

DRAFT

GREAT HILL

Great Hill is a low hill (elevation 532') just west of Bar Harbor with two summits of almost equal height, separated by a shallow notch or saddle. A brook runs west from the notch into Duck Brook. On the extreme eastern side of the hill there is an Overlook with excellent views of Bar Harbor. The Paradise Hill Road has made a deep cut directly below this Overlook. There is a second overlook a short distance up the hill although the views are not as good. According to the 1915 *Path Guide*¹, there were no views from the summit. With its spruce forest still recovering, there are now fine views in all directions.

Although today there are no maintained trails, in the 1890's Great Hill was a popular destination and had an extensive network of trails. Two of these may be the oldest planned trails on Mount Desert. At the time these trails were built there were almost no roads nearby. Road construction (and the 1947 fire) is largely responsible for the demise of the trails. It is thus important to examine the history of road building before addressing the trails themselves. It is also important to note that in the 1890s, New Mill Meadow was dammed up to form a reservoir. The dam has long since been removed, although there are foundations near the water company building on the Duck Brook Road. There is an unofficial but well-worn trail from the Paradise Hill Road.

Roads around Great Hill

The 1881 Colby Atlas map of Mount Desert shows no roads between Eden Street and the Eagle Lake Road. In the following decade, real estate developers, chiefly Charles T. Howe, built a network of roads around the lower hills near Bar Harbor to create lots for cottages. These included Highbrook Road, Bloomfield Road, Woodbury Road, Devon Road and the northern portion of Cleftstone Road ending at the Hugh McMillan estate just south of the junction with Devon Road.² By 1896 Cleftstone Road had been completed south to the Eagle Lake Road.³

About 1902 the Champlain Road was constructed around the north and west sides of Great Hill to link Woodbury Park to Eagle Lake⁴. This road was later called the New Eagle Lake Road and recently the Park has renamed it the Duck Brook Road. I will use the last as being the most descriptive and least confusing even though it is not historic⁵.

After World War II, the Park constructed the Paradise Hill Road from the Eagle Lake Road to Hulls Cove, where the Visitors' Center was later built. This road opened in the early 1950's. The road curves around the eastern side of Great Hill on a huge amount of fill and makes a deep cut under the Overlook, obliterating the trails on this side of the hill.

In addition to the road itself, two entrances to [Paradise Hill Road](#) ~~it~~ have destroyed a substantial part of several trails. The entrance ramp from the Eagle Lake Road has obliterated a large piece of the Bracken Path, including its original entrance. The West Street Extension was constructed at about the same time as the Paradise Hill Road. Originally it led to the Duck Brook Road, with a branch going to the Paradise Hill Road. Later this was rebuilt, so that the West Street Extension leads directly to the Paradise Hill Road and the Duck Brook Road branches right for about 500 feet to its original alignment. All of this construction has obliterated much of the lower part of several trails in the area.

To accommodate the Paradise Hill Road, the Eagle Lake Road was rerouted through a deep cut and under a new bridge. The cut went through the original entrance to the Bracken Path.

Trails of Great Hill

“ROYAL FERN PATH – Woodbury Park to Reservoir Corner.

BRACKEN PATH – Eagle Lake Divide to Reservoir Corner.”

Woodbury Park to Overlook Path (CLR #303)

Cleftstone Road to Overlook Path (CLR #304)

Overlook to Great Hill Summit Path (CLR #303)

Southwest Trail (CLR #306)

Brook or Northwest Trail (CLR #310)

Unofficial Trail to the North Summit

Summary of Trail Development

The historic trails on Great Hill consist of two trails (Bracken Path and Royal Fern Path) which make a circuit around the base of the hill, and three trails which ascend to the two summits.

The 1891 Annual Report of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association briefly describes the trails then in existence:

“ROYAL FERN PATH – Woodbury Park to Reservoir Corner.

BRACKEN PATH – Eagle Lake Divide to Reservoir Corner.”

(Woodbury Park was at west of Bar Harbor village at the foot of Great Hill; Reservoir Corner was where the Duck Brook Carriage Road Bridge is today, and Eagle Lake Divide is on the Eagle Lake Road where it crosses the ridge between Cadillac Mountain and Great Hill.)

These trails had been in existence for some time, probably since the mid 1880s. They connect at Reservoir Corner with the Duck Brook Path which the CLR dates to 1874. They are clearly trails which were planned and deliberately constructed, not trails which arose spontaneously from repeated use. As they predate the V.I.A., it is not clear who constructed them⁶.

The 1891 V.I.A. Annual Report also includes three maps drawn by Francis Peabody⁷. One, titled “Western Group of Wood Paths,” shows both of these trails but no trails on Great Hill itself.

The 1896 BRJ⁸ map of Mount Desert Island shows both of these trails and a trail which starts from Bloomfield Road opposite Woodbury Park (unnamed on the map). This trail climbs to the Overlook and then descends to Cleftstone Road.

The first real Trail Map was the 1901 BRJ map. This shows the trails previously existing plus a trail from the Overlook to the north summit of Great Hill, continuing over the south summit and then down the southwest ridge to meet the Bracken Path. Another trail climbs the west side of the Hill, following a brook from near Reservoir Corner to the saddle between the two summits. The V.I.A. Annual Reports for 1892 and 1893 speak of hopes to construct trails over Great Hill. These trails were apparently constructed between 1896 and 1901.

The trails are described in the 1915 *Path Guide* (walk number 1) and *Walks*⁹ (number 48) consistently with the maps.

These trails remained in existence until the 1947 fire, after which none were restored. Most of this system can be followed with difficulty today.

In 2007 the Park discovered that an extensive network of rogue trails had been constructed on Great Hill. The Park obliterated this network, but in the process may have destroyed cairns and other indications of the historic trail system.

Description of Trails

The following descriptions of the trails are intended to be used with GPS tracks located in the folder "Northern Trails Combined." Many of the trails are quite hard to locate and in some cases one has to trust GPS tracks taken from the 1942 topographic map as there are no indications of a trail on the ground. I have given general directions and distances but these are not meant to form a compass course.

Bracken Path (CLR #307)

The Bracken Path was one of Mount Desert's oldest planned trails. It was constructed before 1890. It originally started at the Eagle Lake Road and followed a private road north to the base of Great Hill. It then turned west and descended to New Mill Meadow where it turned north and paralleled the shore of a reservoir, created by damming Duck Brook, to the junction at Reservoir Corner. In the 1894 V.I.A. Annual Report Herbert Jaques stated the he understood that the Bracken and Royal Fern Paths needed some work but that he had not been able to go there. In the 1895 Report he reported that, "The end of the Bracken Path has been turned, so that it now starts at the old spring just beyond the Cromwell's Harbor road, instead of opposite the Green Mountain road as formerly. A branch has also been cut from the Bracken Path coming out at Eagle Lake." The branch to Eagle Lake would appear to be the Water Pipe Trail (CLR#361) which appears on maps from 1896, 1901 and 1903 BRJ maps but is removed thereafter.

The Duck Brook Road (or Champlain Road as it was first called) was built about 1902. Very likely this would have covered over the original course of the Bracken Path near Duck Brook and the reservoir, and the path would have been moved east a short distance. Comparing the 1901 and later maps, it does appear that the path is slightly further east. However, there is no written evidence of this. In 1906 and thereafter the BRJ maps show a short spur trail leading from the bend in the Bracken Path to the Duck Brook Road.

Although the Bracken Path is shown on the 1942 topographic map, it was not reopened after the fire.

The route of the Bracken Path is best described in four sections. The two entrance sections have been badly obliterated by later road construction and are described for historical interest. The other two can be followed quite easily using GPS.

1. Original Entrance. 0.1 miles (Track "Bracken Road")

Start southwest from the Eagle Lake Road opposite Cleftstone Road, about 0.2 mile west of the Kebo Valley Club, on the old route of Eagle Lake Road. The abandoned roadway is still followed by telephone lines so it remains quite clear and there is a well-worn path. In 350 yards a woods road forks NW to the right (Waypoint "BR1"). It is easy to spot because it is obstructed by several large blocks of

granite. This road was the original entrance. It is easily followed for 150 yards until it reaches the cut for the present Eagle Lake Road (BR2).

The road continued on the far side but has been obliterated by construction of the Paradise Hill Road and the entrance ramp. To continue on the Bracken Path, walk left (west) a short distance to the park road and follow it across the overpass to the beginning of section 3 described below (BR6).

2. 1895 Entrance. 0.3 miles (Track "Bracken Path East")

Start from the Cleftstone Road, about 100' north of the Eagle Lake Road (BR3). There is no evidence of a trail but the terrain is easy walking on flat land just south of a small knoll strewn with rocks. In about 100 yards the route becomes a faint path along the north bank of Eddie's Brook, and follows the brook around a bend to the right. About 300 yards from the start the 1942 map shows the trail turning due west to the ridge (BR4). The drainage must have been different 100 years ago because this is now a swamp with much standing water. The faint path leads north and can be followed a short way but then it is necessary to turn left off the path and circle the swamp as best as possible and return to the original route on the far side. Here the land rises sharply toward the ridge and soon becomes fill for the entrance ramp to the Paradise Hill Road, eliminating any hope of locating the original trail. According to the 1942 map, the trail emerged on the entrance ramp at waypoint BR5. Crossing the entrance road, there is a small path through blueberries for about 75 yards to the Paradise Hill Road where the main trail begins at BR6.

3. Bracken Path from Paradise Hill Road to Duck Brook Road. 0.4 miles (Track "Bracken Path West")

This section of the path is in good condition and continues to get some use. The starting point (BR6) is on the Paradise Hill Road about 100 yard south of the intersection with the entrance ramp. Walk west through an open grassy area (there are also several small paths leading to blueberries just to the southwest) about 50 feet until reaching a woods road emerging from under road fill and leading northwest (BR7). This is the same road as described in section 1. Follow the road, which is well built on a rock foundation visible at the left. The road curves left and a well-worn path becomes evident. The road itself seems to end or lead to the right. It is not clear what this road was as no old maps show a homestead here. There may have been a small quarry on the south flank of Great Hill.

Continue west gently downhill on the path. In 0.25 miles the Southwest Trail to the summit forks to the right (BR8), although there is very little to indicate a trail. Seventy-five yards further there is a fork (BR9). Bear right, still on the Bracken Path. The path left is a false trail; it soon ends in a swamp. However, about 60 yards further the Fawn Pond Trail branches left (BR10). There is not much to indicate that this is a trail, although it can be followed and a route discerned to the Duck Brook Road. In still another 100 yards (0.37 miles from the start) the northern section of the Bracken Path forks to the right (BR11). Continue left on the worn path for a final 75 yards to the Duck Brook Road (BR12) near a utility pole with the legend P53-15. Just off the trail to the south of this final segment there is an abandoned Buick from the 1940's.

To locate the Bracken Path from the Duck Brook Road, look for the utility pole.

4. Bracken Path parallel to the Duck Brook Road. 0.6 miles (Track "Bracken Path north")

It is not recommended to attempt following this segment without a GPS device. In some places a stretch of trail is very clear but in others not. The trail runs generally north, or a little east of north, between 100' and 250' east of the Duck Brook Road. The woods are quite thick, and in the southern

portion the road is not visible. There are no cairns. Once you have located the path it is usually fairly easy to see where it leads, although if you get off it, it is hard to recognize a trail nearby.

Start at the fork (BR11) on the Bracken Path coming west from the Paradise Hill Road (or east from the Duck Brook Road). For the first 100 yards or so there is very little evidence of a trail but as you continue north the route becomes more apparent. In 0.42 mile (750 yards) the trail comes to a brook (BR13). The Northwest (or Brook) Trail follows this brook up to the notch between the two summits. Follow the brook west for a few yards to find the continuation of the Bracken Path continuing north. The remainder of the trail is quite close to the road which is almost always visible. About 125 yards north of the brook the Bracken Path crosses an old and little used dirt road (BR14) which leads uphill to a water tank. Seventy-five yards further the path crosses a bigger and more recent dirt road which leads uphill to another water company installation (BR15). In about 100 yards the Bracken Path joins the Royal Fern Path coming in from the left (BR16). If you don't want to continue around Great Hill on the Royal Fern Path, walk through the open woods to the Duck Brook Bridge. Reservoir Corner was probably about where the small water company building stands. The small road to the right of it leads down to the remains of a dam over Duck Brook which could have been crossed to reach the trails on the far side.

Royal Fern Path (CLR #305) (Tracks: Royal Fern Path 1, 2, and 3)

The Royal Fern Path started at Woodbury Park and circled the northern side of Great Hill to join the Bracken Path, as well as the Duck Brook Trail and the Sweet Fern Trail, at Reservoir Corner. Woodbury Park is no longer a park and I have been unable to find any real evidence of a trail east of the Paradise Hill Road. According to the BRJ maps from 1909 on, the Royal Fern Path branched off the Woodbury Park to Overlook Trail (or vice versa) a short distance west of Bloomfield Road, opposite Woodbury Park¹⁰.

Because the east end of the trail is missing, I will describe the route as a continuation of the Bracken Path. The condition of the trail from the Bracken Path to the Paradise Hill Road is similar to that of the Bracken Path and can be followed using GPS except for one section through a flooded area. Again, it is not recommended to follow this trail without using a GPS device.

Start from the end of the end of the Bracken Path or from the Duck Brook road opposite the carriage road bridge (waypoint RF1). The path parallels the Duck Brook Road although it makes a couple of sharp zigzags. In about 250 yards it bears right uphill and then onto open ledges where it is marked by cairns. A rogue trail marked by cairns crosses here, coming in from the northwest and leading southeast onto open ledges toward the summit of Great Hill (RF2).

The Royal Fern Path continues more or less east on open rock and then descends slightly to an area which has become a wetland (RF3). It appears that the trail originally circled this at the base of a steep slope, but the route here has become impassable. The best alternative is to backtrack to where you can climb onto open ledges and head east and northeast again, descending steeply to locate the trail on level ground at the foot of the ledge (RF4). There are a few cairns here and the trail can be followed south and then southeast to the Duck Brook Road (RF6) For the last few yards the trail is over an old road that leads up to an abandoned reservoir.

The trail continues on the far side of the Duck Brook Road on an easily-spotted ramp leading up the side of a rocky outcrop. However, at the top the trail disappears, although it is easy to walk about 100 yards through high grass to reach the Paradise Hill Road (RF7).

There is a path descending the fill on the far side and at its base the Royal Fern Path crosses a heavily used path that leads from the Duck Brook Road to the Bar Harbor Motel on Eden Street (RF8). (This path does not appear on any map.) Beyond, there is some indication of a trail leading southeast through very open woods. Evidence of a trail becomes less and less. Three hundred yards beyond the motel path, the Royal Fern Path comes to the abandoned section of the Champlain Road which is a short distance from the current entrance to the Duck Brook Road (RF9). The roadbed of the Champlain Road is easy to follow down to Bloomfield Road but I have not been able to find any evidence of a nearby trail. Distance: Bracken Path to Champlain Road: 0.56 miles.

Woodbury Park to Overlook Path (CLR #303) (Tracks: Woodbury Park to Overlook 1, 2 and 3)

The 1896 BRJ map shows a trail from Woodbury Park to the Overlook which then descends to Cleftstone Road. In 1901 and thereafter the BRJ maps show a trail which continues from the Overlook to the summit. I am treating these as three separate trails.

The route of the Woodbury Park to Overlook Path has been almost completely obliterated by road construction. As noted above, there is no evidence of any paths in the wooded area opposite the former Woodbury Park. As a result, I do not recommend attempting to follow this route and provide a description only as a matter of historical interest. To reach the Overlook one should use the Cleftstone Road approach or start from Paradise Hill Road.

There is a short stretch of trail near the base. Start where the Royal Fern Path comes to the abandoned Champlain Road and new entrance to Duck Brook Road (RF9). Cross the Duck Brook Road obliquely to WP1. It seems probably that the path went almost due south around the east side of a rocky knoll to the West Street Extension. (WP2) The far side has been disturbed by grading for an unknown purpose and almost immediately one encounters massive fill for the Paradise Hill Road. It is pointless to climb this because on the opposite side of the Paradise Hill Road there is a deep cut into the side of Great Hill. To reach the Overlook, take West Street Extension to the Paradise Hill Road and walk left (southwest). Just before the beginning of the road cut, walk uphill in the woods parallel to the road. There are intermittent indications of a social trail having been worn in here, but it is not continuous. As the road cut reaches its highpoint, you will join the original trail which leads a few yards to an open area behind the Overlook. The Overlook itself is to the east on a rocky ledge. There are superb views of Bar Harbor and the Porcupine Islands.

Cleftstone Road to Overlook Path (CLR #304) (Track: Cleftstone Road to Overlook)

The path from Cleftstone Road to the Overlook is quite faint, but can be followed especially with the use of a GPS device. It is not difficult and there is not a problem crossing the Paradise Hill Road.

This path starts from Cleftstone Road, 0.25 miles north of the Eagle Lake Road, opposite a newly constructed house. There is a flight of about 20 stone steps leading diagonally up the bank; although they are obscured by fallen trees and leaves. (CL1). At the top of the steps, the path goes west, uphill, passing an old cairn (CL2) to the concrete foundation of what was probably a garage (CL3). There is a turnaround and an old road leading south. These are the remains of the Rowell estate which was burned in the fire. It is possible that the original route of this path went diagonally through what was later the estate (see 1941 Lynam Real Estate Map) and that it was rerouted to the steps along the boundary of the property.

At the foundation, the path turns north, following a faint woods road. This curves to the slightly to the left and comes to fill for the Paradise Hill Road. Cross the road at CL4 and scramble up a steep

bank. Follow a natural route northwest up what may have once been a woods road for about 75 yards and then turn north and continue uphill about 100 yards to a level area behind the Overlook (CL5). The Overlook itself is a few yards to the east on a rocky ledge.

Total distance: 0.22 miles.

Overlook to Great Hill Summit Path (CLR #303) (Tracks: Great Hill NE Trail, Gt Hill between summits)

The trail from the Overlook to the summit of Great Hill is actually in quite good condition. It starts behind the Overlook where the Trails from Cleftstone Road and Woodbury Park meet (GH1). It goes almost due west over level and then rising ground, passing a fairly recent cairn (GH2). In 325 yards, after climbing about 100', the ground starts to level off (GH3) and the trail turns southwest for another 200 yards to the North Summit (GH4).

A trail continues southwest into the notch between the two summits. It is fairly easy to spot a route descending from the rocky summit but the notch is open woods and grass without much evidence of a trail. There is a junction here with the trail from the Duck Brook Road (GH5). To reach the South Summit, see the description of the Southwest Trail below.

Total distance: 0.34 miles.

Southwest Trail (CLR #306) (Track: Great Hill Southwest Trail)

This trail is a continuation of the trail from the Overlook that descends the southwest slope of Great Hill to the Bracken Path. It is not a particularly logical route and unlike the other trails, it has not received any informal maintenance and does not have a worn path. However, the route is quite easy to follow using a GPS device.

The trail starts at the junction in the notch between the two summits. Walk southwest through the notch and climb whatever seems to be an easy route to the top of the rock outcrop. There is a good route up a gentle slope a bit to the east, which then reaches the South Summit (GH6) across a grassy area. There are actually two summits of equal height (526'). The Southwest Trail goes due west from the northern of the two and leaves the open rocky area at GH7. A logical route can be followed in a fairly straight line down to the base of Great Hill where it joins the Bracken Path at BR8. From time to time there are indications that this had been a trail, including a few possible fallen cairns. Two recent Bates cairns were found in 2010.

Total distance: 0.33 miles.

Brook or Northwest Trail (CLR #310) (Track: Great Hill Northwest Trail)

The Brook Trail follows a small brook from the Duck Brook Road to the notch between the two summits of Great Hill. The trail has received some user maintenance (branches cut back) and there is a faint path much of the way. Because it hugs the bank of the brook it is easy to follow. Occasionally there are thickets of young spruce to push through.

The trail starts from the Duck Brook Road 225 yards south of the carriage road bridge (GH 8). Follow the left bank of a small brook. In about 25 yards the Bracken Path forks left (north). The Bracken Path joins this trail for about 100' and then forks right at BR13. Continue along the brook, avoiding several false trails leading left or right to open ledges. As the ground becomes level and the brook disappears, evidence of a trail becomes fainter. Continue walking southeast until reaching the

junction in the notch (GH5). There is almost nothing to indicate any trails here but I assume the junction was at the low point in the saddle.

To descend, walk northwest from the saddle until reaching the brook and follow this down to the road.

Distance: 0.33 miles.

Unofficial Trail to the North Summit (Track: Great Hill Trail)

An unofficial but well-worn trail leads from the overlook parking area on the Paradise Hill Road (about 0.2 miles north of the Eagle lake Road entrance)(GH9). Climb the left (south) end of the rock outcrop opposite the parking area. At the top a path leads northwest in an almost straight line to the summit (GH4). There are no cairns but it is heavily used and easy to follow.

Descending, walk southeast from the summit, approximately in the direction of Champlain Mountain. The trail leads through a few trees here but mostly is in the open.

Distance: 0.17 miles.

¹ *A Path Guide of Mount Desert Island, Maine*, published by the Village Improvement Societies of Bar Harbor, Seal Harbor, Northeast and Southwest Harbors, 1915.

² See Real Estate Map of Bar Harbor, undated, but estimated to be about 1890.

³ See 1896 (dated) Real Estate Map of Bar Harbor.

⁴ The Champlain Road appears on the 1903 but not the 1901 BRJ (see note 8 below) maps.

⁵ According to the BRJ maps (see note 8 below), the name "Duck Brook Road" was used for the portion of Eden Street (Route 3) near Duck Brook and thus was unavailable.

⁶ An effort was made to establish a Village Improvement Association in the 1880s but this fell apart. The V.I.A. was reconstituted in 1890. Possibly the earlier group is responsible for the paths. They also could have been built by people not operating under the auspices of any organization.

⁷ The CLR (Margaret Coffin Brown, *Pathmakers: Cultural Landscape Report for the Historic Hiking Trail System of Mount Desert Island*, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2006) dates these to 1890 for the 1891 report. They were subsequently reprinted frequently in the *Bar Harbor Record*.

⁸ In 1893 Edward L. Rand produced a map to accompany the *Flora of Mount Desert Island, Maine*. This map did not show many trails. In 1896, Waldron Bates and Herbert Jaques joined Rand in improving the map which they reissued as a wall map. Starting in 1901, the three men reissued the map every few years as a series of Path Maps. I refer to these as the BRJ maps.

⁹ *Walks on Mount Desert Island, Maine*, by Harold Peabody (east side) and Charles H. Grandgent (west side). Privately printed, 1926.

¹⁰ The BRJ maps seem to have had difficulty in getting the layout of trails starting from Woodbury Park accurately portrayed. The 1896 map shows both the Royal Fern Path and the Overlook to Woodbury Park Trail starting separately from Bloomfield Road opposite Woodbury Park. The 1901 Path Map of Eastern Mount Desert (in color) shows the Overlook Trail starting from Woodbury Park and the Royal Fern Path crossing it about 100 yards west, and continuing to end at the corner of Cleftstone Road and Devon Road. However, the small black and white path map of 1901 merely shows the Royal Fern Path branching from the Overlook Trail (or vice versa). The 1903 and 1906 maps show the Royal Fern Path ending at Champlain Road west of the old reservoir. Note that the Champlain Road was constructed between the 1901 and 1903 maps and may have obliterated the course of the Royal Fern Path. The Overlook Trail started from Woodbury Park as before. The 1909 map shows the Royal Fern Path crossing the Champlain Road for about 0.2 miles and then recrossing back to the south side and joining the Overlook Trail very close to Woodbury Park. All subsequent BRJ maps show the trails in the same way. My hypothesis is that the spur to Cleftstone and Devon Roads on the colored 1901 map is simply wrong, and that the Royal Fern and Overlook Paths had always forked a short distance from Woodbury Park. The Royal Fern Path was damaged by the construction of the Champlain Road and was restored and rerouted a few years later.

The 1942 topographic map show the Royal Fern Path and Overlook Trail coming together at the Champlain Road and no footpath leading to Woodbury Park.

Neither the 1915 *Path Guide* nor *Walks* provide enough detail to clarify this matter.