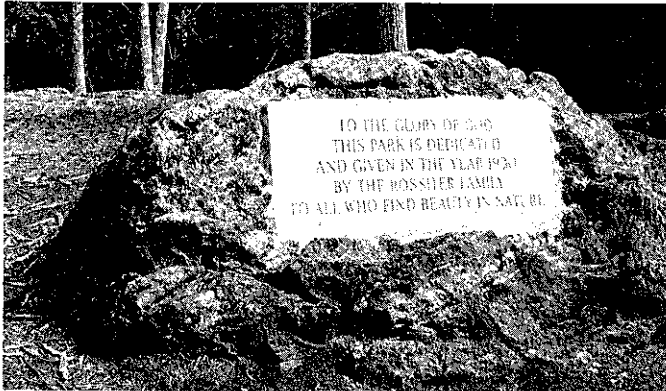


The Steep Rock *VISTA*

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Spring 2000

Happy 75TH Birthday, Steep Rock!



Monument honoring Ehrick Rossiter, at the top of Steep Rock.

About this time three quarters of a century ago, Ehrick Rossiter set the stage for what was to become Steep Rock. His contribution of 125 acres has grown to almost 3000 acres thanks to the generosity of many others over the ensuing years.

In this day and age of megabites and seemingly endless and instant communication, to have trees, open space, a river, endless trails and the peace and tranquility they bring, is both unique and a treasure.

To have something in this ever changing world that changes only at the whim of nature and not man, is a constant that the human psyche must have.

To all the individuals who use this beautiful preserve and who are involved in its care and feeding - from the financial support, to the gifts of land, to the members of the Stewardship, Preservation and Trails Committees - thank you for making it not only the jewel in Washington's crown but the place of peace for all who are uplifted by its beauty and solitude.

John Millington



This plaque honoring Adrian vanSinderen is can be found on the Pinnacle in Hidden Valley. Mr. vanSinderen's 1961 gift of 650 acres comprises almost all of what is known as the Hidden Valley Reservation.

Victory for Shepaug River !! River Advocates Win Lawsuit Judge Orders More Water Released

In what can only be described as a stunning victory for the Shepaug River Association, the Steep Rock Association, the Roxbury Land Trust and the towns of Roxbury and Washington, Judge Beverly Hodgson delivered her decision in the Shepaug River trial slightly earlier than expected, on February 16, 2000.

In her 85 page decision, Judge Hodgson ruled that the city of Waterbury has breached the 1921 contract with the town of Washington, the city has violated the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act, and Waterbury has also violated the riparian rights of downstream landowners along the Shepaug.

The judge ordered Waterbury to release significantly more water to the Shepaug during the critical summer months, when low flow causes the greatest harm, and she ordered the city to make the necessary modifications to the Shepaug dam in order to make the releases possible.

Judge Hodgson ordered Waterbury to install a stream gauge, which would allow the U.S. Geological Survey to monitor releases to the river, by March 1, 2001. She gave the city 90 days to file any applications needed to alter the Shepaug Dam in order to achieve the increased releases, and declared that any alterations to the city's water supply system should be completed by May 1, 2002.

Under Connecticut's Environmental Protection Act, there is a statutory provision entitling those who bring a claim to recover attorney's fees and other reasonable costs related to the trial, for example the costs of hiring expert consultants. In her decision, Judge Hodgson invited the River advocates to make such an application.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal praised the decision, as did the Connecticut Fund for the Environment (CFE). Arthur Rocque, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection (D.E.P.), allowed that the decision supported the testimony of the D.E.P.'s expert witnesses in the case.



The Washington Horse Show

Hedda W. von Goeben

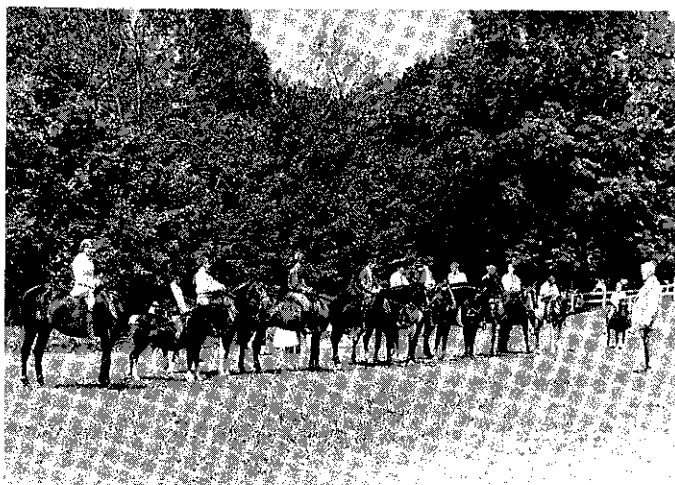
The town of Washington held annual summer horse shows before 1957 in two locations: on the Washington Fair Grounds, located near what is now Fair Grounds Road, and at the Colonel Samsonoff stable on the west side of Roxbury Road, adjacent to Tom Whitney's house.

The show held at the fair grounds was an expanded event managed by New Yorker, Al Lowe, who ran shows throughout New England and New York State. He admitted that the show was not a financial success and it was not held again.

The shows held at the Samsonoff Stable were popular with the local riding families, considered a "springboard" to larger competitions for the more advanced riders or a day to gain confidence and have fun for the children with lesser skills and became the model for the event created in 1957.

In 1957 the following local families formed an active committee to design a prize list for a show with classes only for residents of the town of Washington: the Marshs, Potters, Straws, Bronsons, Johnsons, McCaffreys, Edmonds, Carlsons, Hardees, Eames, McTiernans, Hoadleys, Byerleys, Andersons, Cooks, Chesses and von Goebens,

Because most of the children lived and rode near the Marsh Horse Farm on Wykeham Road, John Marsh built the first horse show ring just about where Linda Allard's driveway is now. The show donated what small profits it realized to the Washington Visiting Nurse's Association. In subsequent years Bill Williams helped the Boy Scouts or members of the 4H Club cook and serve food to both exhibitors and spectators.



From the Left: Mary Hoadley, Corinne Bonyng, David Byerly, John Potter, Saen McCaffrey, Colonel Samsonoff as Ring Master. Washington Horse Show, Bareback Equitation. 1958 Photo: Fred Stoneall. (additional photo p.4)

Washington Horse Show, cont.

By 1962 the number of entries in the horse show had increased dramatically, and it became clear it had outgrown the Marsh Horse Farm location. The organizers appealed to Ed Pinney, then President of Steep Rock, to ask the Board to permit the Washington Horse Show to move to the field near the entrance to the Steep Rock Reservation. This location would be ideal. It was well drained, level, large enough for a 100' by 200' ring, and had plenty of room for parking. Because it was centrally located, competitors could hack to the show and home again. The show committee also asked Steep Rock to share the cost of building the ring, and agreed that it would be made available for use by the general public throughout the year.

Permission was granted. In 1963 for the first time the Washington Horse Show was held in Steep Rock. For many of the following years, the ring was maintained by committee members using their own equipment and jumps for the show.

In the 1970's and 1980's the horse population in Washington declined and despite opening the show to neighboring towns, adding classes for carriages and side saddle entries, the show closed in 1986 and the Challenge Trophies were returned to their donors or given to the Gunn Historical Museum.

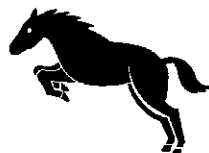
In 1991 a new post and plank 100' by 200' ring was built to replace the old one, funded by donations from local residents and built with the volunteer labor of Don Massey of Bethlehem's Massey Fence Company.

Steep Rock's President at that time, George Ward, suggested the horse show be revived, and the summer of 1991 saw the first show under a new format in the new ring. The show has been held for nine years since then. It is now run strictly by AHSA rules along the lines of a schooling show and hires AHSA or NEHC judges. It has become one of the best and most popular small shows in Connecticut, with entrants from as far away as New York State and Massachusetts.

In the years from 1991-1999, profits from the show have been donated to Steep Rock and total almost \$25,000.00. The year 2000 marks the tenth anniversary of the show held in the new ring and becomes, overall, the 40th year of this Washington event.

The date for this year's 10th anniversary show will be Sunday, August 6, rain or shine, starting at 8:00 a.m. Plan now to attend.

**Between
1991 and 1999
The Horse Show
Donated
Almost
\$25,000
to Steep Rock .**



EXTRAVAGANZA! **This Year's Picnic on** **Labor Day Weekend**

Remember what it was like 75 years ago? Come back in time with us as we have a grand old fashioned picnic. On Saturday September 2, 2000, Labor Day weekend, the annual picnic sponsored by the Steep Rock Association will be a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Association. Steep Rock hopes that all the residents of the town will come and join us at this special birthday party.

We plan a horse drawn wagon ride to transport you from your parked car to the riding ring.

There'll be a marvelous feast. For appetizers we'll have steamers and crackers and cheese. In addition to hot dogs, we will serve roast beef and roast pork, with potatoes, salads, and rolls. Jane Conn and Mark Averill promise more of their extraordinary onion soup. For dessert you'll find a variety of delicious sweet treats, and, of course, watermelon for everyone.

Weather permitting, you can thrill to the excitement of a tethered balloon ride. Shirley Downs will entertain the youngsters with a variety of games and activities.

The Washington Volunteer Fire Department has agreed to provide a fire truck for safety demonstrations and the Boy and Cub Scouts plan educational presentations on nature and survival.

And Roger Cannavaro and his musicians will entertain us with wonderful bluegrass music.

Throughout the day citizens dressed in period clothing will be strolling throughout the crowd, so you'll truly have the flavor of what a picnic was like 75 years ago.

Or, if all else fails, you can simply relax and dip your toes in the deep waters of the Shepaug River!

Victoria (Tara) Cherniske

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Ehrick K. Rossiter

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It's Nearly Goshawk Season Watch Out!

Remember! Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) begin their courtship and nestbuilding in early April – earlier if the weather has been mild. The Hidden Valley goshawks have nested in the same area, on the ridgeline above the west side of the river, for several years. The birds are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until courting and nest building time.

When eggs are in the nest the hawk may only circle above and call out warnings. When there are fledglings, the birds will attack by repeatedly swooping down upon intruders – we call it "dive bombing".

Become a Member of Steep Rock

Steep Rock's Membership Drive corresponds to our fiscal year- September 1 to August 31. If you haven't renewed your membership yet, or if you want to become a member, we welcome you to do so. A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year. The funds raised help us to maintain the reservations. Clip and use this form to send in your donation.

Name _____
 PO Box /Street _____
 Town _____
 State, Zip _____

Send To:
 Steep Rock Association
 PO Box 279
 Washington Depot, CT 06794

Photo Search

We're looking for old pictures taken in Steep Rock and Hidden Valley. We plan to display old photographs at Steep Rock's Picnic EXTRAVAGANZA on Saturday, September 2. Call the office if you have anything you think might interest us.

The photo below is a good example of what we're looking for.



Victoria Cherniske (nee Tara Marsh) dressed as a bride. Washington Horse Show costume class, 1958. Photo: Mrs. Carl von Goeben

Mountain Bikes, Horses, and Camping Prohibited During Spring Thaw

We are continuing the practice of closing the Reservations to mountain bikes, horseback riding and camping during the spring thaw. Be on the lookout for the signs announcing the closure - they are posted at the main entrances.

Trails are particularly susceptible to erosion and damage during the freezing and thawing periods that regularly occur in early spring. Many of Steep Rock's trails are in a fragile condition already. They are eroding and showing signs of overuse and abuse. Prohibiting the uses that create the most wear and tear during this brief but critical time period will prevent further erosion.

Open Space Grant Award For Meeker Swamp Acquisition

The 238 acres known as Meeker Swamp moved a step closer to being permanently preserved this month, when the State of Connecticut's Open Space and Land Acquisition Grant Program awarded Steep Rock a grant of \$450,000.00 towards the purchase of this property.

Saving Meeker Swamp from development has been a long time goal of Steep Rock and the town of Washington.

The property contains the headwaters of Bee Brook, which is a major tributary of the Shepaug River. A significant portion of the land is farmland. The wetlands surrounding the headwaters and the aquifer that lies under the farmland are the largest in the town of Washington.

"This is a great first step toward what we hope will be a state, municipal and private partnership whose goal will be the preservation of this important property," said Washington's First Selectman Alan Chapin.



Open Space Grant Award ceremony, February 22, 2000. From left: Assistant DEP Commissioner David Leff, DEP Commissioner Arthur Rocque, Steep Rock Trustee Bill Fairbairn, Lieutenant Governor Jodi Rell, Washington First Selectman Alan Chapin, Steep Rock Executive Director Susan Branson, State Representative Arthur O'Neill.

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