



Cook Quest

New London, New Hampshire

Physical Difficulty: Moderate

Special Features: Natural

Walking Conditions: Trail

Duration: 0:45

Bring: Field Guide

To get there: Take Wilmot Center east from Elkins, turn left on unpaved Whitney Brook Road. Go about .3 miles and look for parking on the west (left) side of Whitney Brook Road, before the power line at Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust sign #49 (pink mailbox).

Overview

[Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust's](#) (ASLPT) mission is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Mt. Kearsarge/Lake Sunapee region for public benefit through conservation agreements that protect the farms, forest, streams and wetlands – the special undeveloped “open” spaces; stewardship of our conserved land, now and forever; partnerships with private individuals, local governments and like-minded organizations sharing expertise and efforts in protecting land; education of the people of our communities about the importance to them of our growing obligation to protecting our environment and its ecosystems through land conservation.

Clues:

Walk 100 yards **north along the road** from sign # 49, past the power line right of way and look for the pink dot, and orange trapezoid paint marker on a tree on the left. It is the tree that is directly across from the beginning ASLPT of the grass yard of the grey house on the right. **Follow the pink dots through the complete Quest.**



1

Your first clue is the seven large rocks you weave through as you start the trail. These rocks are glacial erratic, which means they were picked up by the Ice Sheet that covered New England about 1.2 million years ago. As the Ice Sheet moved across New England, these rocks were carried along. About 20,000 years ago the Earth's climate started to warm again and the Ice Sheet began melting. As it melted, these rocks were left behind as we see them today.

There are many such glacial erratic boulders on this trail.

(Note: According to the NOAA [2019 Global Climate Summary](#), the combined land and ocean temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.07°C (0.13°F) per decade since 1880; however, the average rate of increase since 1981 (0.18°C / 0.32°F) is more than twice as great. This increase is due entirely to human activity on the planet, producing Green House Gases.)

Keep right. Look for piles of pieces of pine cones on the forest floor. They were probably left by a red squirrel that ate the pine seeds from them.



Next you will come to Whitney Brook which you will pass over a number of times. Count the number of times you cross the brook. You may need this number later on today!

Did you see any small Brook Trout or Water Striders (they look like spiders on top of the water) in the brook?

You should see Hemlock, Yellow Birch

and Red Maple in the forests and a stone wall in the distance on the right.

Look for the Yellow Birch with the hole in the trunk after you cross the second wooden bridge. Have you found it? Do you think an animal might sleep in the hollow of the tree at night? My granddaughters think an elf probably lives here and that whenever he wants to have some fun, he slides down the small waterfall you recently passed. (Did you see it?-it's just back down the trail a short distance). If an elf lives there, what would you name him?



2

Your next clue is a Yellow Birch that has some charred areas on its trunk. It is past the next wooded bridge. How do you think that came to pass? If you said it may have been struck by lightning that would be a pretty good guess.

The trail will lead you through a small open field that has power lines going through it. It is a good place to pick some blackberries if the season is right.

Be on the lookout for a good sized dead Red Spruce that is laying on its side near the trail on your left. It has several Red-belted Polypore mushrooms that look like they were painted by an artist, but they are natural! Let your imagination run wild and decide what you see when you look at this display of natural art. Remember not to disturb it and allow the next person to enjoy it also.



Next you will come upon a large Red Oak that has been cut down. Did you know you can tell the age of a tree by counting the number of rings in the cross-section of the trunk? How many rings can you count? Remember the number.

(Note: Tree rings provide a snapshot of an area's past climate. Thick rings means plenty of water and warmth, thin rings indicate dry and perhaps colder conditions.)

Be sure to follow the pink dots to stay on the correct trail. All other dots are irrelevant.

Next, be on the lookout for a large downed Sugar Maple that has a large number of Artist Conk mushrooms on its trunk. Be sure to leave them untouched for others to enjoy.



Now look for the large Hollow Ash tree at sign post # 27. It has a diameter of 48 inches, the largest of any tree on the trail. It may be 200 years old.

(Note: A sweeping study of forests around the world finds that the older the tree, the greater its potential to store carbon and slow climate change. The 38 researchers from 15 countries found that 97 percent of trees from more than 400 species studied grew more quickly as they aged, thus absorbing more carbon. Although trees become less efficient at processing carbon as they get older, there are a greater number of leaves to absorb CO₂, explained Nate Stephenson, lead author of the study. Leaves are crucial in photosynthesis, the process by which plants make energy and absorb carbon dioxide. [Pacific Forest Trust 2014](#))



Your next sighting is a small quarry on the left where granite was probably quarried for foundation stone. A clue to help you find it is to look for sign post #26. Can you find the drill holes on some the remaining stones? After the holes were drilled, wedges were pounded in them to help split off a slab of granite.

Be on the lookout for acorns in this area. The acorns are the seeds from the many Oak trees that grow on this part of the trail. The acorns are a favorite food of deer.

Now look up the trail for the mossy cliff straight ahead. A section of granite has been split off due to the freezing and thawing cycles of water. Do you think it came from the side of the rock or off of the top? (Sign post #23)



Make sure you catch the left turn of the trail here and look for the remains of stone walls on the right. We are getting nearer to the treasure box.

Pass through a field of ferns, cross over a stone wall, go through another field of ferns and up the hill. Turn left as you near the top of the

rise at the Apple tree, go down a small slope and look for a large stone on the right hidden by a small clump of trees at sign post # 19.

Check out the crevice in the split erratic rock. Is the treasure box there? HMMMM! Maybe that's not where I put it! Let's return to the trail and continue on.

Do not follow the orange marks at sign post #18.

Now you should come to one of nature's fantastic landscapes. Look at this view! Any idea how many mountains you can see? Do you recognize any of them? Can you pick out Kearsarge Mountain?

Now on to the Treasure box. Continue on the trail down off the summit. About 20 feet past the end of the granite is sign post #15 and a trail leading to a large rock on the left. Follow the trail and inspect the rock. You should find the treasure box here.



Hooray, you have found it! There is a stamp and logbook inside to record your visit. There are slips of paper which you can stamp and take home as a memento if you like. There is also a Questionnaire to see what you remember from the hike. Try filling it out and leaving it for me to read. I hope you enjoyed the Cook property Quest!

This Quest was created by volunteer Dave Brazier in 2011. Updated by Vital Communities staff in 2021.

Please be a good steward of the land: leave it better than you found it and pack out any trash you find.



Valley Quest is a collection of 160+ treasure hunts that share and teach about the natural gems, historical and cultural heritage of the Upper Valley. It is a program of Vital Communities, a regional nonprofit that cultivates the civic, environmental, and economic vitality of the Upper Valley. We bring people together, bridging boundaries and engaging our whole community to create positive change. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org.

Have a suggestion, question, comment, or idea for us? We'd love to hear from you. Reach us at valleyquest@vitalcommunities.org or 802-291-9100.