

Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley

Read the Stones

Everywhere in the National Heritage Corridor there are stone walls - some beautifully constructed by master craftsmen, others tumbled together linear piles of rock. They appear neatly around the edges of pastures, and run disconcertingly through the midst of forests that were farmlands a century ago. Each rock is in itself a testament to the geological forces that created the Corridor's landscape. Some came from the bottom of an ancient sea, others were formed by activities that created a huge mountain range as high as the Himalayas, and still others were scraped smooth by centuries of glacial action. The history of people is recorded in the stone walls, not only in the construction but also in the individual stones. Tools, rocks used in or near fires, shards from creating tools, and stones split by plows have all become elements of the walls. Each has a story to tell, and collectively they are a notable part of our environment.

Hear the Voices

"If you listen you will hear the clatter of the mills, the clang of the farmer's plow against stone, the sound of the power of the water at the falls, the voices of those now gone on, the dreams of those to come." ["If You Listen," by Sally Rogers, from *Songs of the Heritage Corridor, CD, 1998.*] Its people, past and present, can be heard telling the stories of the Quinebaug and Shetucket throughout the National Heritage Corridor. They are chronicled by an interpreter at an historic site, in an inscription on a plaque commemorating an important event, or carved on a gravestone recording an individual's life. They are celebrated by actions at town meeting, where residents gather to decide issues, each speaking with one voice and one vote as they have for centuries. Other stories may best be heard in the deep silence of the forest.

Touch the Past

The great strength of the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor is the richness and abundance of its resources – natural, historical, cultural and scenic. Throughout the region there are historically and architecturally significant structures and neighborhoods: National Historic Landmarks, National Historic Districts, and a plethora of state and local designations. Picturesque views abound on National Scenic Byway Route 169, one of the first highways so designated in the country. The natural environment remains largely intact, valuable not only for recreational opportunities, but also as context and integrity for historical and cultural resources. Special designations include National Natural Landmark status for Pachaug Great Meadows (Pachaug State Forest), and the listing of the Quinebaug River on American Rivers' Outstanding Rivers list.

Imagine the Future

At the beginning of a new century and with the abundance of existing resources, the people of the National Heritage Corridor have an unprecedented opportunity to celebrate and conserve the Last Green Valley. Unlike surrounding areas which have already been overdeveloped, the region still has the chance to make thoughtful decisions regarding quality of life and quality of place. The Last Green Valley can be the future, as well as the present.

The Last Green Valley

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley of south-central Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut has been called "the Last Green Valley" in the sprawling metropolitan Boston-to-Washington corridor. The region appears distinctively dark in the urban and suburban glow when viewed at night from satellites or aircraft. In the daytime, the green fields and forests confirm the surprisingly rural character of the 1,085 square-mile area defined by the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers systems and the rugged hills that surround them. The relatively undeveloped character of this green and rural island in the midst of the most urbanized region in the nation makes it a resource of local, regional, and national importance.

Two hundred years ago Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University, wrote that "the Quinebaug . . . is generally lined with handsome intervals. From these the country rises on both sides with every varying gradations into hills of every form, and of heights changing from the small knoll to the lofty eminence. No country of any considerable extent which has fallen under my eye, when unaided by mountains, large rivers, lakes or the ocean, can be compared with this for the beauty of its scenery."

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley is still notable for its quality of life and quality of place.

Amid the enormous economic and population changes of the twentieth century, the region has retained its fundamental attributes of lush pastures and woodlands; clean streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes; small cities and smaller towns representing important developments in American history; and continuing opportunities for individuals and families to enjoy a rural, small-town life-style. In 1994, because many civic groups, businesses, volunteers and local and state governments had banded together with technical assistance from the National Park Service, Congress designated the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, a recognition of the region as a unique national resource. And in 1999, because of the same kind of grassroots effort, Congress enlarged the Corridor to include Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley towns in both Massachusetts and Connecticut.

"The Last Green Valley" is what we are today. It was not always so. The story of the region is centered around its forests and rivers, its swamps and hills, the birds and animals and plants that inhabit it. The story is also centered on the people who lived here – the Native People who used its natural resources first, the immigrants who built the small-town villages that are now so characteristic, the waves of people who built factories, farmed, raised families and moved on. From before the Revolution, this region's economy has provided people, food, and manufactured goods to a growing nation. It was the center of the growth of democracy and still uses the direct democracy of town-meeting government. Its independent people contributed in many notable ways to the government and culture of our nation.

It is by telling and understanding the distinctly New England but nationally important story of the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor that residents and visitors alike are able to celebrate and preserve its special qualities of life and place.

Exploring The Last Green Valley

There are many ways to tour the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley. Visitors are encouraged to use the map to plan their travels and to enjoy—at a leisurely pace—the region’s historic sites, museums, natural areas, country fairs, festivals, and other activities.

Sites mentioned in this brochure are open at least seasonally for 20 or more hours per week. You will find many other delightful sites that are open periodically. Inquire locally about them and about restaurants, lodging facilities, campgrounds, and antique and craft shops.

Annual Events

Each Columbus Day weekend, more than 50 guided walks are offered at historic, natural, and cultural areas throughout the 35 towns in the valley – the Walking Weekend. In August and September, agricultural fairs are staged in various communities. America’s oldest agricultural fair is in Brooklyn. Each year Norwich holds a Rose Arts Festival in June and an Oktoberfest. The famous Brimfield Antique Shows are held the second weekends of May, July and September.

Historic Sites And Museums

Old Sturbridge Village, Route 20, Sturbridge, MA, is a recreated village and outdoor history museum that brings to life the world of ordinary men and women of early 19th-century rural New England. It is open year-round and offers a full schedule of special, seasonal events.

National Parks passport stamping site.

Clara Barton Homestead honors the founder of the American Red Cross and nursing pioneer at her birthplace, a 125-acre farm in Oxford, MA. She was also instrumental in the development and acceptance of the Geneva Convention agreement regarding the appropriate treatment of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. Open seasonally.

Roseland Cottage on National Scenic Byway 169 in Woodstock, CT, was a summer home where Henry C. Bowen entertained U.S. presidents and other dignitaries. The 1846 pink, Gothic Revival house and adjacent gardens, maintained by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, are open seasonally.

The William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut serves as the state’s art museum. Exhibits of American and European artwork are changed periodically in the museum’s two galleries located at 245 Glenbrook Road in Storrs, CT.

The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History at the University of Connecticut in Storrs features exhibits about the state’s native inhabitants, minerals, and animals. Also at the University is the **Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry** that features puppets from around the world.

A Georgian farmhouse is the main feature of the **Nathan Hale Homestead** at 2299 South St., Coventry, CT. A month before the family moved into the rebuilt 1776 house, Hale was hanged by the British as an American spy after uttering his famous last words, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

The Prudence Crandall Museum building at the corner of Routes 14 and 169 in Canterbury, CT served, amid much controversy, as an academy for young black women in 1833 and 1834. It now houses exhibits on black history, abolitionism, women’s rights, and related subjects. **National Parks passport stamping site.**

The Leffingwell House Museum at 348 Washington St., Norwich, CT, is the restored home of Christopher Leffingwell, an American Revolution supporter whose entrepreneurial pursuits included the state’s first paper mill and a chocolate factory. It is open seasonally.

The Governor Jonathan Trumbull House, 169 West Town St., Lebanon, CT, is the home of the only Colonial governor to support the American Revolution. The house, open seasonally, was built in 1735 and features period furnishings.

The Lebanon Historical Society Museum is also located on West Town St., Lebanon, CT, and focuses on the rich and diverse history of this agricultural town from 1690 to the present day. Collections include archaeological artifacts, family histories/genealogies, a stone smoke house and a broom shop. Open year round. **National Parks passport stamping site.**

The Windham Textile and History Museum, 157 Union and Main St., Willimantic, CT, tells the story of the textile industry in the region, and specifically, the history of the Willimantic Linen Company that once had the largest factory in the world.

The Slater Memorial Museum at 108 Crescent St., Norwich, CT, features a collection of Greek, Roman, and Renaissance casts and art from around the world.

Natural Areas

There are many natural and man-made waterfalls along the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers and their tributaries. They include Cargill Falls in Putnam, CT, seven falls and dams along the Willimantic River, and the Yantic Falls area in Norwich, CT. Yantic Falls was a Mohegan outpost and is known also as Indian Leap. Here, according to a legend, a band of Narragansetts battling the Mohegans fell to their deaths in the gorge. The harbor in Norwich also has a rich history, as well as recreational opportunities.

The U.S. Army Corps manages flood-control reservoirs in Thompson and Mansfield, CT, that are used for boating and fishing. Similar facilities exist at sites in Brimfield, Oxford, and Sturbridge, MA.

Parks and forests are located throughout the region. The Mashamoquet Brook State Park on U.S. Route 44 in Pomfret, CT, offers camping, swimming, picnicking, and fishing. At Wolf Den, one of the park's three units, a trail leads to the cave where Israel Putnam tracked down and killed what was said to be the last wolf in Connecticut. Putnam later became more famous as a general leading patriots in the American Revolution.

Brimfield State Forest in Brimfield, MA, includes the three highest points in the Corridor: Mount Pisgah, 1,250 ft., Mount Hitchcock and Mount Waddaquadick, both at 1,150 ft. Nearby, Wells State Park offers many trails, an interpretive center and boat access to Walker Pond.

At Trail Wood, on Kenyon Road off Route 97 in Hampton, CT, three miles of trails wind through the 130-acre farm of the late naturalist author Edwin Way Teale, winner of the Pulitzer prize. This Connecticut Audubon Society preserve offers guided walks, nature programs, and museum exhibits.

The 23,000-acre Pachaug State Forest off Route 49 in Sterling, Plainfield, and Voluntown, CT, contains an extensive system of hiking and equestrian trails, Mount Misery and a beach at Great Fall Pond. The forest is enjoyed by anglers and hunters.

The 12,000-acre Natchaug State Forest off Route 198 in Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Hampton, and Pomfret, CT, and the adjoining 2,000-acre James L. Goodwin State Forest on U.S. Route 6 in Hampton are enjoyed by anglers, hunters, hikers, equestrians, and campers.

At the Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery, on Trout Hatchery Road in Plainfield, CT's, Central Village, visitors can tour the facilities where 600,000 brook, brown, and rainbow trout are produced yearly.

A Special Kind of Park

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor encompasses about 695,000 acres in northeastern Connecticut and south-central Massachusetts. The area stretches from Norwich, Connecticut north to Charlton, Massachusetts and from Coventry, Connecticut east to the Rhode Island border. More than half the size of Grand Canyon National Park and ten times the area of Acadia, the National Heritage Corridor is a special type of park. Its 35 towns with numerous villages has a total population of about 300,000. The Federal Government does not own or manage any of the land as it does in traditional national parks. Instead, people, businesses, nonprofit cultural and environmental organizations, local and state governments, the National Park Service and other federal agencies are working together to integrate the celebration and conservation of the region's resources with the needs for sustained quality of life and quality of place. Today the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers and their tributaries are much cleaner than they were in the 19th and early 20th centuries when bustling textile mills and factories lined their banks. Residents and visitors now enjoy these riverways for fishing, boating, canoeing, and swimming. Besides water activities, the National Heritage Corridor provides recreational opportunities for history buffs, hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, antique collectors, fall leaf peepers, and families out for a pleasant excursion.

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