

# The Falmouth Enterprise

Tuesday, August 29, 2006

## Falmouth's Quiet Treasures

### The Knob: A Promontory That Gives One A Boater's View Of Buzzards Bay

*(This is the fifth in a series of pieces highlighting open space in Falmouth. It is produced by The 300 Committee in celebration of the town's on-going successes in preserving the character and nature of our corner of Cape Cod.)*

By BETH SCHWARZMAN

From the outer end of the Knob you can look back east to Falmouth and almost imagine that you are on a boat in Buzzards Bay: the southwest summer wind sweeps past you unobstructed and the water on all sides breaks against the shore far below. In winter sea ducks like eiders, goldeneyes, scoters, and occasionally long-tailed ducks and harlequin ducks, which breed in the Arctic and winter in our balmy clime, can be seen foraging along shore, seemingly impervious to sleet, wind, ice, or waves. Just as you can often approach these birds more easily on a boat, they pay you less mind when you are on this promontory. In summer you can see boats in all directions—the boats moored in Quissett Harbor itself, lying quietly behind the protecting arm of the Knob, the ships and barges that pass up the channel in Buzzards Bay headed for the Cape Cod Canal, and the hundreds of runabouts, cruisers, sailboats, and even windsurfers following their dreams in all di-

rections in the bay. The Knob has long been a favorite spot to watch the sunset; in the 1930s cars could drive out to the end of this peninsula. Although you'll have to hoof it today, you'll still find lots of company almost any time of day, enjoying whatever the weather has to offer.

The Knob was given to the people of Falmouth by Cornelia Carey. This exemplar of generosity and land preservation has been an inspiration to many, particularly as open space in town has disappeared and building encroaches on many favorite spots. Thanks to her we still have space to breathe, beaches and rocks to walk on, picnic spots beneath the trees, and views to admire.

The rocky ridge that forms the Knob is a piece of the moraine, the hilly sweep of land that runs from Cuttyhunk to Bourne. The Knob began as a crack or crevasse in the edge of the ice sheet. As the ice melted that crack filled up with the rock, sand, silt, and gravel that had been carried to this point by the ice sheet. A chunk of solid ice occupied Quissett Harbor, which prevented the moraine material from being deposited there. When all the ice melted, the former earth-filled crevasse stood up as a ridge and the areas that had been filled with ice were

deeper basins, forming the harbor and Buzzards Bay. If you walk along the beach from the harbor to the point you will pass several spots where the makeup of the Knob can be seen: huge rocks, and little ones, set in a matrix of sand and clay, all mixed together at random. This soil is fairly rich, and retains moisture better than the sandy soil of most of the Cape, so despite the exposed location, the trees, mostly oaks, have grown quite large.

There has been a great deal of disturbance on the Knob lately as the revetments all around the point have been rebuilt, and rebuilt again. This armoring, which places ranks of enormous rocks along the shore and up the foot of the bluffs, was done to protect the upland from erosion. And it will do that, at least for a while. But inevitably, as sea level rises, the revetment will be undermined and collapse again, because erosion is one of the natural processes that gave us Falmouth's original shoreline, and that builds and sustains coastal features like beaches and clam flats.

The Knob is at the end of Quissett Harbor Road. From Woods Hole Road go west at the Quissett lights, and park in the parking slots before you get to the private roads.