**GPSing VERMONT HISTORY, by Herb Ogden**

Those who have been on my hikes know I am fascinated by the traces of history that our trails and old roads pass through.  With a GPS, it is now fairly simple to get a picture of what some parts of this history look like.  One can mark as waypoints things like cellar holes, barn foundations, the ends and bends in a stone wall, old wells, piles of stone cleared from fields and pastures, terraces, and even the berms that formed on whichever side of a tilled field the plow thrust the soil toward.  Once all these things are plotted on a map, the outlines of long-vanished farms, for example, become much clearer than they seemed when we were just wandering around among the various features.  One may also marvel at how far some of the fields seem to have been from the farmhouse, and how farmers cleared even some quite small "shelves" on side hills to serve as fields.

Here is an example, from an area known to quite a few Killington Section hikers: the area between North Dorset and the Old County Road.  For orientation: the Natural Bridge on Gulf Brook is east of waypoint 030, the junction of Sweeney Lane (the Class 4 road up from North Dorset) and the Old County Road is 066, and 050 is where the wood road and former State trail up from North Dorset hits the  Old County Road.  Double lines show old highways and wood roads and single lines show stone walls, except for the single line from 060 north to 023, which is an ATV track.  Cubes are stone piles.  The tablet like symbols on either side of 025 are cellar holes or barn foundations.  Ignore the east-west "Sweeney Lane" and the north-south dashed line labeled "Hill Rd."  That's where Garmin thinks Sweeney Lane and the Old County Road run.  In fact, Sweeney Lane is mostly south of where Garmin locates it and the Old County Road is mostly west.

What does this all show?  At 025, about 900' southwest of the Natural Bridge, was a farm.  The hole just east of the old highway probably was the farmhouse, because it is four sided and sits on a little terrace.  The larger hole across the road probably was the barn, because it is larger and does not have all four sides.  North of the farm, on a relatively gently sloping hillside, a stone wall runs from 046 east to 048.  Because it is not straight and its bend is not a right angle, it probably was not a boundary wall.  Instead, it was just a handy place to stack stones while possibly preventing erosion.  North of this wall are two groups of stone piles.  The southerly one, centered around 033, includes at least eight piles of various sizes and heights.  The northerly one, centered around 041, includes at least four more piles.  The walls and piles indicate at least a cleared pasture and probably some cultivated fields or hay mowings.  West of the farmhouse and barn lies another developed area.  Around 058 are several more stone piles, indicating that the area between them and the Old County Road probably was cleared pasture or maybe even cultivated fields.  A peculiar feature lies between 054 and 055.  What began as a stone wall at 051 turns into a sort of wide stone dam at 054, filling a little valley.  I can't figure out its function.  It would be too low to hold back much water even if it were level, and besides, it's not.  The west end at 054 is so low that any water would have escaped that way.  I once saw something similar near Laconia, New Hampshire.  Two of the walls probably are boundary walls.  One, at the bottom of the map, runs east from 069.  The other, near Sweeney Lane, runs east from 075.  I think they are boundary walls because they run pretty much due east-west, and lots in Dorset were laid out on a north-south grid.  Up at 030, there's also a 15' boundary wall at a right angle to the highway wall, but it's too short to show on a map of this scale. The final features shown by this map are stone highway walls.  They border the Old County Road, on the east side from 060 to 050 and on the west side from 065 north to 063 and again from 027 to 030.  They also border Sweeney Lane south of 105 and south of 108.

 If folks are interested, I can do a similar article for a future issue of Smoke & Blazes about the Lottery Road area in Shrewsbury or about the area north of Wallingford Gulf. I can be reached at 293-2510 or

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