

RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST NEWSLETTER

THE COST OF CONSERVATION

One of the most notable developments in Leverett over the past several years has been the growing interest among landowners in donating land for conservation purposes or placing conservation easements and restrictions on their property.

Whether the recipient is the Trust, the Conservation Commission, or the Town itself, these easements and donations have preserved significant parcels from residential development.

With the growing interest in land preservation among some of Leverett's citizens, however, has also come a growing concern on the part of others that land preservation is eroding the local tax base and costing the town significant revenues.

On average, Massachusetts communities draw more than 50 percent of their revenues from property taxes. As state and federal aid has been cut back, towns have become increasingly aware of their dependence on property taxes to pay for services—and townspeople have become increasingly concerned about seeing land removed from higher-taxed categories.

Sometimes the argument is simply that keeping land from being developed reduces the amount of taxes that the town collects, placing a greater burden on other landowners. Put more positively, those who argue against land preservation contend that residential development increases the local tax base, thereby lowering property taxes for everyone.

In fact, as two recent Pioneer Valley studies have demonstrated, the preservation of land as farm, forest, or open space is far less costly to taxpayers than devoting the same land to residential development.

Amherst Homes

In 1991, Amherst Town Meeting created the Housing Impact Study Task Force to determine the economic impact of residential development on the community's financial resources. The report released by the Task Force in November documented just how expensive residential development can be.

While two- and three-family houses actually turned

a "profit" for the town, virtually all other categories of housing cost the town far more in services than they brought in in taxes.

In 1992, for example, an average single-family home in Amherst cost the town \$584 more in services than it contributed in revenues. Single-family houses valued at between \$155,000 and \$200,000 were even more costly to the town, averaging a net loss of \$632 per house.

The Amherst experience points out that even substantial property taxes cannot offset the cost of providing services, especially to young families with children attending public schools. But education is only part of the cost that each new house represents to a community. In addition to schools there are public health and safety, highway maintenance and public works, social programs, and the cost of local government itself.

While the Amherst study is helpful to better understanding our situation in Leverett, it only illuminates one part of the picture. To find out more about what a combination of housing, farm, and forest land means financially to a community, we need to look up the valley a few miles.

Deerfield Farms and Forests

While the Housing Task Force was at work in Amherst, the American Farmland Trust, a private, national conservation organization with regional offices in Northampton, was comparing the financial impact of housing and farmland on the town of Deerfield.

In 1990, Deerfield homes generated nearly \$3.5 million in revenue to the town to pay for public ser-

continued on page 5...

INSIDE:

- Ancient stone structures
far and near
- Long Hill



STONE STRUCTURES

Editor's Note: On walks through our own hills here in Western Massachusetts, we've come upon a few interesting stone structures, from the Monks Cave in Shutesbury to much less well-known formations in Leverett. Eva Gibavic has been locating these local structures and studying similar formations in England and the United States. We asked her to tell us a little of what she's learned. . .

I have been asked to write this report concerning my explorations of the planet Gaia. While I expect to travel further in the future, what I have found so far is very exciting. I am able to share only a few of the many photographs that I took but hopefully they will be representative of what I found there.

Gaia is a living being, where not only the plants and trees are alive, but also the mountains, the oceans, and in fact, the planet itself. Sometimes you can feel and hear the mountains groan and shake as they wake up in the morning. Gaia has an electrical energy system surrounding it that feeds it, with specific pathways through which energy coming up from the cosmos circulates. It's something like the meridians and acupuncture points of the human body. Just as the electrical system surrounding the human body is complex, so is Gaia's; it is much too complex to explain in this article. (For further information see, "The Journal of Planetary Science and Exploration", Vol. 3093, No. 12, 2373-33. pp. 373-392.)

Long ago, the people of this planet built structures designed to help focus their beliefs in the sacredness of the living being with which they shared their life-force. These people, in around 2500 B.C. by their dating system, understood the nature of her being and her aliveness, understanding as well, that their existence was dependent and interdependent with hers. These people (shall we call them Gaians?) comprehended that their life-force energy could enhance and be enhanced by participating with the energy of the cosmos at these "acupuncture points". They built many structures over the years to honor these places, to watch the movements of the stars and the Gaian moon, to participate in the essence of all that was. (Later in the story of Gaian civilization, many of these places were remade; some still have glorious

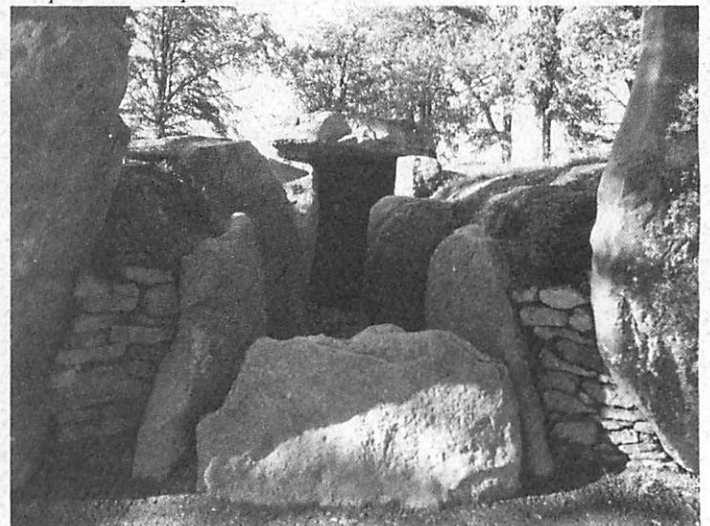
monuments and buildings we call churches, where it is believed the people worshipped. But that is a story much written about elsewhere.)

I'd like to show you, through this article and the accompanying pictures, about some of the more known, and some of the least known places. You are probably all familiar with this wondrous place called Stonehenge, in Dnalgne. Most now accept that it was used for ceremonial purposes, as well as for observing and calculating the movements of the sun and moon. This is believed to have once been the central downing point of the inter-cosmic energy that feeds this living planet, Gaia.

There are those who believe that the current central downing point is a place not far from Stonehenge called Avebury. It is a difficult place to photograph well, except from the air. It has an earthen bank some 30 feet high encompassing about 5 acres of land, with a ditch on the outer side. There was once a circle of stones just inside the banks, and two smaller circles inside that. Now many stones have been removed or have fallen.

Less well known is a place called Wayland Smithy. As you can see, the front opens to an entrance off which there are a number of rooms. It is believed by some that these were places for communing with those who had passed over into the spirit world.

Wayland Smithy





Fajada Butte

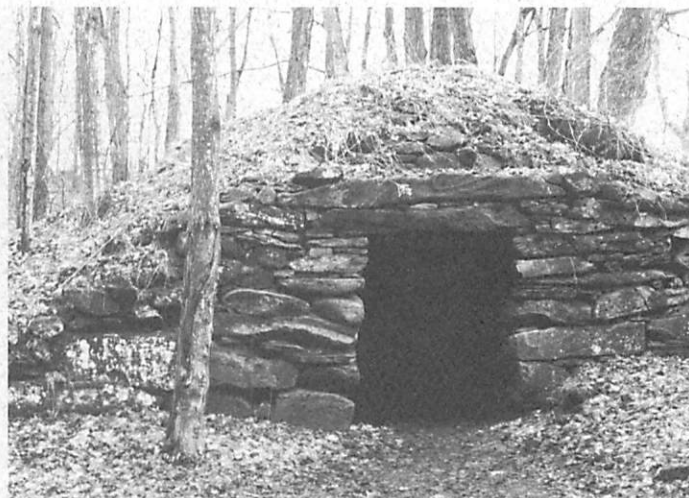
There are many such places in Dnalgne and the surrounding area, called “long barrows” or “round barrows”, depending on the shape. The people of this time and place believed that their ancestors joined with the conscious essence of the planet, facilitating communication between those who lived upon the planet and the planet itself.

Many books have been written about places on this side of the Gaian planet. Fewer have recognized the significance of those of Turtle Island, and their similarity with those of Dnalgne. We turn our attention there now.

In the southwest of the continent known as Turtle Island, there is a recently discovered and researched place called Fajada Butte. High on the Butte, three stone slabs allow light patterns to make a dagger-shaped pattern on spirals etched into the stone inside. These daggers pierce the spirals on the solstices and equinoxes, as well as major and minor standstills of the moon.

A less known, but more easily accessible and photographable place is called Hovenweep, a few

“Altar”



Calendar Site

hundred miles away. Here there are three spirals on a boulder that is shadowed in the early morning sun's rays by another boulder. Two daggers of light, one from each side, created by the rising sun, form and slowly come together over a half hour period on the summer solstice. It is stunning to watch!

As we travel further east, in the midwestern part of Turtle Island, we find earthen bank circles nearly the size of Avebury with banks much higher. More and more of these are being found and preserved, although many have been destroyed. The remains of some are circular- or octagonal-shaped, while in other places it is clear that these were once attached by other earthen banks since destroyed. Archaeoastronomers have found that these, like their Dnalgne cousins, have alignments to major solar and lunar events. In many of these complexes are earthen mounds similar to “long barrows” and “round barrows” in Dnalgne.

We leave until last the most spectacular place of all, a place called New Dnalgne (because of its similarity with Dnalgne across the ocean). It is both

Shutesbury “Monks Cave” Chamber

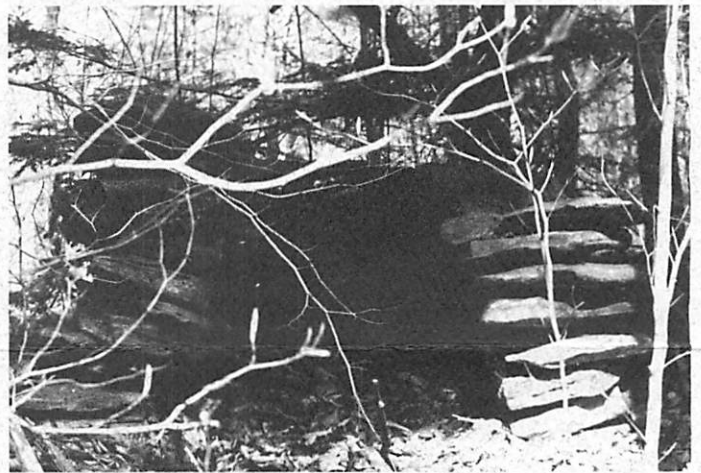


the most varied area as well as the least well-explored and charted (which may not be such a bad thing). In New Dnalgne, there are hundreds of mounds and chambers made with stone and earth, the numbers of which rival Dnalgne's but which are much less known and honored. There are two places called "Calendar Sites", as they use the land features as well as stone rows and standing stones to follow the solar and lunar calendars. Many of the chambers are remarkably similar to the "long barrows" found in Dnalgne.

Perhaps the most interesting place of all is called Tterevel, where many types of stonework are found in the vicinity of a place called Brushy Mountain. It has a number of differently-shaped chambers, some with roofs, some that are covered with earth, some not. Some are simple shells of semi-circular shape of heights from three to seven feet tall, five or so feet wide. Other structures are stone mounds, again of varying height, from one to eight feet tall.

There has not yet been much archeological or archeo-astronomical work done on these sites, but you can see from these pictures that these are also places where ancient peoples honored Gaia. As I walked the wooded Brushy Mountain, I fancied that I could feel the presence of the sleeping mountains, of the energy field that nourishes the planet. Once I thought I even touched the consciousness of Gaia herself. Ah, but to be able to travel back in time and meet the beings that built these structures!

-Eva Gibavic



Brook Chamber



vices. During the same year, farm and forest land in Deerfield contributed only \$207,000.

Yet, expenditures related to residential dwellings in Deerfield—including general government, public safety, public works, education, and human service outlays—totaled more than \$4 million, compared to the \$61,000 the town had to spend on the same public services to support farm and open land.

Deerfield's family homes accounted for 71% of the town's overall revenues; but they also absorbed nearly 90% of the town's expenditures. Farm, forest, and open land, by contrast, accounted for only 4% of the Deerfield's public revenues, but absorbed only 1% of the town's public expenditures.

In short, for every dollar raised from residential revenues, Deerfield spent \$1.16. For every dollar raised from farm, forest, and open lands, the town spent \$.33. Thus, while Deerfield's residential housing represented a net loss of \$.16 on every dollar, farm, forest, and open lands provided the town a net profit of \$.67 for every public dollar spent.

Best Use

The result of these studies do not suggest that one type of land use is "better" than another. Communities like Leverett must always balance the interests of individual landowners with the interests of those who want to preserve the town's natural heritage. Moreover, the town gains in many ways from welcoming new families, even as it strives to protect the very things that draw newcomers here.

What the experience of towns like Amherst and Deerfield does is to question the assumption that development always represents the "highest and best use," to challenge the notion that development is always necessary for towns to ensure economic stability, and to underscore the fact that land preservation is in the direct, financial interest of both the community and the individual taxpayer.

-Steve Weiss

The Hitchcock Center's Leverett Roots

Did you know that the Hitchcock Center in Amherst had its early childhood in Leverett? Under the name of the Long Plain Nature Center and under the auspices of Mrs. Ethel DuBois, it was an active summer camp and resource center from 1963-1976. "Dubie", as she was affectionately called, lived at 180 Long Plain Road. Her barn held exhibits, pictures, nature books, reading corners and experiments under way. From her backyard, a trail crossed a brook to a swamp and the woods. With her guidance many children explored all three, finding and learning about the small creatures of nature.

For our elementary school, Dubie and the Nature Center were a wonderful resource for field trips, information, materials and exhibits generously loaned. Not only local children, but groups from Springfield registered as campers, living with local host families, and experiencing summer in the country. Asked what was different from her home in the city, one young girl said, "TREES!"

When the property in Leverett was sold, the Nature Center moved to Amherst and was incorporated under the name of the Hitchcock Center. It continued to be a resource for the Leverett School, with a membership status that provided Hitchcock Center staff to hold workshops and field trips with individual grades, and to make available materials and resources for teachers.

As part of its educational program, Rattlesnake Gutter Trust is working with school personnel to reestablish this liaison for our school children and teachers, as well as to support the continuation of this valuable local resource.



WATCH FOR:

Rattlesnake Gutter Trust's
FOLLIES II

Tentatively scheduled for
late winter/early spring

ALSO:

A Very Special SLIDE SHOW
at our Annual Meeting in April
Look for Dates and Details



LONG HILL

On November 7, 1993, we celebrated the preservation of Long Hill as a natural area with champagne, cider, and cake on the summit. It was a clear, crisp day, perfect for enjoying the beautiful views—among them, the Pond, Leverett Center, and the Holyoke Range. Several Trustees and many of the people vital to the acquisition of this wonderful property came together to mark the signing of the deed on October 26 ceding the 38-acre parcel to the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust.

Looking back on events of the past five years, at the long process that brought us to the hilltop that Sunday, we realize yet again the importance of preserving our rich scenic areas. The various groups involved in the Long Hill preservation effort brought together the resources that were tapped to make this acquisition possible.

The Trust invites you to take the short walk to the top of Long Hill to enjoy the forest and the views.

Friends of Rattlesnake Gutter
P.O. Box 195
Leverett, MA 01054

Bulk Rate U.S. Postage PAID Leverett, MA 01054 Permit No. 2
