This 1.3 mile loop trail (CIL) is located on the 69-acre Cook ASLPT conservation easement #49 at Whitney Brook Rd. in Elkins, on property gifted in 2007 by David and Celeste Cook to the Town of New London. The trail features a panoramic Overlook of Ragged, Kearsarge and Sunapee mountains, geologic bedrock of Kinsman Quartz Monzonite, century-old sugar maples, a “Teddy Bear Cave,” giant hollow ash tree, 900-feet of juniper bush (dead or alive), and a magical walk beside Whitney Brook’s small waterfalls.

The CIL trail starts at ASLPT sign #49 on the west side of Whitney Brook Road in Elkins (below the power line). Walk left into the woods. Follow orange trapezoid + pink dot markings. This section is shared with the Pleasant Lake High Trail (PLHT, green dot).

#1: Glacial erratics — Due to the great number of glacially-deposited boulders on this pine/hemlock shaded hillside, the area below the stone wall was never farmed — the rocks remaining undisturbed since deposited by the glacier 10,000 years ago.

#2: Stone wall — Built in the early 1800’s during the heyday of New England sheep farming. By the mid-1900’s all efforts to farm were abandoned. Thereafter the property was used for occasional logging (now prohibited by conservation easement).

#3: Old farm/logg ing road — The CIL turns left here onto a logging road last used about 1992. Note how saplings have grown up and obscured the abandoned road on the right.

#4: White Pine (Pinus Strobus) — Largest of the Easterns evergreens (over 100 ft. tall, 3 feet in diameter). New pines cannot grow in its shade. The abandoned logging road goes to the right of the tree; the CIL to the left — rejoined shortly by the PLHT (green dot).

#5: INTERSECTION B. The CIL turns left (on the logging road). The PLHT (green dot) continues straight, merging with the Overlook Shortcut Trail (OST, orange dot, .2 mi. to CIL #18).

#6: Gap in the stone wall. The stones were moved to accommodate the logging road. The wall follows the 1773 “LOTT plan” survey boundary between historic “Lots” 35 (near side) and 34 (far side). The standard size for a LOTT was 150 acres. The CIL turns right here, up hill.

#7: White Ash (Fraxinus Americana). Ash, a valuable hardwood, grows to 80 ft. high. It seldom comprises more than 5% of the forest canopy. Those at CIL #27 and #29 still thrive.

#8: “Teddy Bear” Cave. Turn right 100 feet on TB side trail (yellow dot) to small cave (too wet for real bears). At far end, TB trail links to PLHT, EEL. Return here to continue (left) on CIL.

#9: Grove of Hop Hornbeam trees (Ostrya Virginiana). Called ironwood because of its great density and strength. A member of the birch family, hornbeam is short (max. height 30 ft). The trees here appear well adapted to the north side ridge climate.

#10: “Wolf or Witch” Tree. One glance at the ugly white pine beyond the stone wall explains the name. Growing up in sunlit pasture, this 36” diameter tree escaped logging because of its stag-like lower limbs, crooked trunks and deep barbed wire scars. On private property, the tree is not reached by trail. Turn right for the CIL.

#11: Tree form Juniper. One of the few junipers here to grow vertically (the rest are bushes with horizontal branches). As the forest returns and shapes out, the juniper form — their “skeletons” a stark reminder that here was once a farm.

#12: Juniper Ridge. A 900 ft. stand of junipers (Juniperus Communis), some alive, more dead, along the spine of this unnamed Elkins ridge. Sunlight dependent, the bush flourishes on rocky out-crops and overgrazed pastures. In other climes, it became a nursery for white pine, cherry, birch and red maple, which, when grown, shade and kill their host. The bedrock beneath is Kinsman Quartz Monzonite, a metamorphic intrusion similar to granite, and characterized by thousand-year slow-baked rectangular white potash feldspar crystals. The CIL turns right, up the ridge.

#13: Yellow Birch. (Betula Alleghanensis). A full-grown yellow birch can grow up to 60 ft. tall and 3 ft. in diameter. A prized commercial hardwood, its venturesome bark-covered roots allow it to survive on bare rock. The trunk parts probably came from sprouts on a logged stump.

#14: High-bush blueberry (Vaccinium Corymbosum) (to left of trail). Blueberries require sun to ripen (in late July). Birds and bears come here to dine when we are not around.

#15: INTERSECTION D. The PLHT rejoins the CIL beneath this hemlock tree. Forty feet to the left (on the PLHT) is a red pine (Pinus Resinosa) and, just beyond, three northern white cedar (arborvitae) (Thuja Occidentalis). Next to them, the icy/wet weather Ridge Safety Trail (RST, yellow trapezoid, yellow dot) links to CIL #19 on the ridge crest. Back at and to the right of Intersection D, the White Spruce Loop (yellow dot) visits three White Spruce trees (Picea Glauca), uncommon this far south), and a large erratic, before rejoining the CIL at #16, where the main trail proceeds up hill to the Overlook.

#16: Out-cropping amidst the juniper. The roughness of this dramatic 30 ft. stretch of exposed bed rock (Kinsman Quartz Monzonite) was created by the glacier’s rearward “pluck” when moving down hill. The out-cropping is friendly to snowshoers when snow-covered in winter. CAUTION: in icy or wet weather (and little snow cover), use the Ridge Safety Trail (yellow trapezoid, yellow dot) from the PLHT to CIL #19 (see #15 above).

#17: The Overlook. A dramatic 180° panorama (left to right) of Ragged Mountain, the Belknap Hills (distance), Moose Mountains, Mt. Kearsarge, the Mink Hills (in Warner), Bradford Hills, Rowell Hill, King Hill, Pleasant Lake (in winter) and Mt. Sunapee.

#18: INTERSECTION E. Twenty feet past the Overlook, on the right, the Overlook Shortcut Trail (OST, orange dot) (.2 mi.) descends to CIL #5. So, too, does the historic 1830 Spring Trail (white dot) (.2 mi.) descend to CIL Intersection I between CIL #29 and #30. The 1830 spring was the sole source of water for the sheep that then grazed on the ridge. The CIL, however, continues along the ridge crest (being spectacular under a full moon when snow shod in winter).
A 200 ft. wide easement granted to PSNH in 1948. The stone wall crossed by the CIL here is part of the historic 1773 LOTT line (see CIL #6), which is why the 1773 LOTT Line trail (1773, yellow dot) goes to the right, where it also provides bail-out access via the Overlook Shortcut Trail (OST, orange dot). The CIL, however, turns left. Ahead, a large yellow birch trunk straddles the stone wall (its top fell in 2006). Beyond, steep cliff made stone walls unnecessary for containing sheep. Logging being awkward, oaks/maples grew large.

The scraped smooth surface of this ridge top outcropping contrasts with the “plucked” downhill roughness at CIL #16. The stone wall cross by the CIL here is part of the historic 1773 LOTT line (see CIL #6), which is why the 1773 LOTT Line trail (1773, yellow dot) goes to the right, where it also provides bail-out access via the Overlook Shortcut Trail (OST, orange dot). The CIL, however, turns left. Ahead, a large yellow birch trunk straddles the stone wall (its top fell in 2006). Beyond, steep cliff made stone walls unnecessary for containing sheep. Logging being awkward, oaks/maples grew large.

#24: Moose activity. Still evident on the maples are several-years-old jaw scrapes made by moose approx. 5-6 feet above ground. Forest understory is chiefly young sugar maple.

Small Quarry loop trail (yellow dot). A short side trail (yellow dot) goes to one of nearly two dozen large sugar maples on the easement (see CIL #28). Forest shrubbery is chiefly young sugar maple.

Hollow Ash. This giant tree (over 200 years old?) has a diameter of 46 in. — shelter for small animals (but not bear).

Sugar Bush. A grove of nine large sugar maples — dead, dying, thriving. At one time they were tapped (in February/March) for sap (which ideally had a sugar/brix content of 5% or more). Buckets of sap were collected daily and boiled down by wood-fired stoves: 20 gallons of sap per gallon of syrup.

INTERSECTION H. The Power Line Parallel trail (PLP, orange dot) connector from the Deming Easement, joins the CIL from the left at the large double-trunk White Pine. Thirty feet downhill, a second small quarry is accessed by a short side trail (yellow dot). The CIL turns right.

Fallen Red Oak (Quercus Rubra). When this red oak fell in 2000, it was cross-sectioned by Jay Hartwell at 4.5 ft. above ground level — standard height at which foresters measure trunk diameter (and age). The oval-shaped diameter varies between 25 and 29 in. The ring count is 67 years. Check out the thriving large ash tree.

INTERSECTION J. The CIL (pink dot) turns left. The historic 1830 Spring Trail (1830, white dot) begins on the right (.2 mi. to the Overlook). The Power Line Parallel trail (PLP, orange dot) leaves the CIL and, continuing straight, provides a short-cut, bail-out to the CIL trail start/finish via CIL #3.

#30: Power Line. A 200 ft. wide easement granted to PSNH in 1948. Trees are cut and chipped by mobile mechanized equipment every 5 years (most recently in 2009) to keep the line clear and expedite needed line maintenance.

Yellow Birch. Perched dramatically atop bare boulder (like CIL #13). Very shade tolerant, hemlocks are a climax forest species and can live for 600 years. They love brooks.

Whitney Brook. The CIL follows this brook for 500 ft — crossing it six times (four by bridge, twice by stepping stone), to provide a delightful view of many small pools and waterfalls. It is especially lovely after winter snows and freezing (use snow shoes). During spring melt or severe storms, the brook may rise as much as three feet, a time to be cautious. The brook’s headwaters are two beaver-supervised ponds on the adjoining Deming Easement. Occasional brook trout are seen. Notice: THE BROOK environment is FRAGILE. PLEASE DO NOT PUT ANYTHING IN OR TAKE ANYTHING OUT that would change its natural condition.

Fern Rings (Marsh Fern?). These appear to grow around the perimeter of fully-decayed tree stumps. Not evergreen.

INTERSECTION K. The CIL is joined by the upper leg of the Elkins Erratics Loop Trail (EEL, blue dot) at the middle bridge (just above the waterfalls). The two remain paired until the trail emerges at Whitney Brook Road.

The Seven Sisters. Thread your way through seven split-apart glacial erratics. In Greek mythology, the original seven sisters were the daughters of Atlas, placed in the Pleiades star cluster by Zeus.

Turn right on Whitney Brook Road and walk 250 feet — past the Power Line and over Whitney Brook — to the Trail start/finish.

Thank you for being part of our mile-and-a-quarter adventure on the Cook Interpretive Loop. In other seasons, even at other times of day, this trail has a very different look and feel. Please come again.

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For maps showing the entire Cook and adjoining Deming easement trails go to the Ausbon Sargent web site at: www.ausbonsargent.org and you will find them under Protected Properties>Trails in New London. Pink Trail is the Cook Interpretive Loop (CIL); Blue Trail is the Elkins Erratics Loop (EEL); Orange Trail (northern) is Power Line Parallel (PLP); Orange Trail (southern) is the shortcut to the Overlook; Green Trail is the Peaceful High Trail (PLHT); Yellow Trails are shortcuts or scenic loops.