



# GIANT NEWS

Newsletter of the Sleeping Giant Park Association  
Fall 2023 • Issue 131

## Sleeping Giant: *Stories of an Indigenous Place*

—by Melinda Tuhus, *Giant News Editor*

Next time you come in the main entrance to the park, you might notice a new sign posted near the park map. It's titled "Sleeping Giant: Stories of an Indigenous Place."

This better-late-than-never plaque was unveiled September 20 in a ceremony attended by indigenous representatives, local elected officials and members of the Sleeping Giant Park Association.

It came about because after the tornado in 2018, DEEP (the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection) asked FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) for clean-up funds. "When you take money from the feds there's a process – Section 106 under the Historic Preservation Act – to make sure you're not doing damage to cultural sites or the environment," explains Leah Glaser, who directs the public history program at CT Central State University.

The State Historic Preservation Office determined that damage had been done by moving rocks around, which triggered the requirement to install the plaque. The state put out an RFP (request for proposal) and Glaser, her husband Steve Amerman, and Mohegan anthropologist Rachel Sayet responded jointly.

Amerman is a professor of history at Southern CT State University specializing in the history of indigenous peoples on the North American continent. Sayet is a Mohegan and did her master's thesis on giants and little people among the indigenous peoples of southern New England. She currently teaches at the Five Colleges in western Massachusetts.

"We wanted to inform people or remind people that everywhere on this continent has a history that goes way, way back before European arrival," Amerman says. "They had meaningful cultural connections to the land, but also that it's not just a past tense thing. We used the present tense to note that indigenous people are still alive. In New England that's an added struggle; indigenous people have to show that they are still alive after colonization in the 1600s."

He adds, "We worked together on it, having important conversations about how to approach it and how to word it. We both tried to listen really carefully to Rachel and let her take a lot of the lead on how she thought it best to word it, since neither Leah nor I am indigenous."

Rachel is also the great-great-niece of Gladys Tantaquidgeon, the medicine woman of the Mohegan Tribe, who, during her long life (she died in 2005 at the age of 106) preserved tribal traditions and founded the Tantaquidgeon Museum.



Clan Mother of the Golden Hill Paugussets, Shoran Waupatukuay Piper  
-photo submitted by Jeff Borne

<https://www.mohegan.nsn.us/explore/museum>

Rachel says, "I was raised with these elders, spent a lot of time with them; I was passed down the traditions of my people, especially of little people and giants. Those are the most important stories." She majored in anthropology and researched those stories further, writing her thesis on Maushop the Giant. She adds that Maushop and Hobbomock – the indigenous



**INDIGENOUS PLACE** continued from page 1

name for the Sleeping Giant – are interrelated, “though Hobbomock has a darker energy.”

Rachel says she would visit the parks and leave offerings to the spirits of Maushop and Hobbomock. “It’s not just a park to me. It’s where I feel the presence of these ancient beings.”

Regarding the wording on the plaque, she says, “I was trying to speak as a Mohegan person; this was a Quinnipiac site but we all probably would have gathered here. We’re all related at the end of the day. We utilized Quinnipiac sources. The Quinnipiac were displaced and intermarried with

other tribes; there are some in the area who identify as Quinnipiac, there is just not a big presence.”

Rachel says the three authors working on the plaque went through many drafts and she’s gratified at

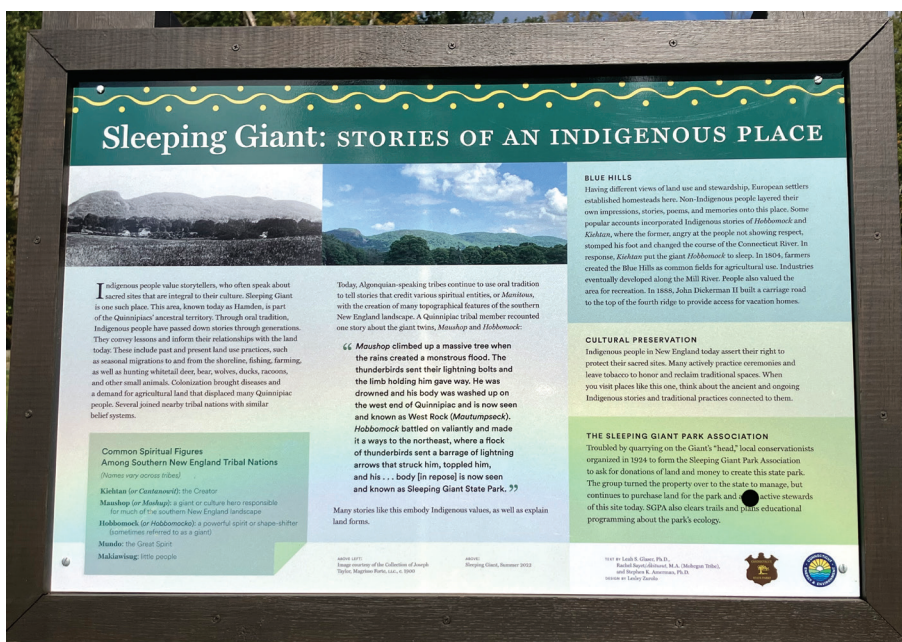
how it turned out. “I’m happy other native folks were able to come to the opening [she was unable to attend] and were happy with the work I contributed to, that they’re seeing us represented on this plaque.

My goal has always been to expand awareness among the general public.”

“This is a first step in what’s been a long time coming for these state parks.”

Rachel is available for

lectures and teaching on these topics and can be reached at [rbsayet@gmail.com](mailto:rbsayet@gmail.com).



—photo submitted by Melinda Tuhus



Plaque dedication group  
—photo submitted by Jeff Borne



# Meet Our Park Superintendent

—by Melinda Tuhus, *Giant News Editor*



Jill Scheibenpflug  
—photo submitted by Julie Hulten

Whether delivering young trees with a frontloader for planting in the picnic area, clearing snow (remember that?) from the parking lot, or taking calls from DEEP (Department of Energy and Environmental Protection) and the general public, SGSP Superintendent Jill Scheibenpflug's days are busy.

And her history with the park is long.

"I started with DEEP in 1982, one of the few that was never a seasonal. I worked on the CCC crew. That's the CT Conservation Corps, funded by the federal government in the '80s. A lot of us who are supervisors or maintainers started work there.

"After a year, you had to take a year off before you could come back. I worked for the forest service for the summer, and then worked with CCC again. Then I worked in the dispatch center in Hartford; the parks called us when they had an emergency, like crime or hazardous spills. We'd get calls even from the nuclear power plants.

"I started at Sleeping Giant in the fall of '87. I covered Sleeping Giant, West Rock, and Wharton Brook [state parks]. We had four maintainers then." She says now the unit is down to one – an example of the overall staff shortage in DEEP's parks department, which we covered in our last newsletter #130. "Years ago we had like 10 patrollers, now I have three," she adds.

Jill says the state is now hiring more officers to do park enforcement as well as oversee compliance with fish and wildlife regulations. If you haven't noticed police in the park except in emergencies (like a stranded hiker),

she says, "They're around, in unmarked vehicles."

What's her day-to-day like? "I spend a lot of time talking to the public; coordinating work in the park; I hire the seasonals. In the winter we plow, and try to fix the stuff that broke all summer. Usually I have a maintainer, and I do some maintenance. I had 13 seasonals over the summer, seven are left. Some of them are good with carpentry and like to build stuff, others mow the grass, operate the tractors."

She recently installed overflow parking at West Rock to accommodate the growing number of visitors there. That was well received by most, though she said someone complained about paving over more of the ground. "You can't make everyone happy," she says with a virtual shrug of her shoulders.

What changes has Jill seen over the decades?

"We have less staff and more people using the park. Covid boosted attendance and it didn't stay as high [after the Covid peak] but didn't fall back to what it was. There's more diversity among locals and a lot of out of staters.

"The landscape certainly has changed, and sometimes I think for the better. The white pines in the front were horrible – they were dangerous and snapping all the time. I almost got killed by one of them, one day when I was working under them and it was windy. As soon as we left, two trees fell. Now I can see the head [of the Giant] from my office. I think it's better. It's more open. People are always going to entertain themselves, trees or no trees."

And, of course, we planted more trees.

Another big change coming is the planned Visitors Center. "It's moving forward; the bid was awarded and work will probably start in spring of '24. First will be a lot of design work and site prep."

Under Jill's auspices, former SGPA President Julie Hulten volunteers as an interpretive guide at Sleeping Giant every Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, handing out maps, showing people where to go, answering visitors' questions. Also, Jill notes, "She keeps track of whether people are in-state or out of state, just proving that the visitors' center will get used. We used to pay people to do it and it's something I'd like to get back to doing."

Jill has flirted with retirement, but now says she plans to work at least another year. It's hard to imagine Sleeping Giant without her.

# Annual History Hike Reveals Some Surprises

—by Melinda Tuhus, *Giant News Editor*

Sleeping Giant Park Association board member Trina Learned led the annual history hike at the park on Oct. 1. One of her goals was to refute the oft-repeated story that the main incentive for the creation of the park was stopping the trap rock quarry, which had already eaten into the Giant's head by the 1920s.

More than a dozen hikers gathered first at the kiosk, where Julie Hulten, Past President of SGPA, talked about the construction of the tower and the cabins that used to be on the middle ridges.

"Then we took the group over the Red Diamond trail to the quarry," Trina explained. "My master's thesis research was on the founding of the park, and a lot of it is wrapped up in the quarry. But there were many societal factors at the turn of the last century that inspired people to create forest preserves, and this was one of the only places that had an intact forest near the large population of New Haven."

James Toumey, first President of the Sleeping Giant Park Association, was a silviculturist and one of the first professors at the Yale School of Forestry. As a proponent of the Progressive Movement, he believed in making nature available to as many people as possible. Creating a forest preserve at Mt. Carmel was an ideal project.

In 1911, Mt. Carmel Judge Willis Cook leased out the Giant's head to open a quarry. And although Toumey's advocacy for creating the park began in 1913, it stalled during World War I. "That gave the owners of the quarry plenty of time to build up their business. By the time Toumey got back to

establishing the forest preserve," Trina noted, "the quarry had made significant progress in chipping away at the Giant's Head."

The Sleeping Giant Park Association was founded in 1924, with CT conferring official state park status that same year after accepting the gift of SGPA-acquired land. But the head and the quarry were not yet part of the park. Board member Arnold Dana – who, as a 12-year-old boy, had tumbled down the mountain and lived to tell the tale – headed the committee to stop the quarry.

"I think it's an oversimplification to vilify Judge Cook and people who were running the quarry," says Trina. "The advent of the automobile created a huge demand for trap rock, essential to building safe, durable roads."

When Willis Cook died in 1930 the lease was sold to the Park Association, lengthy court battles ensued, and the quarrying didn't stop until 1933. See the story about Helen Porter, the woman who helped make that happen in our archive (#125).

The hikers stopped to see the machine shop and munitions vault, then made their way along the Violet trail to see other remnants of the quarrying operation. "The series of colonnades were the foundation for a very tall processing shed over rail lines with small trolley cars to receive and transport material," said Trina. "The trap rock was moved from the quarry

floor to the shed by conveyor belt, then sifted and sorted because traprock was sold by size."

The history tour of the park revealed a past that was both part of the region's industrial base and an important natural refuge.



Raccoon on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci



# Sharing the Giant's Story

## *New History Pages*

## *Make History Accessible to All*

—by Aaron Lefland, *Vice President*

Continuous improvements have been made to SGPA's website since the site was updated last fall. Most recently, eight new pages have been created to better tell the Giant's incredible story. These pages are accessible via a new landing page:

<https://sgpa.org/giant-history/>.

From the landing page, visitors can journey into six fascinating eras of the park's history:

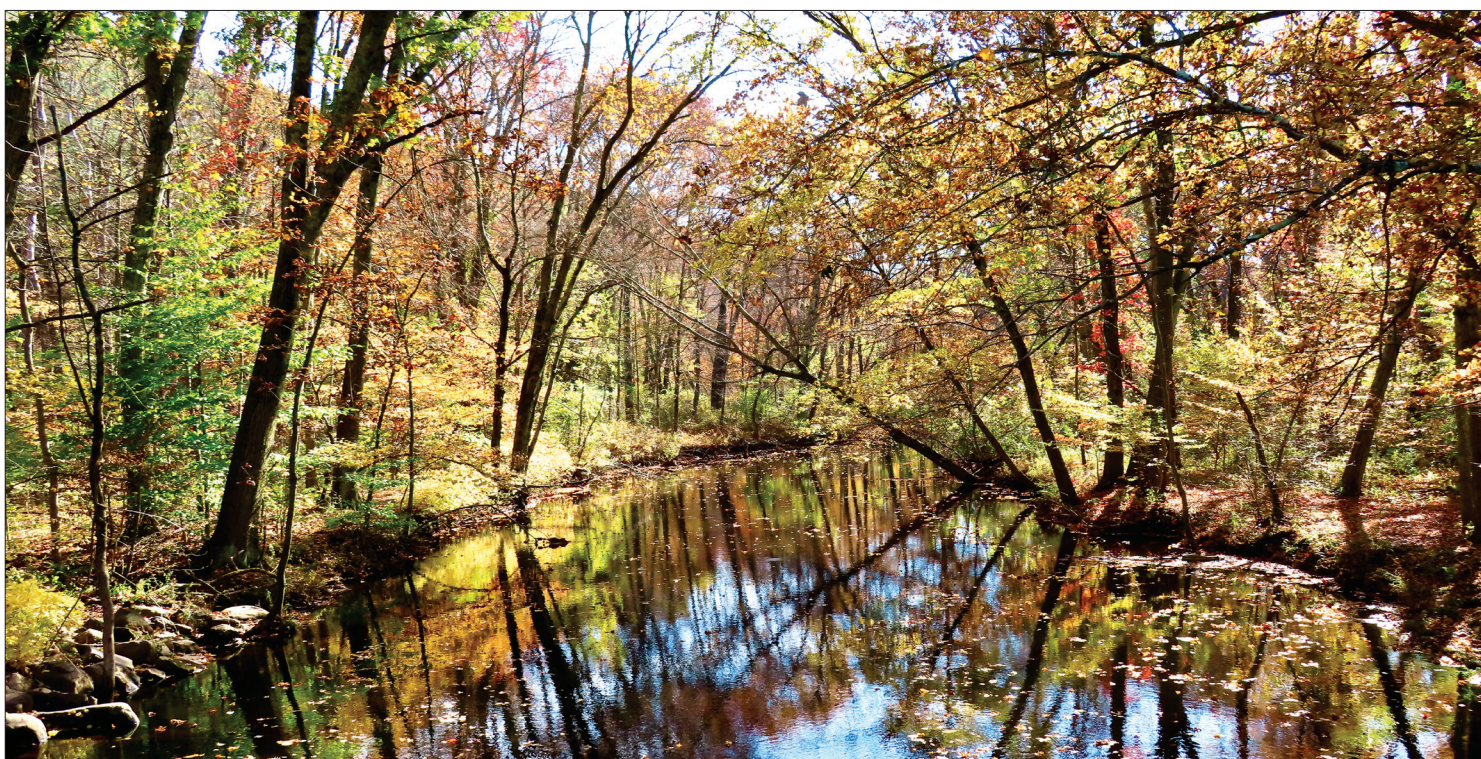
- **Geologic Formation:** Explore the remarkable forces that shaped the Giant we cherish today.
- **Indigenous Peoples:** Remembering the "First People" and their profound connection to Hobbomock
- **Early Industry:** Uncover the establishment of the Mount Carmel neighborhood, and a growing economy's impact on the Giant.
- **Cabins and Cottages:** Get a glimpse into life atop the Giant at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Quarrying and the Formation of SGPA:** Relive the tale of quarrying on the Giant's head, and SGPA's heroic efforts to preserve it.

- **Construction of the Tower and Path:** Learn about the park's most popular destinations and some hidden secrets it holds.

The landing page also provides links to two new captivating pages about the "Legend of Hobbomock" and "The Tarzan Rangers."

The Sleeping Giant's story spans more than 210 million years – a history too vast to capture entirely. Instead, these pages are designed to be a resource for those looking to dip their toes into the Giant's history, and are intended to make that history more accessible to all. Since their launch, these pages have become some of the most-visited on our website, a testament to our community's enthusiasm for connecting with the Sleeping Giant.

We invite you to explore these new web pages, delve into the rich history of the Sleeping Giant, and forge a deeper connection with this iconic landmark.



Trees reflected at the Giant  
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci





Deer and heron on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci

### ***Your Support Makes It All Possible***

Your gift to SGPA helps to maintain and improve the trails, engage visitors, and advocate for the park in its times of need. Together, we can ensure that Sleeping Giant remains a beloved destination for generations to come.

SGPA's year-end appeal, happening right now, is the perfect time to share your love for the Giant. Make your gift today, at [www.sgpa.org/donate](http://www.sgpa.org/donate)

## **Giant Master Program**

—by Manju Prabhu, *Giant Master Coordinator*

The revised Giant Master program went live in February, 2023. It is running smoothly and growing in popularity. So far 89 people have registered and 21 of them have completed all the trails to earn their Giant Master designation in the basic program or one of the advanced categories: 4-season, 12-month, or marathoner.

### **Congratulations to new Giant Masters:**

|      |                  |
|------|------------------|
| #582 | Dave Desjardins  |
| #583 | Lois McCutcheon  |
| #584 | Stephanie Crump  |
| #585 | Kent M. Hurlburt |
| #587 | Joe Schlosser    |

### **And to the newest Giant Master Marathoner:**

|     |                |
|-----|----------------|
| #26 | Andrew Mastroe |
|-----|----------------|



### **Looking for a Challenge?**

**Hike all 32 miles of blazed trails at the park and become SGPA's next**

## **GIANT MASTER**

Complete the challenge to receive a certificate, Giant Master cap and be eligible to participate in the Advanced Programs, including:

**4-Season GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in each of the four seasons

**12-Month GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in each month of a year

**Marathon GM:** Hike all of the blazed trails in a single day



To learn more and complete the required registration, visit

**[SGPA.org/giant-master](http://SGPA.org/giant-master)**





# PARK INTERLOPERS

—by Melinda Tuhus, *Giant News Editor*

The struggle against invasives in the park is never-ending.

In recent months, volunteers worked on the large patch of Japanese Knotweed along the Mill River on the Red Diamond Trail.

“Knotweed is extremely difficult to control and we are not allowed to use chemical means at the park,” says SGPA Naturalist Gail Cameron. “Mechanical means can be effective but it takes many visits over the growing season and several years of cutting and pulling to weaken the plants, and then continued vigilance as the root system is extensive. There is a possibility of tarping the area once the plants are weakened but we aren’t there yet. At one point we had made a lot of progress, but with the tornado [of 2018] and Covid, our access to the park for work parties was curtailed, and the knotweed came back just as strong as ever.”

A group of students from Quinnipiac University joined Gail, who explained how to identify the invasives and the importance of clearing invasives to make room for native species. After focusing on one area, a weedwhacker came to clear out the area for native regrowth.

“Everyone enjoyed the experience and it felt rewarding to see the visible difference in the landscape after removing the invasives,” said Angel Wang, a fourth year student member of Students for Environmental Action (SEA). “Several freshmen were in attendance, and they had joined this SEA event as an opportunity to visit Sleeping Giant since they had not yet had the chance to do so, while some upperclassmen had already participated in clean-ups in past years. Overall, we found this experience rewarding and educational. We learned a lot about invasive species and SEA is planning on joining the clean-up crew again sometime during the spring semester.”

Gail says there are invasive plants scattered all over the Giant, but efforts tend to concentrate on the largest problem areas. Further down the Red Diamond Trail, for example, there is a lot of Winged Euonymus, which volunteers have been working on over the summer. “It too will take multiple years to really see a difference and we will be vigilant as young plants emerge,” she says.

The Trails Crew has joined forces with the Environmental Stewardship Committee and other volunteers like the students at QU. “The battle will never be won,” she says, “but we can help to contain what is already there to avoid the spread of invasive plants to the detriment of the natives.” If you would like to help in this noble endeavor, email Gail at [naturalist@sgpa.org](mailto:naturalist@sgpa.org).

## Kris Bellemare

Once Kris Bellemare discovered hiking, he jumped in with both feet; the first hike he tackled at Sleeping Giant was the Blue

Trail up the head of the Giant – what many consider the toughest hike in the park. He even brought his wife and two kids along. “It was a little more than I expected, but we did it. They were surprised when they looked down and saw what they’d done. None of them were hikers.”

Doing the blue trail enabled him to do one of the items on his bucket list, which was to climb Mt. Washington.

Someone mentioned the Giant Master program to Kris. He joined the SGPA (a pre-requisite) and did all the trails in nine days, finishing in early June. Kris said, “I wanted to do the 4-season one right away,” so he finished the Spring hikes before Summer started. “Then I went right into the 12-month and did it from December to December. That February (2021) was really cold and snowy. I did it with crampons and broke a snowshoe. Then I got better snowshoes. There was one part after the Tower on the Blue Trail that’s fairly steep, and I ended up sliding down on my butt. The snow was fairly soft but I was worried about hitting a rock.

“I felt a great sense of accomplishment, especially finishing the 12-month one, because you can’t skip a month, and if it’s pouring rain you still have to get it done. Hiking the White Trail in the pouring rain was fun. It was also fun getting to know the trails really well so if someone has any questions I can help, like how to get to the Tower from any trail.”

His advice: “I would say just get started. Fill out the log. Make a plan and just go.” That’s what he tries to impart to his parishioners at New Life Church in Wallingford, where he is a family care pastor.

About Sleeping Giant he says, “It’s a beautiful park because there’s something for everyone. You could spend all day or an hour hiking.” Did he see any bears? “No bears – I wish.”

With a hiking record like that, you may wonder why he hasn’t already done the Giant Master Marathoner (in truth, at 32 miles, it’s six miles longer than a marathon).

“I’m a big guy – 290 pounds and 5’10”. My legs have gotten strong and able to push my big body around. I have to lose weight before I can do the marathon, but that’s my goal.”







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copperhead and toad on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci

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The *Giant News* is published three times a year by the Sleeping Giant Park Association, a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation, maintenance, and expansion of Sleeping Giant State Park.



Be sure to check our SGPA Facebook page or our SGPA website for updates on the Park's status. Feedback on the *Giant News* can be sent to [giantnews@spga.org](mailto:giantnews@spga.org).



purple fungus on the Giant  
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci