

The Steep Rock VISTA

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Summer 1991

Hauser Footbridge Dedicated

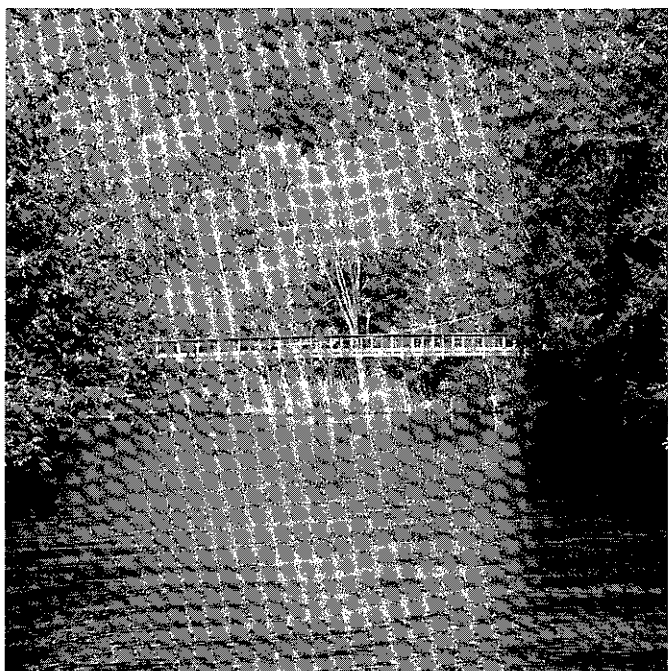
by George Ward

On May 11, the recently completed footbridge over the Shepaug River was officially opened and dedicated. The bridge is named the "Hauser Footbridge" in honor of Rita and Gus Hauser of Washington, whose matching grant gift of \$25,000 through the Hauser Foundation was critical in making a reality of this long-sought improvement to the Reservation.

A total of 210 other Steep Rock friends responded to the appeal and matching grant gift, contributing to the bridge project with individual donations ranging up to several thousand dollars. To all these fine supporters our many, many thanks.

The new bridge, modeled after an Appalachian Trail bridge near Rutland, Vermont, was designed by engineer Richard Marnicki and constructed by the O & G Corporation under the supervision of Gene Sternberg.

The footbridge is a major addition to Steep Rock. It greatly improves the accessibility of hiking trails on the other side of the Shepaug, and will ease the overuse problems along Tunnel Road.



A view of the Hauser Footbridge from the vantage point of a canoe, looking down river toward the Clam Shell.



Gathered for the dedication of the Hauser Footbridge were (from left) Ketti Maisonrouge, Rita Hauser, Mr. & Mrs. Avery Fisher, William Kinsolving and Gus Hauser.

Hemlock Scale Update

by Susan Branson

The Steep Rock Association Forestry Committee, chaired by Arthur Potter, will use a technique known as "microinjection" to inject selected trees with pesticides in order to limit the damage from the hemlock scale. With this technique, a pesticide is injected into the root of a tree and is carried to the needles by its vascular system. The amount and concentration of the pesticide is predetermined according to the size of the tree being injected. The scales, attached to the underside of the needles, ingest the pesticide, which acts by destroying the scale's nervous system.

Dr. Mark McClure, chief scientist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in Windsor, has been helpful to Steep Rock since the scale infestation was first reported. He has agreed to conduct the experiments in early June. Two areas have been identified for study. The first is in the Steep Rock Reservation on the hill north of the Shepaug River near the new Hauser Footbridge. The large "specimen" trees in this area are heavily infested with the scale. The second area is located in Hidden Valley. The scale has been identified in this area, but damage to the trees is not as severe as in Steep Rock itself.

Hemlock scale was accidentally brought into this country from Japan in 1908. Since then it has spread from New York City to as far north as Kent.



The Steep Rock Picnic, September, 1990—more than 450 attended. Join the fun this year on September 14!

Steep Rock Riding Ring Tradition Continues

by Susan Branson

Last fall, Washington resident Don Massey volunteered his services and spent four weekends building a new riding ring for Steep Rock. His helpers, also volunteers, included Hedda vonGoeben, Harry Wright, Bunker Burr and Ian Branson.

The first ring was built in 1959, after Hedda vonGoeben approached president Ed Pinney and asked if Steep Rock would allow the Washington Horse Show to construct a riding ring in the preserve and hold its horse show there. The field near the entrance to Steep Rock was an excellent place for a ring. The area was level and the footing was always good because of the dry, sandy, well drained soil. There was even room for parking. The Horse Show provided 50% of the materials and labor.

The Washington Horse Show, which originated in 1956, was for Washington residents only and was held at John Marsh's farm. Under Hedda's guidance the show became very popular. In just three years it outgrew its location at Marsh's.

For almost thirty years, the Washington Horse Show was one of the town's most popular events. One year an enthusiastic young rider named Tom Marsh (now a veterinarian) and his horse, Jet, jumped into and out of the ring during the show. Another year the entire ring was stolen—posts pulled up out of the ground and cross rails taken away. Claude Decker, a Washington constable, discovered it, accidentally, in a back yard in New Milford, and the ring was returned.

The last Washington Horse Show—the 30th—was held in 1986. The riding ring continued to be used by horsemen, but by last summer so many of the crossrails had rotted out that the Steep Rock Association decided to replace it.

Michael Harwood Bird Walk— a Bird's-eye View

by Linda Potter

The Michael Harwood Bird Walk begins near the Riding Ring at the Steep Rock Preserve. The sign is easy to see from the parking area.

Are you aware that the venerable sugar maple at the head of this trail provides food for the ruffed grouse and rose-breasted grosbeak in the form of buds and seeds, or that many songbirds use its fallen leaves in nest-building? Or that the old apple tree nearby probably contains some knothole cavities, favorite nesting sites for bluebirds? And the elm, just above, harbors insects that attract warblers and vireos? Well, neither was I until I was asked to look at the vegetation along the Michael Harwood Bird Walk from the birds' point of view.

I did know, though, that wild turkeys gobble acorns whole, and here there are mature specimens of both red and white oaks. Don't discount the dead trees you come across—many tasty morsels lurk beneath the bark, and punky wood makes nest-hole excavation a breeze for chickadees.

Another tree important to birds and other wildlife is the American beech, whose 3-edged nutlets are in demand by the ruffed grouse, tufted titmouse and various woodpeckers, to name a few. Along the path I discovered the haphazard, flimsy twig nest of a mourning dove in a beech sapling at the angle created by trunk and crooked branch. The black and yellow birches provide spring delicacies for the grouse in the form of dangling catkins, the flower of the tree. The gracefully swooping foliage of contiguous young hemlocks offers winter cover for turkey grouse, while in the spring the veery and black-throated blue warbler seek higher branches as nesting sites.

The cardinal loves the fruit of the wild grape vine seen looping up a tree near an outcropping of rock, and it uses the papery shreds of bark to line its nest. Another vine frequents the grove of white pines adjacent to the rail at the base of the hill—the dreaded poison ivy. However, the chickadee, the white-throated sparrow and many woodpeckers find its diminutive white berries a taste treat. In fact, poison ivy is ranked 7th in a list of 35 woody plants most valuable to wildlife.

Look carefully in the carpet of russet needles here—you might be lucky enough to find a discard of the screech owl. The regurgitated pellet may be a light-gray ovoid or a dark-gray, rain-flattened mass with tiny rodent bones in white relief against the sodden fur. The ruffed grouse also likes to roost in the evergreens. Its presence is detectable by white and gold droppings on the ground.

If you return to your car via the road, listen for the rattling call of the belted kingfisher, and you may be rewarded by the sight of him speeding upriver or plunging downward to snatch up a fishy feast. If you return through the field, you may notice, as you turn right

continued on p. 4

TRAIL BLAZES...

• Washington Horse Show

The Washington Horse Show will be held Sunday, Aug. 4, 1991, for the first time since 1986. The show will be at the new riding ring at Steep Rock, and proceeds from it will be donated to Steep Rock.

The Show Committee, co-chaired by Charlotte Kenney and Ruth Eren, and including Susan Branson, Diane Kennedy and Hedda vonGoeben, has "opened" the show to include participants from all surrounding towns. Adults and children are invited to take part.

• 1000 Norway Spruce Planted

On the morning of April 29, 1991, Art Potter, chairman of the Forestry Committee, led a group of 30 Gunnery students into the Steep Rock Preserve to plant trees. The occasion was the workday that the Gunnery School holds each year, and this year the timing coincided perfectly with the arrival of 1000 Norway spruce trees Steep Rock had ordered.

The trees were planted in some of the areas hard hit by the hemlock scale, where many of the hemlocks are already dead. The spruce should have enough light to get a good start, and eventually they may grow large enough to create the same understory that existed when the hemlocks were alive. The scale does not attack Norway spruce.

• Dead Hemlocks Are for the Birds

The Board of Trustees of Steep Rock has launched an effort to make the best of a bad situation and in the process to involve many in the community not usually engaged in Steep Rock endeavors. Trustees are organizing a program to make bird boxes from some of the hemlock trees that have been killed.

Forester Vinnie Forese, with the assistance of other able-bodied volunteers, will bring some full length logs cut from hemlocks lost to the disease. George Ward has arranged with one of the trustees of the White Memorial Foundation to use their sawmill, which is now operated only for demonstration purposes, to saw the logs into thin boards for use in the bird box construction.

Pat Desmond, director of the Senior Center, is trying to find the next piece in the puzzle: a volunteer to cut the boards into the pieces needed to make the bird boxes. Then we hope to have school children and/or scouts nail the pieces into the finished product.

The bird boxes will be offered for sale over the holidays and into next spring, with the proceeds going to Steep Rock—and the hemlock houses to the birds!

If you are interested in participating in any facet of this undertaking, please call the Steep Rock office at 868-9131.

• Summer Intern Improving Reservation

Steep Rock's intern this summer is Trevor Johnson. Trevor grew up in Washington and knows Steep Rock and Hidden Valley very well. He is a student at Bryant College.

Trevor has already completed his first project for Steep Rock—he opened the old switchback trail behind site #16 near the new Hauser Footbridge. Trevor is a hard worker and Steep Rock is pleased to have him as this summer's intern.

STEEP ROCK ASSOCIATION, INC.

Statement of Operating Fund

Revenue and Expenditures

9/1/90-2/28/91

REVENUE	YEAR TO DATE	
Contributions	\$42,181.37	99.1%
Interest Income	361.76	0.9
EXPENDITURES		
Executive Director	6,250.02	14.7
Forester	9,743.34	22.9
General Maintenance	4,496.79	10.6
Vehicle Maintenance	730.73	1.7
Picnic	982.03	2.3
Insurance	4,751.00	11.2
Supplies, Printing, Postage	3,464.21	8.1
Utilities	440.89	1.0
Rent	816.67	1.9
Property Taxes	1,919.72	4.5
Professional Fees	1,788.95	4.2
Payroll Tax	272.05	0.6
Fess, Dues & Permits	103.00	0.2
Bank Charges	11.85	0.0
Miscellaneous	25.85	0.1
Staff Education	88.50	0.2
Petty Cash	146.51	0.3
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$36,032.13	84.7
Excess (DEF) of REV over EXP	\$ 6,511.00	15.3
Operating Fund Balance 9/1/90	\$ 15,187.48	
Operating Fund Balance 2/28/91	\$ 21,698.48	
Investment Fund Balance 2/28/91	\$388,716.93	



Bert Read and Susan Branson monitor a conservation easement.

Steep Rock Flora and Fauna

by Mary Durant Harwood

Wetlands, woodlands, rock uplands, and meadows—Steep Rock has them all—the preferred habitat for a host of wildflowers. My informal list, noted from memory this April morning, comes to some sixty-five species. In marshy ground, examples range from skunk cabbage in early spring to forget-me-nots, pink-white turtlehead, cardinal flowers, and at the end of summer, Joe-Pye weed.



Epipactis helleborine

In the hemlock forests are waxy-white Indian pipes (a true flower, not a fungus), spotted winter, pink lady's-slipper (a native orchid) and *Epipactis helleborine*, a northern European orchid with tiny green and purple flowers, which somehow found its way into the sunless depths of Steep Rock. I've never seen it anywhere else, and as yet "helleborine" has no American nickname that I can find.

In leafy woodlands, spring brings us trailing arbutus, purple hepatica, delicate white star-flowers, rue anemones, and wind anemones. On rocky hillsides you'll find flame azaleas and mountain laurel. Among our native lilies, the first of the season are in woodland clearings—the yellow trout lily named for its speckled leaves, red trillium, and Indian cucumber root with small yellow flowers and crimson stamens. In midsummer the tall Canada lilies with yellow bell-like flowers bloom in damp clearings, and the red-orange wood lily, despite its nickname, blooms in open, sandy soil.

A startling number of meadow flowers are of Old World origin. Some were imported for colonial gardens, but the majority came as stowaways in shipments of seed or in crates of glass and chinaware packed in hay. Among them: ox-eye daisies, the common buttercup, pink or white yarrow, toad-flax (butter-and-eggs), and Queen Anne's lace. Black-eyed Susans, native to our western plains, are said to have come east in the mid-1800s via freshly-dug, transcontinental railroad beds.

My favorites among our native summer flowers are purple bergamot (a mint and first cousin to bee balm), royal-blue closed gentians, pink steeplebush, and the downy yellow false foxglove, also known as "oak leach," because it grows only in dry oak forests. With autumn come our myriad varieties of goldenrod and asters galore; in shady clearings, woodland asters and white baneberries (doll's eyes). All are our very own—a New England farewell to summer. If you need a reference book to explore for yourself, the best is still *A Field Guide to Wildflowers of Northeastern North America* by Roger Tory Peterson, first published in 1968 by Houghton Mifflin.

TRUSTEES

George D. Ward, President
George A. Murphy, Vice President
~~Douglas H. Greene~~, Treasurer
Fourgie W. Smith, Secretary
Robert L. deCourcy, Past President
Helen Wersebe, Honorary Trustee

Henry de F. Baldwin	Mary Durant Harwood
Penelope K. Bardel	John A. Herrmann, Jr.
Barry D. Burr	Susan F. Payne
Arthur L. Carter	Arthur F. Potter
Alan J. Chapin	Linda Potter
P. Lincoln Cornell	Bertram Read
Natalie H. Dyer	Charles R. Robinson
Robert Ficks	Allan Turner
F. Robert Frost	Hedda W. vonGoeben

Harry R. Wright

Susan Branson, Executive Director
Vincent L. Forese, Forester

Bird Walk *(continued from p. 2)*

at the bottom of the hill, the scalloped leaves of an herbaceous plant called celandine. The swallow, after her young have fledged, uses the bright yellow juice of this member of the poppy family to sharpen the eyesight of her babies so they can accurately swoop upon tiny airborne insects. Take time to inspect the dense honeysuckle bushes bordering the edge of the field. They provide excellent songbird cover and perhaps you'll find last year's catbird nest littered with the remains of seeds and berries left by a deer mouse who used it as a dining hall. Or maybe you'll be delighted, as I was, to discover, partially hidden by fallen leaves, a pheasant's tail feather.

Steep Rock Annual Picnic Saturday, September 14 Plan to attend!

Steep Rock Association
P.O. Box 279
Washington Depot, CT 06794

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #11
Washington Depot, CT
06794