

The NNEC-SIA Spring 2003 Field Tour

The Spring 2003 meeting and field trip sponsored by the Northern New England Chapter, SIA, took place on Saturday, May 10, a day offering splendid weather for such an undertaking. The itinerary allowed participants to visit six major sites whose connecting strand was either the long-abandoned Eastern Route of the Boston & Maine Railroad's Portland Division or its Conway Branch, previously the Portsmouth, Great Falls & Conway (PGF&C) Railroad.

Nineteen persons in all—twelve NNEC members, three SNEC members, and four guests—participated, with the majority meeting at the north end of the Sarah Mildred Long bridge, spanning the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth, NH, and Kittery, ME. The steel, double-decked, vertical-lift structure, accommodating By-Pass U.S. I on its upper level and the railroad stub line serving the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard on its lower level, was completed in the fall of 1940, only 12 years before this stretch of the Eastern Route was abandoned. Until 1927, the York Harbor & Beach Railroad turned off at Kittery Junction, just north of the Long Bridge's timber predecessor, and thereafter the first mile was retained. Thus the stub line now in place is historically the remnant of Eastern Route, YH&B, and Shipyard Railroad trackage. Members were able to

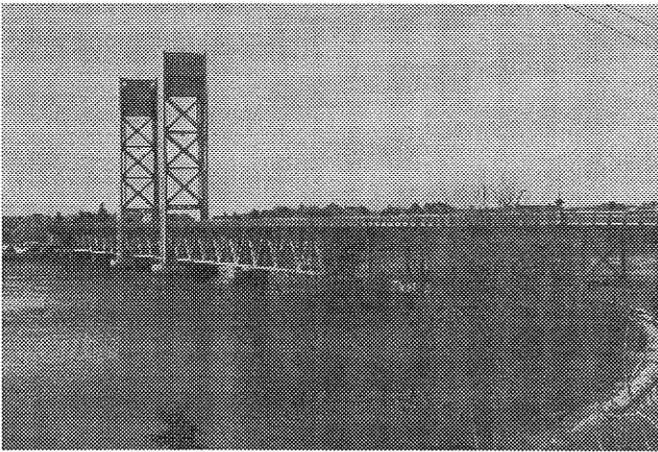


Fig. 1. The Sarah Mildred Long bridge, a vertical-lift structure completed in November 1940, spans the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth, NH, and Kittery, ME. Its lower deck accommodates the Boston & Maine (now Guilford) Railroad line curving downriver to serve the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in

view close-up not only the lower bridge level and the track leading downriver to the naval shipyard, but also the surviving concrete tunnel that permitted the Eastern Route's single-track main line to pass under the highway.

Thereafter the participants proceeded in convoy, with the next stop an unscheduled one, six miles from the starting point. In the field on the opposite side of Maine Route 236 from Marshwood Junior High School in Eliot, a linear array of concrete anchors and a granite-block abutment stand. They are the remnants of a steel bridge permitting the trolley cars of the Portsmouth, Dover & York Street Railway, later the Atlantic Shore Line, to pass over the B&M right of way, going to and from Rosemary Junction Station. The sites of that station and the railroad's Eliot depot both lie near the junior high school.

Nearly 4.5 miles to the northwest, at Jewett in South Berwick, Route 236 diverges left from the trackbed of the B&M's Eastern Route, onto that of its Conway Branch. Here, at the intersection of Fife Lane and the highway remain the ashlar block turntable pit and foundation of the three-bay locomotive house for the former Portsmouth, Great Falls & Conway RR. Ironically, the railroad never ran beyond this point into Portsmouth, but it did extend farther north than Conway, to Intervale in order to connect with the Portland & Ogdensburg RR, later the Maine Central RR. This location bore two previous names: Conway Junction, and before that, Brock's Crossing. The gran-

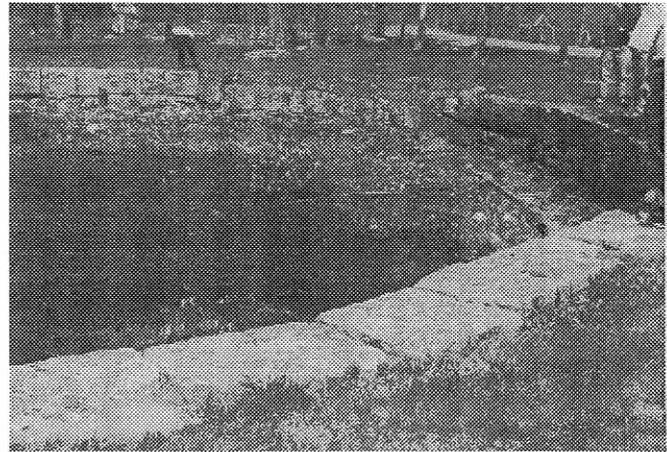


Fig. 2. The granite-block turntable pit and foundation beyond it for the threebay locomotive house, were built for the Portsmouth, Great Falls & Conway Railroad at Conway Junction, South Berwick, ME. The junction was later renamed Jewett by the Boston & Maine Railroad.



Fig. 3 The Burleigh woolen mill was constructed during the 1850s at Rocky Gorge, South Berwick, ME, using the falls of the Great Works or Asbenbedic River for the essential waterpower. The main mill building shown is a unique clapboard-over-brick construction. The Great Works mill site is one of the oldest in Maine, in use since the mid- 17th century.

ite remnants are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Less than a mile farther, on Brattle Street just off Route 236, is the old woolen mill at Rocky Gorge, also known as Great Works. The watercourse is called the Great Works or Asbenbedic River, and powered the first sawmill here c1650, one of the earliest such sites in Maine-not at all surprising, given the height and power of the falls in the gorge. A tour of the mill was offered by the owners, John and Eric Truebe, who also participated in the day's tour. The main building that survives-the more extensive complex on the other side of the river no longer does-is an unusual clapboard-over-brick construction, the masonry interior wall apparently added inside the existing wood exterior. The mill was built by John H. Burleigh during the 1850s, and in the decades following, was operated under a series of names, including the Rocky Gorge Woolen Company. During World War II the mill made woolen army blankets, and postwar it saw successive changes in ownership before closing c1950. An older brick structure, likely a ginger mill, still stands on the other side of the river, and is now being used as an apartment building.

About 1.5 miles farther is the center of South Berwick. Continuing on Route 236, and then bearing left at the second split, the convoy arrived at Hog Point and the bridge across the Salmon Falls or Newichawannock River to Rollinsford, New

Hampshire. Spanning the river at this point is the iron and steel trestle for the Boston & Maine RR's main line, formerly the Western Route of its Portland Division. That trestle was built in 1888, replacing a timber structure, and now consists of three different bridges, in decreasing size from east to west: the main deck truss over the river, and on the New Hampshire side, two successive deck girder bridges, spanning the trackbed of the old PGF-LC and Church Street. The iron trestle was upgraded in 1929; receiving two steel truss insertions and having rivets replace its original iron pins. The ashlar abutments and single pier for the long-gone branch-line RR bridge downriver remain, closely adjacent to the street bridge. The gazebo in Salmon Falls Village Park, in sight of the trestle and the dam and waterfall almost underneath, stands on the site of the branch-line station serving Rollinsford's mill village until the line was abandoned c1941.

Following the consolidation of the participants into a smaller number of vehicles, the convoy then headed west along the B&M (or Guilford) main line to visit the last surviving overhead, timber, boxed-pony-truss railroad bridge in the U.S., at the Rollins or Dodge Farm. Here the bridge permits an agricultural lane to pass over the railroad right of way to access distant acreage. The farm's main effort was a dairy herd, and accordingly, the overhead pony has three trusses, the third one supporting a cattle run parallel to the road deck. All three trusses are-or were, before being van-



Fig. 4 Rollins Farm bridge spanning the Boston & Maine (now Guilford) RR main line at Rollinsford, NH, is a timber housed-pony-truss structure. It is unique among its handful of fellow survivors in being the last overhead railroad boxed pony now- standing, as well as for having three trusses in place, the third one (seen on the far left) to accomodate a cattle run.

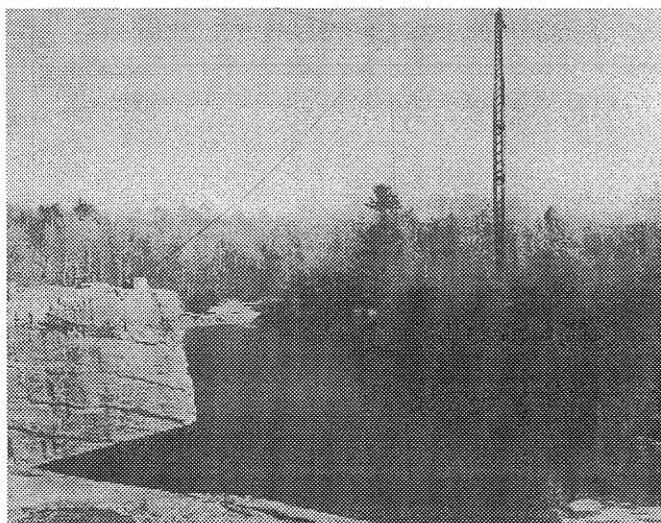


Fig. 5 The Swenson pink granite quarry at Bald Hill, Wells, Maine, was abandoned in 1974 after being in use for half a century. Several structures survive here, including one of the three tall cranes erected to lift the massive ashlar blocks out of the quarry.

All photographs by Nelson H. Lawry

dalized-boxed or sheathed to protect the trusses from the deleterious effects of weather and the smoke blast from steam locomotives. Where once there were thousands of such housed pony truss bridges, spanning brooks, rivers, and canals, now six survive in North America: one in western Quebec and five in the United States, of which four stand in the Granite State.

On its return from the boxed pony bridge site, the convoy passed through Salmon Falls village, so the participants could view the brick textile mills there.

After lunch and the short business meeting, addressing only the location of next fall's meeting and tour (almost certainly to be in western Vermont/eastern New York), the convoy pushed on, now over Maine Route 4. Five miles from the center of South Berwick, Hussey Brook runs under both the highway and the closely adjacent trackbed of the B&M's Eastern Route, abandoned in 1952. The convoy made its second unscheduled stop of the day, to allow the participants to see the original stone arch for the passage of the brook under the trackbed, with " 1842" graven in the stone, marking the year of construction of the original Portland, Saco & Portsmouth Railroad.

The last stop was the abandoned pink granite quarry at Bald Hill in Wells, about five miles from the center of North Berwick (where the Eastern and Western Routes of B&M's Portland Division once crossed at grade). A lengthy walk-about of the site was encouraged by owner Richard Bois, Jr., who also participated in the day's tour. The quarry was purchased in 1925 by the Miniutti brothers, and they sold it four years later to the Swenson brothers of Concord, NH. The operation was served for nearly 20 years by a spur from the B&M RR's Eastern Route. After the portion of the Eastern Route between North Berwick and South Portland, Maine, was abandoned in 1944, the spur was converted into a stub line running north out of North Berwick, maintained by the railroad until the 1960s but paid for by Swenson. In 1974, after the quality of the Bald Hill stone had declined, foreign competition had adversely impacted on the domestic granite market, and pumping out the seepage had become energy-intensive, the quarry closed. Today, structures still standing include a single derrick, a boiler house (an adjacent one has collapsed), an oil tank, and two granite block explosives shacks off in the woods.

The tour ended in mid-afternoon.

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