

Volunteers Help to Shape the Future of the Kelly-Drake Conservation Area A Special Place in New Hampton

By Gordon DuBois

Community volunteers have been working all summer and fall to clear cellar holes and build hiking trails at the Kelly-Drake Conservation Area in New Hampton. Members of Boy Scout Troop 56 in Plymouth, the youth group from the Church of Latter Day Saints in Plymouth, students at the New Hampton School and community members have volunteered over 170 hours and will continue their work into early winter finalizing the trail system that runs through old farm meadows, along stone walls, over a rock strewn ridge, following a woodland stream bordered by towering hemlock and white pines. The New Hampton Conservation Commission is spear heading the effort to create an expanded recreational resource for not only the New Hampton Community, but for anyone interested in hiking a unique and stunningly beautiful conservation area. A Forest management Plan states, "The land is a museum of artifacts, from old saw blades to gigantic granite slabs each telling a part of the old story. The interior fences, walls, cemetery, orchard, stone piles and fields, in fact, anything created or modified by the hand of man would classify as a cultural resource. These symbols of past life of our predecessors should be revered and protected where found".

The Kelly Drake Conservation Area signifies the origins of New Hampton. In 1775 Samuel Kelly (1733-1813) brought his wife and two young sons from Exeter, NH to New Hampton and built a log cabin adjacent to Kelly Pond (now known as Pemigewasset Lake). Over time he acquired large tracts of land in and around New Hampton. He moved his family to the summit of "the Pinnacle" and gave his sons William and Nathan land at the base of the hill, a part of which is now the Kelly-Drake Town Property. Around 1820 this land was sold to Abraham and Nathaniel Drake. The Drake family farmed the land until 1950 when the house and barn burned down. In 1966 the land was purchased by J. Wilcox Brown from the estate of Luther Drake. In 1978 New Hampton bought the property through funds made available by the federal government's Land and Water Conservation Fund.

This fall the trails system was laid out by Lew Shelly, Snowhawk, LLC, and since then volunteers have been diligently working to clear brush and blowdowns, build rock steps, water bars, cribbing and cutting switchbacks along the steep terrain of the hillside. In addition to building trails Eli Lopez, who is working on his Eagle Scout Award, will be building benches and a bridge across a small stream. The cellar hole complex, which dates back to the late 1700's when Samuel Kelly built his first home has been cleared of rubble and trash which accumulated over the years. Small trees and shrubs have been cut exposing the 200 year old structures, which stand as a testament to the pioneers who settled this rugged land. Future plans call for an improved parking area, kiosk, trail markers and signs along with map and brochure of the area.

The area is open year-round and is not only ideal for hiking, but also snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, hunting or just enjoying a walk along the old stone walls and open meadow. To get there take Rt. 104 from Meredith and in New Hampton turn left onto Sinclair Hill Rd. Take

the next left onto Kelly Pond Rd. drive to the closed gate where you can park your car. Walk pass the gate and up the old woods road. Watch for the trailhead on the right, further along you'll find the cellar hole complex and large open meadows. If you continue following the road you will eventually end up on the shores of Pemigewasset Lake. Happy hiking.