

Heron Point Sanctuary, a 32-acre Conservation Commission site that belongs to the people of Newmarket, was dedicated on August 2, 1997. Given to the town by Mark Klein and Leslie Parker, this land is intended for observation and reflection. ♦ The sanctuary is dedicated to Richard Lee Atherton, "the bay man," who lived in harmony and friendship with all creatures inhabiting this land. ♦ We ask that visitors please respect the spirit of this place and help us to keep it clean, quiet, and as untouched as possible. We encourage you to record your thoughts and observations in the nature journal at the kiosk.

OTHER CONSERVATION COMMISSION PROPERTIES

- ♦ **Sliding Rock Conservation and Recreation Area, 2.5 acres**
Piscassic St. (next to Twin Rivers Condominiums)
- ♦ **Riverbend Environmental Education Area, 1 acre**
Riverbend Road, off Packers Falls Road
(about a 1/4 mile on the right)
- ♦ **Piscassic River Natural Area, 2.5 acres**
Riverbend Road (just beyond the Riverbend Area)
- ♦ **Follets Brook Environmental Education Area, 1.25 acres**
Mastin Drive, off Packers Falls Road
- ♦ **Tuttle Swamp, 60 acres**
Not yet open for public use

By town vote, the Newmarket Conservation Commission receives 50 percent of the land use change tax penalty receipts. These receipts are derived from the change of use of a property when a buyer or seller pays a 10 percent penalty on the appraised value of the property at the time of purchase. The Commission uses its funds for citizen education, land conservation, and other environmental activities. We are committed to maximum multiple use of conservation areas for the benefit of future generations. ♦ For more information about the Conservation Commission, call 659-5563. We welcome visitors to our meetings (second Thursdays, 7 p.m., Town Hall, 3rd floor) and are always looking for committed volunteers.

Heron Point Sanctuary

Newmarket, New Hampshire



Map and trail guide

The Newmarket Conservation Commission

THE NATURAL WONDERS OF HERON POINT SANCTUARY

Heron Point lies along a bend in the Lamprey River, one of three rivers that flow into the Great Bay. This 4,471-acre inland bay is an estuary, where fresh and salt water mix to create a special habitat. Waterfowl raise their young here; herons, other wading birds and shorebirds feed on snails, clams, and worms in the tidal flats. Estuaries are often called "nurseries of the sea" because so many fish, shrimp, and lobsters depend on them as breeding grounds.

Great blue herons arrive in New Hampshire in late March and head for warmer waters by late fall. This large graceful bird flies with its long neck pulled in, its legs trailing behind. Its blue-gray color, dagger-like bill, and large size (it stands four feet tall) are unmistakable. Herons hunt for fish, frogs, insects and other aquatic creatures in ponds, streams and coastal estuaries. They travel several miles from their nesting colonies (called rookeries) on inland marshlands to feed along the Lamprey River.



As you walk along the river, you may hear a loud slap on the water. The resident "bank" beaver has signaled your approach to its family with its broad flat tail.

Beavers typically build their dams and lodges along woodland streams. You won't see a dam on the Lamprey because the river is too wide and fast and is already deep enough for beavers. Strict vegetarians, beavers feed on the shoots, twigs, leaves, and bark of trees and shrubs. Usually they emerge at night to eat, dragging felled trees back to the water near their underwater lodge. Beavers are one of the few mammals that alter the environment to suit their needs.

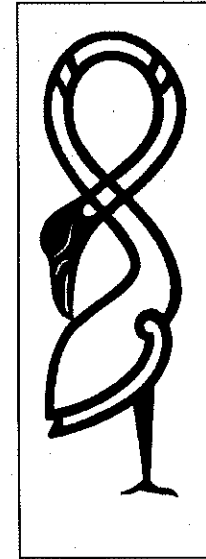
Double-crested cormorants fly low over the Lamprey River from dawn to dusk in search of American eels, summer flounder, smelt, and other anadromous fish (which live in the ocean and breed in fresh water). These black birds with orange chins often perch on posts or piers, spreading their wings to cool off and dry their feathers. Many of these cormorants nest six miles off shore on the Isles of Shoals, where they are safe from predators.

In late spring, pink lady's-slipper orchids, also called "moccasin flowers," bloom along the trail like bright jewels scattered on the dark forest floor. This pouch-shaped flower rises between two large, broad basal leaves. Please leave them for others to enjoy: most orchids bloom infrequently and are rare.

The graceful evergreens that sway overhead include hemlocks and white pines. Hemlock needles are short (less than one inch) with two white lines on the underside. The white pine's longer needles (3-5") are attached in bundles of five. These lacy trees provide shade in summer and a refuge in winter for many birds and mammals, including our resident black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, brown creeper and red-breasted nuthatch. Seeds from the cones of the white pine are eaten by red squirrels, chipmunks, and some songbirds. The tall pines also serve as roosting and resting spots for great blue herons, bald eagles, ospreys, and owls.

As the trail loops away from the river, the vegetation changes to hardwoods—trees that lose their leaves in autumn. The young saplings coming up include black birch, red and white oak, and red maple. They give way to large oaks further along the trail. Tall northern red oaks have pointed, lobed leaves; white oaks have rounded, lobed leaves. In the fall, more than 40 species—flying squirrels, blue jays, rose-breasted grosbeaks, ruffed grouse, white-tailed deer, and others—prepare for the winter by feeding on high-protein oak acorns. Oak is also one of the most important timber species in New Hampshire, producing high-quality wood for furniture and flooring.

The last leg of the trail leading back to the entrance road is lined with raspberries, blackberries, and sumac. In late summer, these berries are a great food source for wildlife, who help disperse the seed. Protected by a hard coating, the seeds are indigestible and so are left behind in animal droppings. Berry bushes multiply thanks to the very animals who feast on their fruit!



THE STORY OF HERON POINT

The history of Heron Point and the Lamprey River stretches back across the centuries, disappearing into the beginnings of time like the meandering path of the river itself.

The land on which you now stand once lay beneath the Labrador ice sheet, thousands of feet thick. As you walk these woods, watch for signs of this distant past. Glacial erratics, giant boulders dropped in the wake of the retreating ice, lie scattered at the beginning of the trail and throughout the woods (1). Some of these boulders are marked by striated ridges, long scratches left by the glacier.

Human history on Heron Point began with a wigwam village. The Squamscots, part of the Penacook branch of the Algonquian family of Indian tribes, fished and farmed along this river for centuries. At the edge of the trail, look for the large grinding stone (2) where Squamscot women may have milled their corn. The Indians must have caught their fish using weirs similar to the one across the river in front of the Town Landing (3). Constructed of sticks and netting, the weir—one of the last in New Hampshire—traps herring and alewives on their upstream journey.

The Squamscots called the river they lived on the Piscassic, which some believe to mean "the river of many turns." This is the name now used for the Lamprey's largest tributary. European settlers renamed the river for the Lamprey eels they caught here. Heron Point, which lies on the south side of Doe's Neck (also known as Lubberland Neck), bears the name of the great birds that perch among its tall pines.

No record exists of conflict between the Squamscots and the English settlers, who arrived before 1635. But by 1672 the Squamscots had migrated west to the Hudson River. Meanwhile, Edward Starbuck and Hatevil Nutter were granted the first sawmill rights along the river in 1647. Their mills, built at the Lower Falls (4) here in Newmarket were the start of a new era along the Lamprey.

As the "Lamprey Village" grew, wharves and shipyards went up along the west bank, and the river was busy with the sounds of boat building. Gundalows, packets, and other wooden vessels were launched here. As the waterfront changed, so did the town, and the river itself. Marshes were gradually filled in, and today buildings stand along the land below the falls (5), where early colonists once harvested salt hay. Farther down river, salt hay (spartina) still grows along the bank (6).

By 1751 a carding and fulling mill stood on the west bank of the river, predecessor to the full-fledged textile industry launched when the Newmarket Manufacturing Company came to town in 1823. Funded by wealthy shipping merchants from Salem, Massachusetts, the Newmarket Mfg. Co. erected eight mills along the Lamprey. Some were built of granite blocks quarried right here on Heron Point (7). Keep your eyes open for "drill rocks," where laborers drilled by hand into the stone. One rock even has a wedge still embedded in a crack (8).

During its busiest years, the mills in Newmarket churned out yards and yards of cotton cloth. Majestic three-masted schooners and 60-foot flat-bottomed gundalows came and went along the river, carrying cargo to and from the mills: stone, bricks, lumber, cordwood, and, in later years, coal. Maneuvering through the narrows demanded precision, careful timing—and iron rings (9) anchored to the rocks. Crews threaded them with heavy rope, hauled their vessel forward, and then repeated the effort at the next set of rings, "warping" their way up river.

Two large rocks known as the "Sisters" (10) guard the entrance to the Upper Narrows. Down river beyond Young's Cove are the Lower Narrows (11), the site of Philip Crommett's ferry, established in 1671. He charged six pence for man and horse, doing a fine business until the town built a "boom," or floating bridge, across the river. Split Rock (12), which sits below the embankment of Heron Point, is another well-known local landmark, visible in many historical photographs. The only covered bridge (13) in Rockingham County passes over the Lamprey between the granite mills.

The Great Depression marked the end of the Newmarket Mfg. Co., as the textile industry moved south. Well-known shoe shops flourished here from 1933 until more recent years. Varied industries have since used the mills, including a brewery, and companies producing electrical insulation, extruded metals, and furniture.

Today from Heron Point, Newmarket's history is still visible. On top of Zion's Hill, which rises steeply above town, you can see the Stone Church (1833), once a Unitarian Meeting House, now a popular musical venue, and the Stone School (1841), now home to the Newmarket Historical Society. Much of Newmarket's Main Street is lined by original buildings. And the mills still cling to the river's edge, their proud profiles of brick and granite tangible proof that Newmarket's past is very much a part of its present.

