Explore the 'other' Diamond Hill park

Old Cumberland maps, and the nearby cemetery, seem to confirm that this is the foundation of the Scott family homestead at least through 1895 where a son of Charles Scott, Olney Scott, is the listed owner.

By MARCIA GREEN, Valley Breeze Editor  This is the 7th in a series of hikes exploring the trails available to the public in Cumberland.

I couldn't wait to explore the state's Diamond Hill Reservation on the west side of Diamond Hill Road, across from the park. And as it turned out, explore is the right word. This area is due for formal state oversight, but the management plan that will set that direction is pending, says the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Lisa Primiano, deputy chief. With that plan will come parking areas, maps and trail markers, she says. But until then, my suggestion is that you download a compass app on your smart phone before venturing out.

Some 800 acres, including Emerson lands of 235 acres acquired in 2011, make up the woodland that sits roughly between Diamond Hill Road on the east, Pine Swamp Road at the north, West Wrentham Road on the west and Tower Hill Road on the south. While there are many trails here, there are no markers for hikers, just numerous arrows for what I believe are all mountain bike trails criss-crossing the area. It was quickly obvious to me and my hiking friend, Frank Matta - who grew up hiking and riding horses in this reservation - that this is already a well used area.

Tire and skid marks suggest mountain bikers and motorized ATVs. Many new looking trails have been cut into the hillside and some have been deliberately banked. We got ready for our two-hour outing last
Thursday morning by parking one car at Resurrection Cemetery on West Wrentham Road then driving down to the Diamond Hill Park parking lot. We crossed the street and accessed the property to the left of Dr. Joyce Gifford’s veterinary service. Yes, you'll feel as though you're trespassing along someone's driveway. And the chain across the trail's start, apparently to discourage vehicles, isn't exactly welcoming.

It was a hike that immersed us in history - the 19th-century granite quarry operation, the remains of a pre-1900 cart road that was once the main east-west roadway through this area of northern Cumberland, and the very solid rock foundation of what's likely the Charles Scott homestead. There's also a bit of 20th century history contained on the land here. The concrete remains of a firing range where World War II weapons were tested sit right along the path, although greatly altered by a mountain bike trail. Frank and I stood at the old quarry and had little trouble imagining a noisy quarry operation here. A broken old mill stone to your far right as you approach it will tell you you're in the right spot.

Cumberland historian Robert Simpson tells us Amasa Whipple owned this thriving enterprise on the eastern slope of Catamint Hill. A quarry village here was known as the Red Village, he says. And a spur line was extended to the quarry from the main line of the Providence-Franklin Railroad. The stone cutting operation used derricks secured by guy wires to lift the cut stone and deposit it onto waiting carts for transporting by railroad. Cumberland's granite can be found in the foundations of the Massachusetts Statehouse, and was used extensively in house construction throughout Pawtucket and Providence. I've been told the large granite steps of Town Hall come from Diamond Hill. In your travels, don’t overlook smaller quarry efforts. In some cases, you'll see tell-tale drill holes along the edge of the stone. Cutting the granite required a row of hand-drilled holes, about four inches apart. Wedges that were inserted in the hole were then tapped with a hammer to split the rock.

From the quarry area, we walked west and upward. You can get up pretty high and stand on a ridge of granite, but alas the view of Diamond Hill is blocked by trees that include pines, making me wonder if it even opens up in wintertime. We walked west-southwest to find the old cart road, lined with stone walls - far more attractive than Jersey barriers - that Pine Swamp Road replaced in the late 1800s. My 1895 map of Cumberland describes the "new" Pine Swamp Road. Frank noted the trail bed here like many others is several inches lower than the ground on each side, likely the result of years of erosion by all-terrain vehicle use.

We walked west toward West Wrentham Road to reach the stone foundation of the Scott family home. It wasn't hard to imagine the Scott family's farmland, now covered in trees and overgrowth of ferns, and to speculate about the difficulty of surviving in Cumberland in the late 1700s and 1800s. A job offer at one of the new textile mills, complete with housing, had to have been very appealing to some. One-quarter mile up the hill from the foundation, you'll find Historic Cemetery No. 31, where Charles Scott and wife Amey Briggs and nephew Charles are buried. It's a little startling to see a graveyard so deep into the woodlands. Thanks to fine research by Cumberland's Lester Hilton, you can use an app to find it. The GPS coordinates places it at latitude 42.003950, longitude 71.439554. Charles, born in 1759 and still a teen when he enlisted as a Revolutionary War soldier, is listed on military records as having a lame hip because of a wound suffered in battle on Aug. 29, 1778, the Battle of Rhode Island on Aquidneck Island, that shortened his leg by about five inches. He died in July of 1840.

Frank was dismayed to see that the mountain bikers have created a trail that crosses on top of the Scott house foundation, and my personal plea to them is to remove it and let us preserve the remains of this Revolutionary War soldier's homestead. On that topic, I couldn't find someone responsible for recent mountain biking activity, but did have both the Cumberland Director of Parks and Recreation Mike Crawley and DEM’s Primiano deny sanctioning the activity.

Another half-mile or so down the trail brought us to the beautifully maintained Resurrection Cemetery and my car. Eventually, a parking area on Tower Hill Road, along with trail markers, will encourage hikers to head to that southern access point.
It's hardly welcoming at this point, but here’s the main access to 800 acres of town and state property known as the Diamond Hill Reservation across from the park and just south of Dr. Joyce Gifford’s veterinary practice.