

# **A Brief History of the Mount Everett Summit and Comparison with Other South Taconic Summits**

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The purpose of this report is to substantiate four points regarding Mount Everett's summit:

- 1.) For more than two hundred years, Mount Everett's summit has been described as bald, barren, or bare, with a low tree cover that has enabled 360-degree views. Since 1841, that tree cover has been specifically described as pitch or yellow pine (an early alternate name for pitch pine).
- 2.) Among all the south Taconic mountain summits rimming the town of Mount Washington, the density, pervasive stunting, and extensive acreage of the pitch-pine community on Mount Everett's summit is unique, with neighboring Race Mountain a close second.
- 3.) So far, I have not found any record of disturbance of the Mount Everett summit – neither fire nor clearing -- other than cutting and using trails and building fire towers.
- 4.) There is evidence of early Native Americans on and near Mount Everett.

## **1.) Dwarf pitch pines on Mount Everett's summit for more than 200 years**

In his 1846 report to the Massachusetts state legislature on the trees of Massachusetts, George Emerson noted that “[o]n the hills in the southwestern corner of the State, [pitch pines] are still found growing to the height of one hundred feet; and men are living in Massachusetts and Maine, who remember that it was not uncommon to find them of more than a hundred feet in height, and four or five feet in diameter.”<sup>1</sup>

No wonder then that state geologist Edward Hitchcock made special mention of the “numerous yellow [pitch] pines, two or three feet high” and consequent “entirely unobstructed” views from the summit of Mount Everett in his 1841 report on the state's geology to the Governor.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder, too, that Hitchcock was neither the first nor the last to do so. As was noted some fifty years later, “... ‘the Dome’ [Mount Everett] and its contiguous territory was generally visited by

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<sup>1</sup> George B. Emerson, *A Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts* (Boston, MA: Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers, 1846), pp. 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Hitchcock, *Final Report on the Geology of Massachusetts: in Four Parts* (Northampton, MA: J.H. Butler, 1841), p. 238.

admirers of Berkshire scenery some time before [Mount] Greylock.”<sup>3</sup> Scientists, naturalists, and literary figures have been remarking on the barren crown, stunted trees, and 360-degree views from Mount Everett’s summit for more than 200 years.

In 1781, Timothy Dwight, future president of Yale College, hiked up to Mount Everett’s summit and described a 360-degree view that spanned Saddle Mountain (Mount Greylock) to the north, the Catskills to the west, Butter Hill to the southwest, and the Green Mountains and Mount Tom to the east. He lamented that due to the haze he was unable to see New Hampshire’s Mount Monadnock as was possible on a clear day.<sup>4</sup> Only a low tree canopy would have enabled the panoramic views he described.

Ten years after Hitchcock’s report to the Governor, author Nathaniel Hawthorne described the mountain he saw from his Lenox home in 1851: “In the early sunshine of the morning, the atmosphere being very clear, I saw the dome of Taconic with more distinctness than ever before, the snow-patches, and brown, uncovered soil on its round head, being fully visible.”<sup>5</sup>

Nineteenth-century poet Dora Read Goodale rhapsodized about Mount Everett,<sup>6</sup> as did Catharine Sedgwick.<sup>7</sup> English poet Matthew Arnold admired it<sup>8</sup> as did preacher Henry Ward Beecher.<sup>9</sup> Herman Melville and Fanny Kemble Butler signed registers at the mountain’s base and may have written accounts of their excursions.<sup>10</sup>

In 1879, noted author of his day, J.T. Headley was quoted: “Two or three miles from Bash-Bish, is the Dome of the Taghconics, a lofty mountain rising, precisely like a dome, from the ridge of which it forms a part. It is in our estimation, far superior to the Catskill, for you have from a single spot, a perfect panorama below you; you have only to turn on your heel, and east and west, north and south, an almost endless prospect spreads away on the vision. You are the center of a circle at least three hundred and fifty miles in circumference; and such a circle!” He then described the panoramic views.<sup>11</sup>

The 1885 *Gazetteer of Berkshire County* also described the circumferential views from the “dome-like summit of Mt. Everett, or Bald Mountain...”<sup>12</sup>

A wintery photo in the 1893 book *Picturesque Berkshire* shows a man standing perhaps on a boulder next to the tripod marking the apex of Mount Everett surrounded by a sea of frozen trees no taller than his thighs. At the right margin of the photo is a small patch of open ground abutted by trees of perhaps

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<sup>3</sup> Charles F. Warner, ed., *Picturesque Berkshire: Part II – South* (Northampton, MA: Picturesque Publishing Company, 1893), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Travels; In New-England and New-York* (New Haven, CT: 1821), II, p. 377.

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Passages From The American Note-Books* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), p. 403.

<sup>6</sup> Warner, pp. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Blum Shearn, *A History of Mount Washington Massachusetts* (1976), pp. 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “Arnold in Stockbridge,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 7 November 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “Henry Ward Beecher,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 24 December 1964.

<sup>10</sup> Information from Milo Smith’s guest registers, in the collection of Lucile Van Deusen.

<sup>11</sup> Godfrey Greylock [J. E. A. Smith], *Taghconic; The Romance and Beauty of the Hills* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, Publishers, 1879), p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer of Berkshire County, Mass. 1725 – 1885: Part First* (Syracuse, NY: 1885), p. 225.

chest height. Another photo on the same page, labeled “Mount Race, from Mount Everett,” shows what appears to be a thick carpet of pitch pine and scrub oak on Mount Everett’s southeastern slope.<sup>13</sup>

Later in the same book is an entertaining vignette on the travails of reaching Mount Everett’s summit along with a reference to the “scrub oak and dwarfed pines” and a florid description of the magnificent views from “the bare rocks of the highest point”, with the observation that “[f]rom its isolated position, it commands a larger tract of country than many loftier summits.” The author describes views to the “rolling hills beyond” the Housatonic valley, to Connecticut and the mountains of Vermont, to the Catskills, Adirondacks, and Hudson River in the west where “through the distance, you may perhaps distinguish the smoke of a passing steamboat” and to “...the Shawangunk mountains [which] show faint and low down the valley.”<sup>14</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the writings of naturalists again dominate the literature on Mount Everett. In 1899, John Coleman Adams noted that “[the Dome’s] sides are clad in a growth of maples, chestnuts, and birches, as far as the upper ledges where the scrub-oaks and pines compete with the blueberry bushes in the struggle for existence.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1919, Warren Manning, writing to his fellow members of the Mount Everett Committee of the Boston Society of Landscape Architects and the Appalachian Mountain Club, recommended firmly: “I think we should also have [the Mount Everett State Reservation commissioners’] assurance that they will not undertake any improvements on the top of [Mount Everett] that will destroy the exceedingly attractive cushion-shaped, stunted pitch pines or the ground cover of huckle-berries, potentilla tridentata and the chokeberry that covers practically all the soil between rocks.”<sup>16</sup>

Walter Prichard Eaton, a *Berkshire Eagle* columnist, Mount Everett State Reservation commissioner, avid hiker, and property owner at the eastern base of Mount Everett, observed in 1920, “It is a curious fact that on Mount Everett timber-line is practically reached at 2,500 feet. Graylock, fifty miles to the north, does not reach it at 3,500, and it is at something like 4,000 feet in the White Mountains.”<sup>17</sup>

In his 1922 *Flora of Berkshire County*, Ralph Hoffman noted that pitch pine is “...frequent in Sheffield, occasional in Stockbridge, New Marlboro, Sandisfield, Great Barrington; summit of The Dome, Mt. Washington.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1930, Walter Prichard Eaton published another of his many descriptions of the Dome: “On the final path up the peak to the naked, wind-swept summit, I had been preceded by several wild folk. A deer (the hunters didn’t get quite all of them), a cottontail, a fox (maybe after the rabbit), a partridge walking a considerable distance and a red squirrel. It seemed odd that these animals should seek the bleakest, coldest spot in fifty miles, but no doubt the scouring summit wind keeps a food supply exposed. Deer in winter are almost always to be found near the top of the mountain.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Warner, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Warner, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> John Coleman Adams, *Nature Studies in Berkshire* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1899), p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Members of the Mt. Everett Committee: Boston Society of Landscape Architects, and the Appalachian Mt. Club from Warren H. Manning, 11 July 1919, in the collection of James Whitbeck.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Prichard Eaton, *In Berkshire Fields* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Hoffman, “Flora of Berkshire County, Massachusetts,” *Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History*, 36, No. 5 (1922), p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Prichard Eaton, *New England Vista* (Boston, MA: W.A. Wilde Company, 1930), pp. 77-78.

Eaton was more explicit in the 1938 annual report of the Mount Everett State Reservation Commission, which he authored: “The Dome which is the rounded summit of Mount Everett, is over two thousand six hundred feet above sea-level and from it may be seen panoramic segments of five neighboring states. In itself, this high flung rocky eminence is a natural, primeval rock garden of dwarf, angular pines and of similarly small scaled deciduous trees – many, ancient though they are, hardly higher than a man may reach. Laurel, and small flowering and fruit-bearing shrubs and minute plants follow the design of the main and branching crevices and fissures of the upheaved rock structure.”<sup>20</sup>

In *The Berkshires: The Purple Hills*, a 1948 compilation of nature writings, A. Kenneth Simpson mentioned “...a trail leads through the scrub oaks and dwarfed pitch pine over wind-swept ledges, to the [Mount Everett fire] tower.”<sup>21</sup> George J. Wallace noted “...a small colony [of Bicknell’s thrushes] is nearly always to be found summering in the stunted tree growth skirting the bald Dome.”<sup>22</sup> Bartlett Hendricks wrote “...the view from Everett is one of the Berkshire’s best, and, because of the stunted growth on the summit, it can be enjoyed without climbing the tower.”<sup>23</sup> He wrote also that “the species [of worm-eating warbler] has been seen so frequently about Mount Everett that we have every right to expect its nest will eventually be discovered.”<sup>24</sup>

Although he didn’t make a specific reference to the exposed summit of Mount Everett, New York State botanist Rogers McVaugh made an interesting observation in his 1958 *Flora of the Columbia County Area, New York* that is worth noting here: “The [Bash Bish] ravine as a whole is of special interest, but particularly so on the lower slopes of Bashbish Mountain...because of the presence of a number of plants not found on the surrounding mountain slopes nor in nearby woodlands, plants characteristic for the most part of more northern latitudes or of higher altitudes. Like conditions and like flora are found in our area only near the summit of Mount Everett and on the high hills adjacent to the Rensselaer Plateau.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1964, *Berkshire Eagle* columnist Morgan Bulkeley Sr. described the effect of an ice storm on Mount Everett’s pitch pines: “At the top of the mountain in the mist...the grotesque shapes of low pitch pines loomed like convoluted masses of coral, solid to the rock from which they sprang. Terminal sprigs of pine needles had grown by accretion to cauliflower heads weighing more than a pound. We brought several home to keep in the deep-freeze to convince summer skeptics. Little branching twigs were grown to sizeable deer antlers, blunt-ended as in the velvet.”<sup>26</sup>

According to the 1972 *Berkshire County Landmarks*, “Referred to as ‘The Dome of the Taconics’ and called simply ‘the Dome’ by old-timers, [Mount Everett’s] prominent crown is covered by stunted

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<sup>20</sup> *Treasurer’s Report of the Receipts and Expenditures also County Commissioners’ Report Upon the Affairs of the County of Berkshire For the Year Ending December 31, 1938* (Pittsfield, MA: 1939), p. 81.

<sup>21</sup> A. Kenneth Simpson, “With What the Hills Are Clothed” in *The Berkshires: The Purple Hills* by Roderick Peattie, ed. (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1948), p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> George J. Wallace, “Four Seasons of Berkshire Bird Lore” in *The Berkshires: The Purple Hills* by Roderick Peattie, ed. (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1948), p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Bartlett Hendricks, “Byways to Pleasure” in *The Berkshires: The Purple Hills* by Roderick Peattie, ed. (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1948), p. 122.

<sup>24</sup> Hendricks, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> Rogers McVaugh, “Flora of the Columbia County Area, New York,” *Bulletin of New York State Museum and Science Service*, No. 360 (Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York, April 1958), p. 348.

<sup>26</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “Ice Storm,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 10 December 1964.

pitch pine and topped by a fire tower. An excellent panoramic view may be had from both the parking area and the fire tower.”<sup>27</sup>

Botanist Pam Weatherbee noted “Dwarf [pitch pine] trees seen on Mt. Everett...” in her 1996 *Flora of Berkshire County Massachusetts*.<sup>28</sup>

This litany of descriptions of the stunted trees on Mount Everett’s summit and the resultant 360-degree vistas is by no means complete. During my research, I have encountered references to many other sources that I simply haven’t had time to find. This winter, I will continue the search. Nonetheless, I think this list gives a strong sense that the dwarfed pitch-pine community on Mount Everett has been there since the town of Mount Washington was incorporated in 1779, and probably earlier.

## 2.) Mount Everett’s pitch-pine community unique among South Taconics

Pehr Kalm, sent by the Swedish Academy of Sciences to America in 1748 to investigate its natural resources sailed up the Hudson River and reported in his June 11, 1749 diary entry that “to the eastward was a high chain of [Taconic] mountains whose sides were covered with woods up to more than half of their height. The summits however were quite barren; for I suppose that nothing would grow there on account of the great degree of heat, dryness, and the violence of the wind, to which that part was exposed.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1829, naturalist Chester Dewey wrote in a book on Berkshire County’s history: “The County was originally well timbered and fruitful in vegetables. Except the higher parts of Taconic Mountain, the hills were, and many still are, covered to their summits.”<sup>30</sup> He was still using the old-fashioned name for the town, Taconic Mountain,<sup>31</sup> and considered the entire elevation one mountain, with Mount Everett as its highest peak.<sup>32</sup> Incidentally, although in his “Catalogue of Plants” in the same book Dewey described the habitat of *Pinus rigida* (pitch pine) as “Plains and low land”, he singled out Taconic Mountain, the town, as a noteworthy site for *Quercus ilicifolia* (scrub oak).<sup>33</sup> A former Williams College professor, he nonetheless named more plants as particular to Taconic Mountain (13) than to Saddle Mountain of which he described Greylock as the highest peak (10).<sup>34</sup>

In the same book, Egremont minister Gardner Hayden observed: “This ridge [around the town] consists mostly of broken ledges of rocks, and but few trees of any considerable size grow upon it.

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Spencer Smith, “Berkshire County Landmarks: An Inventory and Description,” Report for the Berkshire Panel for the Public Environment (Williamstown, MA: Center for Environmental Studies, Williams College, 1972), p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Pamela B. Weatherbee, *Flora of Berkshire County Massachusetts* (Pittsfield, MA: The Berkshire Museum, 1996), p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> Adolph B. Benson, ed. *Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America: The English Version of 1770* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), pp. 329-330.

<sup>30</sup> Chester Dewey, “A General View of the County” in *A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts; in Two Parts* by David Dudley Field, ed. (Pittsfield, MA: 1829), p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts* (Boston, MA: The New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, “A General View of the County,” p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Chester Dewey, “Catalogue of Plants Found in the County of Berkshire, MS” in *A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts; in Two Parts* by David Dudley Field, ed. (Pittsfield, MA: 1829), p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Dewey, “Catalogue of Plants Found in the County of Berkshire,” pp. 43-86.

There is only soil enough intermingled with the rocks to support shrubs from one to three or four feet in height.”<sup>35</sup>

More recently, botanist Rogers McVaugh noted: “East of the Hudson Valley, where the metamorphic rocks predominate, surface exposures of both acidic and calcareous rocks are very frequent. The largest exposures are found on the Taconic Mountains from Mount Fray southward and southeastward. The tops of these mountains form a nearly continuous exposed and dissected rocky ridge for more than 15 km.”<sup>36</sup>

He continued: “On the summits of the high Taconics, the continuous exposures of hard gray schists extend from Mount Fray southward and southeastward for some miles, forming an area quite distinct in vegetational aspect from that of any other part of Columbia County. I am unable to explain the abrupt termination of this area at Mount Fray. North of this mountain the Taconics, including those of equal or greater heights, are all forest or grass covered to their very tops...the peculiar plant-association developed south and east of Mount Fray is wholly lacking, although physiographic and edaphic conditions seem essentially similar.”<sup>37</sup>

He then suggested: “...it is quite possible that the present low shrub association [on the southern Taconic summits] is a more or less permanent physiographic climax. Under natural conditions succession is apparently slow. There is no evidence that the communities of *Arctostaphylos-Potentilla-Aronia-Amelanchier-Prunus* [bearberry-cinquefoil-chokeberry-shadbush-cherry] have been disturbed within historic times. The first two in particular are known throughout their ranges as plants of exposed rocky summits, and it is highly improbable that either could have existed within the limits of any densely forested area. It is equally improbable that the association could have invaded the area *in toto* since the removal of the forest by the white man. In the absence of definite information as to the original covering of these rocky summits, then, it is probable that the present vegetation represents the highest stage of development that has been reached since the retreat of the glaciers.”<sup>38</sup>

Mount Fray lies at the northwest corner of the town of Mount Washington. The mountains to which McVaugh referred rim the town. A MassGIS map of Mount Washington shows that the following mountain summits surrounding the town are open; in all cases the open areas extend SSW: Mount Fray, Prospect Hill, Alander Mountain, Ashley Mountain, and Mount Frissell on the western boundary; and, Mount Everett and Race Mountain on the eastern boundary.<sup>39</sup> I hiked to each of those summits to compare them with Mount Everett’s summit. Although not shown as open on the MassGIS map, for more comparisons I also hiked the summits of Sunset Rock, Cedar Mountain, and Brace Mountain on the west (all in New York), Bear Mountain (in Connecticut), and Mount Bushnell and Jug End in Egremont, thus hiking the outer eastern and western ranges of the Taconics looping around our town. Whenever possible, I used existing trails. Unless noted, I did not hike routes between the summits because my intent was to focus on the open areas classified like Mount Everett on the MassGIS map, and secondarily, to check other Taconic summits for similarities.

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<sup>35</sup> Gardner Hayden, “A History of the Town of Mount Washington” in *A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts; in Two Parts* by David Dudley Field, ed. (Pittsfield, MA: 1829), p. 219.

<sup>36</sup> McVaugh, p. 319.

<sup>37</sup> McVaugh, p. 323.

<sup>38</sup> McVaugh, p. 329.

<sup>39</sup> John Schmidt, “Draft 1997 Land Use Map” (Pittsfield, MA: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 14 September 1999).

Using as comparison three aspects of pitch pine coverage at the summit: density, pervasiveness of dwarfed heights, and acreage, I found that Mount Everett's summit is unique among all the mountain summits I hiked. It has the densest coverage of stunted pitch pines over the greatest area. Race Mountain is very similar in the first two aspects but its coverage is confined to a smaller area. However, on its north slope (facing Mount Everett) it has some pitch pines with the thickest trunks I've seen on any of the mountains.

### **Eastern Taconics**

On the eastern Taconics, starting from the south and heading north, Bear Mountain, Race Mountain, Mount Everett, Mount Bushnell, and Jug End Mountain all have pitch pines.

The south, particularly southwestern, slope of Bear Mountain, has broad pitch pine coverage but it is scantier and the heights are more varied. The trunks are also thinner. There are occasional pitch pines spreading laterally over the ground, as is very distinctive on Mount Everett and Race, but the trunks are spindlier. At the southwestern crest just below the summit is a thicket of pitch pines slightly taller than human height but the summit coverage is quite different from that of Everett or Race. Pitch pines of perhaps 15 feet in height mingle with slightly taller oaks and birches. Without climbing the rock monument, it is impossible to see much of a view.

North of Mount Everett lie Mount Bushnell and Jug End Mountain. Bushnell has a long north/south ridgeline that opens slightly toward the east rather like Race but not as consistently open; I couldn't tell exactly where was the summit and so hiked the entire ridgeline. Bushnell has pockets of thick pitch pine along its ridgeline that in some places almost form a series of clumps; one narrow thread extends for about a quarter mile. Many of the trees are about human height, some are taller; there is a noticeable diversity in height, ranging from ground crawlers to perhaps 40 feet. The most exposed trees don't seem as uniformly stunted as on Everett or Race. Some of the taller trees appear to be very old with thick trunks and deeply furrowed bark. They should be cored for age. Although all the pitch pines exist on rocky elevations exposed to sunlight, as is typical throughout the area, my sense while hiking Bushnell was that they were thriving in a greater range of conditions than on the other local summits and ridgelines where pitch pines grow. Bushnell should definitely be studied as part of the pitch pine continuum of Bear, Race, and Everett.

Jug End lies north of Bushnell, at the north end of the eastern spur off Everett. While it certainly has pitch pines along the crest toward its northernmost outcrop, the trees don't match those on Bushnell for age characteristics, height diversity, or frequency. In the open rock at the ridgeline's end, the pitch pines appear almost weedy with thin trunks and sparse needles compared to those on Bushnell.

### **Western Taconics**

On the western Taconics, starting from the south, Brace Mountain, Mount Frissell, and Ashley Mountain do not have any pitch pines on their summits, nor anywhere else that I saw. Nor are there pitch pines on the bluff between Brace and Frissell.

I surveyed Round Mountain with binoculars while standing on Frissell and did not see any pitch pines there, either. Sally Shaw and Frank Lowenstein confirm there are no pitch pines on Round Mountain.<sup>40</sup>

Alander's summit and southwestern slope do not have any pitch pines, based on my hike to the summit and examination of the southwestern slope with binoculars. Frank Lowenstein said Alander Mountain has pitch pines on its ridgeline descending northward to Bash Bish.<sup>41</sup> The northern slope is not visible from the summit because of intervening trees and shrubs.

Bash Bish Mountain's summit is not shown as open on the MassGIS map so it wasn't a priority; nor did I have a chance to hike it. However, Bob Leverett said there are a few scattered pitch pines at its summit.<sup>42</sup> Standing at the Bash Bish Falls overlook (reached from the upper parking lot), I studied the northern slope of Bash Bish Mountain through binoculars but did not see any pitch pines. Upon lowering my binoculars, I realized there was a single pitch pine, perhaps 10 feet tall, standing next to me.

Cedar Mountain is north of Bash Bish Falls and across the Falls Road. It stretches east to west with an impossibly steep south side. Therefore, I surveyed that face by using binoculars from the Bash Bish Falls overlook. There appear to be pitch pines growing in practically vertical conditions. They are not numerous, in fact are quite infrequent overall. Many seem truly stunted, barely clinging to the rock. McVaugh described pitch pines and scrub oaks along its summit<sup>43</sup> but from that angle I could see none. In fact, the trees there seem windswept but of moderate height, and consist of oaks, hemlocks, and a few white pines.

However, because of McVaugh's description I corralled my husband, Morgan Bulkeley Jr., into showing me the route in from West Street to the back side of the summit. Indeed, there are pitch pines scattered sparsely along the extended summit ridge and averaging 20 to 30 feet in height among the comparably sized oaks, birches, and white pines interspersed with scrub oak and huckleberry. There is no view.

Many, many times I have hiked out to Sunset Rock from West Street and never noticed whether or not there are pitch pines. There are. Along the trail, they are occasional and tallish, perhaps of 20 feet maximum height. Out at Sunset Rock there are a few, ranging in height from about neck high to somewhat taller than I. They are thickly choked by scrub oak and laurel. There are also taller pitch pines back down the trail toward Bash Bish and forward on the trail northward to Prospect Hill.

Moderately sized pitch pines (perhaps 15 feet in height) flank the trail up Prospect Hill. The twin-lobed summit is grassy with open ledges rimmed by short pitch pines and dominated by a smothering encroachment of scrub oak. Just off the trail heading north, a few taller pitch pines are tucked back amongst oaks and birches.

The summit of Mount Fray is just north of the town boundary. Like all the other summits on the western Taconics of Mount Washington, Fray's is open to the southwest. Like Prospect Hill, laurel is

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<sup>40</sup> Sally Shaw and Frank Lowenstein, *Classification of Western Massachusetts Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak Ridgetops and Natural Community Inventory of Mount Tekoa in Russell, Massachusetts* (Boston, MA: The Nature Conservancy, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Frank Lowenstein, 3 December 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Conversation with Robert Leverett, Fall 1999.

<sup>43</sup> McVaugh, p. 322.

at the summit, as is thick scrub oak and huckleberry. I counted five pitch pines; one closer to the edge and four set back among oak and birch. None is notably dwarfed.

From the Mount Fray summit, the South Taconic Trail drops slightly and heads north. After a short distance is a lovely hamlet of pitch pines protected from the wind by a shallow embankment and reaching a height of perhaps 20 feet. Other pitch pines of approximately the same height are scattered sparsely down the northeastern slope, in contrast to the more customary southern Taconic scene of pitch pines on slopes facing southwest and west.

### **3.) No 20<sup>th</sup>-century records of fires or clearing on Mount Everett's summit**

In searches of twentieth-century records, I have not found any references to fires or clearing (other than for trails and construction of the fire towers) on Mount Everett's summit. I have not yet reviewed earlier records.

None of the sources excerpted in the first section of this report makes any mention of fires or clearing.

Although owned by the state, the Mount Everett State Reservation was managed from its inception in 1908 to 1975 by commissioners appointed by the Berkshire county commissioners. The Reservation commissioners filed annual reports with the state legislature for a few years and then with the county. The county commissioners' office has the annual reports from 1916, 1927 – 1944, and 1946 – 1955. Based on the facts that the principal report writer, Walter Prichard Eaton died shortly thereafter, and that Mount Greylock reports continued to be filed for a few years after that date, and that no reports for either Reservation afterward can be found in the county files, I believe the 1955 report was the last one filed with the county. James Whitbeck, a former Reservation superintendent, has copies of articles reprinting the 1909 and 1911 annual reports, and a copy of the 1918 annual report. He also has copies of the minutes of the annual meetings from 1940, 1942, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1964.

Each annual report details the events of the preceding year, including clearing and maintenance projects, fires, fire prevention measures, and weather conditions. The minutes outline future plans.

#### **No Fires**

In none of the annual reports or minutes I reviewed is there any reference to fires on Mount Everett's summit.

A complete list of references to fires in those reports and minutes is as follows. The 1929 report states: "There was a fire in June on Race Mt. but it did not reach our bounds."<sup>44</sup> The 1930 report refers to "the severe forest fire last Spring, which burned clear across the southerly portion of the range, from Boston Corners to the Undermountain Road in Salisbury. A north wind and Sage's Ravine brook enabled the fighters to back fire and keep the flames out of Massachusetts on the east side of the range..."<sup>45</sup> In 1933, there was a small fire on the Elbow Trail, quickly extinguished; "[n]ot more than two acres were

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<sup>44</sup>*Treasurer's Report of the Receipts and Expenditures also County Commissioners' Report Upon the Affairs of the County of Berkshire For the Year Ending December 31, 1929* (Pittsfield, MA: 1930), p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to the Berkshire County Commissioners from Walter Prichard Eaton, Secretary, Mt. Everett Reservation Commission, 24 December 1930.

burned. It is the first fire we have ever had to report of any consequence.”<sup>46</sup> The 1939 report refers to the “forest fire which broke out in the early morning of July 5 last, on the easterly slope of the Taconic range in the Town of Sheffield – one of those lightning-set blazes...[however, fire fighters] drove the fire back down the ridge and no damage whatever was done to the Reservation.”<sup>47</sup>

I have spoken with Doris Van Deusen Southergill and Lucile Van Deusen, who grew up and live in this area. Neither recalls any fires ever reaching Mount Everett’s summit.<sup>48</sup> Lucile Van Deusen remembers sitting on the Lookout Cabin roof watching the fire described in the 1939 report, but is certain it never reached the upper part of Mount Everett.<sup>49</sup>

Morgan Bulkeley Jr. remembers fighting a fire out on Mount Bushnell in the late 1960s. He doesn’t remember any other fires in the Mount Everett area. Incidentally, he hiked with me to Bushnell and pointed out the approximate site of the 1960s fire. There is no particular indication of pitch pine; it seems to be overgrown with tall, lanky oaks.

William Turner, Egremont fire chief, does not remember any fires in the Mount Everett area, but said he will check his records.<sup>50</sup> Egremont’s fire department handles fires in our town.

The Nature Conservancy confirms there have been no fires on Mount Everett for at least 25 years, based on its research and conversations with local fire chiefs.<sup>51</sup>

### **No Vegetation Clearing**

There is no reference in the annual reports or minutes I reviewed to clearing of vegetation on the summit.

James Whitbeck, Harry Garrett, Thomas Garrett, and Morgan Bulkeley Jr. are the only current town residents I know of who did maintenance work at the Reservation before its management was returned to the state in 1975. I have spoken with each one and have been told none did any clearing on the summit. As Whitbeck said, “there was no need to, it was always short.”<sup>52</sup>

## **4.) Evidence of early Native Americans on and around Mount Everett**

There has been speculation that early Native Americans may have burned vegetation on Mount Everett’s summit in order to improve hunting and berry picking. There is evidence of early Native Americans on and around Mount Everett, although so far I have not found any record of burning or clearing by them.

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<sup>46</sup> *Treasurer’s Report of the Receipts and Expenditures also County Commissioners’ Report Upon the Affairs of the County of Berkshire For the Year Ending December 31, 1933* (Pittsfield, MA: 1934), p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> *Treasurer’s Report of the Receipts and Expenditures also County Commissioners’ Report Upon the Affairs of the County of Berkshire For the Year Ending December 31, 1939* (Pittsfield, MA: 1940), pp. 60-61.

<sup>48</sup> Conversation with Doris Van Deusen Southergill, Fall 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Conversation with Lucile Van Deusen, Fall 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Conversation with William Turner, Fall 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Shaw and Lowenstein, pp. 8, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Conversation with James Whitbeck, Fall 1999.

In deeds with the Dutch and English, the Mohicans claimed territory from the Hudson River eastward to the Westfield River.<sup>53</sup> Although they preferred living along rivers, they hunted in the mountains.<sup>54</sup> They also retreated to the mountains for ceremonies. With its commanding height and vistas, the proximity of rattlesnake dens, and the ceremonial arrow point found close by (described below), it is likely that Mohicans and their predecessors revered Mount Everett as a sacred place.<sup>55</sup>

This is conjecture, however, because I have done very little research on this subject. Nonetheless, I do have a verbal description of an Indian encampment at the north end of the Mount Everett State Reservation and old maps and newspaper articles about an Indian reservation at the north end of town, an Indian trail north of Guilder Pond, and Indian artifacts uncovered near Mount Everett. I also have one eyewitness account and two secondhand eyewitness accounts of an Indian terrace on the eastern slope of Mount Everett.

### **Indian Encampment**

Edward Peck, who surveyed Mount Everett State Reservation for the state in 1965,<sup>56</sup> told William Miles, chairperson of our town's Historical Commission (quoting from Miles's notes and a subsequent telephone conversation) that "A fair share of an Indian encampment site is within the Mount Everett State Reservation, near the extreme northeastern boundary. The site is near the junction of two or three very small streams – when it has rained for some time – and is bisected by the Appalachian Trail and also has nearby the 'point of illumination' (possibly Black Rock), where the Indians signaled with smoke their brethren at lower elevations in times of danger." Peck said he believes Harvey Kreidemaker, Reservation superintendent at the time, showed him a map of that point of illumination.<sup>57</sup> I have seen a map showing Black Rock as an Indian signaling station. This needs more research.

### **Indian Reservation**

In one of his many "Our Berkshires" columns for *The Berkshire Eagle*, Morgan Bulkeley Sr. wrote: "By a recorded deed of April 25, 1724 to a committee of settlers dispatched to Housatanock by the General Court, the Indians 'did reserve to ourselves' a strip of land five-eighths of a mile extending from the Housatonic River along the north border of Sheffield through South Egremont to the New York boundary. On this tract was the small settlement of Skatekook where dwelled Lt. Umpachene and four other families."<sup>58</sup>

Lecturing before the Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society in 1907, H. F. Keith, a professional surveyor and amateur historian of Mount Washington, said: "...Mount Washington, incorporated June 21, 1779, went as far north as Orrin Curtis' house, at the foot of the mountain, or to the north line of the strip known as the 'Indian reservation.'"<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Shirley W. Dunn, *The Mohicans and Their Land 1609 – 1730* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 1994), p. 60.

<sup>54</sup> Dunn, p. 49.

<sup>55</sup> Conversation with Jani Leverett, Massachusetts Director, American Indian Movement, Fall 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Edward C. Peck Sr., "Survey Map of Mount Everett Reservation, County of Berkshire, State of Massachusetts" (October 1965).

<sup>57</sup> Conversation between William Miles and Edward C. Peck Sr., 23 November 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, "Skatekook," *The Berkshire Eagle*, 23 July 1964.

<sup>59</sup> F. H. Keith, "Mount Washington Historical Address, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1907," in *Collections of the Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society*, III, No. 4 (Pittsfield, MA: Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society, 1913), p. 321.

An old map attributed to Keith shows the Indian Reservation stretching across the northern end of the original town. The northern boundary of each is the same line. The town's northern boundary was moved south in 1817 so that now the southern edge of the Indian Reservation clips only the northern point of the town. The present road to Egremont travels through the Indian Reservation.<sup>60</sup>

"But by 1736 the Indians were removed from...their entire reservation...The reservation strip was granted to Isaac Vosburg, Arent Gardner, Anderes Karner and John Van Guilder."<sup>61</sup> The town road to Egremont follows Karner Brook from the top of the mountain northward; Guilders Pond is on Mount Everett.

"March 29, 1757, a syndicate of forty proprietors purchased the land [in Mount Washington] of the Indians..."<sup>62</sup>

## **Indian Trail**

The Indian Trail ran from New York across the Mount Washington plateau to Sheffield. Old maps show the Indian Trail, also known as Old Spurr Road or Old Sheffield Road crossing East Street just north of today's Blueberry Hill Farm. From East Street, the trail heads east toward Sheffield; some maps show it running along the north slope of Mount Undine and others show it south of Mount Undine, near Guilders Pond. Keith's map doesn't indicate Mount Undine but does show the trail curving northward and passing north of Guilders Pond and south of Sunrise Rock (which, according to Morgan Bulkeley Jr. and Lucile Van Deusen, is north of Mount Undine). A 1932 "Trail Map of Mt. Everett" for the Mount Everett State Reservation commissioners from surveyor F. M. Lane shows the trail running straight between Mount Undine and Guilders Pond. Peck's 1965 map shows the trail curving northward but doesn't indicate Mount Undine. The BashBish Falls Quadrangle map shows the trail curving northward along Mount Undine's northern slope.

I can't explain the discrepancies, but in all cases, the trail hooks into the Elbow Trail and continues down to Sheffield behind Berkshire School. Lucile Van Deusen says there was a trail from the Indian Trail over Mount Undine to Guilders Pond. She used it frequently but thinks it is overgrown, now.<sup>63</sup>

The written record about the exact line of the Indian Trail's midsection is also somewhat unclear.

Morgan Bulkeley Sr. wrote: "...this was one of the earliest roads in the county. One old map of obscure date shows it as a faint, dotted line labeled 'Indian Trail' leading up through the Bash Bish cut, over the Mount Washington plateau, through the pass between Sunrise Rock and Spurr [Undine] Mountain and down the eastern slope past Black Rock into the Housatonic Valley. Proof of Indian travel is offered by an arrowhead, a long ceremonial point and a flint knife found along the course of the trail.

"A map of 1841 calls the trail, by then a cartway, the Old Spurr Road...Some decades later it served as a public way and narrow town road out of Mount Washington, known as the Old Sheffield Road. It

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<sup>60</sup> Map of Mount Washington attributed to H. F. Keith in a notation on the map, in the collection of Lucile Van Deusen.

<sup>61</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, "Skatekook," *The Berkshire Eagle*, 23 July 1964.

<sup>62</sup> Keith, "Mount Washington Historical Address, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1907," p. 321.

<sup>63</sup> Conversation with Lucile Van Deusen, 2 December 1999.

was traversed by farm wagons, high-sided charcoal carts, sleighs, cutters, buggies and surreys; but never by an automobile, for the woods closed in on it about 1900.”<sup>64</sup>

Sheffield historian Lillian Preiss noted: “Perhaps the first road build by any settler in Sheffield was constructed as a pack horse trail by Derrick Spoor, a member of an early Dutch family which received an easement for land in Mount Washington under the Westenhook Patent. Spoor...built a cabin on land now owned by Berkshire School. He then made a trail following for the most part an old Indian path to Bash Bish Brook near East Street in Mount Washington, where the rest of his family lived. Now called Elbow Trail, this road is used by people going to Guilder Pond and Mount Everett.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Walter Prichard Eaton: “...just beyond my north boundary, entering first the grounds of the Berkshire School, is an ancient road, leading west from the state highway. It makes directly for the mountain wall, which is here almost precipitous in places, and it can still be followed to the summit of the ridge, an air-line distance of considerably less than a mile, but a rise of almost a thousand feet. You would naturally suppose that it would have to resort to frequent switchbacks in order to make the ascent, more than half of which is contained in the last few hundred yards, yet the switchbacks are few. It makes a long swing to the north, and then a long swing to the south, getting in behind a pine-clad promontory we call the Fiddler’s Elbow, and suddenly emerging triumphant from the pines into the hardwoods of the level shoulder-top. From this point it goes straight west, by a more gradual ascent, passing just north of the summit cone, and beside Guilder Pond.”<sup>66</sup>

## **Indian Artifacts**

In a *Berkshire Eagle* column, Morgan Bulkeley Sr. described an artifact hunt in a field in the Skatekook area: “In the course of several hunts, four of us discovered the illustrated, mostly perfect artifacts plus much broken material and bits of bone and clamshell. Points and chips were about evenly divided between flint and quarts...The concentration of material was dispersed over a strip 40 rods long and 8 rods wide. The small size as well as the location spelled Skatekook.

“The wide variety of projectile points, including triangular, small-stem corner-removed and side-notched, typified the Ceramic or Woodland period and suggested occupation back to its inception about 300 A.D. ...Most interesting find of all were the two...points of the dark flints. The perfect broad point, side-notched with corners removed, is the diagnostic type of the Late Archaic or Stone Bowl period back to 5,000 years ago in New England. The broken stem-end beside it, showing shoulders and a tapering rounded stem, is diagnostic of the Early Archaic with some overlap of the type to Late Archaic. It may well indicate aboriginal occupation of this site back toward 6,500 years ago.”<sup>67</sup>

In another article, he stated: “Of three known finds in Mount Washington, none were hunting tools. One was a stone tomahawk found at Plantain Pond before 1900; another was a black flint knife-blade turned up somewhat later in a vegetable garden beside the town road; and the third was the ceremonial point (herein illustrated) discovered in planting a blueberry field in 1947.

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<sup>64</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “The Old Wood Road,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 9 December 1965.

<sup>65</sup> Lillian E. Preiss, *Sheffield: Frontier Town* (Sheffield, MA: Sheffield Bicentennial Committee, 1976), p. 75.

<sup>66</sup> Eaton, *In Berkshire Fields*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>67</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “Skatekook,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 23 July 1964.

“This last point of skillfully worked, brown flint was the most startling of all. With a probable three-quarter-inch broken from the tip, it still measured 5 ½ inches in length, and 1 ¼ inch in width, being everywhere less than three-eighths in thickness. Points of such extreme size so finely worked would have broken easily with any rough usage; therefore they are deemed to be ceremonial blades...

“The archaeological potentate of Massachusetts, William S. Fowler, says: ‘Blades of this size are seldom if ever found at camp-site excavations or as surface finds. They may have been made and used expressly as sacrificial burial offerings.’ He attributes them to the Late Archaic culture (3000 B.C. to 300 A.D.)...[This is a] rare surface find of a ceremonial point high in the Berkshire Hills...’<sup>68</sup>

The blueberry field Bulkeley described is part of Blueberry Hill Farm, which is due west of Guilder Pond and lies between two streams. The Indian Trail follows one stream through part of the farm’s northern boundary. The property was owned by Milo Smith, as shown on an 1858 map<sup>69</sup> and in a photo taken some time before 1893.<sup>70</sup> A wood road ran from Smith’s house up to Guilder Pond. An 1893 map shows the road looping around Guilder Pond and returning to East Street farther north; although the Indian Trail isn’t indicated on this map, the road returns over what would have been the Indian Trail.<sup>71</sup>

In 1966, Barbara Bulkeley found a large Indian celt, an ungrooved axhead in the garden next to her house at the western base of Mount Undine. The house is south of the Indian Reservation and about a quarter-mile north of the Indian Trail; part of the old Spoor/Spurr property. In his article about her find, her columnist husband explained: “It was made of hard, fine-grained quartzite, a stone foreign to the mountain-platform of schist but common to the river valley.” He continued with a more thorough description and analysis of how it would have been used and concluded: “This celt, therefore, must have been mislaid or lost by a casual hunting party camping close to the largest of the three sweet-flowing springs just below our garden. Smaller celts are common to camp and village sites of the Woodland Indians. This large size is more characteristic of the stone-bowl or late archaic people.”<sup>72</sup>

Before leaving this subject, “Patience Owen, a widow, married Plantain, the Indian for whom the pond on Mount Washington was named.”<sup>73</sup> Without drawing too close a connection, as noted earlier, Plantain Pond was where a tomahawk was discovered.

## **Indian Terraces**

Morgan Bulkeley Jr.’s maternal grandfather, Earl Van Deusen, told him about seeing an Indian terrace on the eastern slope of Mount Everett.<sup>74</sup>

Surveyor Edward Peck told William Miles that he saw what he believed to be Indian terraces on Mount Everett while doing the Mount Everett boundary survey. He described them as being fairly level places with a curved low stone wall defining the lower elevation of the level area. He doesn’t

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<sup>68</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “Stone, Ceramics and Iron,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 13 May 1965.

<sup>69</sup> E. M. M., “Town of Mount Washington Copied From a Map of Berkshire County, Mass. Dated 1858” (1956).

<sup>70</sup> Warner, p. 93.

<sup>71</sup> “Map of Berkshire Hills Massachusetts” (Boston, MA: George H. Walker & Co., 1893).

<sup>72</sup> Morgan Bulkeley, “A Second Look,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, 21 July 1966.

<sup>73</sup> Preiss, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Conversation with Morgan Bulkeley Jr., Fall 1999.

remember the exact location of the site.<sup>75</sup> Miles asked why he thought it was an Indian terrace and he explained that the wall had a noticeable curve and wasn't associated with a wood road. I asked Miles why it would be an Indian terrace and not a charcoal pit terrace. He replied it was much easier for colliers to dig into the dirt to create a level spot than to build a stone retaining wall and he had never seen a charcoal-pit terrace with a stone wall.<sup>76</sup>

In a taped interview, James Whitbeck said Alfred Van Deusen, Earl Van Deusen's son, took him to the Indian terrace years ago. Whitbeck showed me the approximate location on a USGS map.<sup>77</sup>

## Other research sources

The information provided in this report is cursory and very incomplete. There are many sources I want to investigate. For example, I want to review winter photos of Mount Everett for evidence of Indian terraces. The now defunct local newspaper *The Berkshire Courier* was published for approximately 163 years, and I want to search it from the beginning for any stories on fire or other disturbances on Mount Everett's summit. H. F. Keith's extensive files on Mount Washington at the Berkshire Historical Society, records of Elizabeth McNaughtan's court case against the state taking of the Dome, and the legislative record preparatory to passage of the 1908 bill creating the Mount Everett State Reservation may all contain useful information about Mount Everett's history. Many botanists have visited the mountain over the past 200 years, and I want to check their herbaria scattered throughout libraries and universities in the northeast. Robert Livingston, an early claimant to land in Mount Washington, was a Hudson River patroon and New York State's secretary of Indian affairs for almost 50 years; his records in the New York State archives could be valuable resources. These and many other sources need to be researched but the few records I've found so far and excerpted here do give a sense of the truly unique dwarf pitch-pine community on Mount Everett.

## The Scrub Pine

Up near the crest it bravely stands  
And holds aloft its needled hands.  
Its roots can find but scanty fare  
Among those rocks so bleak and bare.  
It faces frigid winds and sleet,  
The summer drought and blazing heat,  
The lightning flash, the thunder roar,  
The killing frost and drenching pour.  
Yet there so calm and brave it stands,  
As if in prayer with lifted hands.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Conversation between William Miles and Edward C. Peck Sr., 23 November 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Telephone conversation with William Miles, 2 December 1999.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with James Whitbeck and Lucile Van Deusen, Mount Washington, MA, 9 January 2000.

<sup>78</sup>D. A. H., "The Scrub Pine" (Braeside, South Egremont: 10 December 1923), newspaper clipping in the collection of Lucile Van Deusen.