

The Town of Wilton purchased the Belknap Preserve in November 1999 from the Belknap family. Thirty-seven acres of open woodlands were purchased on the corner of Wampum Hill Road and Honey Hill Road in northeast Wilton. Keen to preserve this track of land as it stands, the Town of Wilton also granted a Conservation Easement to the Wilton Land Trust for this property that will keep the Preserve open for many generations. Additionally, the Town purchased an overlying Conservation Easement on 8.63 acres directly south of the Preserve, which, while not open to the public, will insure this land retains its open rural character.

Features such as open pastures, lush wetlands, rolling forests, and Mayapple Brook valley make Belknap Preserve desirable open space. Many features of the preserve still clearly reflect its agricultural past. The trails cross several old fields in different stages of forest succession and a network of remarkable stone walls.

The main entrance is off of Wampum Hill Road. A short access trail connects to the blue-blazed loop trail. Turning north, downhill, the loop trail passes through a wetland system. The land within this wetland, bound historically by stonewalls, experienced minimal land use. An impressive group of "wolf" trees, large, broad-crowned, excessively branchy trees which occupy more space than justified by their timber value, provide abundant cover and heavy mast crops for animals.

Following the loop trail counter-clockwise, rolling open woodlands predominate. The trail passes through former fields experiencing different stages of forest succession. Eastern red cedar, hickory, sassafras, and other sun-tolerant trees are filling in the former fields. Woodland grasses carpet much of the sunny forest floor. Grey and black birch, red maple and oak trees occur throughout the more established woodlands.

The southwestern corner of the preserve provides a dramatic westward view of the Mayapple Brook valley and beyond into the Gregg Preserve. Enjoy the view and then walk down the access trail to Mayapple Brook where you can cross the bridge and access the 74.5-acre Gregg Preserve.

Continuing on the loop trail, the woodlands brighten into areas that are still maintained as open fields. The tall grasses provide habitat for insects and bird species that prefer open meadows. Look for grasshoppers and bobolinks as you pass through the fields. The fields gently slope down to a wetland system at the eastern boundary of the property. A small stream runs through the wetland and connects to Mayapple Brook south of the property.

At the base of the slope, before you reach the stream, the trail turns into the wooded wetland and heads north and up a rocky ridge. From high on the ridge, especially in the spring and early summer, frogs can be heard from the pond below, on the adjacent property. The pond was created in 1963 when the Belknap Family constructed a dam at the watercourse.

This property is a wonderful place for a walk, not only because it contains rich natural history, it also provides an insightful glimpse into Wilton's early agricultural history. Stonewalls dominate the property. All of the property lines are marked by well built stonewalls and there is a high density of stonewalls within the property. It is assumed that most of the stonewalls were constructed in the 1800's at the height of colonial expansion. With a shortage of timber, farmers turned to an abundant resource, rocks, to construct walls to fence in livestock.

The Belknap Preserve offers a variety of trails. Depending on the amount of time one wants to spend in the preserve an adventurous walkers may follow trails as an entrance into additional trails within the Gregg Preserve. For a shorter walk use the yellow-blazed trail. It provides the option of a shorter route within the Preserve by cutting across the loop trail.

Directions:

From Wilton center, take route 7 north for 2.6 Miles to Honey Hill Road on the right (east). Follow Honey Hill Road 0.7 Miles to Wampum Hill Road. Turn right (south) and entrance is 200' south on the right.

Acreage:

37 acres

Parking:

Adjacent to entrance on Wampum Hill Road.

Access:

Entrance 200' south of intersection of Honey Hill and Wampum Hill roads. Also from trails within the Gregg Preserve to the west.

Trails:

Loop Trail	1.5 Miles	Blue
Access Trails	0.6 Miles	Orange
Cut-Across Trail	0.25 Miles	Yellow

Ownership:

Town of Wilton

