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Overlook Mountain Center marks 10 years with focus on Native American sites, history



Rob Saffer, the co-founder of the Overlook Mountain Center, points out the different types of stone that made up this particular cairn, or ceremonial stone landscape. The above cairn is in Lewis Hollow in the town of Woodstock, N.Y. (Tania Barricklo/Daily Freeman)

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KINGSTON, N.Y. — Ten years ago, a group of area residents joined forces to form the Overlook Mountain Center with the goal of protecting 82 acres of land located in Lewis Hollow on Overlook Mountain from the threat of potential development.

With those lands now protected through conservation easements, the not-for-profit is on a new mission: to draw attention to and recognition for the hundreds of cairns and other formations, known to the indigenous tribes of the region as “manitou hassanash,” or sacred stones, found throughout the hollow.

According to the Overlook Mountain Center website, “the ancient importance of Overlook Mountain is reflected in a Native American ceremonial stone landscape present in Lewis Hollow. Consisting (of) stone constructions, subsurface hydrological features, and effigies with connections to the constellations, these archaeoastronomy and landscape archaeology features represent unique resources of cultural significance. The research, identification and protection of such resources as sacred sites, is inherent in (Overlook Mountain Center’s) core mission.”

Glenn Kreisberg, chair and co-founder of the group, said to help the center achieve that goal, the not-for-profit recently expanded its board and advisory council to include members of indigenous tribes, archaeologists and others in order to put a greater emphasis on relationships with local indigenous tribes and to create partnerships to research the sites that will “complement local indigenous knowledge with scientific research.”

“Having members of indigenous communities provides local indigenous knowledge to help inform all we do, from site identification and research to outreach and education,” he said.

That knowledge is especially important, he said, because although the stone formations have long held a place of sacred importance to the indigenous peoples whose ancestors once roamed the lands, many in the scientific community argue that the indigenous people of the Northeast didn’t create anything with stone and that the formations were instead constructed by colonial Americans.

“Of course ... a lot are very definitely early American, boundary markers and things like that,” said Kreisberg. “Then there are ones that clearly don’t fall in that category, that don’t serve another purpose, low walls that serpentine through the woods, that have no purpose and are clearly not colonial or early American.”

Kreisberg said that within the hollow, the center has identified spirit stones, serpentine walls, many piles of stones that resemble turtles, which hold a place of importance to the indigenous people, as well as other effigies and structures that seem to be tied to the sky through astronomy and to the underworld through water and other features, while others seem to provide practical purposes acting as calendars and navigational aids.

Recently, he said, a stone structure was identified as an altar that would have been used by indigenous people. And a stone cairn in Lewis Hollow was recently dated to 1590 CE.

“It sort of on the cusp of European contact, but there were no Europeans in Upstate New York, considering Henry Hudson didn’t sail up the Hudson until 1609,” Kreisberg said.

“It’s kind of a point of contention among academics, whereas the Native Americans, they know, through local indigenous knowledge,” he said.

“We’re looking to work with the state regulators, academics at state universities and tribal preservation folks ... to study these and help document them and get them on the record books,” he said.

Kreisberg said the organization will also continue to promote public awareness of the site and its historical significance through guided hikes, workshops and lectures.

To learn more about the Overlook Mountain Center and its mission, go to [overlookmountain.org](https://www.overlookmountain.org).



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