



A section gang building the Lye Brook Railroad near Bourne Pond in a remote section of the Bennington County town of Winhall.

William Gove Collection, Vermont Historical Society

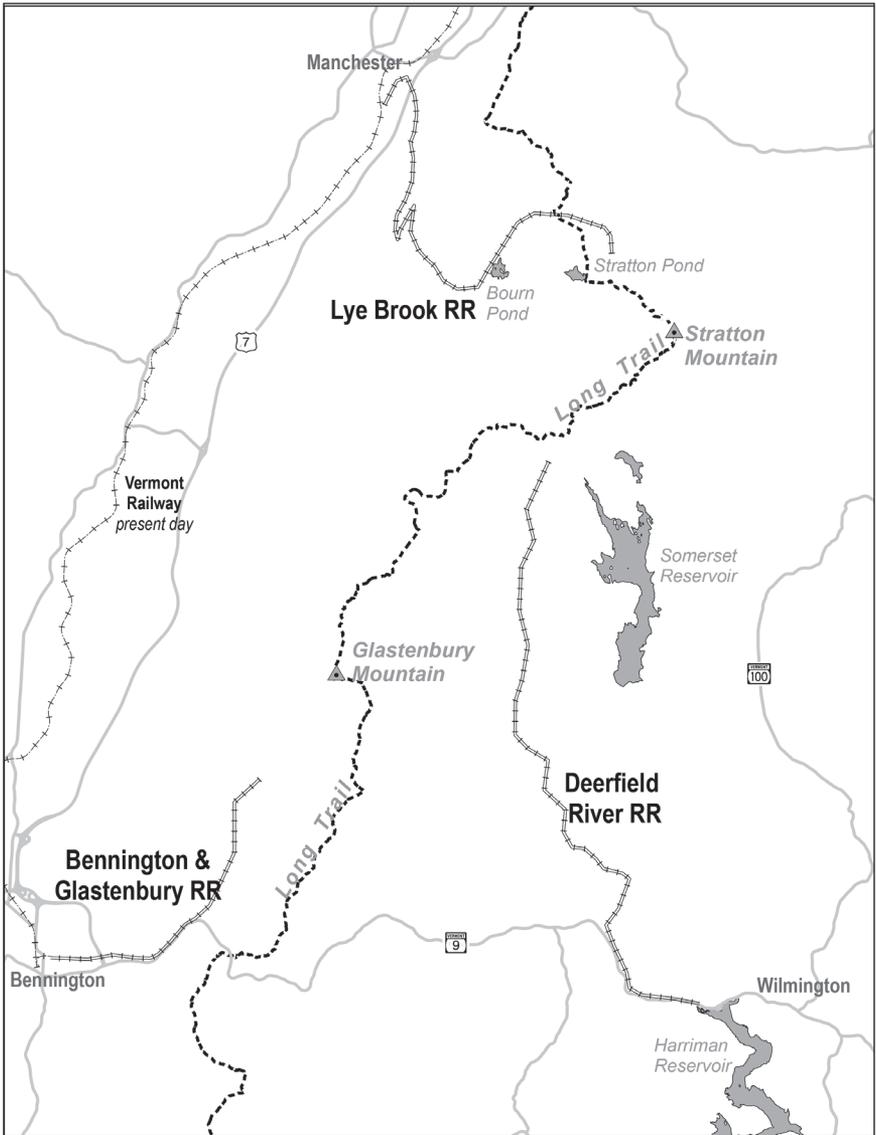
Vermont's Long Trail and logging railroads

Preston Bristow

Vermont's logging railroads lacked the sheer scale of those in New York's Adirondack Mountains, where no less than twenty-two logging railroads reached deep to extract its old-growth forests. Vermont also lacked villainous timber barons like New Hampshire's J.E. Henry, the "wood butcher" and legendary railway logger of the White Mountains, who was famously quoted as saying, "I never see the tree yit that didn't mean a damned sight more to me goin' under the saw than it did standin' on a mountain."

Yet the Green Mountains were plied by logging railroads, and three of them are intertwined in the history of Vermont's Long Trail. The Long Trail is the creation of the Green Mountain Club (GMC), which was established in 1910 with a mission "to make the mountains of Vermont play a larger part in the life of the people." The GMC set out immediately to establish the "footpath in the wilderness," which extends the length of the Green Mountains from the Massachusetts line to the Canadian border, some 265 miles. In 1971 the Vermont General Assembly recognized the GMC as "the founder, sponsor, defender and protector" of the Long Trail system.

Considered to be the first long-distance hiking trail in the nation, the Long Trail was the inspiration for the Appalachian Trail, a 2,175-mile footpath from Maine to Georgia. In fact, the founders of both the Long



Map shows locations of the three logging railroad lines that became part of Vermont's original Long Trail or Catamount ski trail. Shown for comparison are the modern Route 7 and present-day Vermont Railway between Bennington and Manchester.

Trail (James P. Taylor) and the Appalachian Trail (Benton MacKaye) credit a hike up Stratton Mountain in southern Vermont as the place where they received their inspiration. The Appalachian Trail coincides with the Long Trail from the Massachusetts line to "Maine Junction" at a point just north of US Route 4 near Killington.

In the early days, the challenge before GMC volunteers was to quickly

cut and blaze as many miles of trail as possible. With the northern sections of the Long Trail laid out first, the GMC's slogan in 1914 was "Killington to Massachusetts" and the Club's Bennington Section, or chapter, took up the challenge. Much of the initial Long Trail south of Killington was hastily routed over boggy and deeply rutted logging roads that did not offer a pleasant hiking experience. Logging railways offered a better hiking experience, and because these railways were abandoned they came to be increasingly used. The GMC has published two official histories, *Green Mountain Adventure, Vermont's Long Trail* in 1985 and *A Century in the Mountains, Celebrating Vermont's Long Trail* in 2009 and neither makes mention of logging railroads. But their use is indisputable following a review of early editions of the GMC's Long Trail Guide.



The train crew poses at the Deerfield River across White Barn Flats.
William Gove Collection, Vermont Historical Society

The Bennington & Glastenbury Railroad

The first abandoned logging railroad grade to be utilized by the Long Trail was the Bennington & Glastenbury, which is chronicled by Tyler Resch in *Glastenbury: The History of a Vermont Ghost Town*, published in 2008. This rail line extended nine miles from Bennington through Woodford Hollow and up Bolles Brook to "the Forks," a fork in Bolles Brook and the one-time logging village of South Glastenbury.

The venerable first edition of the Long Trail Guide published in 1917 describes an "optional route" of the Long Trail as follows: "The optional route from G.M.C. camp at Hell Hollow follows Glastenbury stream about 1½ miles then along old railroad track to Old Glastenbury, 1½ miles further. (Look out for bad holes in track.)" This "optional route" is maintained until the sixth edition (1924) of the Guide when it is

downgraded to a side trail. Then, in the eighth edition (1930) of the Guide, following a major relocation, it becomes the main route of the Long Trail and it remained as the main route until the twentieth edition (1971) of the Guide, after which it was abandoned following another major relocation. All told, this 1½-mile stretch of railroad bed served for seven years as an optional route, six years as a side trail, and 41 years as the main route of the Long Trail!

The Bennington & Glastenbury Railroad has a fascinating story. It was established in 1873 as a logging railroad and continued for 22 years until 1889, when the trees were gone. Then, in 1895 it was resurrected as a trolley line by the Bennington & Woodford Electric Railway Company. The logging village of South Glastenbury at the end of the line was transformed for only one summer into an upscale resort with hotel, clubhouse, dance hall, dining room, and casino. Alas, the trolley line was irreparably damaged in the “freshet” or flood that fall and the resort was abandoned, no doubt resulting in great financial loss to its investors.

The 17th edition (1963) of the Long Trail Guide refers to this conversion from logging railroad to trolley when it describes the trail as following “the grade of a former lumber railroad (later a trolley line) which extended from Bennington into this valley.” The railway had been abandoned for 16 years when this route of the Long Trail was first blazed in 1914.

The Deerfield River Railroad

The second abandoned logging railroad grade to be utilized by the Long Trail was the Deerfield River Railroad. *The Coming of the Train, Volume I*, published in 2008 by Brian Donelson, chronicles the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington Railroad and includes a chapter on the Deerfield River Railroad, a logging line that extended from Wilmington 23 miles north through Searsburg and Somerset and into the town of Stratton. Donelson’s sequel, *The Coming of the Train, Volume II*, published in 2011, has much more on the Deerfield River Railroad.

The original route of the Long Trail, which followed “practically level country” along woods roads from the Somerset Dam to Grout Job (near Grout Pond), and the abandonment of the northernmost portion of the Deerfield River Railroad in 1919, offered a more interesting route along the Deerfield River. The 2nd edition (1920) has the Long Trail following a three-mile stretch of the newly abandoned railway where it remained for 10 years until the 8th edition (1930) of the Guide when a major relocation moved the trail to its present ridgeline route north of Glastenbury Mountain.

The Deerfield River Railroad, although primarily a logging railroad, was chartered by the state of Vermont as a common carrier. Its founder, Amos Blanton, had visions of his railroad extending all the way to Manchester and continuing to carry freight and passengers after the logging was done. But the Deerfield River Railroad was to succumb to the growing need for electric power. In 1920 it was purchased by a subsidiary of the New England Power Company and railway operations ceased in 1921. By 1923 the railroad's base of operations at Mountain Mills was submerged under the power company's new reservoir, called Lake Whitingham, later to be named for utility executive Henry I. Harriman.

The Deerfield River Railroad does have one claim to fame, however. Between its 23-mile main line and its many extensive branch lines, it is considered by some to be the largest logging railroad in the northeast. No one is quite sure of the Deerfield River Railroad's end point. An early document called for the northern terminus to be "a point at or near the east bank of Bourn Pond," but it appears that the rail line never reached quite as far as the Stratton-Arlington Road, also known as the Kelly Stand Road.

The Rich Lumber Company's Lye Brook Railroad

The third abandoned logging railroad grade to be utilized by the Long Trail was the Lye Brook Railroad, of the Rich Lumber Company. Its 16-mile Lye Brook line climbed an incredible grade out of Manchester up Lye Brook Hollow to Bourn Pond and east into the town of Winhall, to the north of



Holding back a heavy load on the Lye Brook Railroad switchback on Manchester's East Mountain.

William Gove Collection, Vermont Historical Society



View looks west along tracks of the Deerfield River Railroad in Wilmington toward Mountain Mills, a company town that was fully submerged in 1923 by the rising waters of Lake Whitingham, later called the Harriman Reservoir, part of a major hydroelectric project.

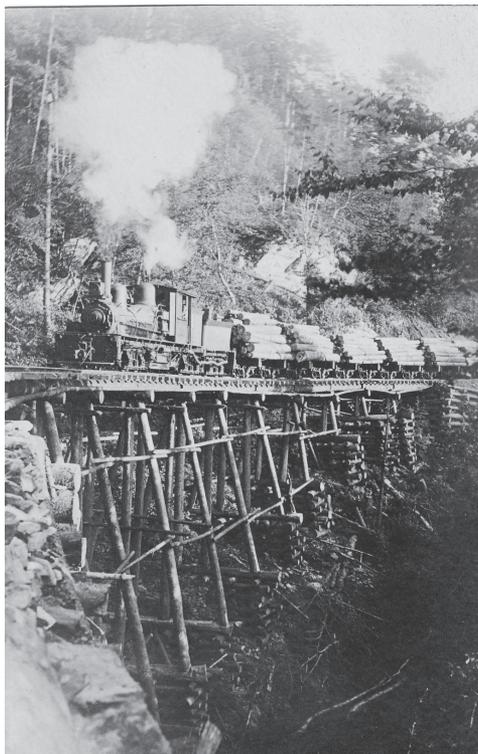
UVM Center for Digital Initiatives

Stratton Pond. The company and its shortline railroad are documented in a chapter by William Gove in *Rails of the North Woods* published in 1978.

Originally the Long Trail extended north directly from Stratton Mountain to Prospect Rock and bypassed Stratton and Bourn Ponds altogether. The 4th (1922) edition of the Long Trail Guide, however, offers this tantalizing alternative: “The [Long] Trail emerges from dense second growth to a large clearing with the remains of a railroad. This may be followed west (not marked) to Bourn Pond by always following uphill; the roadbed makes many wide serpentine curves and crosses some ravines by bridges of huge logs.”

By the 6th (1924) edition of the Guide the Long Trail was routed by both Bourn and Stratton ponds. The Trail’s route north of Bourn Pond followed three miles of a different branch of the Lye Brook Railroad than the one described above. The Long Trail remained in this route along a branch of the Lye Brook Railroad for 54 years until the 21st (1978) edition of the Guide when a major relocation took Bourn Pond off the Long Trail.

Flush from a successful railway logging operation in the Cranberry Lake area of New York’s Adirondacks, the Rich Lumber Company purchased the standing timber on what they thought was a 12,000-acre tract atop the East Mountain plateau (where Bourn and Stratton Ponds are located) and built a sawmill in Manchester, Vermont. To access the plateau they had to build a logging railroad up through Lye Brook Hollow. Immigrant workers literally carved the rail bed into the side of the Hollow, and to avoid a grade that exceeded six percent required a switchback about half-way up. The railroad



A trainload of logs on the Lye Brook high trestle.
William Gove Collection, Vermont Historical Society

began operations in 1914 and by 1919 the timber supply had run out. The 12,000 acres turned out to be 7,500 acres and the rail operation came to a premature end. The Rich Lumber Company was liquidated in 1920.

Portions of the rail bed of the Lye Brook Railroad can be walked today. The former three-mile stretch of the Long Trail that followed a branch of the Lye Brook Railroad from Bourn Pond north to William B. Douglas Shelter is now the Branch Pond Trail. The base of the Lye Brook Trail and the spur at 2.3 miles up the Lye Brook Trail that leads to a high waterfall also follows the main line of the old Lye Brook Railroad.

Portions of the rail bed of the Deerfield River Railroad can also be followed in winter on cross-country skis. The Catamount Trail is a wintertime counterpart to the Long Trail, a cross-country trail extending the length of Vermont from the Massachusetts line to the Canadian border. The Catamount Trail Association was founded in 1984 and its trail was finished in 2007. About three miles of the Catamount Trail from the north end of Harriman Reservoir to a point north of the Searsburg Reservoir follow the Deerfield River Railroad. In addition, the first 13 miles of the Catamount Trail north of the Massachusetts line follow the abandoned Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington Railroad (aka Hoot, Toot & Whistle), the Deerfield River Railroad's connecting railroad.

Was the Green Mountain Club's early use of abandoned logging railways the first blazed and maintained "rail-trail" in the nation? The Robbins Trail in Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Valley, although barely one mile long, appears to hold that record. The line was converted to a bicycle path in the 1890s, making it the oldest documented rail-trail in the country. Even among hiking trails, the Long Trail's use of logging railroads falls short.

According to the 1st (1907) edition of New Hampshire's White Mountain Guide, a trail into Zealand Notch following the abandoned Zealand Valley Railroad was blazed by the Appalachian Mountain Club in 1906, some eight years before the abandoned Bennington & Glastenbury Railroad was blazed by the GMC in 1914.

It may seem incongruous at first that something as massive and industrial as a railroad would be located in designated Wilderness areas throughout the northeast. Yet it does make sense. Only the most remote areas that could not be feasibly accessed by any other means were logged by rail. About nineteen logging railroads operated in the White Mountains, eight in the Green Mountains, twenty-two in the Adirondacks, and a handful in the Catskills, but virtually none is found in the Berkshires or elsewhere in the southern New England states. The hills of southern New England were more accessible and less wild.

Today, these logging railways have left little trace. In the construction of rail lines through forested land it was much easier to construct a log trestle or bridge to span ravines and swampy areas than to cut and fill, and so the many log trestles that were built are long gone. The rails and spikes were also mostly pulled when the lines were abandoned. I have traced some of these railroad lines and found them difficult to follow.

The public hue and cry surrounding logging railroads stripping the White Mountains led to passage of the Weeks Act in 1911 establishing national forests in the eastern United States; and the advent of the logging railroad led to the creation of New York's Adirondack and Catskill state parks. Vermont's logging railroads seemed more benign. One gets the sense in reading the early Long Trail Guide descriptions that the GMC trail blazers stumbled upon these abandoned rail lines without knowing much about them or being much concerned by them. Vermont's logging railroads may have lacked the sheer scale of Adirondack lumber railroads or the villainy of the White Mountain timber barons, but they are a colorful part of the Long Trail's history worthy of documentation. □

Suggestions for further reading

Curtis, Jane and Will, and Frank Leiberhan, *Green Mountain Adventure, Vermont's Long Trail: An Illustrated History*, Green Mountain Club, 1985.

Donelson, Brian A., *The Coming of the Train: The Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington and Deerfield River Railroads and The Industries They Served, Volume I – 1870 to 1910*, NJD Publishing, 2008.

Donelson, Brian A., *The Coming of the Train: The Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington and Deerfield River Railroads and The Industries They Served, Volume II – 1910 to 1922*, NJD Publishing, 2011.

Gove, William, *Mountain Mills, Vermont, and the Deerfield River Railroad*, “The Northern Logger and Timber Processor,” May 1968.

Gove, William, “Rich Lumber Company” in *Rails in the North Woods: Histories of Ten Adirondack Short Lines* by Allen, Richard S., et al., North Country Books, 1978.

Green Mountain Club, *Long Trail Guide*, First Edition (1917) to Twenty-Seventh Edition (2011).

Jordan, Phil, *The Rich Lumber company of Manchester, Vermont (1912-1919)*, “The Newliner,” Rutland Railroad Historical Society, Spring 2007.

Resch, Tyler, *Glastenbury: the History of a Vermont Ghost Town*, the History Press, 2008.

Slayton, Tom, ed., *A Century in the Mountains: Celebrating Vermont's Long Trail*, Green Mountain Club, 2009.