

## WILLARD POND OR BUST!

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Ever since my grandmother visited her college English professor on White Birch Point some one-hundred years ago, our family has had the great happiness of spending summer weeks on the shores of Gregg Lake. We've discovered caves under giant boulders on Patten Hill, created a depth chart of the entire lake, canoed two-bridges-deep into the swamp north of the Public Beach, counted rusted bed frames in the abandoned Antrim Boy Scout Camp, even met Hattie Brown, thirty years ago, and witnessed the arrival and disappearance of the road sign bearing her name.

But we have never been able to walk from the lake we know and love to its smaller neighbor, Willard Pond. The pond is in the Audubon dePierrefeu Willard Pond Wildlife Sanctuary. No petroleum engines are allowed, and it is fly-fishing only. The founding mission is "Peace among all beings." Several times, we have tried to reach the pond via the legendary Sachem Boy Scout trail and always got lost in a maze of marsh and beaver dam. Recently, we copped out and traveled there by car via rural road from Hancock. We washed our faces in the clear water and climbed Bald Mountain off its western shore, but still we had not yet truly discovered the pond. For that, we had to go on foot.

Last year after entering our family cottage on Gregg Lake to start our precious summer stay, I noticed the *Outdoor Guide to Antrim and Bennington New Hampshire* (published in 2009 by the Antrim Bennington Lions Club) lying near our groceries. It had probably been placed in view by a family member for those of us arriving later in the summer. Immediately I wondered, will the *Guide* perhaps show a path from Gregg Lake to Willard Pond?

The *Outdoor Guide* has in its center pages a map encompassing both Gregg Lake and Willard Pond. The map, however, does not show any path between them. Didn't the colonial settlers of the Contoocook Valley, the ones who built those enduring stone walls, want to link the two bodies of water, and wouldn't some traces remain of their efforts? Armed with the Lion's Club *Guide*, my son, Samuel, and I decided that summer 2014 was "Willard Pond or Bust!" First, we'd try to reach it from the Balancing Rock floating in the marshy waste north of the pond, and, if that failed, we'd bushwhack from Brimstone Corner Road up Goodhue Hill and descend to the pond from the east.

Inspired by the center-page map, we took a narrow dirt road towards Balancing Rock, starting at the intersection of Brimstone Corner Road and the upper entrance to Camp Chenoa. We hiked about a mile to a small set of buildings (which we learned later were Francis Whittemore's) and noticed a sign to Balancing Rock pointing into the woods due right. Due right was wrong for the pond, we reasoned, since Robb Mountain was up that way. We continued on our nar-

row dirt road hoping it would head south to the pond. Unfortunately, the road soon bent northwards and up. Abandoning this strategy, we descended to try the approach via Goodhue Hill. We parked near the Price Farm and hiked further along Brimstone Corner Road, avoiding numerous boulders and puddles. We passed the southern end of Gregg Lake and started peering west through the woods for signs of Goodhue Hill. Puzzled, we continued to see sky instead of the darkness that would herald a rise. We briefly tested a couple of logging roads, but they kept running to marsh. Samuel did capture (and release) a small army of frogs. Evening fell, and we still had not succeeded in our quest. Regretfully, we traipsed back to our car. Before driving off, I spotted a neighbor resting on her steps and walked over to tell her our story, just in case.

The idea worked. We met Joan and Frank Gorga, the perfect guides. Retired biologists, they photograph local wildlife and hike the Gregg Lake region year-round. On their kind offer, the four of us met the next morning. We tramped out a circular hiking route and learned not just one but two ways to walk between Gregg Lake and Willard Pond.

Here's the Gorgas' route. Take the narrow dirt road to Francis Whittemore's homestead. Once there, ignore the sign to Balancing Rock pointing hard right. Continue along the road for another 1000 feet into a grassy clearing on the left. Cross the clearing, and you'll be amazed by a guidepost reading "To Willard Pond." From there, just follow the blue blazes, and in less than 30 minutes, you'll see the pond glinting through the trees. When you arrive at the pond's edge, bear right, passing the trail up Bald Mountain and the circular marshy area where loons have nested, and you will reach the road to Hancock. To top off your day, take a dip in Willard Pond. Even without my glasses, I could see the bottom at 20 feet deep, like swimming inside a cool cedar-tinted diamond.

From the road, you can return to Gregg Lake via Goodhue Hill. Take the Mill Pond Nature Trail to the Goodhue Hill trail sign. Follow it for an energetic scramble up to the flat top that has been logged and is jammed with berry bushes. Watch out for black bears in mid-summer! Perhaps happily for us, no berries remained when we came in August. On the far side, you'll find a ledge with views of Pack Monadnock and the daddy mountain. To reach Gregg Lake, descend along a nearby stonewall, keeping your back to the pond. Soon you will spy orange blazes. These will eventually lead you to Knight's Road at the bottom. When the road forks, go left, past a splayed harvesting machine that resembles a double-jointed dinosaur. Soon you'll emerge onto Brimstone Corner Road and then back home, feeling proud. □