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Assessment of Gurnee Path

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Purpose:

To determine the feasibility of rehabilitating the Gurnee Path as an alternative route for walking and bicycling between Hulls Cove and the Bar Harbor village.

Summary Conclusion:

The Gurnee path would not be a suitable alternative for bicycle nor frequent pedestrian use. While the trail is scenic, it presents a number of safety and environmental concerns that would be very difficult to overcome. Cost for construction would be significant and might impose an unfunded burden on Acadia National Park. Details follow.

Methodology:

On November 2, 2010, with GPS and camera in hand, I walked from the Hull's Cove Park Visitor Center south on the Park Loop Road to the Duck Brook Bridge. I descended the steep bank to Route 3, looking for a trail. I then proceeded north along this bank, parallel to Route 3, looking for any trails that I could find. I continued on sections of the Gurnee trail as possible until it appeared to end on Route 3 approximately .2 miles south of the visitor center entrance road.

I transferred the photographs to a computer and overlaid the GPS track in ArcGIS along with 2005 aerial photos, contour lines and the road network. The map that follows indicates the trail portion of my walk. All conclusions are based on my visual inspection during the walk, but are informed by the contours of the land and other geographic information.

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Acadia Byway Gurnee Path



0.2 0.1 0 0.2 0.4 Miles

Map prepared by the
Hancock County Planning Commission
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South to North on the Trail

Duck Brook

As indicated by the map below, Duck Brook presents a significant barrier to any travel other than on Route 3 or the Park Loop Road.



Drainage Ditches

From this southern point there appear to be two ditches that run parallel to Route 3 and may have been constructed to drain water toward Duck Brook. These ditches might be shaped into a trail if the trees growing in and around them are removed and significant earthwork and trail building ensue.



Rocks and Woods'

The ditches fade away, and no apparent trail can be found. The landscape is still undulating with rocks and mixed vegetation. A trail could be constructed through much of this area, though typically the trail would be skirting the side of the hill.



Serpentine Path to Foundation

The woods give way to an open field with a narrow serpentine paved path or drainage gutter that leads to granite steps and a small foundation.



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"H" Markers and Constructed Trail

After the foundation, two markers with the letter H are visible. The trail becomes more apparent. Much of it is deteriorated, but consisted of stonework along the left and right side. The trail is approximately 5 to 8 feet in width passing through relatively gentle slopes. Some sections are more obscured, but reconstruction as a walking trail would be possible.



Assent

The trail now approaches the steeper section of the bluffs area. The trail ascends at approximately 15 degree slope to a midpoint along the bluffs where a natural shelf occurs. The construction elements of the trail are much more visible throughout the steeper section.


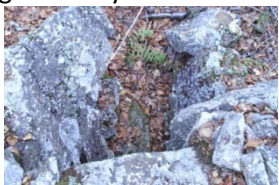




High Point

The trail reaches the shelf and continues north with a slope down to the highway approaching 70%. Any rocks dislodged in this section have a reasonable chance of landing on the road shoulder or in the road itself.



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<p>Washout</p> <p>Sections along this shelf that have collapsed. This photo indicates one of the more precarious locations where the walker is skirting a vertical drop above Route 3 on a trail about 2' wide. Here too rocks would fall close to the highway.</p>	
<p>Stone Bridge</p> <p>North from the steep shelf, the trail returns to a gentle slope with some interesting remains of the original construction. This photograph shows a small stone bridge over a seasonal stream. The bridge is a nice piece of work, though it would not be wide enough for bicycles.</p> 	
<p>Utilities and End of the Line</p> <p>Shortly after the stone bridge the trail appears to disintegrate. It is possible that it ends here, but it also is possible that installation of utilities resulted in removing a section of the trail. I circled the area without finding ongoing trail. From here is about 30 feet of 30 degree slope down to Route 3. This dropping off point is .2 miles from the Park Visitor Center entrance road.</p>	

Conclusions

The Gurnee path would not be a suitable alternative for bicycle nor frequent pedestrian use. While the trail is scenic, it presents a number of safety and environmental concerns that would be very difficult to overcome.

- Duck Brook is a major obstacle to trail development south to the village.
- The southern "ditch" section can be reshaped into a trail, with significant work removing trees, leveling the ditches and creating a new trail base.

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- The rocks and woods section has traverses gentle slopes and could be shaped into a trail, but drainage along this section would be a concern.
- The ascent and steep sections of the bluffs would be a very significant challenge. Insuring safe passage, particularly for bicycles, would require straitening the trail, reinforcing and paving along the shelf in the bluffs, installation of railings and systems for trapping dislodged rocks.
- The stone bridge and north sections appear feasible, though one private house is in the course of the path unless the travelers ascend to the Park Loop Road or drop down to Route 3.

With a significant investment, the Gurnee path might be made available for seasonal pedestrian use, perhaps more as a recreational facility than a transportation facility. The starting and ending points are ambiguous, though a walker from the park headquarters to the bridge at Duck Brook could have about 1 mile off of the shoulder of Route 3 or the side of the Park Loop Road.

Construction and maintenance would need a sustainable source of funding, or the trail becomes the responsibility of the National Park Service without specific funding. This trail is not connected with the park trail system and has not received park support in many years.