

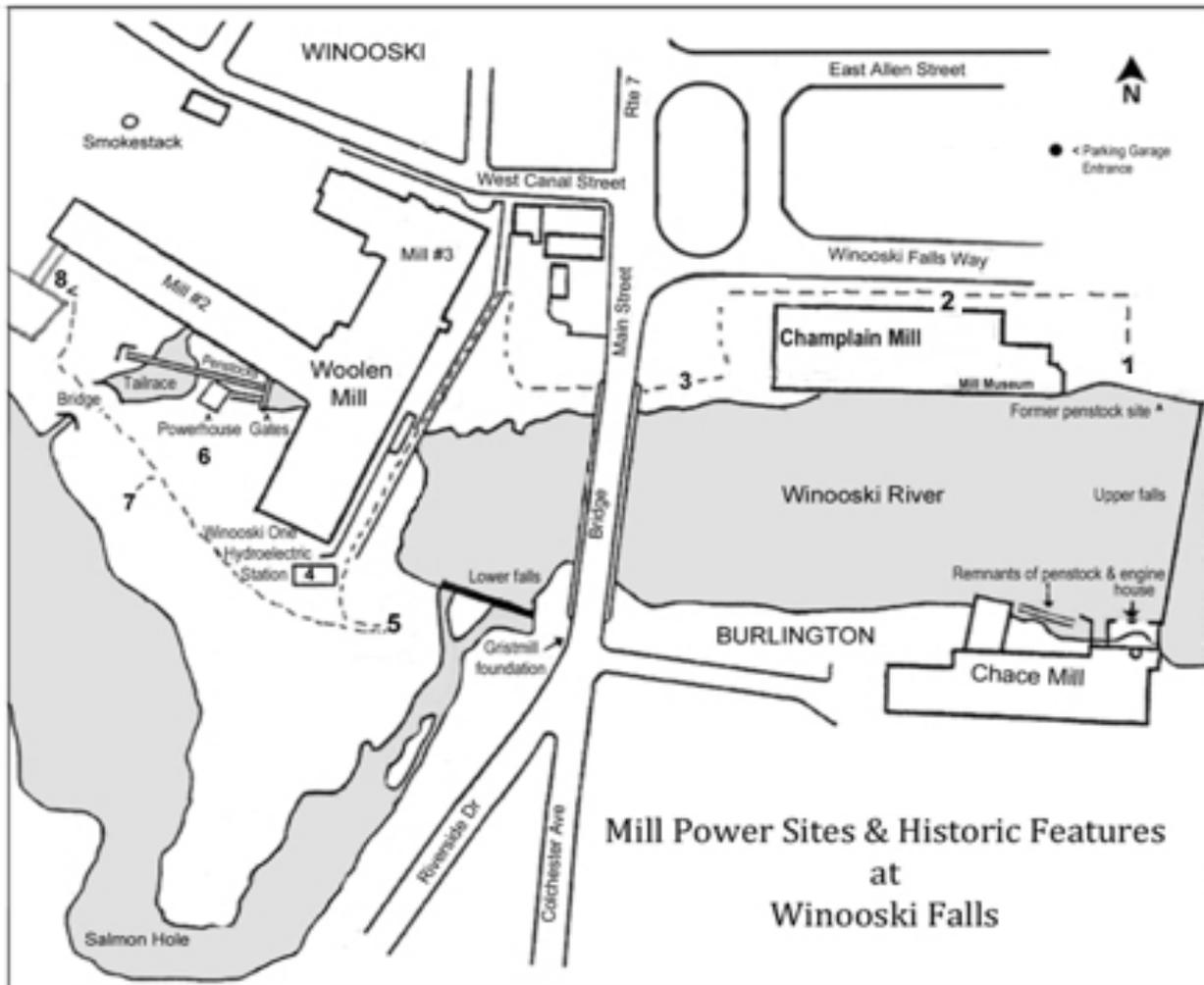


Walking Tour: Mill Power Sites At Winooski Falls

Updated from an earlier trail walk by Sarah Niland, Saint Michael's College student

As you walk along, I hope you can experience Winooski's industrial past and appreciate what exists today. The trail contains a variety of trees, several historical sites and some modern features. ~ Sarah Niland

This walking tour follows paved walkways and a rough gravel path. Good walking shoes are recommended.



The Winooski River, like rivers and streams throughout New England and elsewhere, provided power for early mills and factories. Abundant waterpower and proximity to Burlington's transportation routes encouraged small scale manufacturing at Winooski Falls as early as the 1780's. Dams transformed Winooskitogok, the Onion Land River of the Abenakis, into a power engine. Penstocks channeled river water through the mills.

In time, steam engines turned the turbines at low water; electricity followed, generated by coal, wood and moving water. The six story woolen mill built c.1835, and subsequent additions established Winooski Falls as Vermont's leading woolen textile center. The turbines stopped briefly during the flood of 1937, and from 1954 when the mills closed, until the construction of Winooski One, the hydroelectric station, in 1992.

1 Winooski River Walk

Start from the platform next to the entrance to Waterworks restaurant. You can see the **Chace Mill** across the Winooski river. Look for remnants of a penstock and the former steam engine house near the chimney. The top half of the metal penstock was donated to the war effort during the 1940s.



2 Champlain Mill (Mill #4)

Completed in 1912, this is the newest of the four textile mills that operated at Winooski Falls until 1954. Fine worsteds for men's suiting and dress fabrics were manufactured in this building.



The **Heritage Winooski Mill Museum** is located in the Champlain Mill. The museum opened in 1998. Gallery exhibits tell of sheep in Vermont, wool textile manufacturing, the men, women and children who ran the machines, products and markets, and waterpower technology.

3 Path under bridge to the Woolen Mill.

Take the ramp to the path under bridge to the Woolen Mill. Stop just before the bridge to look upriver. There is a splendid view of the river, the upper falls and the Chace Mill.

Continue on the path under the bridge where the east elevation of the Woolen Mill comes into view.



When the mills were in operation, the river was channeled directly beneath the **Woolen Mill (Mills #2 and 3)**, into two powerhouses and, via a canal, to Mill #1 beyond (no longer there). The river turns south over the Winooski Falls, a drop of 35 feet. Mill workers made woolens and military blankets in the Woolen Mill.

4 Winooski One Hydroelectric Station

Only the entrance door and roof of the station, and the fish elevator are visible at ground level. The building, descending down to the river, contains three turbines and a control room. Computers control the turbines and the amount of water flowing over the dam.

East of the station is a fish elevator and holding tank. *Follow the steps below the fish tank down a stairway to a platform overlooking the dam and the lower falls.*

5 Winooski One Exhibition Platform

On two walls are several panels depicting the transfer of power from turbine to electricity, the fish elevator and a brief history of Winooski. From this platform is an excellent view of the dam built in 1992. The original timber crib dam, c. 1876, still exists upstream of this dam.

Look across the river at the bank just below the south end of the bridge.



Still visible are stone foundation remnants of an old gristmill, dynamited during the 1927 flood to relieve pressure on the Woolen Mill.

Burlington Gristmill, 1926

Looking south you can see **Salmon Hole**, an important Abenaki fishing hole before the advent of the mills. Natural spawning runs ended with the installation of dams. In 1993 Vermont began stocking salmon in upstream brooks.



Landlocked Salmon



Steelhead (Rainbow) Trout

Winooski One Hydro Plant is trucking salmon and trout up past several dams for spawning. During late spring and early autumn, you might see salmon or trout in the holding tank atop the first elevator. Winooski One exhibit panel gives details.

Retrace your steps up the stairs; proceed to the gravel path just west of the hydroelectric station building.

6 Powerhouse, Penstocks and Tailrace

Looking north through the trees. These features are somewhat obscured by foliage during the summer.

The powerhouse, c.1838, held turbines powered by moving river water diverted under the Woolen Mill to the penstock. The second penstock carried water to a smaller powerhouse no longer standing. The tailrace carried the water back to the river.



The river has recovered from dye and acid waste dumped from the mills. Water plants and animals can thrive again.

7 Dirt Path: Winooski River and Bridge

Descend at your own risk. This path is short, steep and slippery. Beware of poison ivy. You might want to bypass this stop.



From the river edge you can see the arched stone bridge over the tailrace where the water reenters the river. The bridge, in fine condition after nearly two centuries, is built of local Vermont stone:



cream-colored Winooski dolomite, reddish Monkton quartzite, gray Isle La Motte limestone. The bridge contains no cement.

Return to the gravel path; continue to the end of the Woolen Mill wing.

8 Mill #1 Foundation Traces

Mill #1, the first large mill built at Winooski Falls, c. 1830, burned in 1957 after mill operations had stopped. The smokestack still stands.



Later, Mill Yard Apartments were built on this site. Foundation traces of the original mill building are visible just behind the apartment building. This mill, with subsequent additions over the years, was the largest building in the mill complex.

Looking north you will see a tall smokestack built during the late 1800s for a huge coal furnace that produced steam, and later, electricity for the mills. Coal arrived by train at the Winooski coal yard nearby.

Retrace your steps to return to the Champlain Mill.

For more info, visit www.themillmuseum.org or www.facebook.com/themillmuseum