

IT SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY

PROPERTY & STEWARDSHIP NOTES FROM HOWIE FIFE

Stewardship involves many things that we just take for granted. A tree falls across the trail and there are two options: people who use the trail scramble through the woods next to it and eventually a path is worn in that goes around the obstacle or volunteers go out with saws, cut it up and drag the brush off to clear the trail. Over the past two years mother nature has placed quite a few obstacles across our trails and I am working hard to keep the trails open and safe for people to enjoy.

This past winter was somewhat kind to our woods and trails. Scott Benoit has checked and cleared trails at the Claire Birtz Sanctuary and also the Thompson Preserve. I have been working on the trails in Opacum Woods doing the same. There are several

trees that have fallen. I need a few people with chainsaws to help me cut them into smaller pieces so we can drag them off.

If you are willing to help, please give me a call at 508-347-9144.

An even bigger issue we have at Opacum Woods is the foot bridge over Honey Brook, pictured on page 2. I inspected it in April and it is now closed until we can replace it. For now, there are stepping stones just south of the bridge that you can use. It seems like only yesterday that we were building the current bridge when Opacum Woods was first acquired. Can you believe that was ten years ago?

(Continued on page 3)



FROM JENNIFER'S DESK

Dear Opacums,

Thank you so much for being a part of Opacum Land Trust. As a volunteer, this role as president can be overwhelming and at times frustrating, however, I have to say the good always outweighs these moments. That good is always from one of you as you step up to lend a hand. Here's a great example: Not that long ago a member approached me and said she wanted to do more for Opacum. She was a new mom and her time was limited to "nap time" but she offered to write grants for us to raise money.

Becky delaGorgendiere (aka Becky d) has been seeking, clicking and typing away during nap time. She has been working with Leslie on land protection

grants as well as with Howie on projects that will improve your experience when you visit Opacum trails. I am thrilled that she has taken on this task for

the Land Trust and I really admire her spunk: Becky put together a proposal that was due on April 5th at 2pm and after dotting the i's and crossing the t's that morning, she drove the grant into Boston to hand deliver it. Wow!



Naptime! Being "in the moment" at Becky d's home!

(Continued on page 3)

THANK YOU TO FLYNT QUARRY VOLUNTEERS!

Published in the Palmer Journal 4/25/13

On Sunday, April 14 Opacum Land Trust and the Monson Conservation Commission held a “fun day” at the Flynt Quarry Lands. This 165-acre property situated behind Monson High School became conservation land recently through a joint effort between Opacum and the good people of Monson. The next step was to get the trails cleaned up and marked so we can enjoy the views of downtown from the “rock house” and see the historical features associated with the old quarry operation. We were expecting a few people but at 10am the cars kept rolling into the parking lot. What an amazing show of support!

We would like to thank those who worked hard clearing brush and blazing the trail: Jim Newland, Beau Schneider, Stephen Phillips, Scott Benoit, Glenn Clark, Susan Jones, Jim & Jane Zavitovski, Glenn Colburn, Carol Erling, Al Smith, Scott Gerrish, Becky delaGorgiendere, Howie Fife, Larry Lowenthal, and our volunteers from the Monson Environmental Action Team: Zac Corriveau and Robert Thorpe. We also want to say thanks to Zac for GPSing the trails so we can begin work on a trail map.

Great work everyone! We still have more to do but we made great progress. Thanks for all the help!

Sincerely,

Jennifer

Jennifer Ohop
President, Opacum Land Trust

Leslie

Leslie A. Duthie
Monson Conservation Commission



CAN YOU HELP THE HONEY BROOK BRIDGE?

We need funds to purchase lumber and help constructing the bridge. Please call Howie at 508-347-9144 or email hfifejr@aim.com.

To make a donation, send a check earmarked for “Honey Brook Bridge” or donate via our website, www.opacumlt.org.



2013 - 2014

Directors & Officers

Jennifer Ohop*President*
Leslie A. Duthie*Vice President*
Jennifer V. Morrison*Treasurer*
Kathleen Hunt.....*Clerk*
Howie Fife*Director,*
Stewardship & Properties
Larry Lowenthal.....*Director*
Alan F. Smith*Director,*
Nominating Chair
Felicia Andre*Director*
Scott Gerrish*Director*

OPACUM WOODS' HONEY BROOK FOOT BRIDGE

I am asking for your help and support so that we can replace the bridge. We are currently working on a design and will be filing with the conservation commission in Sturbridge. We will need to purchase lumber and will also need help constructing the bridge. If you want to help (this would be a great project for an eagle scout) please call 508-347-9144 or email hfifejr@aim.com.

To make a donation, you can send a check earmarked for "Honey Brook Bridge" or you can donate via our website, www.opacumlt.org.



DID YOU KNOW?

Part of the Opacum Woods trail system has existed for some 273 years and may be older than that, but we have no knowledge if it might have been a Indian trail before 1738. This might be a possibility since many colonial roads followed pre-existing Indian trails, the Old Bay Path being one.

The Town of Sturbridge was incorporated in 1738, and among the first actions the governing body approved was the laying out of a "road from the Meeting House to the County Gore". Beginning at the meeting house they marked trees "thru the woods northward to the path" (Old Bay Path) and then 50 rds (800 feet) easterly along that path, "left the old path south of a small swamp".

By today's street names, the path would start from the Town Hall north on Maple Street to Route 20, along Route 20 and onto (Walker) Mountain Road to Wells State Park.

(Continued from page 1)

FROM JENNIFER'S DESK

It's that type of action that makes me happy to be part of Opacum. On top of that, seeing so many of you at the Annual Meeting recharges my battery. While this event is required by law it serves a much greater purpose to me personally and to Opacum as a whole. I would like to thank all of you who came to Fins & Tales and especially to those of you who donated and bid on prizes for our silent auction and "Where is it?" contest.

At the annual meeting, you may have noticed a new face at our membership table. Katie Blake is the Coordinator of the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership, a voluntary association of land trusts, conservation organizations, municipal, state and federal agencies and foresters serving a region of 38 towns spanning the border of South-Central



Katie Blake Coordinator of the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership

Massachusetts and Northeastern Connecticut. MassConn is one of over 30 Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) in the Northeast, inspired by Harvard Forest's 2005 "Wildlands and Woodlands Report," which outlined a new vision for conservation in New England. As a MassConn Partner, Opacum is able to collaborate with like-minded neighbors to think about land conservation and connectivity across town and state boundaries as political boundaries are irrelevant to plant and animal communities and to ecosystem processes.

This spring has been long in coming, to say the least. Take some time and go outside to appreciate the woods; the cooler temperatures have caused spring wildflowers to bloom in slow motion. A wonderful place to observe this is where I work. Please come and visit Leslie and me at The Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary on May 17 from 5:00-7:00 pm. You won't be disappointed!

Jennifer



CLAIRE BIRTZ SANCTUARY HISTORY HIKE

FROM OPACUM DIRECTOR AND RESIDENT ARCHAEOLOGIST AL SMITH

On Saturday, April 27th, after two weather-related cancellations last year, Opacum Director Al Smith finally led the cancelled, delayed, postponed Claire Birtz Sanctuary History Hike. The day did not disappoint!

It was a beautiful day for a hike and fourteen people participated. Before hiking we looked at the topographic sheet for this area and discussed the geology of the rocks that would be seen in the stonewalls, as outcrops, and that were used in the dry laid stone foundations and dam that we were going to view.

As we walked along the trail we stopped to look at the early spring plants in the brook that enters Morse Pond. Yellow marsh-marigolds, purple trillium, and the yellow flowered aromatic spicebush were viewed. Further along the trail we saw a dark colored hawk swoop out of a tree and down to the pond - probably a red-shouldered hawk.

We stopped along the trail to investigate a vernal pool and found many gelatinous egg masses of wood frogs and salamanders attached to small twigs in the water.

From here we went to see the stone foundation with its central chimney and the stone structure behind the house. From research it was explained that this was the home of someone who worked at the Pond Factory Mill on Muddy Pond just west of here. Other names for this mill were the Muddy Brook Cotton Manufacturing Company and the Woodstock Manufacturing Company which were the forerunners of the Hamilton Woolen Company of Southbridge.

On the walk back to the cars we saw some deer bone on the trail. Next we drove to the dam and sawmill at the southern end of Morse Pond. We spent some time explaining the ownership of the dam, sawmill, and water rights. During the research on the sawmill it was discovered that there was also an ice house just south of the sawmill.

Since our hike three of the group have sent comments on how much they enjoyed the hike. We thank you for the comments and hope to see you at future walks.



on the trail...

'TIS THE SEASON — THESE WEBSITES MAY HELP!

- Grand Trunk Trail Blazers www.grandtrunktrailblazers.org
- Brimfield's web site: www.BrimfieldTrail.org
- French River..... www.frenchriverconnection.org/greenway.html
- Holland http://town.holland.ma.us/Pages/HollandMA_Trail/index
- Southbridge www.ci.southbridge.ma.us/trails.asp
- Sturbridge www.town.sturbridge.ma.us/Public_Documents/SturbridgeMA_RegionalTrails/index

THE ELUSIVE NAUGA

OPACUM DIRECTOR LARRY LOWENTHAL, PRESIDENT OF NAUGAS

No one now living has seen the vast herds of Naugas that once roamed the shadowy forests of New England. As with the Passenger Pigeon, accounts of their former numbers seem to defy imagination.

This emblematic creature was driven nearly to extinction by human exploitation, but in an indirect way in which the unfortunate Nauga was something of an accidental victim. In the late 19th Century society women wore enormous hats, whose wide brims were lavishly decorated with flowers, birds' nests and other natural objects. (Although the public display of abs was then considered to be in poor taste, the neck muscles developed by our great-grandmothers must have been sources of wonder.) One of the most popular decorations was the antlers of the tiny roe deer, then abundant in North American forests.

Predictably, the slaughter of roe deer soon threatened the extinction of the species. A group of prominent society women in Boston determined to stop this by organizing a campaign to halt the use of antlers on hats. Some of the more radical sisters even dared to go bare-headed.

Their campaign succeeded beyond expectations, and before long it was the hat industry that was in danger of going extinct. Fighting to survive, hat manufacturers turned to the Nauga as a replacement source of decoration. Although the Nauga sported horns rather than antlers, they could be creatively adapted for ornamenting female headgear.

Naugas were so abundant that it seemed inconceivable that they could be exterminated. Moreover, they received less sympathy from Boston society matrons because they often devoured favorite flowers and shrubs. The Nauga is a gentle animal with a highly developed herd instinct. When one was shot the others in the herd gathered around to commiserate and offer help. In this way entire herds could be quickly annihilated.

At first the carcasses were left to rot after the precious horns had been removed. Eventually, however, leather workers learned that the hydres, though delicate, could be tanned for use as furniture coverings, gloves, handbags, etc. Examples of naugahyde objects are still often encountered in antique shops. Since the hydres cost nothing, they replaced artificial materials that had

previously been used for those purposes. Thus the docile, inoffensive Nauga was nearly eliminated. Even after hat and furniture fashions changed, Nauga populations never recovered, in part, it is thought, because their favored food, the chestnut, was no longer available.

Lovers of the outdoors have never abandoned their search for the elusive Nauga, and one of the best chances for spotting one may come in our local region, specifically our own Claire Birtz Sanctuary in Southbridge. This is because the strong herd behavior of the Nauga, while detrimental in some respects, contributed to survival in others. Over time the remnant Nauga herds learned to stay close to state lines because of laws against the discharge of firearms from one state into another. The Birtz Sanctuary, being situated on the Connecticut-Massachusetts line, offers ideal habitat for the woodland Nauga.

Keep your eyes open and if you do happen across tracks or sign of the Nauga (or if you are fortunate enough to photograph one) please report your sighting to Larry Lowenthal, president of NAUGAS (Noted Author Unashamedly Guilty of Administering Satire).

AUCTION DONATIONS SUPPORT OPACUM!

Thank you to everyone who donated Silent Auction items at our March Annual Meeting!



Anna Ozolins	Richard Hunt
Bradford Wykoff	Howie Fife
Felicia Andre	Jennifer Morrison
Louise Garwood	Jennifer Ohop
Nick Sanborn	Alan Smith
Eric Dominguez	and thanks to everyone who joined us for the evening!
Rachel Dematte	

MUCH AFOOT AT OPACUM WOODS

FROM OPACUM'S KAY HUNT

On February 16, Opacum Board members Scott Gerrish and Kay Hunt lead a brave group through the snowy wilderness in search of tracks and sign left by our wild friends. Despite the snowy weather forecast, a good number of you enthusiastic trackers arrived at the trailhead in late afternoon eager to venture into the woods. Scott and Kay began by sharing some bones and skulls that had been discovered on previous tracking exploits. While to some this may seem gruesome, these items illustrate adaptations that provide clues to an animal's identity (i.e. herbivores have flat teeth, carnivores have sharp teeth). After a short discussion on anatomy and morphology, the adventure began.

About 50 yards into the trail we came across a rather large pile of coyote scat. About half of "tracking" does not involve actual tracks, but signs that provide clues to identification. Following that great find the group trekked south to warm up and it was there in a wetland that more excitement unfolded. A plethora of creatures had moved about the night before and left prints in the dusting of snow. A mink left a trail of muddy tracks on the fresh substrate (light snow is an excellent palette for tracks). We saw where it exited a stream and investigated a furrow beneath a log. The tracks disappeared under the log only to emerge mud free a few yards later where they headed back toward the bank of the creek.

Coyote tracks skirted an ancient rock shelter, spurring Opacum's Alan Smith to share some of the rich archaeological history of this site. As the pack wandered towards Opacum Pond, the sun began to set. We noticed Perry's Point was replete with beaver sign: gnawing on trees, a beaver dam and an active lodge. Fisher tracks traversed the peninsula and ventured onto the icy surface of the pond. Despite the temptation, the not-so-fearless leaders opted not to follow the trail across the lake, a wise but disappointing decision. As the daylight faded the chilled trackers headed back to the trailhead, lucking upon the tracks of a red fox just before their visibility faded in the twilight. The hearty folks who braved the weather to attend the program were rewarded with a great afternoon of tracking. If you weren't able to make it, there is plenty to see even when the snow is gone. Grab a tracking field guide, head out to Opacum Woods and let us know what you find!



MINK

Minks are semi-aquatic members of the weasel family. Their bodies are long and slender and their legs short. They have dark brown to black fur and a furry tail 6 1/2 to 7 1/2 inches long. Their feet are slightly webbed. They are larger than weasels and smaller than fishers, weighing 1 1/2 to 3 1/2 lbs.

Mink habitat includes water and they are found along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and in marshes. They are primarily nocturnal and are active year-round.

Minks are carnivorous. Their favorite prey are muskrats, but they hunt other small animals such as mice, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, fish, frogs, snakes and birds. They will occasionally take poultry. Mink cache extra meat in their den.

Mink in New England mate in late February through early March. Mating is preceded by a rough courtship fight. Males may travel far seeking females. 1 to 10 babies are born in April or May.

Minks are solitary except when a female is raising her young. They use dens near water and move often. Dens can be located in tree cavities, rock or brush piles, or in old muskrat or beaver dens. Minks spend a lot of time in the water. Their fur is oily and waterproof. They can dive up to 16 feet and can swim underwater for distances of 50 ft.

Mink produce a pungent musk that is as smelly as a skunk's and is used to mark territory and for defense. A threatened mink will hiss, snarl and discharge the stinky musk, but they cannot spray it at attackers. A contented mink will make a purring sound.

FISHERS

Fishers are sometimes referred to in common vernacular as Fisher Cats, but they are not felines. Nor are they prone to fishing. They have dark brown fur and a long furry tail 12 to 16 1/2 inches long. They have semi-retractable claws for climbing.

Fishers are members of the weasel family and have the same long thin body type, although Fishers are stockier and heavier than typical weasels. They weigh 3 to 18 lbs.

Fishers prefer dense forested habitat but are found in wooded residential areas. They are primarily nocturnal and are active year-round.

Fishers hunt small animals such as mice, voles, birds, squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks. Fishers are one of the few predators that successfully hunt porcupine.

Fishers produce a litter of 2 to 4 young in March and April. Breeding season is about a week and a half after the kits are born. The female will leave the den to find a mate. After breeding she returns and raises that year's litter. A spring mating produces the young for the following spring.

Fisher are solitary. They den most often in tree cavities to bear young. Fishers scent-mark their territories using "posts" such as small trees that are rubbed, rolled, urinated and defecated upon. They are strong climbers and often seek prey in the trees. Fishers will arch their backs and hiss, growl and spit when threatened.

Source of both sidebars:
<http://www.wildlifeofct.com>

OBSERVATIONS

BY SCOTT GERRISH, OPACUM BOARD MEMBER

In November of 2010, I was doing field work for a Forest Management/ Stewardship Plan for the Town of Monson on the property that was formerly part of the Flynt Quarry. The sun was beginning to set and I decided to exit via a small mountain top vista, hopefully before it got too dark.

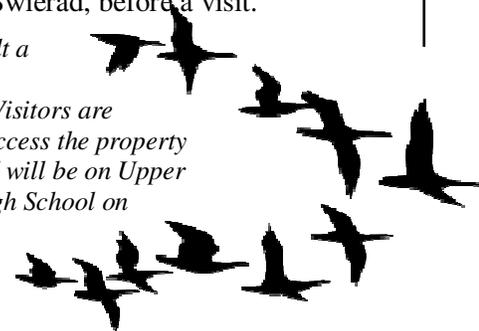
The ridge, located right behind the High School, provided a nice view across the center of town to the south. The view was beautiful; the taller buildings in town were just visible poking up through the trees. Looking to the east I was watching car headlights winding down Brimfield Road as they descended into town. As I looked to the east I heard the honking of a flock of Canada geese. The geese, usually easy to spot as a flying V against the sky, were much harder to locate against the dark background from my higher vantage point. I finally located the geese flying southerly along Chicopee Brook just before they began to turn in my direction. Incredibly, the geese were flying up towards me. As I stood out on a rock outcrop I expected the geese to notice me at any second and change their direction, but they maintained their course and passed a short distance to my right at approximately the same elevation. They passed so close that I could easily hear the wind hissing through their feathers as they flew by. I was so close that I felt that I could read the expressions on their faces, those at the front more stoic while those at the rear appeared to be pleading with their leader to land soon.

As I stood on the small mountain top absorbing the wonderful gift I had just been given, I heard more geese honking as they flew down the valley. At about the same point the geese turned westward again flying upward towards me. This time there were two groups, the first again passing to my right, the second passing to my left, both at about eye level. Wow!

It was starting to get dark and I decided I'd better get moving while it was still light enough to see. As I got back to my car, parked in the pull off area on Margaret Street, I realized the geese had landed in the recently cut corn fields across the street. I theorized that this is an established route that the geese fly using landmarks to locate the corn fields, a great place to refuel and spend the night.

This former Flynt Quarry property, now owned by the Town of Monson, was purchased with help from the Opacum land Trust. Even if you are not lucky enough to catch Canada geese flying by, it is definitely worth a visit. This property has some excellent hiking trails with beautiful vistas, historic sites, geographic features and wildlife habitats. Some might find it interesting to read a small book, *The W. N. Flynt Granite Company, Monson, Mass.*, written by Dennis & Mary Swierad, before a visit.

PLEASE NOTE: The Land Trust has not yet built a formal trail head, nor developed trail maps, but visitors are welcome. Trails are not all blazed. Visitors are asked to NOT park behind the high school and access the property from there. Coming from Monson, the trail head will be on Upper Palmer Road, about a half mile past Monson High School on the right.





PO Box 233
Sturbridge MA 01566
www.opacumlt.org
info@opacumlt.org
508-347-9144

It's Spring! Go for a walk!

Opacum Land Trust is a non-profit conservation organization. Founded in 2000, our mission is to conserve, protect and preserve, in their natural condition, the lands and waters of South Central Massachusetts for the benefit of present and future generations. All donations are fully tax deductible, annual memberships start at \$25.

For more information, please visit our website: www.opacumlt.org



UPCOMING EVENTS

Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary Garden Open House Friday, May 17th, 5:00-7:00 pm

Visit Opacum's Leslie Duthie and Jennifer Ohop at their "real" job this evening for a little cross-pollination and enjoy the peak time for spring wildflowers.

Leslie, horticulturist at Norcross for over 30 years will be leading guided tours through the Sanctuary gardens. Join her to see and learn about native wildflowers, both common and rare. Tours leave the Visitor Center starting at 5:00 pm.

This event is free.

The Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary is located at 30 Peck Road, Wales, MA. For directions, go to www.norcrossws.org

For more information, call Leslie at 413-267-9654 or email lduthie@norcrossws.org

Wild Edibles Hike with Russ Cohen Thursday evening, May 30th 6:00 pm

This evening we will join Russ Cohen, expert forager and author of *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*, on an early evening ramble over the Broz & Simon Farm in Brookfield to learn about at least two dozen wild edible plant species.

The Brookfields are home to over 100 species of edible wild plants, many of which are more nutritious and/or flavorful than their cultivated counterparts. Information on edible species, portion(s), season(s) of availability and preparation method(s), as well as general guidelines for safe and environmentally-responsible foraging will be discussed.

This is a very popular program. There is no charge, but to insure an enjoyable experience, we do limit participation. We ask that you call to reserve your spot on the hike. Please call 508-347-9144 or info@opacumlt.org. Directions will be provided when you RSVP.