



# Pinnacle News

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association FALL 2019

## History of the Soapstone Quarries in the Athens Dome Area

The Pinnacle Association now owns several historic sites in the Athens Dome area connected with the mining of soapstone, including the remains of a mill, slag heap, boarding house for the workers, barn for the oxen, and multiple quarries cuts in the land. While mining there ceased in the early 1900s, there is interesting evidence remaining of this historic industry.

Soapstone is a close relative of talc, with a soft feel similar to soap. It has an exceptional ability to absorb heat without cracking, and to slowly release that heat. It can be cut with a handsaw or ax, and carved with a pocket knife. Grafton soapstone is bluish-gray in color.

Early Grafton pioneers first discovered and quarried this deposit of soapstone in 1784, carving pieces into household items such as foot and hand warmers, ink wells, and hearth-stones. Many examples can be found at the Grafton Historical Society in Grafton village (across from the store).

Between 1825 and 1910 the quarries were a significant business. By the 1840's Grafton was the largest producer of soapstone in Vermont and one of the two largest in the United States. Ten to fifteen men worked the quarries. Once the blocks were extracted they were hauled down the mountain on ox drawn wagons to the finishing mill in Cambridgeport. By-product pieces of soapstone from that mill can be found in the Saxtons River gravel banks today, near the bridge.

Visit the Grafton History Museum at 147 Main St. in Grafton Village to learn more about the soapstone quarries and the people who worked in them, and join us on the November 2 Athens Dome Walk to visit some of these sites. *See Schedule of Events, page 3.*

For more information: 802-842-2584 , [www.graftonhistory.info](http://www.graftonhistory.info)



## Annual West Hill Grinder • Sunday, September 22

**Starting at 10 or 11 AM (depending upon route).** Organized by the West Hill Shop in Putney, this event is a thank-you benefit to WHPA for its 25-mile trail system. Several different routes offer a variety of rural biking challenges for intermediate and advanced bicyclists. Distances range from 19-45 miles and wind through Westminster, Athens, Brookline, Dummerston, Brattleboro and Putney on town dirt roads, Class-4 woods roads, and Pinnacle hiking trails, with a bit of pavement here and there. **Visit [www.bikereg.com](http://www.bikereg.com).** Search for West Hill Grinder for information on routes, bike recommendations, equipment requirements, prices, food, and registration. For questions, email [jim@westhillshop.com](mailto:jim@westhillshop.com) or call 802-387-5718.

**WANTED: YOUR EMAIL!** If you haven't done it, please send us your email address. Then we can send you our newsletter, updates, or last-minute notices about special events. That means faster contact with you while saving time, money, and trees.

## 2019 Volunteers of the Year

At the Pinnacle Association's Annual Meeting on April 28, 2019, three dynamic, dedicated women were presented with the Volunteer(s) of the Year Award for their collaborative efforts in chronicling the growth of the Pinnacle lands.

Libby Mills, a former, and now again, Pinnacle Association trustee, and Rosalyn Shaoul, enthusiastic Pinnacle trails hiker, supporter, and recently elected trustee, have together created a written history of WHPA. Their project began as an oral history as they recorded the recollections of individuals involved over the Pinnacle's 27-year history. These recollections form the base of their written history, which evolved through many edits as they interviewed others and explored documents and land records. Then Wendy Wallas, long time supporter and Pinnacle land lover, joined the effort with her video camera, and expanded the project by filming interviews of some of the Association's founders, as well as of others who have been instrumental in growing the successful land conservation organization it is today.

The long lasting gifts realized as this project developed were not only the wonderful complexities of the jigsaw puzzle-like history of land acquisition, but also a profound appreciation of the collective effort of the many people involved, and a renewed sense of the importance of capturing that history.

That history, "**The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's Story: How Did They Acquire All That Land?**" continues to be a work in process, and upon completion, will be available for all to enjoy!



2019 Volunteers of the Year, Wendy Wallas, Libby Mills, and Rosalyn Shaoul

## SRVTI Receives Claremont Savings Bank Grant for Knotweed Management

This past June, the Saxtons River Valley Trails Initiative (SRVTI) of which I am a member, was a lucky recipient of a Claremont Savings Bank grant in the amount of \$3,250 for knotweed management along the proposed SRVTI trail system. SRVTI was created by members of the Bald Hill Committee of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, the Rockingham Conservation Commission, and the Bellows Falls Historical Society (BFHS). Our mission is to connect the Bellows Falls Historic Riverfront Park and Trail System to the Bald Hill Reserve in Westminster, and, hopefully one day, to Saxtons River and beyond. Upon completion, this trail will offer a stunning riverside walk through a beautiful gorge, meander through the meadows and fields of the Basin Farm, and continue on to the pristine Bald Hill Reserve where there's something for everyone. On your way to the summit, where hikers can catch a view of the Connecticut River Valley, you might pass a vernal pool that's very active in the spring, become mesmerized by the impressive Twin Falls, or simply enjoy a gentle walk in the shade of its many hemlock trees.

As we continued to develop plans for the SRVTI trail system, it became quickly apparent that knotweed was beginning to be an obstacle to fulfilling our dream of trail connectivity. Sadly, since tropical storm Irene, the knotweed problem at the BFHS Riverfront Park and Trail System has only intensified, the root fragments of which were transported in the fill that was needed to repair the damaged river banks. We invited Mike Bald, sole proprietor of Got Weeds? down for a walk with us and learned about his non-chemical methods of knotweed management. The generous award from the Claremont Savings Bank has made it possible for us to hire Mike to work his magic on the SRVTI trails.

Mike founded Got Weeds? in 2011 on the notion that "ecosystems can be protected with vigilance, persistence, patience, education, humility, respect, and cooperation." When Mike came to speak to a group of concerned citizens, (after all,

knotweed is often referred to as the "Godzilla weed"), he assured us that knotweed management isn't about declaring war on this Japanese plant, but taking the time, and having the perseverance, to control it with regular and repeated cutting. Mike insists that there aren't "good" or "bad" plants, and wants the public to understand that landscapes are the healthiest and most resilient when they have strong biodiversity.

Mike advocates the "Ten, Nine, Eight" method of cutting, which translates into mowing the invasive weed ten times the first summer, nine the next, and so on, so that its photosynthesis is never allowed to operate at high levels. When using this method, it's imperative that you gather the cuttings and bag them for disposal. They can also be dried and burned.

Japanese knotweed, a member of the buckwheat family, likely arrived here in the 19th century. Featuring small, white flowers and heart shaped leaves, it was coveted for its ornamental potential. It thrives in sunny, moist areas including riverbanks, lawns, and gardens, and will happily take over any plot of land that has been disturbed by humans in search of sunny yards and friable soil. Fortunately, it doesn't do well in forests, another great incentive to protect, and increase, woodland areas.

I have yet to meet anyone who believes that knotweed can ever be truly eradicated. Researchers from Swansea University in Wales have carried out extensive trials using an integrated approach of both physical and chemical methods, and they concluded that "eradication is not possible, at least in the short term. These same researchers also asserted that "it's not a question of eradication, it's a question of sustained control and management." I expect that Mike Bald would agree.

Vanessa Stern

**For more information on how to manage knotweed, visit:**  
[www.brattleborotv.org/brattleboro-conservation-commission](http://www.brattleborotv.org/brattleboro-conservation-commission)

*Photo courtesy of U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Northeast Region [Public domain]*



## New Roof Water Collection for Fire Suppression and Pinnacle Cabin

The Trails and Cabin Committee has collaborated with long-time WHPA volunteer and master metalworker Joe Richards in designing and installing a roof water collection system on the north side of the Pinnacle cabin shelter. The system was completed on July 25, 2019 and has now been installed.

Joe fine-tuned his design to accommodate the rustic roof rafters and log walls of the cabin, and custom fabricated the gutter and water barrel supports in his Westminster West shop.

The water harvested from rainfall runoff is collected through a gutter and barrel system, and is intended be used only for extinguishing campfires in the outdoor fire pit. The setup includes a 50-gallon water barrel outfitted with a spigot, from which water may be drawn into the accompanying bucket. This new system will greatly improve fire prevention at the Pinnacle cabin.

Joe has been a dedicated trail steward for many years, and was awarded Volunteer of the Year in 2016. We extend our thanks to Joe for his work on this water collection system and for all he does for the Pinnacle Association!



Joe Richards (left), and Tony Coven (right)

## WHPA Field Notes

Red (*Actaea rubra*) and White Baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*), have a warning in their names - "bane" meaning something that causes death or a deadly poison. "If you eat me, I will make life miserable for you."

Both beautiful plants, the Red and White (or Doll's Eyes) species, grow in moist, shaded, woodland soils throughout much of the United States and Canada. Both species have white flower heads in the spring that mature to either red or white berries, with deep purple, almost black spots that look like pupils in an eye. The flowers of Red and White Baneberry are quite similar, but can be identified by the shape of the flower head. The Red Baneberry's is more globular than the elongated head of White Baneberry. The thickness of the stalks that hold the berries will help distinguish each species before the berries



ripen. The stalks are thin on the Red Baneberry and thick on the White Baneberry. The Red Baneberry fruits ripen in July and August, the White Baneberry follows a couple weeks later.

All parts of the plant are poisonous, with the berries and roots having the most toxicity. Eating a mouthful of these berries could lead to death from cardiac and respiratory arrest; fortunately, the bitter taste of the berries is so powerful they seldom get swallowed. Native Americans used the berries to poison arrow tips and for some medicinal purposes, including aiding in childbirth, reducing pain and teas for colds. Although toxic to humans, the berries are eaten by birds and small mammals.

The Red Baneberry in the photo was found on July 28th on WHPA lands northwest of the Athens Access Trail, on the high land next to an old farmstead cellar hole. If you see some Red or White Baneberry on your WHPA trail hikes, let me know with a photo and location description. I will try to find them the next time I am in that area.

Andy Toepfer, [Toepfer.alt@gmail.com](mailto:Toepfer.alt@gmail.com)

## Schedule of Free Events: Weekend Strolls and More

For more information and directions, visit [www.windmillhillpinnacle.org](http://www.windmillhillpinnacle.org) or contact the program person listed below.

### September 14, Saturday, 10:45 AM-2:30 PM. Accessibility Day.

A once-a-year opportunity for a vehicle ride to a remote and beautiful site for lunch - on the Windmill ridgeline between the Pinnacle overlook and Paul's Ledges, with spectacular views of Vermont mountains and beyond. If you're an adult who has difficulty walking, this is your chance to visit a rural spot with a grandchild or friend. Advance registrations a MUST for riders. Hikers do not need to pre-register. Bring water, bag lunch, and a sweater for chilly weather. Meet at Westminster West Church at 10:45 AM to carpool. Register with Tony Coven at 802-387-6650.

### October 12, Saturday, 1-4 PM. Fall Foliage Walk on Bald Hill.

Vanessa Stern, member of the Bald Hill Committee and WHPA Board, will lead this riverside walk along the Saxtons River, where hikers can venture down to get a closer look at the rock basins and Twin Falls. Then, climb to a summit with a good view

of the surrounding area. Meet at the Bald Hill kiosk on Covered Bridge Road in Westminster. Wear waterproof shoes. Contact Vanessa Stern at 802-463 4948 to register or get information.

### November 2, 12:30-3:30 PM Historic sites on Athens Dome.

Walk to historic sites on WHPA properties in Athens and Grafton. See the remains of the historic Goodridge & Smith Soapstone quarries, quarry pools, cellar holes, mill foundation, and old roads. This area, adjacent to the Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area, has significant wildlife habitat including wetlands and very productive beech/oak/cherry mast stands. The hike is moderate, there may be some water in the old roads depending on previous weather, watertight boots recommended. Hike leaders are Camil Roberts and Andrew Toepfer. Please register by email at [camil@vermontel.net](mailto:camil@vermontel.net) or [a.l.toepfer@gmail.com](mailto:a.l.toepfer@gmail.com). Meet at Athens Pond in Athens on Route 35.

## Meet Our New Board Members

**Todd Eastman**, a lifelong outdoor enthusiast, was fortunate to grow up in a family that hiked, climbed, skied, biked. Living in Baltimore, he and his brothers couldn't wait to get outside to adventure and explore. Local parks and back yards, with healthy doses of



trips to the Eastern mountain ranges instilled a deep sense of the mixing of nature and sport. He has been involved in outdoor education since the early 1970s - guiding and instructing climbing and skiing; selling outdoor gear; working in experiential education programs; and pursuing skiing as an elite racer - have shaped what he believes to be a broad perspective how people and nature can interact. Currently he is race director for Madshus USA, a Norwegian ski company servicing some 80 skiers ranging from Olympians to junior racers, and a few speedy geezers. After 23 years in Colorado and Washington, he moved back East in 2017 and resides in Westminster at the base of the Pinnacle. He and his sweetheart Kirsten were married in their garden on July 26 this year!

**Jennifer Latham** grew up in Westminster West, and climbed the Pinnacle in first grade as a part of Claire Oglesby's classroom. After graduating from UVM with a B.A. in English, she began working on film productions in Vermont and found her career as a film producer. She moved to New York City, and fell in love with documentaries. Her film credits include *Endurance: SHACKLETON'S LEGENDARY ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION*, the critically acclaimed PBS documentary *TWO TOWNS OF JASPER*, Michael Moore's Oscar-nominated *SICKO*, and she received an Emmy award for her work on *YEARS OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY*, a series about climate change. More than ready to return to fabric of close community and connection with the natural world, she moved home to Vermont in 2014. She is honored to be on the WHPA Board with her mother, Alison Latham.



**Libby Mills** had the lifelong good fortune to live in places of extraordinary natural beauty—the Maine coast where she grew up, the high mountains of Colorado, and finally, the welcoming hills of Vermont. With her husband Bob, she came to The Putney School in 1958 where he introduced the relatively new study of ecology. In those early days Libby coached women's sports and led uncounted



camping trips; the latter quickly showed her how the pressure of development was changing the New England landscape. That concern, coupled with her love of walking our abandoned roads and old trails, fueled her interest in protecting the land from unhindered overdevelopment. A serious knitter and weaver, Libby also taught fiber arts and human development at Putney, and was a co-founder of the Green Mountain Spinnery. She has served on the boards of both Putney Mountain Association and the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, a mark of her allegiance to the whole ridge of Windmill Hill. She lives on an old farm in Westminster West, but returns to her native territory on the Maine islands, like a migratory bird.

Returning to the Pinnacle board, **Camilla Roberts** was originally a board member starting in 2004, and Chairperson of the board for seven of those years until retiring in 2013. She has lived in Vermont nearly all of her life. She and Silos Roberts have two children, and built their log cabin home at the north end of the Windmill Ridgeline trail in 2003. Work experience includes artist, dairy farmer, vegetable gardener, Resource Manager at Farm & Wilderness Foundation, college instructor, fundraiser for NOFA-VT, and Lister (assessor), Property Valuation Hearing Officer. Her experience with non-profit boards includes NOFA-VT, Farm & Wilderness Foundation, and the Rockingham Board of Listers.



Although **Rosalyn Shaoul** grew up in New York City and spent 13 years living in cities around the world, she always wished to live a country life closer to nature. While living overseas she and her husband bought their first home in the U.S. in Westminster West, Vermont in 1987 and spent all their free time there for many years, becoming early supporters of the WHPA. They finally becoming full-time Vermonters in 2014, and Rosalyn soon joined the Westminster West Wednesday hikers, where she and Libby Mills would often walk together and talk about the history of the Pinnacle. They decided together that this history should be recorded and thus began their joint project which is now almost ready for publication as "The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's Story: How Did They Acquire All That Land?" After learning so much about what the WHPA has accomplished while researching this history, Rosalyn is looking forward to joining them as a Board member and helping to advance their mission into the future.



Interested in donating monthly? Visit our website [www.windmillhillpinnacle.org](http://www.windmillhillpinnacle.org) and click on the PayPal link. There's now an option to choose monthly payments.

PO Box 584, Saxtons River, VT 05154  
[wpha@sover.net](mailto:wpha@sover.net) • [windmillhillpinnacle.org](http://windmillhillpinnacle.org)