



## October Farm Riverfront Trail Guide



Concord River in Winter



Division of Natural Resources  
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William Brewster's Cabin at October Farm

Excerpt from William Brewster's Journal

May 24, 1886

*The river was smooth as glass, the air perfectly still and the songs of birds could be heard for unusually great distances. It was a real singing day, too, and the birds kept it up almost without cessation from morning until night.*

*Along the strip of dry meadow bordering the river, Bobolinks were holding high carnival and chasing the females in the intervals of their songs. They were quite as numerous as of yore and I saw not less than a dozen. The Red-winged Blackbirds have sobered wonderfully within the past week. Their mates are now sitting and I startled many from their nests in the sweet-flag, or blue-joint as I paddled along.*

*A new comer on the river was the Black-billed Cuckoo, of which I heard several. The King-birds have also increased materially since my last trip, at least fifty being seen today. Opposite Ball's Hill, a fine drake Wood Duck rose from the button bushes in shore and circled around the boat just out of range; his brilliant coloring showing plainly. He crossed the point over the woods and disappeared down river.*

*Landing at the hill, I spent several hours along its base and sides, as well as on the top. Birds were numerous with a fair sprinkling of migrants, chiefly Black-polls and Water Thrushes.*

## October Farm Riverfront

### Ecology

With 80 acres of ample water, topographic, and vegetative diversity, this land is outstanding wildlife habitat. Four rare species have been found in and near the area, as well as three vernal pools. Wood frogs, spring peepers, and blue-spotted salamanders breed in the ponds and vernal pools; the blue-spotted salamander is a state-listed species of special concern. A wide variety of waterfowl, shore birds, birds of prey, and songbirds abound here during the summer and the spring and fall migrations.



Important in its own right as wildlife habitat, the property is even also important as part of a much larger whole. Along the opposite bank of the Concord River, extending for several miles upstream and downstream, is the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The October Farm Riverfront is also a critical ecological link with the more than 1,600-acre Estabrook Woods to the west. As a keystone in the network of open space, the landscape provides rich and intact larger habitats in the area and allows wildlife movement between them for breeding, migratory, and overwintering habitats for a variety of wildlife species.

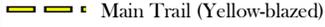
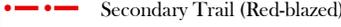
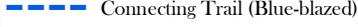
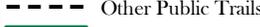
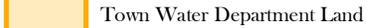
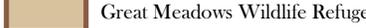
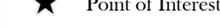
### Location and Access

Access with parking for five vehicles is at the end of Ball's Hill Road off Monument Street. **Please park only in the designated area and not on Ball's Hill Road.**

**Please respect our neighbors and stay on public land and off trails marked "private".**

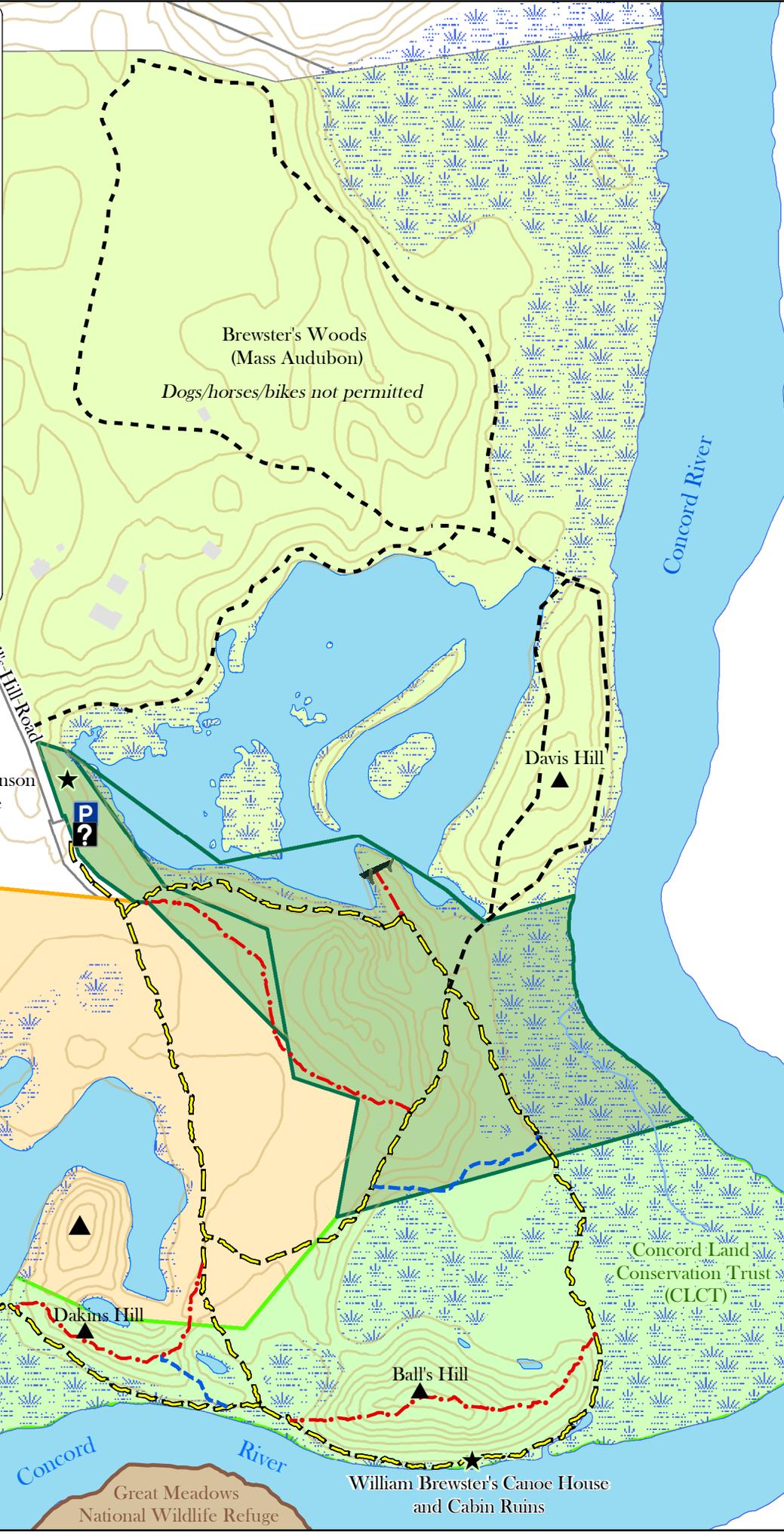
**Dog Owners:** *Keep dogs leashed or under your direct control at all times, away from private yards and buildings. It is the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any feces left by his or her dog.*

October Farm Riverfront / Brewster's Woods

-  Main Trail (Yellow-blazed)
-  Secondary Trail (Red-blazed)
-  Connecting Trail (Blue-blazed)
-  Other Public Trails
-  Town Conservation Land
-  Town Water Department Land
-  CLCT
-  Mass Audubon
-  Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge
-  Wetlands
-  Parking
-  Kiosk
-  Point of Interest
-  Hilltop
-  Caution: Steep Hill
-  Bench



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Division of Natural Resources



Private Property  
(Public Trail Ends in A approx. 200 Feet)

Brewster's Woods  
(Mass Audubon)  
*Dogs/horses/bikes not permitted*

Concord River

Ball-Tarbell-Benson  
House Site

Davis Hill

Holden Hill  
(second knoll)

Holden Hill  
(first knoll)

Dakins Hill

Ball's Hill

Concord Land  
Conservation Trust  
(CLCT)

Concord  
River

William Brewster's Canoe House  
and Cabin Ruins

Great Meadows  
National Wildlife Refuge

## History

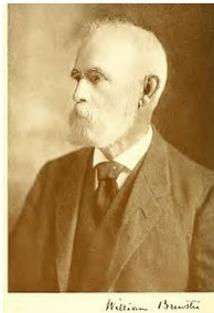
The forested landscape of hills, ponds and riverfront we see today was formed fifteen thousand years ago at the end of the last ice age, when the retreating glacier left its mark on the land around Ball's Hill. Glacial deposits formed a line of hills that parallels the Concord River along the property's southern and eastern boundaries. At the southwestern edge, Holden Hill rises sharply from the river, followed by Dakins Hill, and finally Ball's Hill, the highest.

Long before European settlers arrived here, this area was valued for its rich, varied habitat. It was one of five sites where Algonquin inhabitants hunted, fished, and gathered, and the only one of these five identified in a survey by the Concord Historical Commission as "undisturbed". Henry David Thoreau made note of the Landscapes' distinctiveness in both books and journals. Shortly after setting out on the voyage recorded in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau and his brother stopped to pick late berries on Ball's Hill before taking leave of Concord from that point, describing the Hill as the "St. Ann's of Concord Voyageurs".

At the beginning of the last century, the property became a focus for the observation of wildlife, particularly birds, and the preservation of their habitat. William Brewster bought Ball's Hill in 1891 to preserve a stand of large white pines, and over a period of years, acquired a total of 300 acres between Monument Street and the Concord River, naming it "October Farm". Brewster loved observing bird behavior and listening to their songs. He was the founder of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and the

American Ornithologists' Union, the first president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and the longtime curator of a ornithological collection at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. In 2018, the Beeuwkes family purchased 120 acres of developable land and generously donated it to Mass Audubon.

The farm's main house was on Monument Street, but Brewster often stayed in a cabin built on the riverbank at the base of Ball's Hill. The stone foundations of his cabin and the remains of his fireplace, canoe sheds, and the small boat landing dug into the bank can still be seen. "It is my custom," he wrote in his journal, "when sleeping in the cabin to open a little window by



the side of my bed when I first awake to enjoy the early morning singing without the trouble of rising at an inconvenient hour." Brewster's many volumes of birding journals, excerpts from which were published posthumously in book form as *October Farm* and *Concord River*, make the area around Ball's Hill of special significance.

## Points of Interest

### William Brewster

Brewster had a long association with Concord, having spent holidays in the Old Manse and exploring the environs with his lifelong friend, sculptor Daniel Chester French. He was acutely aware of environmental changes that were reducing the population of many birds. He had an intense discomfort with the fashion trend of the time that killed birds for decorating ladies' hats. His love of nature motivated him to

purchase this property on the banks of the Concord River, both to prevent its development and for use as his sanctuary and base for ornithological observations, where he was aided by his sharp-eyed Black photographer, Robert Gilbert.

### Benson Farm

In Brewster's time, there was a farmstead at the end of Ball's Hill Road where the parking lot is today, the seventeenth-century Ball-Tarbell-Benson House and barn. The Benson family lived here from 1886 until the last family member, Sanfred Benson, died in 1987.

When Sanfred's nephew, Colburn Benson, put the property up for sale in the 1990s, the Town acquired the land and had the house and barn carefully dismantled and put into storage where it remains today.



*Ball-Tarbell-Benson House*

### Carriage Trails

The picturesque trails throughout the property were originally built by Brewster. Horse jumps have since been added for equestrians. These trails provide walkers with comfortable access through rugged glacial formations, but with access to footpaths offering more strenuous climbs, and rewarding river views, from Holden, Dakins, and Ball's Hills.



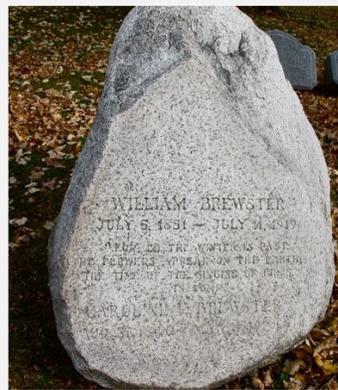
### Cabin foundation

Brewster maintained several out-buildings at the base of Ball's Hill beside the river, all landscaped with native trees, flowers, and shrubs. Only the stone foundations remain of the cabins, where he entertained guests with food and overnight stays. This was his private retreat and base for bird-watching excursions at October Farm and beyond.



### Boathouse

An arched stone structure built into the hillside by the river served as Brewster's boathouse, with an inscription that remains: "W. B. Sept 1910". Brewster had the channel opposite the boathouse dug through the riverbank for easier



access to the river. The Rushton, his sailing canoe, was stored here.

### Concord River

The river location was convenient for Brewster's many birding field trips in

Great Meadows and along the river. He used sailing canoes outfitted with a deck,



### Concord River by Robert A. Gilbert

*William Brewster's Assistant and First African American Landscape Photographer*

paddles, and removable mast. When not reaching his October Farm by vehicle from Concord, he canoed across the Concord River from a landing on the West Bedford side.

### Mount Auburn Cemetery

The headstone that marks William Brewster's grave was made from a granite stone from October Farm that was worked into a natural monument by Daniel Chester French. An



inscription from *Song of Solomon* reads, "Lo! The winter is past, the rains are over and gone; the time of the singing of birds is come."

### Suggested Walks

**Riverfront Walk** - Take the main trail from the parking lot passing trail junctions to the left and right to arrive at the trail along the Concord River. Turn left onto the yellow-blazed trail, following it past foundation stones and Brewster's arched roof boathouse. Turn left at the fourth intersection and continue on the yellow-blazed trail back to the parking lot. Estimated walking time: 35 minutes.

**Holden and Dakins Hills** - Take the main (yellow-blazed) trail from the parking lot passing trail junctions to the left and right to arrive at the Concord River. Turn right onto the yellow-blazed trail, following it across a short dike to a trail junction. Continue to follow the yellow-blazed trail, staying left at the next four trail junctions to a second dike. Turn sharply right onto the red-blazed trail that goes up the steep trail to the top of Holden Hill. This trail runs up and down two knolls and is precipitously steep. Keep left at the next trail junction to stay on the red-blazed trail, then downhill to a trail junction with the yellow-blazed trail. Turn left to follow the yellowblazed trail back across the dike to a fork. Turn left onto the red-blazed trail which climbs Dakins Hill and then down to an intersection with the yellow-blazed trail. Turn left and follow the yellow-blazed trail back to the parking lot. Estimated walking time: 45 minutes.