



Thanks to its great diversity of birds, Johnston Mill is part of the North Carolina Birding Trail, a cooperative effort to promote birding in the state.



TLC's mission is to protect important open space—stream corridors, forests, wildlife habitat, farmland, and natural areas—to help keep our region a healthy and vibrant place to live and work. TLC is a private, nonprofit land trust serving Chatham, Durham, Johnston, Lee, Orange and Wake counties.

Since 1983, TLC has protected 10,000 acres in scores of sites across the Triangle region. These sites enhance the quality of life in the Triangle by protecting wildlife habitats, water quality, recreation areas and open space.

TLC is a member-supported non-profit organization. To support TLC or for more information, please visit our website at www.triangleland.org or contact us at:

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JOHNSTON MILL NATURE PRESERVE

Preserve Guide



Welcome to Johnston Mill Nature Preserve, a 296-acre natural area owned and managed by Triangle Land Conservancy. This forested tract on the outskirts of Chapel Hill is a green oasis in the midst of a suburban area facing rapid growth and change. A walk in these woods transports visitors to an earlier time when water-powered gristmills dotted New Hope Creek and the pace of life was just a little slower. We hope you spend an hour or an afternoon in this preserve and get acquainted with one of the most significant and scenic natural areas in Orange County.



The Nature of the Place

Located between two large tracts of Duke Forest, Duke University's research forest, Johnston Mill Nature Preserve is part of a large expanse of unfragmented mixed hardwood forest in Orange County. A two-mile section of New Hope Creek winds through the northeast corner of this property as it travels southward to Durham. Visitors to the preserve are treated to a scenic blend of rocky outcrops, stony creek bottoms and mature forest.

In its upper reaches north of Chapel Hill, New Hope Creek twists below rock bluffs and snakes through a narrow forested valley. Downstream, the creek abruptly changes character and becomes a lazy floodplain stream as it meanders southward to Jordan Lake, the drinking water supply for thousands of Triangle residents. The waterway remains clean and forested for much of its length and serves as a haven for wildlife and hikers even as it passes through a sprawling suburban area.

Beauty and Beasts

In the springtime ephemeral wildflowers like trout lily, hepatica, Jack-in-the-pulpit, spring beauty and Catesby's trillium carpet the floodplain. Rainy spring and summer days and nights are filled with the calls of upland chorus frogs and northern cricket frogs. Spotted and marbled salamanders breed in pools in the late winter and early spring. The preserve is also home to several plants and animals that are rare in North Carolina: the four-toed salamander, Thorey's grayback dragonfly and the green violet.



More than 125 bird species have been observed here, including year-round residents such as white-breasted and brown-headed nuthatch, pileated woodpecker and yellow-bellied sapsucker. In the spring and summer, neotropical migratory birds nest here, including ovenbird, wood thrush, yellow-billed cuckoo, Louisiana waterthrush and hooded and Kentucky warbler. Visit the preserve in the fall to see migrating landbirds that stop here to rest and forage.

The Human Story

People have been connected to this landscape for thousands of years, since hunter-gatherers from nearby villages in the New Hope Creek valley hunted and fished in the creeks and bottomlands.

More recently, the history of this tract is intertwined with the story of the Johnstons, a family of Scots Presbyterians. The family lived, farmed and operated a gristmill on this property that they called Green Hill plantation for 200 years beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Reminders of the family's legacy can be seen throughout the preserve. Chimneys and hearths from the family homestead and the foundation of a spring house still remain near Old Field Creek. The stone wall encircling the Johnston family cemetery stands near Turkey Farm Road, although the graves were moved to New Hope Presbyterian Church years ago. Two old mill sites remain on the creek.

Saving this Place

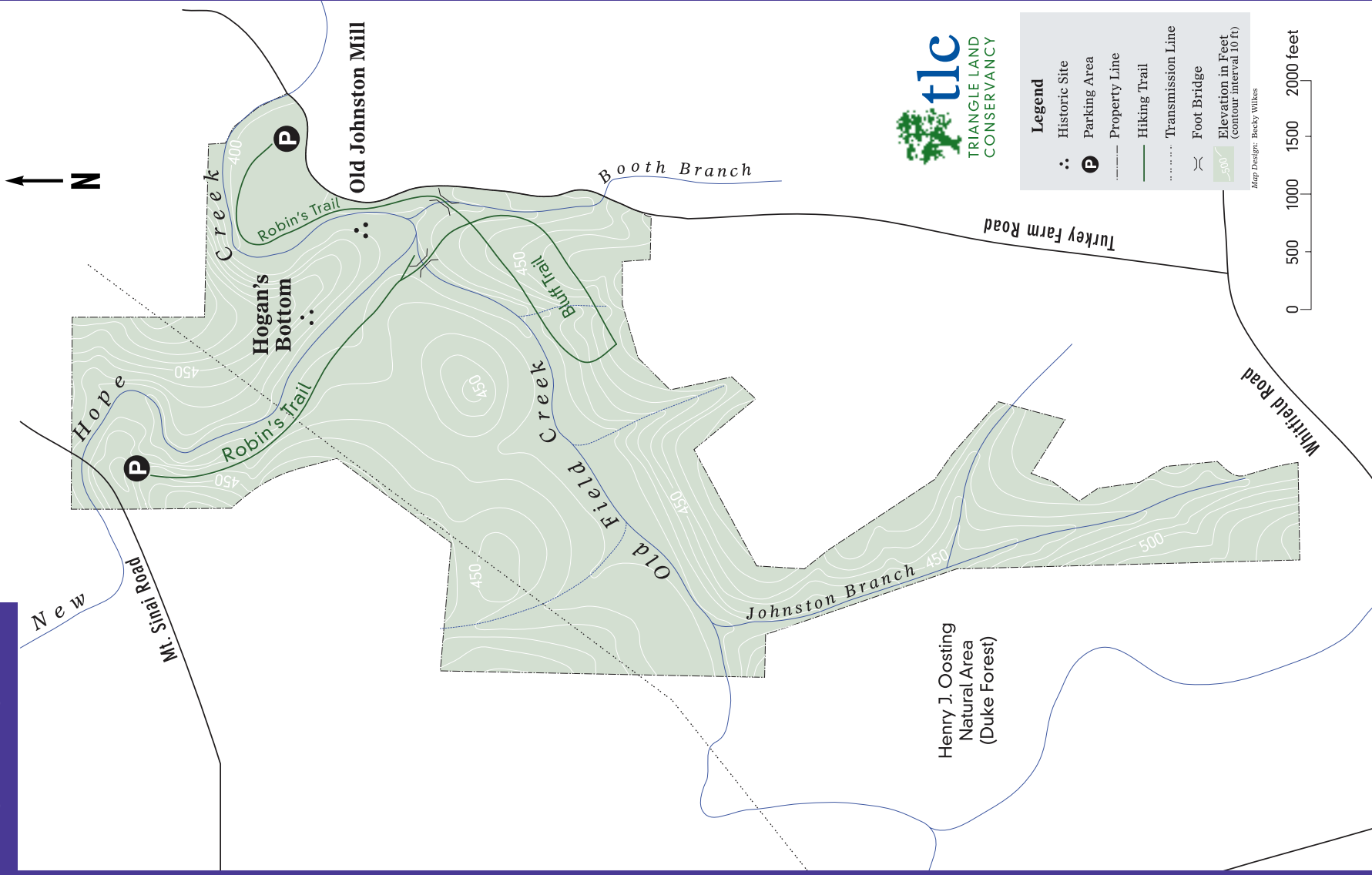
Conservationists became interested in this natural area in the late 1980s when biologists with the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program identified many significant woodland and stream habitats along New Hope Creek and determined that they were threatened by development.

In the late 1990s, TLC launched the New Hope Creek campaign, a fundraising effort to protect the Johnston Mill property and other natural areas along the creek. TLC raised \$680,000 in private contributions to match a \$2.75 million grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund to purchase two tracts in 1999 that formed the 296-acre preserve. TLC opened Johnston Mill Nature Preserve to the public in 2001.

The land trust continues to work with its partners to protect a green corridor that will eventually include 18 miles of trails along New Hope Creek and its tributaries extending from Chapel Hill to Jordan Lake. To date, TLC has protected eight properties comprising more than 500 acres along New Hope Creek.



JOHNSTON MILL NATURE PRESERVE



Legend

- ⋯ Historic Site
- P Parking Area
- Property Line
- Hiking Trail
- ⋯ Transmission Line
- ⌒ Foot Bridge
- 500 Elevation in Feet (Contour Interval 10 ft)

Map Design: Becky Wilkes



Directions

The preserve is located just a few miles north of I-40 near Chapel Hill in Orange County. Two parking areas provide access to the preserve.

Mt. Sinai Road Parking Area

GPS 35.99555, -79.05416

Take NC 86 north from I-40 (exit 266) 1.8 miles. Turn right on Mt. Sinai Road and follow it for 1.1 miles. The parking area is on the right just before the New Hope Creek bridge.

Turkey Farm Road Parking Area

GPS 35.99166, -79.04694

Take NC 86 north from I-40 (exit 266) 0.1 mile. Turn right on Whitfield Road and follow it for 1 mile. Turn left on Turkey Farm Road and follow that road for 1.2 miles. The parking area is on the left.

Trail Descriptions

Robin's Trail

This 1.5-mile trail parallels New Hope Creek and runs between the two parking areas. As it winds through the floodplain forest the path offers vistas of the creek and its stone-covered streambed and takes hikers through a mixed hardwood forest with beech, hickory, tulip poplar and sweetgum. This trail is named in memory of Robin Pascal by the Pascal-Strom family. Visitors will see many interesting landmarks on this trail:

- A gristmill and ford were once located on a section of the creek called Hogan's Bottom near the Mt. Sinai parking area.
- The trail passes through a powerline cut with thickets that offer shelter for migratory birds like the yellow-breasted chat during the spring and summer. This open area is a good place to look for butterflies and soaring hawks.
- The Pullman-Ryals Bridge spanning Old Field Creek, a New Hope tributary, was named in memory of two early TLC leaders, Jim Pullman and Clyde Ryals.



- On the north side of Old Field Creek, the trail passes through a forest of large beeches and other hardwoods. Duck potato, lizard tail and bugleweed grow here, indicating a permanent supply of water from springs and seeps.
- At a bend in New Hope Creek near the Turkey Farm parking area, look across the creek to see the stone walls that formed the foundation of the Johnston Mill. The walls are particularly visible during the winter. The millrace, the channel that conducted water over the mill wheel, is also partially intact.

Bluff Trail

This 1-mile loop trail traverses a mature hardwood forest composed of hackberry, red cedar, black walnut, tulip poplar and sweetgum and then climbs a bluff forested in beech, oak and hickory. Downfall from Hurricane Fran (1996) and a December 2002 ice storm litters the bluff.