The Conservation Land

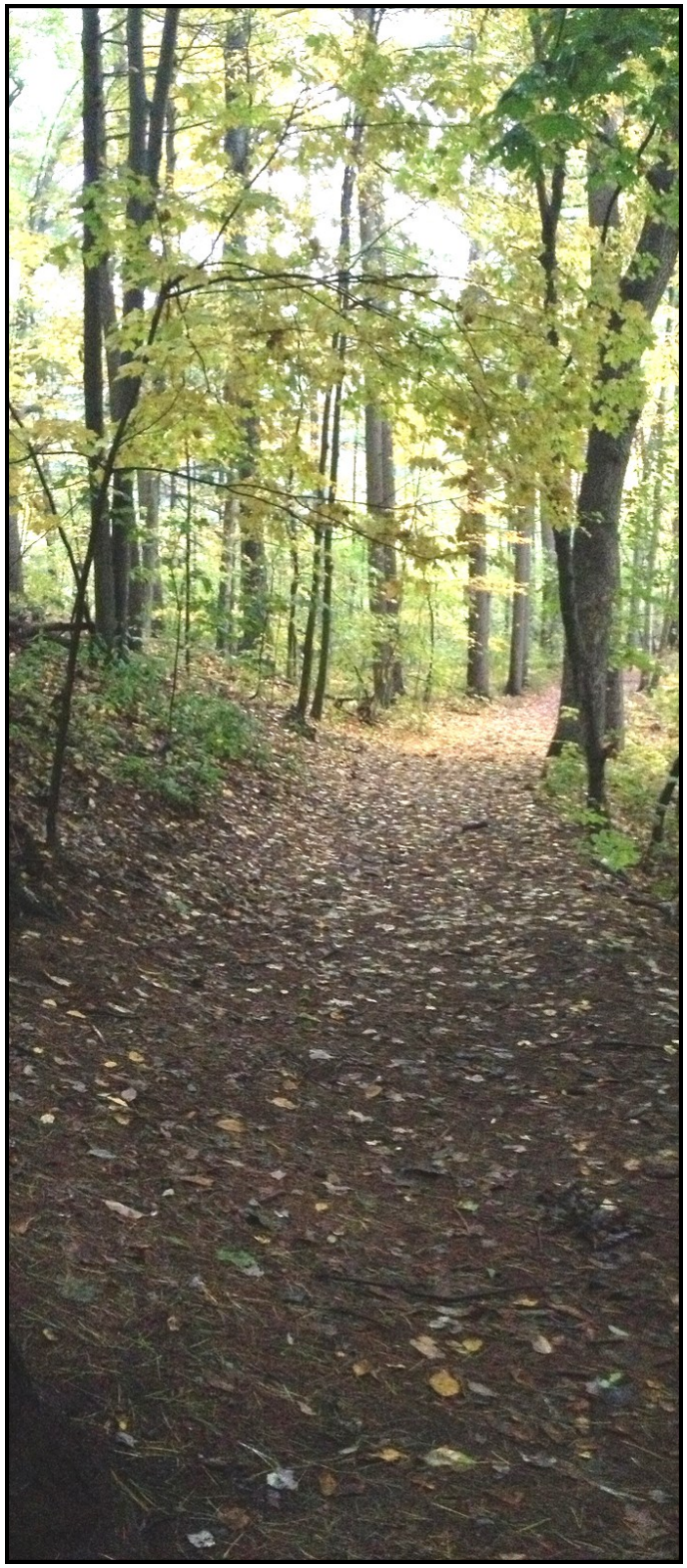
A walk in the Hapgood Wright Town Forest can be a peaceful experience exploring its many natural features, a world apart from the busy roads just above the ridge. This guide describes these features as well as cultural and historical points of interest. Its environs witnessed the lives of freed slaves who settled here struggling to farm its infertile soil. Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the Alcott and Emerson children were frequent visitors. Thanks to Thoreau's written observations, we have a mid-1800s snapshot of the natural features and lives of the people who lived here, broadening our understanding of what we see today.

Trail Development

In 2008, Hapgood Wright Town Forest was chosen to be the first Concord conservation land to use the new trail blaze system. A 2013 trail addition was the Emerson-Thoreau Amble connecting Heywood Meadow in Concord Center to Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond. The Bay Circuit Trail was enhanced by relocating it off Cambridge Turnpike onto the Amble. The Tuttle-Thoreau Loop handicap "assessed" trail was added in 2013 from the small handicap parking lot through the Brister's Hill area.

Location and Access

Access with parking for more than 20 vehicles is provided on the east side of Walden Street across from the entrance to Concord-Carlisle High School. Walden Street intersects MA Route 2 across from MA Route 126. An information kiosk and sign "Hapgood Wright Town Forest" identifies the site. Additional handicap parking is available approximately 2,000 feet towards MA Route 2, at the Assessed Trail entrance.



Town of Concord

Hapgood Wright Town Forest Trail Guide

Fairyland Pond

CONCORD TRAILS

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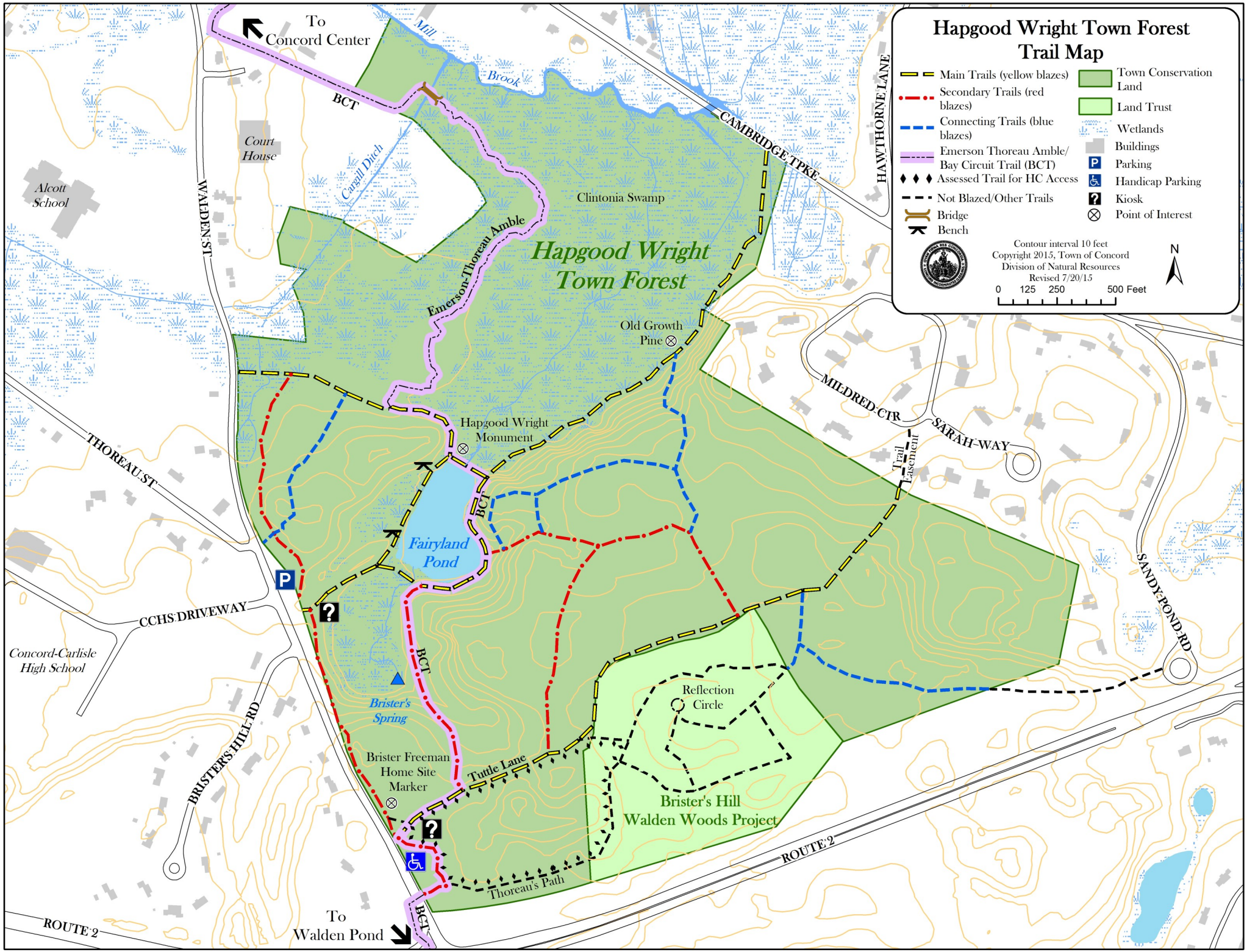
Prepared by the Division of Natural Resources, 2015


Hapgood Wright Town Forest Trail Map
Main Trails (yellow blazes)
Secondary Trails (red blazes)
Connecting Trails (blue blazes)
Emerson Thoreau Amble/ Bay Circuit Trail (BCT)
Assessed Trail for HC Access
Not Blazed/Other Trails
Bridge
Bench
Town Conservation Land
Land Trust
Wetlands
Buildings
Parking
Handicap Parking
Kiosk
Point of Interest
Contour interval 10 feet
Copyright 2015, Town of Concord
Division of Natural Resources
Revised 7/20/15
0 125 250 500 Feet
N
To Concord Center
Mill Brook
BCT
Court House
Cargill Ditch
Alcott School
WALDEN ST
CAMBRIDGE TPKE
HAWTHORNE LANE
Clintonia Swamp
Emerson-Thoreau Amble
Hapgood Wright Town Forest
Old Growth Pine
Hapgood Wright Monument
MILDRED CTR
SARAH WAY
Trail Easement
THOREAU ST
Fairyland Pond
CCHS DRIVEWAY
Concord-Carlisle High School
Brister's Spring
BRISTERS HILL RD
Brister Freeman Home Site Marker
Tuttle Lane
Reflection Circle
Brister's Hill Walden Woods Project
SANDY POND RD
ROUTE 2
Thoreau's Path
To Walden Pond

Hapgood Wright Town Forest

Suggested Walks

Fairyland Pond Circuit - From the parking lot follow the left side of the fork on the yellow-blazed main Fairyland Pond Trail, passing the Hapgood Wright monument and continuing clockwise around the pond and back to the parking lot. Walking time: 20 minutes.

Brister Freeman extended loop – Follow the Fairyland Pond Circuit but turn left at the red-blazed secondary trail on the south side of the pond that climbs a hill passing Brister's Spring. Turn right at the "T" junction with Tuttle Lane then right on the red-blazed secondary trail to the Brister Freeman Homesite and back to the parking lot. Walking time: 30 minutes.

Brister's Hill Loop – From the parking lot follow the red-blazed secondary trail along Walden Street toward MA Route 2, past the handicap parking lot to the Brister's Hill marker and chained gate. Turn left into the Walden Woods Interpretive Site to reach the "Grasslands" stone marker. From there follow the right side of the fork to an arrow pointing left to the Reflection Circle. From there continue on the path to the ecological "Succession" stone marker. Turn left onto the blue-blazed trail and again left onto the Tuttle Lane (yellow-blazed trail). Turn right on the red-blazed trail toward Fairyland Pond then left at the Pond back to the main parking lot. Walking time 40 to 60 minutes.

Tuttle-Thoreau Loop – From the small handicap parking lot on Walden Street follow the route for handicap access displayed on the kiosk map.

Hapgood Wright Town Forest Points of Interest

Consult the Hapgood Wright Town Forest Trail Map for locations of these interesting features listed here in alphabetic order.

Brister Freeman Homesite
On the red-blazed trail along Walden Street, a stone marker was placed here by The Drinking Gourd Project in 2011 to identify the approximate site of Brister Freeman's late 1700s home. Brister Freeman was enslaved for 25 years to a wealthy landholder and doctor in Concord. On gaining his freedom after the Revolutionary War, he enlisted in the Continental Army, became the second freed slave in Concord to purchase land, worked as a day laborer, and raised a family.

Although Brister's time here was earlier than Thoreau's writings, (he died in 1822) Thoreau considered his cabin to be in Brister's "neighborhood". "Down the road, on the right hand, on Brister's Hill, lived Brister Freeman, 'a handy negro', slave of Squire Cummings… With him dwelt Fenda, his hospitable wife, who told fortunes…."

Brister Freeman Homesite Marker

Brister's Hill and Forest Topography
The Hapgood Wright Town Forest has sculpted features that reveal its glacial origin. Brister's Hill is a glacial kame formed of sand and gravel deposits that have long been exposed by gravel mining that once took place here.

Brister's Spring
In a shallow ravine beside the red-blazed trail that winds up to Brister's Hill, water bubbles from underground. A post identifies it as Brister's Spring, named for the freed slave who once lived nearby.

Thoreau mentioned in his writings that this spring was a reliable source of cool drinking water, and he recorded its temperature as 49°F.

"Commonly I rested an hour or two in the shade at noon, after planting, and ate my lunch, and read a little by a spring which was the source of a swamp and of a brook, oozing from under Brister's Hill, half a mile from my field."

The spring bubbles out into a verdant water course lush with mosses, watercress and skunk cabbage. During cool, damp and snow-covered days of winter, this place can seem magical, with mist rising up from the warmer spring-fed hollow. In

the early spring season blossoms of skunk cabbage and sunny yellow marsh-marigold are a main feature of the site.

Clintonia Swamp and Old Growth Pine

The main yellow-blazed trail from the northeast corner of Fairyland Pond to Cambridge Turnpike was known to Thoreau as "Hubbard's Wood Path". He named the area's marshy land Clintonia Swamp for the wildflowers that were once abundant here. The path skirts the base of Brister's Hill passing below a hemlock grove with yellow birch trees. Fairyland Pond is the source of the water that flows beside this trail, eventually joining with the Mill Brook near Cambridge Turnpike.

Halfway between the pond and the turnpike, on the west side of the trail, grows one of the oldest and largest white pines in Concord. Measuring 50 inches in diameter, it has all of the characteristics of an old growth tree, and may have been of good size even in Emerson's and Thoreau's time.

Fairyland Pond

The centerpiece of the Hapgood Wright Forest is Fairyland Pond, a low-lying area filled with swampy vegetation that was dammed in the late 1800s to form the pond. Henry David Thoreau referred to the hollow as "Hubbard's Close" or "Hubbard's shady swamp", named for its owner Ebenezer Hubbard. The swamp was part of the uninterrupted woodland surrounding Walden Pond where he led the Alcott girls and Emerson children on berry-picking trips, fancifully calling it "fairyland", the likely origin of the name given to the area by the town's people. Fairyland Pond as it appears today is a 2.75 acre shallow pond held by a dam.

A visit to the pond is a quiet retreat from the noise of highway traffic above Brister's Hill. Cattails grow along the pond's marshy southern shore and pond lilies float along its long shallow surface. The pond is rimmed with sweet pepperbush, highbush blueberry and grey alder, with a surrounding forest of red oak, pine, hemlock, yellow birch, American Chestnut saplings and dogwood. All contribute to an ongoing pageant of seasonal color and bloom mirrored in the water. When winter sets in the ice covered pond and snow-covered landscape reflect winter's light with particular beauty.

Hapgood Wright Monument

At a trail junction near the outflow of Fairyland Pond, a stone monument recognizes Hapgood Wright who provided funds for the town to purchase the original 78-acre parcel that bears his name. Wright made the gift on the occasion of Concord's 250th anniversary, September 12, 1885. His gift of $1,000 was to be invested for fifty years, after which it could be spent for the improvement of the town. In 1935, Concord used the funds to purchase the 78-acre Fairyland parcel, deemed "the most beautiful place in town", and set this monument at the pond in appreciation of Wright's gift. It was Concord's first acquisition of conservation land, and with subsequent additions, became its largest at 181 contiguous acres.

Brister's Hill Walden Woods Project Interpretive Site

Walden Woods Project Land

In the 1970s and 1980s, Brister's Hill was threatened by plans for development of a highway interchange and a large office park. These projects were defeated through legal action of the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance and strong opposition from the Concord Historical Commission. A nationwide campaign was soon begun to save Walden Woods.

In 1989, Don Henley, musician and founding member of the Eagles music group, responded to the effort by raising funds to purchase the property and founded the non-profit organization The Walden Woods Project. In 1998, the Thoreau Institute was established in cooperation with The Thoreau Society, to promote research and education regarding Henry David Thoreau. The Walden Woods Project followed with the purchase of Brister's Hill and the construction of the trails and markers found here today.

Walden Woods Interpretive Site – Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill

A chained gate off Walden Street marks the entry point of the Walden Woods Interpretive Site. From here a trail circles the top of Brister's Hill where ground-mounted plaques, inscribed with Thoreau's insights, lead the walker through sections devoted to different aspects of his contributions to society. A meadow is devoted to Thoreau as conservationist, the site of Brister Freeman's apple orchard honors him as social reformer, Grassland emphasizes his teaching, forest succession woods illustrates his pioneering ecological science, and a Reflection Circle celebrates his gift of philosophy and writing.

Walden Woods Project's Reflection Circle

The centerpiece of the Walden Woods Project is a circle of large cut granite blocks that invites walkers in for rest and reflection. Each stone block is inscribed with quotations of thinkers and leaders whose words echo or build upon Thoreau's - Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, John Muir, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Aldo Leopold, Chief Standing Bear, Rachel Carson, John F. Kennedy, Wendell Berry, Martin Luther King, and Edward O. Wilson.

Granite Stone
with Thoreau Quote