

RINES FOREST HISTORY

Cumberland's Rines Forest is a beautiful tranquil natural environment. Within its 275 acres grow large hemlock and pine trees as well as a sprinkling of red oak, birch, poplar and maple. It is a perfect canopy for the forest's diverse wildlife which includes white tail deer, coyote, fox, wild turkey, ruffed grouse and numerous wild birds. Along its boundaries, flows Mill Brook which winds its way through the forest providing visitors with beautiful waterfalls and places of solitude. Except for an occasional rock wall and a logging road or two, one can easily sense that they have escaped to a remote boreal forest far removed from a suburb of Maine's largest city.

Although the tract of land where the forest exists today was first surveyed by the E.C. Jordan Company of Portland in 1918 for J. Henry Rines, the history of the area suggests that the property experienced considerable change from the late 1700's until the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to 1821, when Cumberland became a town, settlers of ancient North Yarmouth were occupied primarily with hunting, fishing and lumbering. Because Cumberland had as many as six sawmills and two grist mills during the early 1800's with at least two found on Mill Brook, it's reasonable to assume that much of the land was initially forest. The wood from the Rines tract of land was most probably used not only for constructing homes, barns and the like but also for ship building. We know that the towering "king pine" trees found in nearby Gorham, North Yarmouth and other surrounding communities were used for ship's masts. Since there were boat yards in North Yarmouth, Yarmouth and Cumberland well into the nineteenth century, there is the likelihood that the timber from the area was also used for boat building.

It wasn't long before the forests of Cumberland and North Yarmouth were cleared of timber and replaced with farmland, mostly pasture for sheep and cattle. Certainly, the remnants of rock walls found on the Rines Forest property suggests that the land was used for farming purposes by the mid 1800's. Supporting this claim is the fact that by 1860 Cumberland had 230 buildings and a population of approximately 1,700 people, with their primary occupation being agriculture.

In 1918, J. Henry Rines combined several parcels of land totaling 275 acres along Range Road. The land was to be used as pasture for his cattle which were walked each spring thirteen miles to Cumberland from the main farm in Gorham. The property had a house, two barns and a well. According to Dale Rines, great-grandson of J. Rines, the property on Range Road was a typical farm with its cleared land enclosed by stone walls. For approximately twenty years the Rines family maintained the property for farming and supporting their live stock. In 1941, Dale Rines' grandfather decided to return the property to forest land. Seventy acres of open fields were planted with red pine and white spruce. From this point until the 1960's the forest grew and was pretty much left alone until the Rines family began to thin the forest. It was also at this time when the forest's major woods roads were built by Dale Rines and his father. This enabled the Rines family to harvest wood from the front to the rear of the lot. In more recent years Dale Rines, a forest engineer by training, has managed the property by thinning and selectively harvesting trees as well as maintaining the land. The result is a healthy working forest.

The Town of Cumberland acquired 209 acres of the Rines Forest property in 2003. It is currently part of a 900 acre contiguous “block of unfragmented forest habitat.” A comprehensive management plan for the property is currently being developed by the Town’s Rines Forest Committee for the expressed purpose of insuring that the Forest will remain in its undeveloped state. In addition to management considerations, the Cumberland Town Council voted to place the property under the protection of a conservation easement, in perpetuity, with the Cumberland Mainland Island Trust on September 12, 2005.

References

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