

## Mystery in The Hills

The East Lyme High School Archeological Class, led by teacher Wil Reed, returned this past fall to last year's dig site in the Hills to further investigate the site where many artifacts from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century were found in the 2018 dig. Suspected of having some sort of structure at some point, this year's dig yielded many ceramic and clay artifacts, an abundance of charcoal and the possible hearth of a structure! The students found over 100 artifacts including coins dating back to the 1720's, English Salt Glazed stoneware fragments and Green Onion Glass (used to carry whisky on ships).

At the end of the six-week field session, the students researched the artifacts and history, even checking town land deeds. They presented their findings to FOHNP at the high school library. They presented a shared hypothesis: based on the abundance of charcoal remains and the presence of what may have been seen as valuable items at the time – shoe buckles, pocket knives, utensils and clay and steel pots – the students believe the structure may have burned, either intentionally or unintentionally.

The class theorized that this may have been a 'plague house' because smallpox and TB were both prevalent during that period, which may have led to it being deliberately burnt. Students also speculated that the inhabitants may have simply moved on as part of the western expansion and gold rush during the 1800's. More work is needed, but they did confirm that no house was found on the 1854 town map. Two journals are now available as part of the historical record.



(L to R) Wil Reed, Sarah Fulcher, Summer LoPriore, Ella Page, Olivia Adams, Madison Dupuis, Dylan McDonald, Mackenzie Adams, Gus Dodge, & Kyle Lynch.

## Pitch Pine Nursery Update

Due to the cold weather, outside site work on the pitch pine tree nursery is on hold until warmer/drier weather returns in the spring. That doesn't mean work has stopped entirely. This winter, Master Gardner and EL Conservation Commission Member, Penny Heller, drafted a landscape planting plan for the site. It includes not only the placement of the young pitch pines – which will be left to grow to maturity – but also areas of native wildflowers, ferns and plants.

A second generous donation from Riverhead Building Supply in East Lyme was made to the project. This donation included 10 pallets of stone pavers of different types. Project Manager and FOHNP Stewardship Chair Greg Decker plans on using a portion of the donated stone to build curved benches to partially surround the already installed 20' paver "stage" where talks will be given, and guided hikes will begin. Decker also plans to use freshly cut white oak, donated by Thompson Native Lumber in Rhode Island, to steam bend the curved supports to support the seating for 4 benches.

Final grooming of the site will begin later this spring and will incorporate a lovely meandering 215' gravel path through the exhibit.

## 2019 Southern Pine Beetle Trapping Results

Southern pine beetle (SPB) trapping by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) continued this year at four sites in CT, including one in the preserve. The monitoring is to determine whether the SPB is wintering over in CT or being killed by cold weather. Climate change has allowed the invasive pine beetle to continue to move further north into New England and eventually beyond into Canada.

Results show an overall increase in SPB numbers this year with numbers skyrocketing at a trap site in a pitch pine stand in Groton. CAES is concerned that an infestation may be underway there.

If there is any good news in the data, it is that the numbers of SPB in the Hills were low for the years 2018 and 2019, but the year over year trend increasing. The beetle was first discovered in CT in 2015. It is considered one of the most destructive insect pests of pine forests and has a severe negative impact on endangered species and recreational areas. Detailed results of the data are available at [oswhills.org](http://oswhills.org).

## 1<sup>st</sup> Annual "Run for The Hills"

# Sunday, September 27th

### Trail Runs or Hiking – Fun for Everyone!

Early Registration Gift (Hills Trail Map Bandana) for the first 100 to sign up!

**SAVE THE DATE**

FOHNP is hosting the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual "Run for the Hills" fundraiser. Proceeds from the race will go directly to maintaining this special place for future generations to enjoy.

There will be two **Trail Run** options... a 5K-ish (3.3 mile) and a 10K-ish (which is running the loop trail twice); **Hikers** will complete a 2.1 mile loop. All participants will travel by beautiful Clark Pond and finish at the bridge.

We are fortunate to have Tara Borden, FOHNP board member and frequent Hills runner, assisting with coordination of this event. She has completed races in all 169 CT towns and has attained the status of 'Queen' in the 'Run 169 Towns Society'! **For registration and details go to [oswhills.org](http://oswhills.org)**

To find out how you can help or become a sponsor, contact Liz Paganetti at 860-759-2983 or Paul Whitehouse at 860-460-2348. Be sure to Save the Date and register early to get your trail map bandana!

## Annual Meeting – May 9th

Please join us on Saturday, May 9, for the Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. The meeting begins at 10:00 a.m. in the East Lyme Room, located in the Library. As part of the program, we will present a video, ‘Birds After the Fire Oswegatchie Hills’ by Michaela and Mike Dunn in conjunction with The Natural Resources Conservation Academy at UCONN. This is a story of forest succession and birding after the 1962 fire in the Hills. A sneak peek of the video is available at [oswhills.org](http://oswhills.org).

## CT Trails Day – June 6th

Join the thousands of other CT hikers on the first Saturday in June! For avid hikers or new ones, there will be guided hikes for all levels through the Hills offered on June 6<sup>th</sup>! Meet at the entrance near the ball field on Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> at 10 AM. Be sure to wear your hiking boots and bring water. See you there!

Those who contemplate the beauty of  
the earth find reserves of strength  
that will endure as long as life lasts.

*Rachel Carson in Silent Spring, 1962*

## Update on Landmark Land Acquisition

We are frequently asked about the status of negotiations to acquire the remaining Oswegatchie Hills. Multiple good faith offers have been made over the years to purchase at fair market value and protect the remaining undeveloped Oswegatchie Hills; none of which were acceptable to Landmark. This includes, most recently, written and compelling offers from the Trust for Public Land, which successfully negotiated protection of the 1,000-acre Preserve in Old Saybrook. We continue our efforts to prevent inappropriate over-development of this special place.



## President's Message

In thinking about what to write for this column, I decided to do a search on Google using the phrases “forests in Connecticut” and “wildlife in Connecticut.” The results led to some very interesting information. For instance, did you know that, according to the 2015 CT Wildlife Action Plan, there are 84 species of mammals, 335 species of birds, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, and an estimated 20,000 species of invertebrates in the state? The plan explains that this great diversity is due to the “wide range of landscapes, waterscapes, coastal plain and Long Island Sound in the south to the northwest hills.”

And to think that only 100 years ago, the state did not have the forested landscapes we enjoy today. The Connecticut Statewide Forest Resource Plan 2004-2013 explains that trees were barely able to reach commercial size before they were cut for charcoal, firewood or lumber. Trees not cut down were susceptible to wildfires, sometimes burning thousands of acres a year. The forests were in “terrible shape [and] not much thought was given to the future of the forests.” It took a group of “concerned citizens” (sound familiar?) and legislation to change things. As a result, the position of State Forester was created in 1901 and State Forests were created in 1903.

While Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve is not a State Forest, it is a place where wildlife abounds, where migrating birds can find a safe haven, where hikers can enjoy a diverse terrain and school children can learn in a living classroom. But none of this would be possible today if a group of “concerned citizens” like those of the early 1900s had not taken action when development threatened. And here we are 20 years later, still fighting to protect the Hills and to save the last undeveloped parcel of land along the Niantic River.

That is why your financial support of the Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve is so important. Your gift helps to pay the expenses of this prolonged and complicated process and to manage the preserve so all can enjoy it. Learn more at the Annual Meeting on Saturday, May 9 at 10:00 in the East Lyme Room of the Library. Be a “concerned citizen!”

*Kris Lambert*

## FOHNP thanks the following members for their generous support in 2019

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Many donations were made In  
Memory of Marvin Schutt

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