Norfolk Hunt Club

DISCUSSES THE GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF TODAY'S BEAUTIFUL HUNTING LAND

SUBMITTED BY GIL RODGERS WITH D.A. HAYDEN

The Norfolk Hunt Club is privileged to hunt through beautiful territory—the Charles River Watershed area, Middleboro, Grafton, South Dartmouth and Westport, Mass.—and each parcel of land has a storied and geologically marvelous history. Deep beneath the cultivated fields owned by private landowners and the intricate trail systems stewarded by land conservation organizations is a geological story unknown to most foxhunters, trail riders, outdoor enthusiasts, and residents alike.

PAUL KELEHER

The Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course, once covered by glacial ice, is now the home of Polo in the Country.

Gil Rodgers, a Norfolk Hunt member, has conducted extensive research on the geological history of the heart of Norfolk's country, in Dover, Sherborn, and Medfield, Mass. The next time you visit the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course, at the upcoming June 3 Norfolk Hunter Pace, for example, take a moment and imagine it the way Gil does.

The Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course was Once a Glacier

As you tack up your horse for the Norfolk Hunter Pace, or arrange your tailgate for Polo in the Country on September 16, look up in the sky above the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course for a moment. Imagine a block of ice over one-half mile to perhaps one mile high above you. It is full of rocks and boulders from the White Mountains of New Hampshire and as far away as northern Canada. That's the glacier that sat on top of this field perhaps 10,000 years ago—a time known as the Wisconsin Glacier Period.

KATHIE DAVENPORT

Ruth Lawler jumps a stone wall built with rock left by glacial deposits.

Now look down at the ground. Imagine moving forward about 3,000 years from the time of the glacier, or around 7,000 years ago. You would be standing or riding under 20 to 50 feet of water. This was Lake Medfield, which covered two-thirds of Medfield and Dover, half of Norwood and Walpole, and some of Westwood. A huge glacial lake formed with waters of the melting ice sheet. The edge of the lake went right up to North Street where you enter the Steeplechase Course, at an elevation of about 200 feet above sea level. The enormous pressure of the glacier and the large, deep lake caused the earth's surface to flatten out—this is why the steeplechase field is so level, and why the Norfolk Hunt can host polo, horse shows, and special events in this beautiful field.

The glacier left many traces in the soil, boulders, streams, and hills. For example, next to the Steeplechase Course are some very good examples of eskers—ridges of gravelly and sandy drift—that formed from rivers that ran underneath the ice block and left long serpentine piles of glacial debris that remained after the walls of the ice melted away. Drumlins—long, narrow or oval, smoothly rounded hills—formed as the glacier receded and formed smooth mounds; Miller Hill on Farm Street, land the Hunt is fortunate to ride through, is actually a drumlin. The area also has kettle ponds—including Farm Pond in Dover and Sherborn. The kettle ponds were formed as chunks of the glacier broke off, and were surrounded by glacial till. The ice blocks melted and left big depressions that filled with water. The glacier also randomly scattered large boulders around as they dropped out of the ice block. These are called glacial erratics. You can see them all around you as you walk and ride through the local woods. Finally, the glacier left its tread marks on boulders through scratches, or striations, indicating the direction of its movement. A good example of striations can be seen on the smooth ledge outcrop at the corner of Route 27 and Dale Street in Medfield, in the northeast corner of the old cemetery.

Glacial Deposits Sparked Local Businesses

Medfield is a watershed divide separating streams and rivers flowing towards the west into the Charles River, and drainage to the east where water flows into the Neponset River. As the glacier melted, many streams and rivers were formed to carry the water to the ocean. These flows tended to separate sand, gravel, and pebbles into distinct layers. The power of the wind blowing across the open, flat plane contributed to this separation. As a result, there are many large deposits of gravel and sand in the area; including pure white sand, normally found on the most pristine beaches. You can see the sharp demarcations in the landscape—like Tresca Bros. Sand and Gravel on Route 109 in Millis—that were the foundation for commercial businesses in the area. Medfield even had a brick company in the 1920s—Atlantic Brick Company—utilizing the clay and sand deposits such as in the area along the railroad tracks; the company was located off of West Street in Medfield.

With a little imagination and understanding of the geological history of Norfolk's hunt territory, every rider and spectator—whether attending a hunter pace, foxhunt, hunter trial, derby cross, horse show, Grounds for Celebration, polo or simply pleasure riding—can appreciate the marvels of the land, and thank landowners and conservation organizations for keeping this gorgeous country undeveloped for years to come.

For more information on the Norfolk Hunt Club and upcoming events, visit www.norfolk-hunt.com.