

eye sore to eye candy

◆ **Belmont community project:** Volunteers revive neglected area with the use of hard work and history.

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BELMONT

Volunteers have transformed a swampy tangle of brush along Belmont's Main Street into a scenic roadside attraction featuring a rare chunk of New Hampshire mill history.

The once-hidden piece of a massive iron pipe sitting atop pedestals of rock is now clearly visible alongside the cascading Tioga River in Belmont Village. For all who react with a "What's that?" query, the town conservation commission will soon put up an interpretive sign explaining that the pipe is a remnant of a penstock — a hydroelectric power-creating water conduit system. It dates back to the early 1900s, when it helped to generate electricity at the Belmont Mill.

In an effort to beautify the entrance to the village, the commission has led about 25 volunteers to turn the area into a scenic overlook called Penstock Park.

They've hacked away brush, planted a perennial garden, installed park benches and put up a split rail fence.

The penstock, most of which was dismantled decades ago, once carried water from a dam on the Tioga River through the village, under ground and above ground, to the former Belmont hosiery mill's turbine. There, the tremendous force of the water created enough electricity to power not only the mill but also the town, according to Wallace Rhodes, chairman of the Belmont Heritage Commission.

"When you paid your electric bill, you went down to the mill," he said.

That was before 1955, when the mill changed hands and no longer produced electricity, he said. The mill itself is now the Belmont Mill Community Center, since the town restored the crumbling 1833 structure in 1998.

The new park is nearly complete after about a year's worth of beautification projects, powered by volunteers and donations.

On Thursday, Ken Knowlton, the chairman of the conservation commission, labored alongside Woody and Christine Fogg to put up a scenic fence. Working through rain showers and with the jubilant rush of the Tioga behind them, they said the



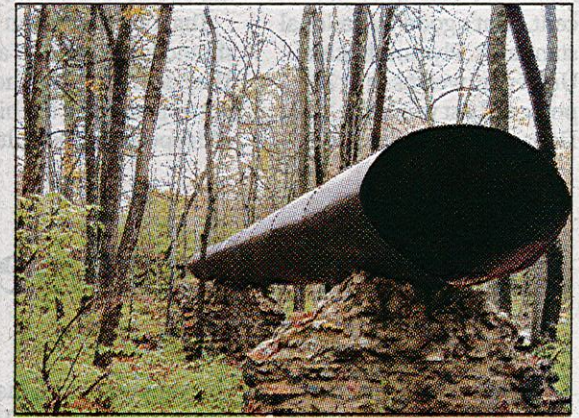
The scene that greets visitors to Belmont's Main Street features a perennial garden at the front of the new Penstock Park.

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Woody and Christine Fogg help to guide the posthole digger as Ken Knowlton drills the hole for a fence Thursday at the new Penstock Park in Belmont.

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The penstock remnant spans about 50 feet and is just one segment of an elaborate pipe system that once brought water from a dam on the Tioga River to the former Belmont hosiery mill.

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community has pulled together to make the park a reality.

"When the selectmen said go ahead and do it, I thought it would take two to three years. What we've done in one year has just been phenomenal, with all the volunteers and cooperation and the freedom from the selectmen," Knowlton said.

The garden, donated by Garden

Artisans, is still abloom and lovely, giving no hint of the sweat it took to prepare the soil for it. "We had to rototill it seven times because it was so full of rocks," recalled Woody Fogg.

The Belmont Rotary Club and the American Legion donated two park benches, and the Tilton Home Depot gave the commission a break on the fencing and delivered it for free.

Although the Penstock Park will surely arouse the curiosity of visitors driving through Belmont, it is already a conversation piece for residents who are surprised at what has been hidden from view for so many years, said Christine Fogg.

"I've heard people say they never knew there was a pipe there, or even a river," she said.