

Babbling Brook Trails

Loantaka Brook is the centerpiece of Morris County's Loantaka Brook Reservation in Morris Township. This walk begins at the South Street entrance of the reservation, about two miles east of the Morristown Green.

When most visitors to Loantaka Brook walk on trails, it is generally on the paved paths, where they see relatively little of the brook. But if you have come to see a brook, then your best bet is the unpaved equestrian trail. From the South Street entrance parking lot, walk behind the Exercise Cluster, enter the trail to the right of the rail fence, and turn right. If you do see horses, please step aside to let them pass.

The land here is almost level, and the water moves slowly and quietly; you will have to listen very carefully to hear it babble. The brook wanders away from the trail for awhile, but then reappears to flow under a bridge and into the lake, and the equestrian trail follows the quiet side of the lake. You can stay on the equestrian trail, or follow the shoreline over the dam and pick up the paved path, rejoining the equestrian trail at a stream crossing with a rail fence.

Back on the equestrian trail, stay to the right and cross the brook on a series of stepping stones. The next bridge carries a paved path over the brook. To return to your car, turn left onto this bridge, follow the paved path, and then turn left at the next trail intersection. The distance walked is about 3 ½ miles, or less than two miles if you turn back at the lake.

Difficulty: *Easy*

Dismal Brook flows through the Dismal Harmony Natural Area in the Brookside neighborhood of **Mendham Township**. The Dismal Harmony Natural Area is not even slightly dismal on a nice day, and the very active Dismal Brook more than makes up for the quiet of Loantaka. There is a small parking lot on East Main Street in Brookside, where a section of Patriots' Path crosses the road. Take a look at the posted trail map to get oriented and learn a little about the history of the area where you will be walking.

Start by following the blue-blazed Patriots' Path. After you cross a bridge with a railing, turn right. When you come to the muddy area, follow the alternate route on the left. Where the blue blazes follow a trail uphill to the left, stay to the right, following the brook.

Along this section the brook descends quickly, and if you have time you may want to leave the trail in places to explore the brook more closely. At the next trail intersection, turn left to walk uphill, then left again for a trail along the hill that reconnects to the blue-blazed Patriots' Path. Follow Patriots' Path to the right, and then back to your car, for a total distance of about two miles.

Difficulty: *Moderate*

Primrose Brook is in the Jockey Hollow unit of Morristown National Historical Park, off Tempe Wick Road in **Harding Township**, about two miles west of Route 202. Stop at the Visitor Center to pay your admission fee, then drive to the Trail Center parking lot on the tour road. Walk to the right on the road, and turn left onto the red-blazed trail after crossing a small bridge.

In much of this park non-native plants, such as Japanese Barberry and Stilt Grass, have obliterated the natural environment, but this trail has been an exception. NY-NJ Trail Conference volunteers have done a lot of good work here and the water crossings include boardwalks, several bridges and stepping stones. Soon you will be able to look down on the brook to the left, and you may even spot the return route - this trail goes out on one side of the brook and back on the other.

At the sign offering either a short or long loop, go for the long loop, unless you have very small or very cranky children; it's less than a mile. You may also see white blazes for Patriots' Pat - when in doubt, follow the red blazes; they are the best way to explore the brook.

Difficulty: *Easy*

Jackson Brook begins in **Randolph**, and flows along the Mine Hill/Randolph border through Hedden County Park and into **Dover**. It appears to be named after John Jackson, Dover's first European settler in 1772, who used local water power to operate an iron forge. Trails follow the brook in **Mine Hill** and **Randolph**.

The best place to start is at the trail head on East Randolph Avenue at the Randolph/Mine Hill border. From Route 10 in Randolph, go north on Route 513, turn left at the first stop sign (ignoring the brown sign), then follow Randolph Avenue to the small gravel parking lot on the right, just over the bridge, by a Morris County park sign at the bottom of the hill.

In season the ferns along this trail can be spectacular. When the trail reaches Indian Falls Road, turn right; the trail continues over the bridge and reenters the woods across the street.

After a total of about 2/3 of a mil, the yellow trail ends at the white-blazed Hedden Circular Trail. To continue along the brook, turn left, then bear left again when you come to the green-blazed Indian Falls Trail. The green trail goes past small waterfall (walk back up the brook after descending a short steep slope) and then ends at an open area with a small pond. In the summer you can rent a rowboat, give your feet a rest, and glide over the water you have been following.

You can also walk the two mile loop of the white-blazed Hedden Circular trail, which returns to the yellow trail, or use the upper section of the green trail to bisect the white trail, turning right at the upper end of the green trail for a one mile loop.

Difficulty: *Easy* if you follow the brook, *Moderate* if you walk the entire white trail loop or the shorter loop of the green and white trails.

The Four Bridges Trail in Lewis Morris County Park connects the Mendham Overlook and Doe Meadow areas to trails in the rest of the park. It's a 1.6 mile loop that leads to a ravine with a small brook, which is one of the prettiest places in this park. The park entrance is on Route 24 in **Morris Township**, about two miles west of the Morristown Green. Follow the entrance road to the Mendham Overlook parking area, and look for the trail just downhill from the parking lot. Walk to the right on this trail, away from the road.

Near the Doe Meadow area, the trail crosses the road and goes down to a junction with a white-blazed section of Patriots' Path. Cross the first bridge and turn right, along the top of a small pond, to the second bridge. After the second bridge, follow the green blazes to the left, then cross the third bridge. The fourth bridge is just a little further up this ravine. You will also pass, but not cross, a new bridge at a junction with the new orange trail. After you cross this brook one last time, (on a new *fifth* bridge) the trail turns left onto a dirt road, and the green blazes lead through a meadow and back to your parking lot.

For a shorter one mile walk (skipping three bridges), follow the white-blazed Patriots' Path to the left after crossing the first bridge, walk for the green blazes when you come to a meadow, and turn left onto the green trail. The new orange trail expands your options for short walks in this section of the park. If you follow it from the white trail to the green trail, the steepest section is downhill, and there is a dramatic view down into the ravine used by the green trail.

Difficulty: *Easy*

Pooh Sticks...

From A.A. Milne's *The House at Pooh's Corner*, is a good excuse for spending some time at a brook with a small bridge. (1) Find a small stick for each player. (2) All players drop their sticks off the upstream side of a bridge at the same time. (3) The first stick to come out from the other side of the bridge wins. (4) Repeat.