



Friends of the
OSWEGATCHIE HILLS
NATURE PRESERVE

Newsletter – Winter 2019

A Message from the President

For this edition, I've asked Rich Gallagher, Board member and long-time friend and colleague, to talk about what makes him passionate about the Oswegatchie Hills.



I've lived in East Lyme since the mid-1990s, and I admit, I didn't know about the Hills until Greg, with whom I had worked, called me in 2010. I had just retired from a long career, when he asked me if I'd like to join the Board. He took me on a hike through the Hills, and I was hooked!

That very first walk exposed me to the wonders of the Hills. Having spent some of my career as a high school science teacher, I was struck by how the Hills were not only the perfect outdoor science lab, but also a treasure trove of history and anthropology.

The preserve contains dozens of healthy wetlands—great habitats for aquatic plants and animals as well as a water supply for terrestrial species. They also retain and purify water, which slowly feeds into the Niantic River, Smith Cove, and the Pattagansett River.

The Hills themselves also provide great habitat for different forest types. Lowland areas consist of, among others, American Beech, Maples, Black Birch, large beautiful stands of Mountain Laurel (our state flower), and a healthy population of Witch Hazel.

The ridges generally favor the various Oaks, including Red Oaks, Chestnut Oaks, and our state tree, the White Oak. Increasingly rare Pitch Pines, discussed in previous issues, also live here.

All these habitats provide safe havens for wildlife of all types, both big and small, to live. When you hike through the Hills, you have the chance to see nature at its best.

Evidence of the Hills' fascinating geologic history abounds throughout the preserve. The bedrock consists primarily of Granitic Gneiss, believed to be about a billion years old.

In many areas, visitors can also see abundant evidence of the role the glaciers played in the formation of the Hills. Large boulders, called "glacial erratics," are strewn throughout the preserve. Evidence of glacial erosion is particularly prevalent in the area known as the "Lunar Landscape," photos of which are shown on Page 3.

Finally, the Hills also carry the voices of history. Native Americans lived here, and artifacts from that time continue to appear. Clark Pond, near the main entrance, was an "Ice Pond," which supplied the area's fishermen and "Iceboxes." And in the northern part of the preserve is the surface granite quarry, which supplied cut stone to some areas in the Northeast and the beautiful granite house located at Three Belles Marina in Smith Cove.

Rich Gallagher

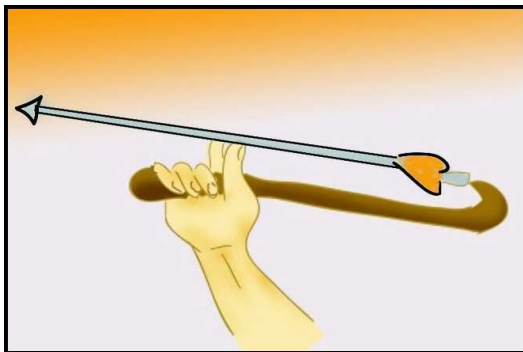
Discoveries in The Hills!

Atlatl Quartz Dart Point

Paul Whitehouse, a founding board member of the Friends, received a surprise ancient relic last year from his friend and former neighbor Jeff Alling, who currently lives in North Pole, Alaska. In 1973 while hiking, Jeff discovered a dart head in The Hills. With the help of Jay Levy, from the Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office and Archeology Department, it has been identified as a Quartz Lamoka Point from 5500 to 3500 B.P. (Before Present)!



The dart point is a stone projectile made by Native Americans. It predates the invention of the bow and arrow and was most likely hand thrown using an atlatl (see graphic below). The atlatl is similar to the common modern ball throwers (molded plastic shafts used for throwing tennis balls for dogs to fetch) which uses leverage for greater speed and accuracy. The dart point was used as a hunting weapon to kill a deer or small game.



Research suggests the atlatl was a social equalizer in that it requires skill rather than muscle power alone; allowing women and children to participate in hunting. The dart point and Jay Levy's certification will be on display at the May 4th Annual Meeting.

The ELHS Archeological Dig

Each semester Will Reed leads his ELHS Anthropology class on a six week dig as part of their archeology study. Over the years they have discovered a variety of artifacts.

The students have been able to work with Jay Levy, archeology supervisor from the Mohegan Tribe, as well as Dr. Brian Jones, the CT Archeologist and Liz Kuchta, EL Town Historian, to help identify the artifacts. It is believed that they most likely found some sort of homestead or encampment. Most of the items found are thought to be from the late 19th century including shoe buckles, a folding knife, several coins, utensils, buttons, a stirrup, pottery, shells and much more.



Pottery Shard found from sifting through soil

Please join us at the Annual Meeting of the Friends on May 4, to see some artifacts and hear Caitlyn Sievers describe their experiences. She will also present her journal of the dig from the Fall 2018 semester to the board, to be kept as part of the historical record.



Snake Tongue Buckle found in the Hills

Evidence of Our Glacial Past Abounds in The Hills

As discussed in this edition's introduction, continental glaciation played a significant role in the way our nature preserve looks today. The last glaciers to travel through North America—called the Wisconsin Glaciation—left their mark around 10,000 years ago. At that time, the glaciers were as much as a mile thick. On the East Coast, the southernmost extension resulted in the formation of Long Island, Fisher's Island, Block Island, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and much of Cape Cod.



Large boulders called glacial erratics, are found throughout the preserve. These rocks were transported southward by the glaciers and came from northern New England as well as Canada.



In the area known as the "Lunar Landscape," the north-to-south flow of the glaciers is etched into the bedrock, where the erosion and flow are obvious.



Photo of large quartz crystals protruding from the bedrock, this is because the quartz is harder than the base bedrock, which wore away faster than quartz.

Dates to Remember

Bridge Grand Opening Ceremony Saturday, April 13

Please join us on Saturday, April 13 at 1PM at the Preserve's main entrance near Vets Park for the opening of the new 45 foot cedar bridge over the Clark Pond Dam spillways. The ceremony will be followed by guided hikes of newly opened trails. If needed, the rain date is schedule for Sunday, April 14, 1PM.



Annual Meeting Saturday, May 4

Please join us on Saturday, May 4, for the Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. in the East Lyme Room, located in the Library.

CT Trail Days Hike Saturday, June 1

Mark your calendar for the annual CT Trails Day, the first Saturday of June, for guided hikes in The Hills.

For more details check out www.oswhills.org or our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/fohnp

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Many donations were made In
Memory of David Ferguson

Editor's Note: Every effort has
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of this list. However, we are
only human so if you find an
error or omission, please let us
know.