



VERMONT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

April 2011

The Vermont Archaeological Society Electronic Newsletter

Greetings!

Stone Structures, Sacred Landscapes, and Expanding One's Horizons

I used to find it easy to be lulled into a sense of easy, if artificial, familiarity with our well-used Vermont landscape and its cultural features. But getting pushed out of your comfort zone occasionally is reputed to expand your horizons. On that basis, I seem to have been 'expanding my horizons' for some time - and thought the VAS newsletter would be a good place to give an update on that experience.

Over 200 large field stone "piles" lie in three clusters on the southeast-facing slopes of a small mountain within the Green Mountain National Forest. The piles are dry-laid, well-built, and appear significantly more "formal" than what we consider a typical farmer's pile. We have been referring to them as "cairns."

Issue: III-3

Joint VAS/NHAS Meeting in Springfield VT Saturday April 30

Don't forget the spring meeting to be held at the Springfield United Methodist Church on April 30th. A complete agenda is available on both the [VAS](#) and [NHAS](#) Web sites.

Return to Little Rock?

Yes, once again this summer, the Vermont Archaeological Society, UVM's Consulting Archaeology Program, and the Green Mountain National Forest will partner up for a field experience down in Mt Tabor. We are still working out the dates and details, but we are planning to extend the work we have been doing at Little Rock Pond and to conduct testing just down the trail at the (former location of) the Lula Tye Shelter site - another location within the kilometer- long Homer Stone site.

We will post details on the [VAS website](#) and in an upcoming issue of the Newsletter.

Looking forward to seeing you in the Forest!

Dave Lacy



A coalition of partners have been examining, speculating about, and providing stewardship for these cairns for several years. This partnership - including Abenaki and Mohican tribal representatives, numerous archaeologists, local historians, members of the New England Antiquities Research Assn and others - has worked together to develop a consensus explanation for the cairns' age, origin and function. We have not succeeded to date, but the prevailing ideas fall into three categories: field clearing or a more specific function related to 19th century agricultural land-use; a function related to pre-Columbian European explorers; or a ceremonial function related to Native American society. The latter origin, if true, would almost certainly cast them in a "sacred" light, and thus condition the rigor with which we monitor and protect them.

One of the conundrums we face in evaluating these stone structures is that - in the absence of substantial empirical data - what one thinks or feels about them is heavily ideological. The historical default assumption of mainstream Euro-american society is that stone structures of all types on the landscape are colonial in origin. To those of us who have grown up in or worked in New England for a long time the "easy" answer is that the cairns in question are the product of a quirky farmer with too many teenaged kids on-hand - and they do, after all, exist on a landscape that was cleared and farmed during the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, many Native people know that they have a (generally underappreciated) tradition in stone as well; and it has been shown archaeologically in cases from Nova Scotia to Alabama and places in between that some stone mounds grossly similar to these are indeed prehistoric in origin, and some subset of those contain human burials.

Meanwhile, in a related development, the Forest Service (as well as other federal agencies) have been holding "listening sessions" with tribes across the country over the last few months regarding "Sacred Sites" policy. An Executive Order issued by President Clinton established that Tribes, and only Tribes, may declare a site sacred. President Obama is committed to ensuring that agencies honor this Order and develop policy that guides how we should manage such sites and landscapes once they are identified.

I inadvertently waded into this confluence of ideology, politics, and Sacred Sites policy development by proposing to do some "invasive" investigation of

New Hampshire 2011 Summer Field School Opportunities

The **NH SCRAP** program continues its research at the Jefferson VI Paleoindian Site from July 26-August 5 and is accepting volunteers (even from Vermont). Call 603-271-6433.

www.nh.gov/nhdh/SCRAP.htm

Strawbery Banke's Field School will run from June 27-July 8 and will continue excavations at the 1762 Chase House. Further information and registration materials are available at www.strawberybanke.org

New Vermont Archaeology Publication Available

Powerful History: The Archaeology of Native People in the Champlain Lowlands is now available on-line or as a free hard copy. Complete information is available at the [VAS Web site](#).

Officers and Board 2011

President

Shirley Paustian
sphavetrowel@myfairpoint.net

Vice President

Bob Brinck
bobrinck@aol.com

Secretary

Candace Lewis
candace.lewis@ccv.edu

one or two of the cairns last fall. Triggered by a complaint from the public, our proposal was postponed. More recently several federally recognized tribes have requested consultation regarding these potentially sacred ceremonial landscapes. As a result, the Forest hosted the first in a proposed series of meetings (March 23-24) to share information and ideas prior to formal consultation. The Narragansett (RI), Poarch Creek (Alabama), Aroostook Micmac (ME), and Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican (WI), as well as representatives from the Aquinnah Wampanoag (MA), and Missisquoi, Elnu and Nulhegan Abenaki joined several archaeologists, NEARA members, Forest personnel and others for two days of talks, films and presentations. Discussion was informative and wide-ranging, and we have agreed to meet again for a field trip and again to work toward a commonly agreed to "tool kit" of methods to bring to bear on the problem.

So, if your own assessment of the cultural landscape has been informed by unchallenged default assumptions, I suggest you reconsider and think about the variety of alternative explanations for the origins of a set of features that once seemed so "obvious", at least to me. In the meantime, if you have seen any structures/features similar to the one in this picture I would love to know about it, and where you saw it/them. And, of course, if you have any good ideas about their origin and function - or creative, non-invasive ways to test or demonstrate those ideas - I'd like to hear them, too!

Many thanks,

Dave Lacy (dlacy@fs.fed.us)

Treasurer

Charles Knight
charles.knight@uvm.edu

Board of Directors

Allen Hathaway
hathaway56@myfairpoint.net

Brigitte Helzer
bahelzer@gmavt.net

Raymond Rodrigues
Raymond_Rodrigues@msn.com

Administrative Coordinator

Georgeana Little
rgtle@stoweaccess.com

Journal Staff

Victor Rolando, Editor
vrolando@maddog.net

Georgeana Little, Assistant Editor
rgtle@stoweaccess.com

