

SAND HILL

The ridge that rises to the west of Skinner Brook is composed of a fine sandy loam that contains almost no gravel. Because it is much more permeable to water than the land downhill toward the brook, nutrients drain out of the soil quickly. As a result, the soil can support only simple, hardy plant forms like hairy cap moss and caribou lichen that are not be found in the valley. Fine sandy soils like this are usually deposited by rivers, but how did the sand get up here, so far above Skinner Brook? Most likely this sand was deposited by a much larger river that ran through this valley at the end of the last glacial period, 10 to 12,000 years ago. At that time the receding Laurentide glacier left a huge dam of rocks, boulders, and sediments in what is now Rocky Hill, Connecticut. Melting glacial ice created a massive lake, known as Lake Hitchcock, that extended north up the Connecticut River valley. To get an idea of the lake's great size and depth, think of the Lebanon Airport perched high above the shopping plazas along the current bank of the Connecticut River. That hilltop is the remnant of a delta left by the Mascoma River as it drained into Lake Hitchcock, whose surface was then level with today's airport. Those high waters in turn backed up into other valleys alongside the lake - including the one which now holds Skinner Brook. When the Rocky Hill dam finally broke, Lake Hitchcock and the streams flowing into it drained down to their current levels. If that ancient river were still here, would your house be under water?