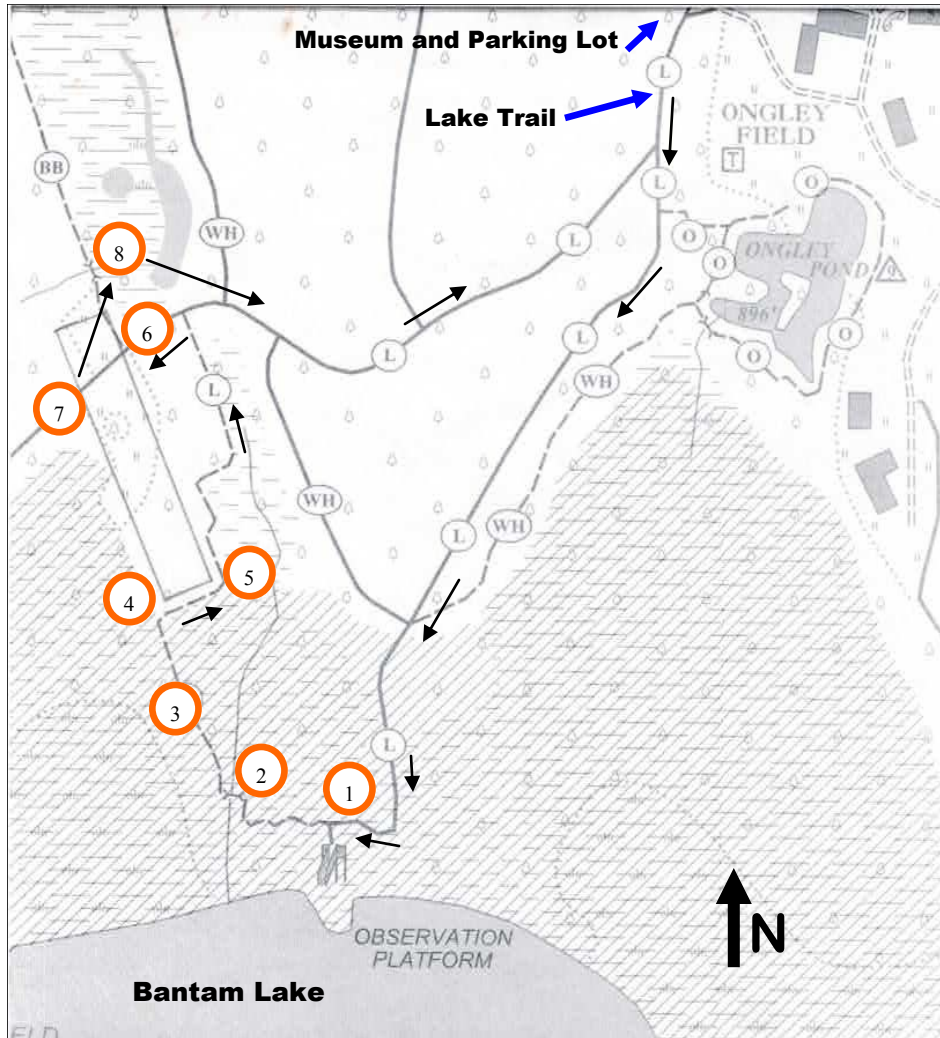


Ice House Ruins Tour Map
Follow the Lake Trail (L = yellow blaze)
Round trip ~ 1 mile



Photos are courtesy of the Morris Historical Society and the Bantam Historical Society with special thanks to Lee Swift and Betsy Antonucci.

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2014

Ice Cutting at Bantam Lake
Berkshire Ice Company 1908-1927
Southern New England Ice Company 1927-1929



Before the advent of the refrigerator, people kept food from spoiling by placing it in an icebox—a wooden cabinet with shelves for perishables and a large compartment for a block of ice to keep everything cold. Where did this ice come from? It was cut from lakes and ponds in the winter in regions where the temperatures were below freezing for extended periods of time. Ice blocks were cut by farmers for family use and by crews employed by large commercial concerns. Both occurred at Bantam Lake. The commercial operation was centered on the north shore and involved one of the largest ice block storage facilities in southern New England. The company even had railroad service making the distribution of ice to distant cities possible.



1. The conveyor – Large cakes of ice cut from Bantam Lake during the winters of 1908 through 1929 were transported from the lake to the ice house by an elaborate conveyor system. Operated by the Berkshire Ice Company, two “endless chains” traveled on a framework built on these concrete supports. They were driven by a 100 horsepower motor powered by electricity from the nearby Bantam Falls hydro-electric plant.



**Inland end
of canal**

2. The canal – As the ice cakes approached the elevator to the ice house they went through a planer which shaved the cakes to a uniform size. The resulting piles of ice chips were washed away by rotary pumps (25 horsepower) using water brought to the site from the lake via this 420-foot concrete canal.



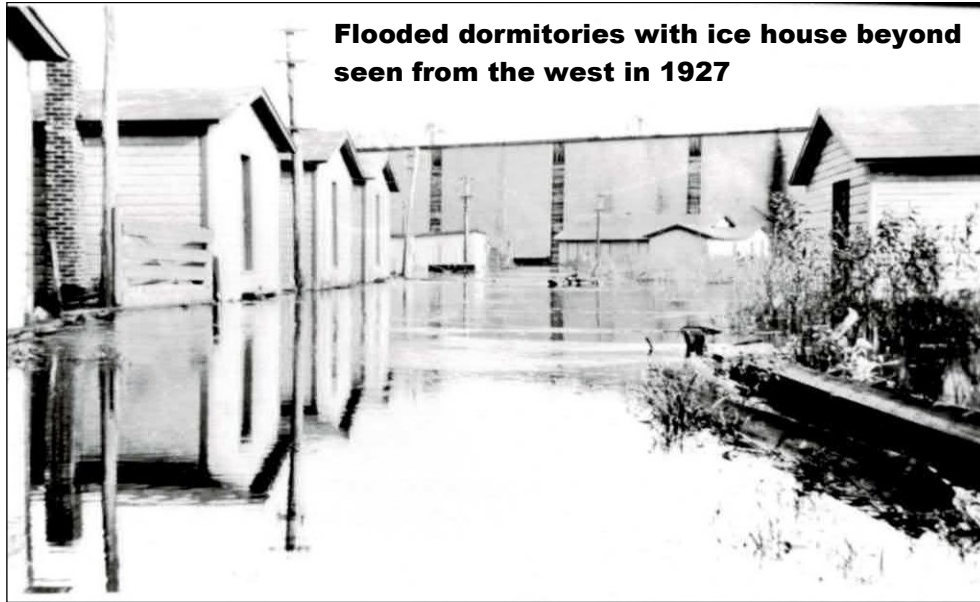
**West side of ice house showing box car
and men shoveling snow from the tracks**

8. The railroad line – This spur (now the beginning of the Butter-nut Brook Trail) led out to the main line of the Shepaug Railroad near the Lake Station. During the summer as many as 20 box cars loaded with ice traveled to the cities to supply the ice peddlers. The railroad also brought workers back in the fall at the beginning of the ice cutting season. The season generally began in late November and ended in mid-March during which time the men worked seven days a week with no holidays. The work day began at 3 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m.!!! It was harsh work out on the lake every day regardless of the weather.



**Horses pull an ice scorer to create grid lines
before sawing begins**

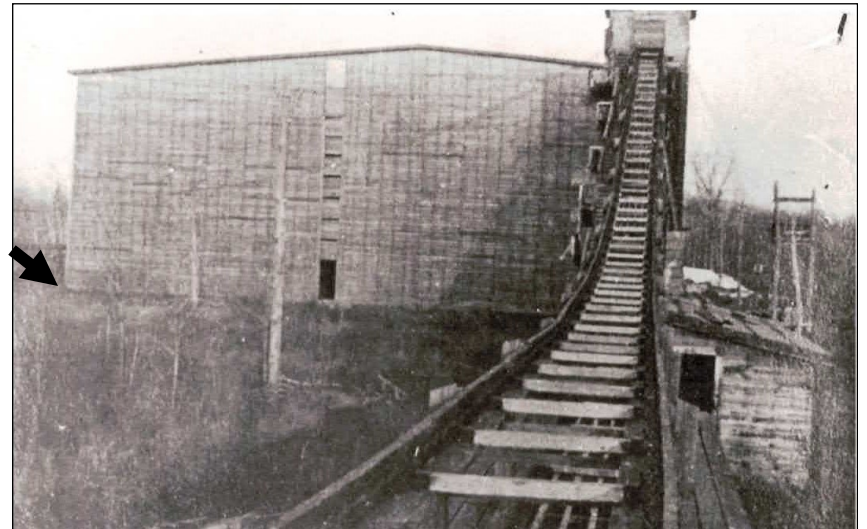
7. The dormitories – On either side of the road are sites where the bunk houses, cook house, and dining shack stood and where some of the 140 men employed by the company slept and ate their meals. Not far from here the foreman's house still exists near the entrance to the Litchfield Town Beach. Local men were hired as well as men from New York City some of whom arrived wearing derby hats and thin suits ready to work. Soon they were wearing rags and burlap bags to keep warm!



Flooded dormitories with ice house beyond seen from the west in 1927



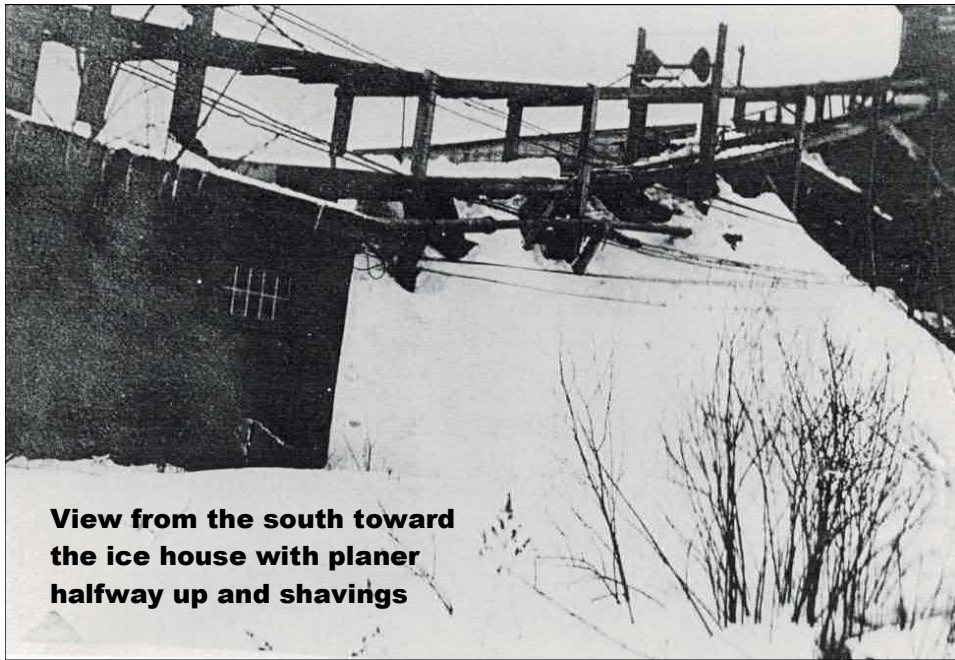
3. The old railroad bed – The Berkshire Ice House being one of the largest in southern New England had an enormous capacity. The ice cakes were shipped by railroad throughout Connecticut and as far away as New York City. The Shepaug Railroad which ran from Litchfield to the Danbury area had a spur from the nearby Lake Station (above) which split to service both sides of the ice house.



4. The ice house foundation (southwest corner) – Imagine a wooden building some 36 feet high built upon this concrete footing. The south and north sides of this building measured about 110 feet wide. This trail parallels the south side making it possible to pace off the measurement beginning here and proceeding to the next marker. The foundation is to the left of the trail.

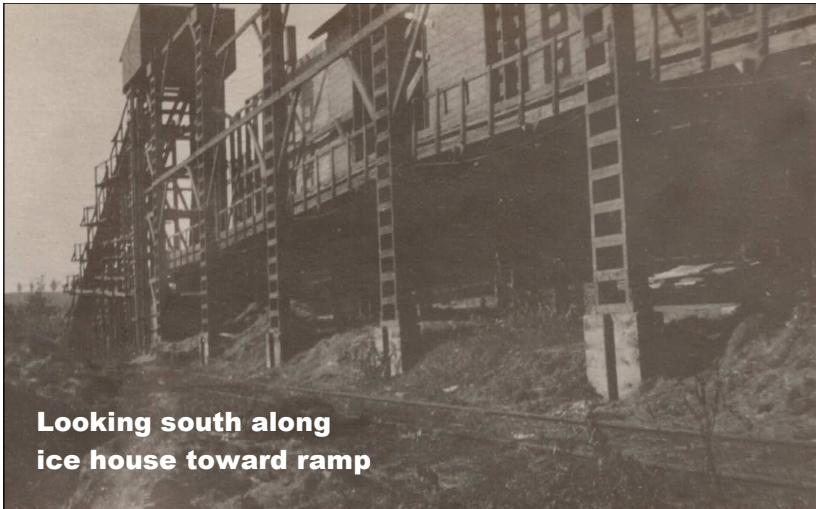


Using pikes to send blocks to the conveyor



View from the south toward the ice house with planer halfway up and shavings

5. The southeast corner – The ice house spanned 700 feet to the north. It was an enormous structure. From this point to the left it is possible to sight all the way to the northeast corner of the building. A path on the opposite (right) side of the trail leads to the remnants of the elevator and pump house foundations as well as the inland end of the canal and the paired concrete conveyor supports as they parade through the woods. From here the trail immediately joins and briefly follows the east side railroad spur before veering away through the woods.



Looking south along ice house toward ramp



Horses pulling snow scraper to clean off ice

6. The ice house field – The northern half of the ice house occupied this entire open field. It had 14 compartments each measuring 49 feet wide by 110 feet long by 36 feet high and having a capacity of over 4,000 tons. The ice house held a total of 60,000 tons. With one acre yielding about 1,000 tons, more than 60 acres would be required to fill the ice house. That's a lot of ice harvesting! Local men who owned teams of horse were hired for about \$5 a day to assist with the hard work. The ice house burned down August 5, 1929 bringing this chapter of history to a close.

