Ed Hiller is restoring the historic bridge markers along the Northern Rail Trail. This one shows that the small bridge just beyond it is 96.90 miles from Boston's North Station when measured along the path of the old rail line.

Photo: Ed Hiller

Bridge Markers Along the Northern Rail Trail

By Ed Hiller, for the Beacon

An earlier article described the whistle posts that are being restored along the Northern Rail Trail. A related project is to restore another set of markers – those that identify the bridges along the line.

These bridge markers are concrete posts, each about five feet tall, that have engraved numbers arranged vertically. There are two numbers, then a bar, then two more numbers. These give the distance to that bridge in miles from Boston's North Station.

The top two numbers are the miles; the bar is like a decimal point; then the lower two numbers are the decimal fraction of a mile. So 96/90 would mean 96.90 miles from Boston.

Similar posts mark the locations of culverts. These posts are shorter and narrower, but have similar mile markings.

Since the Northern was laid out to maintain a maximum of a 1.0% grade, the surveyors followed river and stream beds whenever they could. So the line climbs up from the Merrimack River in Franklin, following Chance Pond Brook and then Sucker Brook, to a summit near West Shore Drive in Andover.

From there it descends into the Blackwater River valley and follows that course and its tributary, Frazier Brook, up to a summit in Danbury. Then it descends into the Smith River valley and follows that stream up to the famous Orange Summit, the overall maximum elevation of the line.

Continuing westward, it follows the Indian River down to Mascoma Lake, and then goes down along the Mascoma River to Lebanon and the Connecticut River.

Considering that the line follows many rivers and streams, it is not surprising that there are quite a few bridges along the way. Some of these bridges are steel structures with their own style of markings. But many are modest stream crossings, and quite a few still retain their bridge marker posts.

These bridge posts testify to the amazing ability of the surveyors to plot a course for the line that satisfied the maximum slope specification and yet kept the distance to a practicable length, considering that the line crossed over the total rugged width of the state of New Hampshire, from the Merrimack River to the Connecticut River.

I have just begun restoring these markers, starting with those nearest my house. It is a slow process. Many are overgrown with small trees and other growth that has to be hacked away before restoration can begin.

If anyone wants to assist in this project, it would be very helpful if they would select a bridge post near their house and clear all the undergrowth from around it. They could then send the mile point number of that post to me (via The Andover Beacon) and I could then complete the restoration painting.

Fifty Years Ago: September 1963

AHS closing swells FHS head count

Here's some old news from the Andover, East Andover, West Andover, Potter Place, and Cilleyville "gossip" columns of the Franklin Journal Transcript, selected by Heather Makechnie.

September 5, 1963

Howard George, Ervin Nelson, Jr., John Ireland, Wallace Scott, Albert Klotz, Murray Smith, Jr., Ralph Sanborn, and James Emerson all went deep-sea fishing off Kittery, Maine on Labor Day.

Showing at the Regal Theatre this month: *Flipper* with Chuck Connors; *The Slave* with Steve Reeves; *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* with Bette Davis and Joan Crawford; *Fanny* with Leslie Caron and Maurice Chevalier; *Donovan's Reef* with John Wayne, and *The Chapman Report*, the personal story behind a sex survey, with Shelley Winters, Jane Fonda, and Effron Zimbalist, Jr.

September 12, 1963

Franklin Sears Store (Tel. 680) is selling top-of-the-line 12.3 cubic foot Coldspot Automatic Defrost refrigerators for $187 and Allstate Nylon Safety Traction Tires (8.70×15 tube-type, blackwall) for $12.95.

Mrs. Joseph Cloutier of Flaghole Road won the Electric Sewing Machine on exhibit at Plymouth Fair.

September 19, 1963

Record Figures Pose Problems for Franklin School Board: An all-time record high of 1910 pupils officially enrolled in Franklin schools! An analysis of the total senior high school enrollment reveals that, included in the total of 565 students, of the 97 tuition students (34 more than the 63 who registered last year), 35 are from Andover, and 13 from Salisbury – this occasioned by the closing of Andover High School.

September 26, 1963

The 115-year-old boys' preparatory school, Proctor Academy, began the 1963-64 school year with a record 159 boys, according to Headmaster Lyle H. Farrell, LL.D. [Today, the co-ed school has roughly twice that population.]

Rex Sherman of Andover was one of the winners of the Eastern States Exposition Sheep Show, taking second place with a Cheviot Ram. Rex is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Sherman of Proctor Academy. He is a graduate of Proctor and presently a junior at UNH. He built his championship flock from one 4H club lamb and is earning his college tuition with the flock.

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