

# Benton Beach Beacon



April 1998

## Help Needed At Annual Work Day

The annual work day at Benton Beach is set for the weekend of May 16-17, 1998.

For the second year in a row, Old Man Winter was pretty bland (and disappointing), so we've been spared some of the damages we've seen in the past. Does anybody remember the winter of 1976 or 1977 when our dock was decimated? Or Hurricane Gloria in 1985 when granite blocks in the breakwater were disheveled?

Regardless, the usual chores of cleaning, painting, and minor repair are essential to insure safety and enjoyment on the beach in 1998.

Many hands are needed and you are cordially invited to the first outing of the season which goes under the heading of "Work Day." It's fun to be down on the beach on the pre-Memorial Day weekend! If you cannot attend on Saturday, your help will be appreciated on the next day, Sunday.

Please bring basic tools, work gloves, and don't forget to pack a picnic lunch. It is high tide at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, which means that youngsters can have a good time combing the bare bay and ledges.

Carolyn Helander is the coordinator, once again, of this event. She will be telephoning family members and will also coordinate the lawn-mowing schedule.

### WORK DAY

**Saturday, May 16, 9:00 a.m. - ?  
Sunday, May 17 (alternate date)**

## Family Clambake

Mark your calendars early for one of the highlights of the summer!

The famous old-fashioned clambake, staged by Edwin E. Benton & son & brother will be staged on Sunday, July 12.

Details will be forthcoming.

## BBC Prevails In Court Case

The truth has prevailed! After nearly four months of anxious waiting, we have received Judge Meadow's Superior Court decision on April 6. The court has *adjudicated the case in our favor*, reaffirming BBC's lawful ownership of a 25 foot wide strip of frontage. Benton Beach Road will not be compromised, now or forever.

The judge's 18-page "memorandum of decision" cites the failure of the plaintiff (Waggoners) in 4 out of 5 counts, i.e.:

- Plaintiff's failure to support a claim of ownership by deed evidence.
- Plaintiff's failure to support a claim of ownership by adverse possession.

- Plaintiff's failure to prove merit for punitive damages for trespass.
- Plaintiff's failure to prove merit for punitive damages for erection of split rail fence.

In the last count, BBC is ordered to remove the split rail fence erected in 1996, which amounts to a lollipop for the plaintiff. The judge further concludes that the fence "*was not done with malice and was not a spite fence,*" but acknowledges its purpose to defeat the plaintiff's claims.

The plaintiff's suit has been duly defeated in a court of law. BBC has prevailed.

If you would like a copy of Judge Meadow's decision, please contact a board member.

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## Shaumpishuh Land Preserve

by Joel Helander

In January 1997, a remarkable gift was made to the Guilford Land Conservation Trust by the Estate of Elizabeth Berger Stevens and her family. Twenty-four acres of land on the northern part of the "Shaumpishuh Farm" were deeded as open space forever, thanks to the planning and wisdom by Betty and Al Stevens. Formerly, this was the untillable acreage of the Daniel Brown Leete Farm.

It is remarkable that the remaining 16 acres, including the waterfront, were partitioned into only four lots. Planning and Zoning regulations would have allowed 6-8 lots! Moreover, there are deed restrictions affecting Turkey Point adjacent to Benton Beach, which prohibits the erection of any "habitable structure."

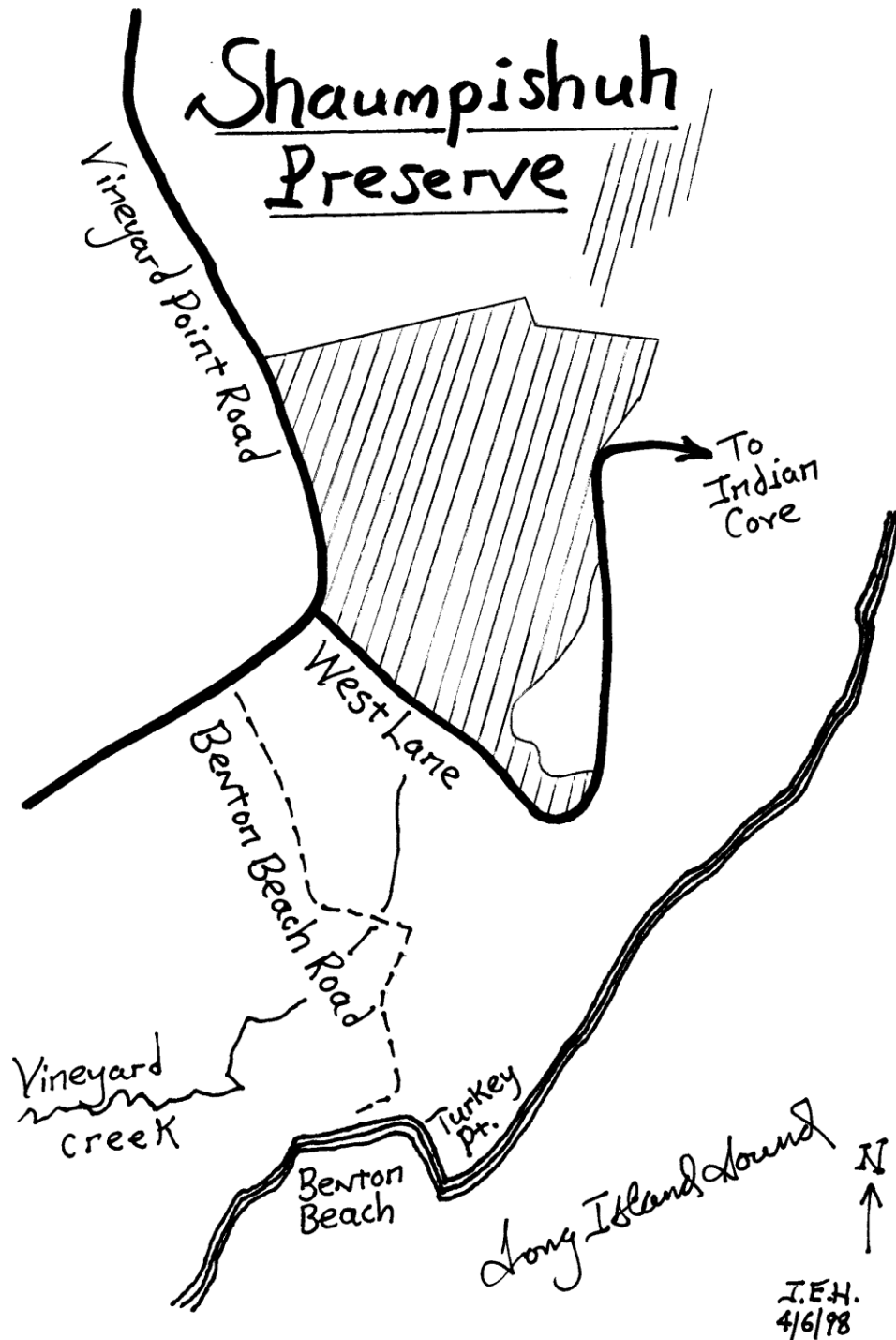
Shaumpishuh preserve includes considerable inland wetland in a forested glen, which is an important aquifer because it forms the headwater of our Vineyard Creek, a tidal estuary. When viewed from the causeway on West Lane, the head of Vineyard Meadow is a beautiful enclave of marsh floor surrounded by woods. This is where the tidewater meets the freshwater. It is the habitat for the Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys Guttata*), which is a threatened species in Connecticut. Edwin and Roger

Benton will probably be happy to reminisce about their turtle-hunting adventures here in the 1930s.

When the ground was frozen during this past winter, Daniel Cabrera, Forrest Helander, and Joel Helander explored the Shaumpishuh preserve from one end to the other. At the end of Vineyard Meadow, a stone's throw from West Lane, they found an ancient row of parallel stonewalls, leading down to the marsh from the woods. These walls certainly date to the 18th century when Sachem's Head was known as the Great Oxpasture and the land was widely pastured for cattle. Vineyard Creek became a valuable source of fresh drinking water. The stonewalls form a convenient lane leading from the pasture to the "watering place."

Two other curious historical sites can be found on Shaumpishuh preserve. About 200 feet back from the hairpin turn in West Lane, shielded by brush and briars, there is secret Shaumpishuh Cave, a large rock shelter in the face of rock cliff. There is no doubt that it was inhabited by native American Indians when they came down to the seashore in the summer. Grandpa Benton used to say that his father (Herbert) remembers from boyhood when two old Indians lived here. They were often seen tramping nearby woods looking for a certain kind of sapling for making baskets. Jill Benton unearthed several shards of pottery here about 1960. An archeologist estimated their age at about 1500-2000 years. To this day, horizons of shells can be found outside the cave entrance, bearing testimony to the Indians' shellfish diet.

The third site is against the north boundary line of Shaumpishuh preserve and can be located next to Vineyard Point Road just below the concrete trolley bridge. It has the appearance of a square foundation hole laid with field stones. Near the center of the hole is a slab of stone supported by small boulders, giving the appearance of a table. Although this site resembles an old house foundation, it is not. It is an early 19th century "potashery," where Sachem's Head farmers processed the alkali ingredients (potash) for soap making. Potasheries were typically located against a bank so that the gathered ashes could be dumped from an oxcart. The large flat stone is a "leach stone" upon which was set a "leaching



vessel” or wooden tub for running water through ashes. One can still see the furrow chiseled into the stone that drained the leaching “liquor” into a waiting trough.

Hopefully, this summer, you can check out the Shaumpishuh preserve. A prize is being offered to anybody who can locate (and document by photograph) the three archeological sites described.

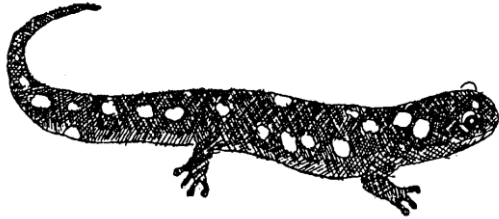
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**Why Does the Salamander  
 Cross the Road?**

by Joel Helander

In Connecticut, reptiles and amphibians spend the winter months hibernating (sleeping) under the ground. The water turtles burrow into the

soft mud in the bottom of ponds. The land turtles do the same thing in boggy swamps. Salamanders dig under the frost line, but frogs and “spring peepers” pass the winter in shallow burrows, unprotected from the frost.

Hopefully, everybody knows why the female turtle crosses the road in June, but does anybody know why the salamander crosses the road in early spring?



While the El Niño winter may have created a freak exception, it is the thawing grounds and March/April rains that stimulate the emergence of amphibians. The first species to emerge is the spotted salamander. Studies show that on the first warm rainy night after the temperature rises above forty degrees, spotted salamanders emerge from their winter burrows to migrate to their breeding ponds.

Spotted salamanders are the largest amphibian in this area. They average 9 inches in length and are shiny black with large yellow spots. When conditions are right, hundreds or even thousands of these elegant salamanders migrate at the same time. The males travel together first and the females follow several hours later.

If the rain stops, the salamander migration stops. Since they are amphibians and not reptiles, their skins must stay moist. The first rain is often the only time spotted salamanders are seen because they are part of the mole salamander family. Except for the breeding season, they spend most of their time under leaf litter in the woods.

When I was 10 years old, Grandpa Benton gave me a spotted salamander that he found on the farm in Sachem’s Head. It was kept in a discarded washing machine tub and she (?) was named “Sally.” The reason I remember this incident is because I still have a note from Grandpa Benton dated September 19, 1961 in which he references “Sally the salamander.” To

this day, Grandpa Benton’s amphibian gift always comes to mind when a salamander is seen crossing the road.

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## **BBC and the Information Superhighway**

by Tim Chemacki

With this new age of computers and the internet, BBC now has some new and exciting opportunities for information dissemination! I’ve been thinking of some options that we now have to supplement mailing of the newsletter, meeting minutes, etc. through US Postal Service. How we use this “new” technology depends on the responses I get from you, the readers.

I envision having a Benton Beach Corporation home page on the internet. This would allow any family member who has access to the internet and the world wide web to read the newsletters and meeting minutes, as well as any other supplemental information such as birthdays, anniversaries, the beach calendar, a tide schedule, *color* photographs, and any other information you desire. I may could even add a form for easily submitting stories and suggestions electronically. The possibilities are limitless!

Another option is that I can send copies of the newsletter over email to anyone who is interested.

None of these options are mutually exclusive. And we save postage if anyone wants to only receive electronic information. Additionally, I can get the access for a web page for free!

What I need to know is...who's interested? Who currently has internet/email access? Any ideas for a web page? Any questions or concerns? Please let me know. I can be contacted 24 hours a day by mail, email, or phone, and look forward to hearing your responses!

## Notes

- Anyone who has email access and is interested in making their address available to the rest of the family, please send a quick note listing your email address to: *tim@swingbridge.com*. I will then redistribute all these addresses to everyone else who responds. For those of us scattered across the country, this is a very inexpensive way to communicate!

- **Calendar of Events:**

Please call Donna Chemacki (203-245-2998), Benton Beach, Inc. secretary, for scheduling a special beach event. This is not necessary for small, spontaneous gatherings.

- Please submit any articles or family updates to Tim Chemacki for incorporation into the next issue.

Timothy Chemacki  
3300 South Tamarac Drive, Apt. K-303  
Denver, CO 80231  
(303) 368-0583  
email: [tim@swingbridge.com](mailto:tim@swingbridge.com)

