

Trail Descriptions:

Robin's Trail

This 1.5-mile trail parallels New Hope Creek and runs between the two parking areas. As it winds through the floodplain forest the path offers vistas of the creek and its stone-covered streambed and takes hikers through a mixed hardwood forest with beech, hickory, tulip poplar and sweetgum. This trail is named in memory of Robin Pascal by the Pascal Strom family.

Beech Loop Trail:

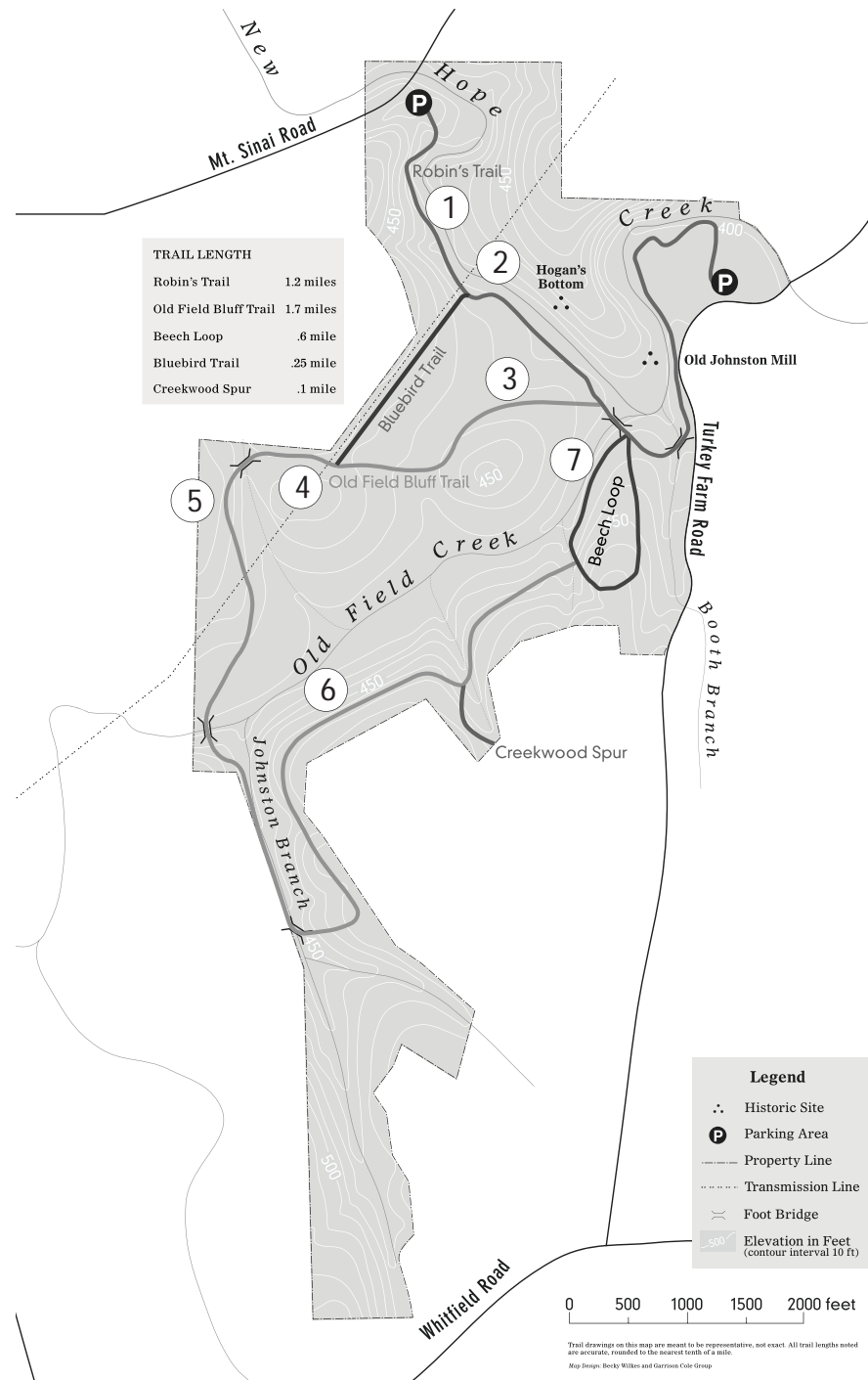
This 0.6 mile loop traverses a beech forest and links the Robin's Trail to the Old Field Bluff Trail

Old Field Bluff Trail: This 1.7 mile loop traverses a variety of habitats and crosses several of Johnston Mill's Creeks.

Bluebird Trail: This 0.3 mile loop links the Robin's Trail to the Old Field Trail via the power line. The open area attracts a variety of bird species. Volunteers have installed bluebird boxes along the trail.

For more information on TLC and to find out how you can become a member visit
<http://www.triangleland.org>

Your contributions make trails like these possible.

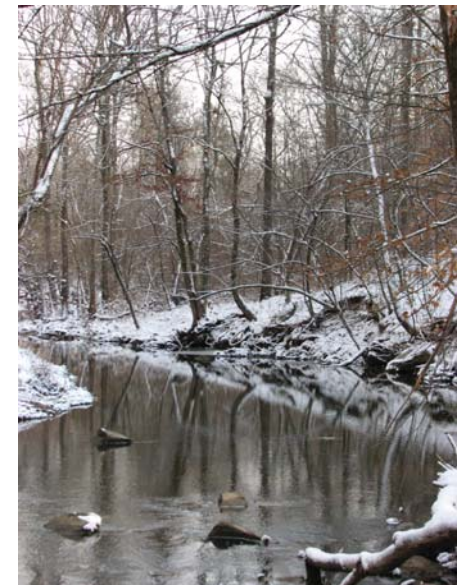


JOHNSTON MILL NATURE PRESERVE

Preserve Guide: Winter

Welcome to Johnston Mill Nature Preserve, a 296-acre natural area owned and managed by Triangle Land Conservancy.

This forested tract on the outskirts of Chapel Hill is a green oasis in the midst of a suburban area facing rapid growth and change. A walk in these woods transports visitors to an earlier time when water-powered gristmills dotted New Hope Creek and the pace of life was just a little slower. We hope you spend an hour or an afternoon in this preserve and get acquainted with one of the most significant and scenic natural areas in Orange County.



Johnston Mill Nature Preserve in Winter: The Landscape Revealed!

North Carolina winters are usually mild, and if you're willing to bundle up, Johnston Mill Nature Preserve promises a lovely winter walk in the Piedmont, with no mosquitoes or ticks to bother you. And, it's the best time of year to see the shape of the landscape and find clues to the past without the vegetation obstructing your view. The numbers below correspond with the markers on the map for a self-guided tour of Johnston Mill in the Winter time.

(1) Winter is the perfect time to study the architecture of a floodplain—notice to your left a slightly elevated bank, the levee, adjacent to the creek, which gradually slopes down a few feet the farther you move away from the creek. Picture this floodplain during a storm, where the swollen creek, carrying sediment and debris, overflows its banks. You might see leaves and debris clumped in the trees several feet above the ground from a recent flood. The farther you go from the river, the slower the water moves, until you reach the standing water in the depression swamp, which usually dries up by summer.

These temporary, or vernal pools provide important nursery habitat for many species of amphibians—frogs, toads and salamanders—safe from fish that would eat eggs and tadpoles. In late winter, warm evening rains prompt many species to emerge from hibernation to mate and lay eggs in these pools. If you see a pool near the trail, look carefully for jelly-like masses of eggs or spirals. As winter gives way to spring, start looking for tadpoles. Many species use the vernal pool habitat at Johnston Mill, including spotted and marbled salamanders.



(2) Pause at an area of walls and the remains of a raceway, just above Hogan's Bottom. Just downstream is the old Johnston Mill, where more walls are visible. These early mills were likely grist mills. Look for other clues of past human settlement as you walk: stone foundations and clumps of cultivated flowers such as daffodils.

(3) For additional views of the land and human influence in winter, take a right at the intersection with the orange-blazed Old Field Bluff Trail. Look for trees with multiple stems sprouting from the same trunk. This indicates past logging activity—many species of trees can re-sprout from their roots when they are cut, resulting in these multi-stemmed individuals. Most of the Piedmont has been logged several times, and Johnston Mill is no exception. You can deduce relative ages of the forest by looking at the largest diameter trees.

(4) Emerge into an open area by a power line easement. Although this is a rather stark, human-created edge, it provides important habitat for species that prefer open areas—notice the bluebird boxes on the edges and look overhead for soaring hawks and turkey vultures, which are scanning the meadows for prey. In addition, numerous insect species call this easement home.

(5) You'll notice an area of extensive storm damage, with all the trees lying in one direction. These are the remnants from Hurricane Fran in 1996, which spawned tornadoes that took down many stands of trees in the Triangle area. In the midst of this destruction, though, look at some of the standing dead trees and see if you can spot woodpecker holes. Woodpeckers are among many species that rely on dead trees for their homes and for the wood-boring insects they eat.

(6) After looping around Johnston Branch at the south end of the property, you will find yourself



high above the floodplain in a cathedral-like stand of mature hardwood trees, likely the oldest stand at Johnston Mill. Smooth-barked American beech is dominant, as it favors these cool, moist, north-facing slopes on the south side of Old Field Creek. Note that the large beeches are all about the same size—indicating that they started as seedlings at the same time, following logging or agriculture. With time, natural disturbances such as storms will create openings in the canopy for young saplings, and the stand will develop a mixture of ages and sizes as it takes on the characteristics of older growth forest.

(7) As you descend along the left side of the Beech Loop toward Robin's Trail, notice thickets of small saplings with fewer large trees—this area was more recently logged. Just before the intersection, you'll notice regular furrows to your left, either the remains of an old road, agricultural legacy, or both.

As you head back to the parking area, continue to look for clues that will tell you stories about Johnston Mill's past, revealed in the winter landscape.