

Winter 2005



# The Sippewissett Association Newsletter



## MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT PETER WAASDORP

**Stop the presses!** A rough draft of the “Wildland Fire and Preparedness Plan for Beebe Woods and Peterson Farm” is now in the hands of the Beebe Woods Management Committee. If you would like to see a copy of the report, please email me at [pwaas@adelphia.net](mailto:pwaas@adelphia.net) or call me at 508.457.6340. The Management Committee includes three Sippewissett residence, Vicki Lowell and Association Directors Janice Hayes and Maureen Conte, and I will forward to them any comments you care to make. Since it is only a rough draft, questions pertaining to scope, clarity, reasoning, etc. would be relevant. The Committee has promised that any final report will be presented for public comment at a future meeting.

## Winter Social

THE SIPPEWISSETT ASSOCIATION will hold its annual **WINTER SOCIAL** on **Sunday, March 13, from 3-5 p.m. at the West Falmouth Library.** Watch your mail for a postcard reminder and plan to attend! It's always a fun occasion and a chance to talk with your Sippewissett neighbors. Refreshments and drinks are provided by the Board.

### TRYING TWENTY-FIVE

*Janice Hayes*

**I knew** who the most common speeders were on Sippewissett Road. My neighbors. Locals. Of course, I didn't speed.

That's what I thought. Then I started watching my speedometer closely. Really closely—trying twenty-five. When the cars backed up behind me, I kept at twenty-five. When there was no one in sight, not car, not pedestrian, not bicyclist, I kept at twenty-five.

**The quantifiable results?** It took me a few more minutes to reach my destination. I used my brakes more.

**Other results?** I realized I had been speeding for years. No one passed me. I felt 25 was pretty slow. Fall foliage was particularly good this year. Residents have made attractive improvement projects to their yards. Hawks are beautiful. When you wave at walkers, they usually wave back. Ripples on ponds glow.

## Observing Beebe Woods History

*Jennifer Gaines*

THE FIRST WALK IN WINTER in the Beebe Woods always brings a surprise: as the leaves have dropped, many of the secrets that have been hidden all the leafy summer are showing. Even the shape of the land with all its hills and hollows is startling, exposed, giving a much clearer idea of the land around us. This is the time of year when we can understand the concept of a glacial moraine as a large dumping ground of sand, gravel, clay, and boulders that were pushed before the huge plow of ice, then left in an unorganized heap as the ice melted away to the north.

We can see evidence of people who used these hills in the past. Their stone walls cross the landscape, outlining past (and sometimes present) property bounds. In colonial days, these hills were most likely used as wood lots by people who lived on the flat land down near the Village Green and Burying Ground. They would venture up into the hills in winter, cut their wood, and haul it down with oxen to heat their homes. Sometimes they would put sheep on the recently cleared, sunny lots. But the rough land with all its hills and boulders was probably never used for field crops. (The exception is the

Peterson Farm, formerly the Weeks farm, which is in a relatively rockless swale, and has been farmed almost continually for over 200 years.) One of their cart ways went down near Ice House Pond, then down to the shore of Buzzards Bay near the present Valley Road. From there they would fish the waters of the Bay, helping to feed their families.

Today there are several places in the Woods where the bounds are marked only by short pink granite posts with a single one-inch-wide drill hole in the top. This time of year it is possible to see well enough to follow these bounds, crashing through the huckleberries, casting searching looks ahead and behind to follow the line. These were reputedly the bounds place by a surveyor named Gifford who lived in Sippewissett. If you look at the end papers of the book “Ring Around the Punchbowl” you will see old maps of the area now known as Beebe Woods. The walls marked on those maps are still there today; you can trace them as you walk, and figure out who used to own the property. Of course when the Beebes began to buy up big pieces of land in the 1800s, they put their own granite posts up. Theirs are fine-grained gray granite with large numbers carved carefully into the tops, each number presumably corresponding to a large purchase of theirs.

# A Winter Walk in Beebe Woods

Jennifer Gaines

Walking in the Beebe Woods in new fallen snow yields many delights and surprises. Not only is the landscape beautiful, but individual trees and shrubs limned with snow stand out as sculptures. Best of all, the snow on the ground lets us see what other animals have been out and about. I always like to go on these “voyages of discovery” practically in our own backyard. Seeing all the tracks, those of the mice and voles, the rabbits and squirrels, the ground-feeding birds, the foxes, and yes, sometimes the coyote makes us realize how many more animals live here than we ever see, and this does not include those who are hibernating underground or who have migrated away.

One of the most charming sets of tracks is that of the deer mice as they jump out of a hole in the snow and jump, jump, jump in a line trailing their tail behind them, then suddenly plunge down another hole in the snow, and then down under the leaves and under a rotten log. Sometimes you can find the track of the meadow vole, a tunnel pushed along in a line just under the surface of the snow. You’ll find rabbit tracks, a confusion to those new to the tracking game, as the bunny’s big back feet always end up in front of his small front feet, which are placed one behind the other. The tidy squirrel tracks are always fun to follow as they hop exuberantly along the ground, then up a tree, or down the tree, digging for nuts

as they go. Although I have never seen a deer in the Woods, I have seen their tracks. And I see fox and coyote tracks a lot more frequently than I see the actual animals.

There are several “grand prizes” in the tracking game. One is finding otter tracks sliding into the pond; the other is finding wing marks in new soft snow, double points for finding mouse tracks terminating with large double wing marks: exciting for us, not so much for the mouse who became dinner!

As interesting as it is to imagine what has happened by reading the clues in the tracks, it is always a pleasure to look up and see birds nearby. There is one special place, which our family calls “Piney Hill” where the oaks have been supplanted by pitch pines due to the dry sandy soils. Here there are almost always birds to see. A charming and friendly mixed band of chickadees and titmice usually welcome me here, and in the winter, I can often find, first by hearing, then by seeing, a few tiny golden-crowned kinglets, migrating here for the winter from their breeding area far to the North. Once we saw a whole parliament of crows, more than a hundred, swooping and talking, gathering for some grand event, unknown to us. Winter will eventually give way to spring, however, and the call of the pine warbler will welcome me to the top of this hill.

## Invasive Plants Survey

Dick Payne sent out email updates on his ambitious survey of Falmouth wetlands for the invasive plants Phragmites and purple loosestrife, and he reports that the last map and report forms came in just before Christmas and the final sampling has been done. The survey covered all 50 square miles of town, and found 64 patches of purple loosestrife and 264 patches of Phragmites australis. Included in the Phragmites are 4 patches of the native genotype, three of them in Great Sippewissett Marsh. These are the first that Bernd Blossey, an expert at Cornell who is assisting the survey, has seen in Massachusetts. The native genotype has been here for at least 3000 years and, unlike the invader, causes no problems in the wetlands.

There are a number of small patches of Phragmites in town that are just getting started, and a very small number of purple loosestrife patches (aside from the Trunk River / Oyster Pond area). Dick has encountered a few abutters who are

eager to do something about them, so control efforts can begin very soon. It is probably infeasible to destroy the large infestations right away, but we may be able to stop the invaders from popping up in new places. This will require a substantial effort, both for education and for control, and Dick is hoping for another strong volunteer effort.

Planning for a control strategy will begin at a meeting at 7:30 on March 22 in the civil defense room in town hall. Two experts on the control of invasive weeds, Karen Lombard of The Nature Conservancy and Chris Matricks of the New England Wild Flower Society, have agreed to participate in the meeting. Dick Payne will give a description of the survey and its results, using some of the excellent maps being generated by Bob Shea, a GIS expert at town hall. Karen and Chris will go over what methods are available, and what the pros and cons of each are. There will be time for questions, and all interested members of the public are welcome.

[E-mailing the Sippewissett Association membership](#) - Issues and meetings of importance to the entire S.A. membership can now be e-mailed. We have promised our membership that they won’t be flooded with nuisance or political messages, so we ask that you give your item to either President Peter Waasdorp ([pwaas@adelphia.net](mailto:pwaas@adelphia.net)) or Secretary Barbara Eck ([barbeck@cape.com](mailto:barbeck@cape.com)) for approval. Messages will then be forwarded to Robert Busby for e-mailing.