spring rains that would otherwise run off the land. These ponds are supposed to be full in May, possibly even overflowing. Gradually the pond wa-

ter seeps into the soil. Some water will also evaporate but the aim is to save approximately six inches of run-off by holding the water where it falls for as long as possible. It is possible that this hold-back and subsequent percolation may re-create a small brook which used to flow, year around by the Sugar Arch shelter. There is a short range and quite subjective feeling that this scheme has already improved the local water supply in the summer months.

If you have followed the whole trail, you will have had a pleasant walk in an interesting area which is in transition from an over-grazed, over-cut, glacially-affected terrain. Except for the trails and meadows it is planned to let this land develop as it will. It is possible that some habitat improvements or some sustained yield forestry may be practiced at some future time because a mature forest offers little support for wildlife.

In the meantime, the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation of the State of Vermont hopes this leaflet gives you an understanding of the purposes of the Area, that you have enjoyed yourselves and that you will feel free to offer suggestions or criticism.

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 vga-04-05

