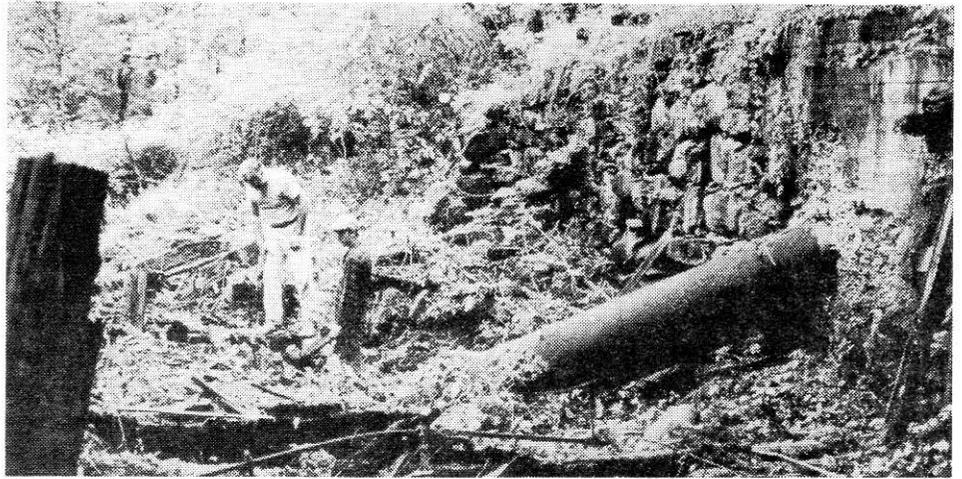


Vermont

Pittsford, Vermont Iron Works

On Memorial Day weekend, May 25-27, volunteers from the New England Chapters and the Pittsford Historical Society worked hard to help make the remains of a 19th-Century standing blast furnace and surrounding mill works a place where the public could learn more about Vermont's impressive historic iron industry. Over twenty people labored at cutting down trees, clearing brush, exposing foundations and surveying the works.



Paul Potvin and student inspect the turbine box of the mill ruin at the Pittsford iron works. Note the iron penstock.

The Northern New England Chapter was invited to aid in clearing, surveying and interpreting the site by Allen Hitchcock, who recently purchased the land and iron works remains to prevent its loss to development. The iron history of the site dates back to the late 18th century when the first furnace was built by Israel Keith. The remains uncovered by the volunteers represented the final works which ceased operation about 1883. (See Vic Rolando's article in this Newsletter for a more complete history of the site.)

Like other 19th-Century blast furnaces in Vermont, the stone remains at Pittsford are quite spectacular, especially when approached through the dense vegetation which surrounded it. The volunteers cleared away much of the brush and trees whose roots were undermining many of the site's components.

Among the features of the site is a wheel pit and tail race constructed with large dry-laid granite quarry blocks. A huge granite slab, 9 feet long, 4 feet wide and 9 inches thick, bridges a portion of the tail race. A limited excavation to remove debris from the wheel pit revealed that one of its walls had partially collapsed into it. Based on the

measurements taken at the mouth of the tail race, the wheel pit was estimated to be approximately seven feet deep, leading to speculation that the overshot wheel which drove the blower, which would have been greater than 20 feet in diameter, was mounted on a superstructure. A search for its foundation was not successful. However, future excavation may reveal it.

Another feature of interest at the site is the remains of a mill ruin which was designated as a "machine shop" on an 1850s map, and which had been adapted to a water-powered saw mill and carpenter shop in the 1920s. A riveted iron-plate penstock had been installed through the mill's original field stone foundation wall. Poured concrete was used to replace the section of field-stone wall in which had been intruded by the penstock, and a concrete turbine box had been installed, possibly at the same location as the original turbine box. While many artifacts such as bearings, leather belting and control wheels were present in the mill ruin, the turbine, carriage and saw machinery had been removed. It will be valuable as a research site to trace the adaptive reuse history.

Brush clearing near the earthen

Krista Jackson (NNEC) at the top of the ladder assists with recording the Pittsford blast furnace as other (less courageous) volunteers look on.

recharge ramp revealed several storage bunkers, some containing residue of ore and flux. Also at the site is the foundation of the company store which was not included in the weekend activity. It, however, should also be an interesting site for future research.

On July 4, an iron works exhibit will be opened at the Pittsford Historical Society. SIA members and the public are invited to visit the exhibit any Wednesday, 10:00 to 3:00, throughout the summer. On September 21, as part of Pittsford's celebration of Vermont's Bicentennial of statehood, visitors will be invited to tour the remains of the iron works. For information, please call Lois Blittersdorf, (802) 483-6485, or Jean Davies, (802) 483-6623.

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The Pittsford furnace stack, ca. 1955. Old farm machinery was abandoned inside the casting arch. Photo by Vic Rolando.