



Strafford Watershed Quest

Strafford, Vermont

Physical Difficulty: Easy

Special Features: Historical, Watershed

Walking Conditions: Driving and Walking. Town and optional trail.

Duration: 1:00

Bring: Car, Compass

To get there: Travel on Rte. 132 W for 10 miles from Rte. 5 in Pompanoosuc Village. You will be following the Ompompanoosuc River on your left as it twists and turns NW with you. As you come over the bridge into South Strafford, bear right to stay on Rte. 132. Travel through the small downtown of South Strafford and continue on the same road into Strafford. (Do not turn left when the Rte. 132 goes left up the hill to Sharon; instead bear slightly right to take Justin Morrill Memorial Highway into Strafford.) When you reach the Strafford Common, stay to your right and travel approximately 1 mile. Next, turn right onto Old City Falls Branch. Travel 7/10s of a mile (go left at the Y to stay on Old City Falls instead of going right on Pennock Rd), and stop at the parking area on your left.

Clues:

1. Out of your car, look up high, and read about Old City Falls. Strafford was chartered in 1761, before there were even any walls. Families named Brisco, Pennock, Thomas, and West Quickly built a sawmill, gristmill, store, and school, doing their best.

The West branch of the Ompompanoosuc River flowed through town, down from the Falls of 45 feet. A new town was forming (and growing!) and the Falls were cool in the heat.

2. Walk back to the bridge which you just drove over, and peer down at the river below.

If adventurous you can choose to hike down to the Falls:

From the parking area, continue into a larger picnic area.

You will drive past a small sign which reads: Old City Falls Natural Area.

3. Walk past the picnic shelter and follow the trail on your left.
Enjoy the hike and the lovely Falls.
You might also be interested in doing the Old City Falls Quest,
which also leads you right down to the Falls and has its own stamp!

The Ompompanoosuc is a river about 25 miles long. It is a tributary of the Connecticut River, which flows to Long Island Sound. Its source is in the town of Vershire. The west branch of this river flows through Strafford and into South Strafford.

4. Back in your car and travel back down Old City Falls road.
Turn left, driving through Strafford.
The river stays on your right at this point and flows behind the buildings;
catch a glimpse, do not be bored.

5. Drive slowly through Strafford, noting the Town House on the knoll built in 1799, on your right. You might like to stop and do the Town House Quest.

The power and falls in the Ompompanoosuc offered this small village opportunities for many mills and factories. If you turn to look at the Town Hall, imagine a large space to the right, on the flat land just beside the river. The river gave power for the R.A. Hatch bedstead factory. It was very successful and produced 6,000 to 7,000 bed frames annually. It was lost to fire in the early 50s. There were also a gristmill, sawmill, woolen mill, acorn mill, and a cider mill. Notice a large brick building on your right. It was a store in the 50s, then a bike shop, and more recently the town post office. Next door, still on your right, there is a Community Building, now the Town Office. During the 50s, Sunday School was held there. Further on, past several houses, on your left, is the large salmon-colored home of Justin Morrill. He was a congressman born in Strafford and was the author and sponsor of Land Grant College Acts. You may tour the home and land. You can also do the Justin Morrill Homestead Quest if you have the time! In the 1860s Strafford also had grocery stores, an undertaker, and a carriage maker.

6. Continue driving south to South Strafford.
Notice Eastburn Road on your right.
You can see the foundation of the former sawmill.
It must have been quite a sight!

7. Next you'll see a white building on your right, close to the road.
This was a creamery in the past.

At this house you will again see the river--
It flows under the bridge and appears on your left,
Rippling, but not very fast.

8. Keep on driving down to Coburn's Store,
Stop and park across the road from the main door.
Start your walk, heading north, after a quick visit
To the family-owned Coburn General Store.

*In the 1950s, generations of the Varney family had owned this store.
You could find meat, veggies, knick-knacks, clothing, penny candy,
gasoline, hardware, and much more.*

9. Walk north on the right side of the road,
past several houses sitting on the bank of the river.
Look for a large white building, Rosa Tyson's Gym.
Lots of exercise and recreation it can deliver.
It was originally a Baptist Church where all could pray.
Today it is a gym and a preschool where many are sure to play.

10. Look across the street at an older home
with large columns reaching for the sky.
This was one of the 14 original school houses in 1820.
Boys going to school only 4 months a year, Oh My!

11. One house past the old school, now look up on the knoll--
It is the Newton School, spiffy and bright with a tall flag pole.
In 1932 this school house was built (my sisters and I attended in the
fifties!)
Now offering gardening, art, musical theatre, world languages, and
more...
It all sounds so nifty!

12. Now is the time to cross Rte. 132. No river in sight,
But we see a marvel: the 1897 White Hall.
Curtis Sawyer Brown gave the Barrett Memorial Hall
to the Town of Strafford for community events,
So everyone could have a ball.

13. Saying goodbye to this location of many a happy event
And facing the steps of Barrett Hall, turn 90 degrees to your right.
March across the road, up the driveway to the Universalist church;
the Evergreen cemetery will be in sight.

14. Meander around and amongst the old, old stones.

Many generations now have peaceful rest for their bones.
You will see Judds, Martins, Lintons, Merchants,
Gilmans, Symonds, and Gadzinskis.
All hard working Strafford folks, and all in our family!

15. Notice several stones belong to Barretts, just across from their Hall,
They were important members of the town and loved by all.
Wander towards the NE corner, downhill, and the river will come into
view,
From the lower edge of the cemetery you can see it twist and turn—
For this river, it's nothing new.
The Ompompanoosuc nourishes farmlands,
lawns, wells, and even swimming holes.
If you can't swim, as we could not, do not drown.
Just wet your ankles you poor souls.

*The river in the current days provides recreation and fun. You might go
whitewater kayaking, rafting, or just lazy paddling in the sun. On July
1st of 2017 the waters were rushing wildly and the banks overflowed.
Damage to fields, buildings, homes, bridges, and mostly to roads.
Bridge #29, which you passed over coming into town, was built 94
years ago. In 1923, it was new and strong, but now "structurally
deficient"--what a blow. A new 46-foot wide bridge has been completed,
as you can see the townfolk were not defeated.
If you stand on the bridge and look up river, peer down to the left,
below the store. Near the river are the foundation rocks of an old, old,
mill. Quiet now, on this shore. The west Branch of the Ompompanoosuc
River is described as running in a steep-sided, narrow, wooded valley,
parallel to Route 132. It is small, rocky, and its watershed is steep. It
has exciting and difficult water runs, so it is popular with boaters.*

16. Up and out of the cemetery and on to the road.
Head south, keeping to the left.
Over the stone Barrett bridge, past the Rosa Tyson Gym,
Look for signs of a new Pocket Park, a welcoming cleft.

17. Past a large gray rock with a bronze plaque, take to the grasses,
Head down, to your left, behind Rosa's playground for lads and lasses.
A beautiful oasis, on the banks of our meandering river, a spot to sit
and hark!
You have found the Strafford Edible Pocket Park!
There are pear, apple, and lilac trees,
nut and berry bushes, and FLOWERS.
Look all around, can you spot Sydney,
the stainless steel sculpture? Perfect for any hour.

Next, look to the left of the heron,
and find a beautiful marble resting spot.
The bench and blueberry bushes were given
in memory of Eva Behren, whom all loved a lot.

*You will see a large variety of edible fruits for you, planted by many
generous students and adults, not just a few. Oh yes, we need to find
the Quest box! Do not worry, you will not get wet sox.*

18. Go towards the garden shed and walk on the right.
There are three spruce trees in your sight.
Go around the single trunked spruce tree.
You will see our birdhouse box. Jump with glee!

19. Leave those relaxing sights and sounds--back to your car,
Go down the road to where you began.
We hope you have enjoyed your visit to our quaint,
Peaceful, and special village--please come again!

Written in 2017 by Lois Frazer and Linda Kahl, sisters who grew up in South Strafford,
Vermont.

Other things to do nearby: The Justin Morrill Homestead, Vermont's first National
Historic Landmark, puts on a variety of events, programs, and exhibits throughout the
year. Check out morrillhomestead.org. There is also a Quest there!

**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 treasure hunts that share and teach the
natural gems and cultural heritage of the Upper Valley with children,
families, adults, and visitors. It is a program of Vital Communities, a
regional nonprofit working to engage citizens, organizations, and
communities in creating solutions to our region's challenges. Learn more
at vitalcommunities.org