Limekiln Natural Area, The Marcus Gift & Todd’s Wood

Ownership: Limekiln (Town); Marcus, Todd’s Wood, Anderson, (Land Trust)

Acreage: 183.5 (Town, 127; Land Trust, 56.5)

Entrance: Off north side of Limekiln Road, 0.2 mile west of Lontown Road, through opening in stone wall

Parking: East of entrance, at edge of open field on north roadside

Trails: White blazes: Boulder, 0.5 mile; Gneiss, 1.5; Split Rock, 0.67
Blue blazes: Crossover, 0.15; The Lariat, 0.48; The Knoll, 0.15
Big Tree, 0.17; Accessway, 0.33; Todd’s Wood, 0.25
Total all trails: 4.2 miles

Background: The natural area and the road giving access to it take their name from the limekiln operation that was located nearby in the early 19th century. One writer reports that all the hills in this vicinity “were stripped of firewood” to fuel the kiln, where limestone under intense heat was reduced to a powder used in the manufacturer of plaster. Redding acquired the property, known as the Mary Frances Jackson Purchase, in 1973. The Marcus Gift takes its name from Pearl and Jack Marcus, who donated 30 adjoining acres to the Land Trust in 1979.

Adjoining the west side of Limekiln Natural Area, Todd’s Wood (in two separate parcels) was acquired by the Land Trust in 1989 through a subdivision settlement. And a year later, almost two acres were added to the southern section of the Wood through a gift to the Trust from Hjalmar Anderson. Much of the Limekiln Road area, including these tracts, was owned in the last century by various members of the Todd family, of whom Charles Burr Todd is best remembered for having written a history of Redding.

Key Features: In aggregate, it is mostly up-and-down country with a brook running through it, a splendid hardwood forest bouncing back from the lime-burning days, and enough twists and turns of a geological sort to satisfy the stoniest explorer.

From the opening in the wall, the Accessway—across property given to the Land Trust by the family of Judy and John Atwood—follows blazes to the natural area and a junction with the Gneiss Trail. (The Boulder Trail—so named for the huge glacial erratic it passes—also gives access from Limekiln Road, some 300 yards farther west, but parking is virtually impossible there.) The Gneiss—that’s pronounced nice, in tribute to the very nice outcappings throughout the area—is the primary trail, and for much of its way it follows the path of an old wood road.

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For a longer stroll, hit out for the Split Rock Trail, which links the Land Trust property. Along the way, you’ll encounter Split Rock itself, brought forth by some long-ago ice-sheet and left perched on the top of a knoll. Time and the elements have since cut it slice through the boulder. The trail also passes a glacial kettle and a twin-trunk sugar maple of venerable age and near-record girth.

At the northwest corner of the Town/Trust properties, the Todd’s Wood Trail strikes out a quarter mile to Bald Rock, just over the Bethel town line. This high lookout point commands a sweeping view of Bogus Mountain nearby and—on the sort of clear day when one is supposed to see “forever”—the faraway foothills of the Taconic and Berkshire uplands. A southward spur of this trail is planned to the subdivision road called John Todd’s Way.

Trails for the Handicapped

In 1991, one of the entrance trails to the Saugatuck Falls Natural Area—off Route 53 opposite John Read Middle School—was improved to facilitate access by handicapped persons. Individuals in wheel chairs or with ambulatory aids may now follow the main trail some 700 feet across the footbridge on the Saugatuck River to the path’s cul-de-sac beyond the Falls Trail and Old Field turnoffs.

In 2004, a quarter-mile long trail for people with ambulatory impairments was opened at the Saugatuck Reservoir off Newtown Turnpike. A project of Aquarion Water Company of Connecticut and the wheels in the Woods Foundation, the trail is part of the Centennial Watershed State Forest and offers a magnificent close-water view of the tranquil reservoir.

A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it. A township where one primitive forest waves above, while another primitive forest rots below—such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages.

Henry David Thoreau