

FINDING THEM A bit tricky! This riverside trail is off Adams Street, near where the George J. Roper Memorial Bridge crosses Neponset River at Milton Lower Mills. Walking or driving from the bridge to the Dorchester side of the river, take the first left, between Baker Square Condominiums. “Hidden” way behind them, at the far end of Baker Court, is the DCR Neponset River Reservation, with ample, free, visitor parking.

DESCRIPTION Here, former factory buildings and an old railway bridge have assumed new lives as residential and recreational gems; granite block walls contain the Neponset River as its water cascades, churns, and pools on both sides of Roper Bridge. Plant life on both sides is “opportunistic;” tree saplings and plants sprout where seeds have lodged, dispersed by wind, water, and wildlife: willow, hickory, locust, elm, staghorn sumac, poison ivy, bindweed, golden rod, purple loosestrife, and more.

STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES Use the MBTA Red Line to commute from Milton stops into Boston or Cambridge and DCR Neponset River Reservation trails for walking or biking on local errands. “Leave no trace” and remove all litter / pet waste. “Legacy Toxins,” PCB’s from old factories contaminate the river and warning signs are posted NOT to eat fish caught between Walpole and Milton’s Baker Dam. Organizations such as Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) depend on members to volunteer and advocate for a healthier river – join a seasonal cleanup or learn to be a water quality monitor.

HISTORY Until the invention of electricity, Neponset River’s water powered early industry. In 1634, Israel Stoughton ran a grain mill nearby. Many of the mighty brick industrial buildings were built to house the Walter Baker Chocolate Company. A granite DCR marker near the trail entrance reads, “On this site in 1765, Dr. James Baker and James Hanno established the first chocolate factory in the US. It was sited here in order to draw power from the naturally-flowing river, which also determined the irregular layout of the buildings in the complex.” George J. Roper Memorial Bridge’s stone arch foundations date to 1765 (3 spans, dry-laid, fieldstone slabs) and 1847 (2 spans, dry-laid split granite arches).

ACTIVITIES Roper Bridge affords wonderful water-watching from its railings in all seasons and the best view (in winter) of Baker Dam’s spillway, on the upstream side of the bridge. The DCR Neponset River Reservation Trail offers wide paved surfaces for walking, jogging, bicycling, rollerblading, and dog-walking (with dispensers for pet waste bags). Granite block benches set among green lawns invite picnicking, passive river- and wildlife-watching, even sunbathing. Catch-and-release fishing from the old railway bridge or the millpond shoreline is popular. DCR kiosks along the trails on both sides display educational posters about natural and cultural history and the Neponset River.