



The Floodplain Quest

Haverhill, New Hampshire

Physical Difficulty: Easy

Special Features: Natural, Historical, Vista

Walking Conditions: Trail

Duration: 1:00

Bring: boots, field guide, binoculars, compass, and pencil

To get there: Take I-91 North to Exit 16. Head east (right) off the exit and cross the bridge over the Connecticut River to Piermont, New Hampshire. Then follow Route 10 north (left) to Haverhill. Approximately ½ mile north of the Haverhill Common, turn west (left) into Bedell Bridge State Park. Park at the bottom of the hill near the barn on your right. The Floodplain Quest begins here.

Overview:

The Connecticut River Valley has been shaped over many thousands of years by the flow of ice and water. First glacial erosion and later river flow deposited a thick layer of sediment on the *floodplain*, or flat land adjacent to the riverbanks. Floodplains have been historically important for migrating animals, Native Americans, and early European settlers. To this day floodplains are prized as important amphibian, bird, and mammal habitat, prime agriculture land, and natural flood storage.

Clues:

From the old stone post
Look in back of you to see
The end of the forest—
A thick tangle of trees.

Then look across, west,
To a vast, open expanse,
The flat, cultivated fields
Where crops, birds & insects dance.

Follow the road straight ahead

Between the tilled and planted fields.
Here, a timeless valley tale
Will soon be revealed.

Ten thousand years ago
The place that you now walk
Was under water, beneath
What is now known as "Lake Hitchcock".

Since the glaciers last retreated
More than 120 centuries ago
This land has been continuously shaped
By the water's ebb and flow.

Your Quest moves across a river's floodplain
Heading west, towards Newbury, Vermont.
The Connecticut River sculpted this earth
Through cycles of flow, flooding, and spring thaw.

While today this river's flow
Is kept in check by many dams
For generations and generations
Seasonal flood was the rule of this land.

There is archeological evidence
And ample documentation
Of more than twenty-five hundred years
Of human habitation.

In the late 1600s
Cawasuck and Sokoki bands
Had seasonal villages and encampments
Upon these floodplain lands.

With each new flood, a sheet of water
Covered these broad fields with silt
And on the "river bottom" soil
An agricultural tradition was built.

Now the life that inhabits a floodplain
Has adapted to standing water lasting weeks.
As we pass through the tunnel of trees
Of the floodplain forest we shall speak.

Because each year their roots might soak
 The only trees that here can thrive
 Are trees adapted to saturation—
 And who in standing water can survive.

So, while hiking in the woods, we see
 sugar maple, American beech, eastern hemlock and white pine
 Here, box elder, silver maple
 Hackberry and black willow are the trees we find.

Box elders often grow with multiple trunks
 Hackberry bark has narrow ridges, wide furrows.
 Silver maple bark grows in long, thin, narrow flakes.
 Black willow has scaly, flat-topped ridges.

Before you come to the wooden sign, you might see
 “Potholes” and “sloughs,” standing water both sides.
 In these temporary, seasonal pools
 Many different species live and thrive.

If you have a bit of time to explore—
 And a good pair of high rubber boots—
 Carefully explore the diverse life forms
 That live amongst the saturated roots.

River otter, mink, muskrat and beaver,
 Various frogs—even the leopard!—and spotted salamanders.
 Migrating birds love this kind of place, too,
 You might see them on your little meander.

Resident birds you perhaps might hear...
 Yellow warblers: “Sweet sweeter than sweet.”
 Common yellow throats: “Whichity whichity whichity.”
 Gray catbird’s “meow,” Red-eyed vireo’s nasal “quee.”

Now the reason that we can enjoy this place
 While conducting our floodplain investigation
 Is the joint efforts of NH Fish and U.S. Wildlife,
 Along with the NH Department of State Parks & Recreation.

Now you approach the Bedell Bridge site,
 A place that has seen oh-so-many bridges.
 Storms have washed and blown them away
 Over 2 ½ centuries of European settler villages.

The last bridge? It blew away
 On September 14, 1979.
 But even without a river crossing
 A stop here is well worth your time.

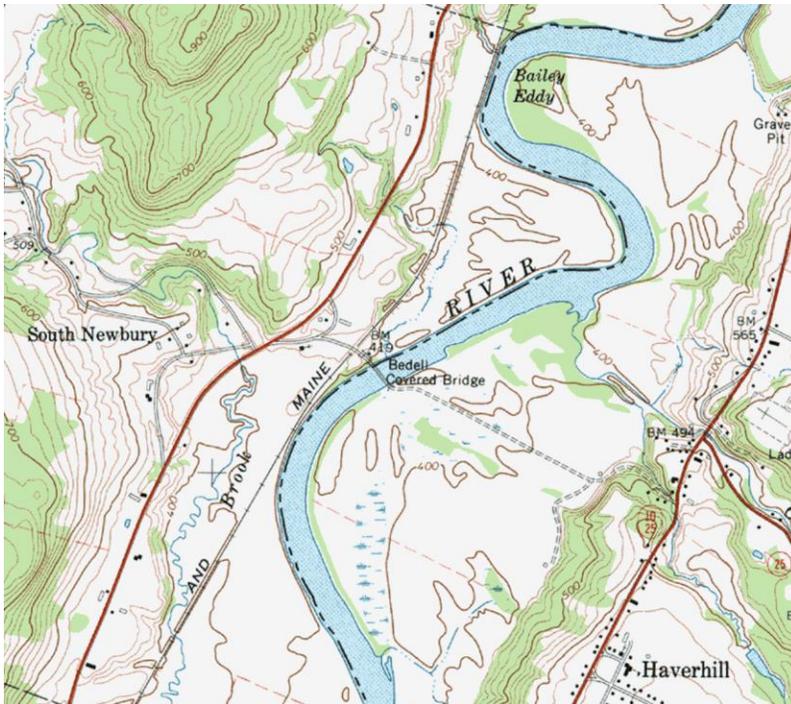
Watch the river flowing south.
 Look and listen for birds in the sky.
 Think of thousands of years of history,
 Of people and animals passing by.

The treasure you seek—Floodplain—has been found
 In the landscape embracing you all around.
 But to find your Valley Quest treasure box
 Carefully search the bridge foundation rocks.

Floodplain Quest Species Check List

What did YOU see?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Box Elder | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Silver Maple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Hackberry | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Black Willow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> River Otter | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mink |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Muskrat | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> American Beaver |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Frog | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> American Toad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Warbler | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Spotted Salamander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Common Yellowthroat | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Catbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Snow Goose | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> White-tailed Deer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Spotted Sandpiper | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Vulture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Common Snipe | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Duck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Hooded Merganser | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed Hawk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Bobolink | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Killdeer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Coyote | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Raccoon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Leopard Frog | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |



Did you know?

While this floodplain might not be as big, many floodplains can be hundreds of miles long. Often, the floodplains themselves contain more species than the river they're adjacent to!

Source: nationalgeographic.org

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