

SUN ROCK

43.51106 N, 72.1326 W

If the water of Skinner Brook is low today, you will see a narrow stream zigzagging between large sheets of flat rock. It is easy to jump across the stream or sit with your toes in the water. If the water is high, as it is in the spring or after a heavy rain, the water is too deep and wide to cross safely. In flood the rocks are completely covered with water and the stream is filled with debris. The “This is your park” sign near the parking lot tells the story of Roy Horne who used to live alongside Skinner Brook. His step-brother drowned in the Brook, so beware.

Do you see the whale upstream from you? He is breaching from the east bank with his mouth toward the brook.



New Hampshire is known as the Granite State because its bedrock is mostly granite or granite-like rocks. In Brookside Park the bedrock is a granodiorite gneiss (pronounced “nice”), known as the Bethlehem Gneiss. It is a metamorphic rock, meaning that it has been changed by heat and pressure. The Bethlehem Gneiss is estimated to be about 410 million years old. At that time, known as the Age of the Fishes or the early Devonian period, New Hampshire lay south of the equator, and the land was covered with forests of giant leafless plants, like fungus and liverworts. A shallow ocean known as the Iapetus Ocean lay between where you are now standing and a volcanic island known as Avalonia. In another 40 million years Avalonia would crash into New Hampshire in what is known as the Acadian Orogeny. Mount Cardigan to our north was created by that collision and the heat and pressure created by the collision turned what had once been sedimentary rock into the metamorphic gneiss of Sun Rock. The shiny mineral grains in this rock include two types of mica (muscovite and biotite). Upstream and to the west is a fault line that separates the Bethlehem Gneiss from an even older unit of gneiss that is about 445 million years old.