Time and the Land: the story of Mine Hill

by Michael Bell and Diane B. Mayerfeld
This book is dedicated to the memory of Wilbur Shook, former president of the Roxbury Land Trust, friend of Mine Hill and all who knew him.

Many people contributed to the preparation of this report. Dr. Thomas G. Siccama, who decided that this project would be "a winner," guided us through the bogs of research and helped us slog through the final write-up.

Fred Chesson gave us the benefit of his long acquaintance with Mine Hill and joined us in discovering more about its history.

Greg Yovan and Les Mehrhoff showed us animals and plants that had been under our noses all along, and Larry Kershner spent many long hours printing the photographs used in this publication.

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A bibliography for this report is available from the Roxbury Land Trust.
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wildlife photography by Greg Yovan

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Only within the last one hundred years have we begun to recognize the
effect of people on the land. Formerly, urbanization, industrialization, and
agriculture were seen only in terms of human needs while their effects on
wildlife and plantlife went unremarked or unnoticed. But now that
irreversible changes in natural systems threaten the quality of life, the
preservation of land and living things is also regarded as a human need.
Located in rapidly developing western Connecticut, Mine Hill Preserve can
play an important role in the protection of our natural heritage.

Ironically, the beautiful oak and hemlock forests of Mine Hill have grown
over remains from an industry that is central to the level of human control
over the environment. Over a hundred years ago, an iron mining and
steel manufacturing venture scarred the hill and stripped it of its trees.
The mine tunnels, the blast furnace, and other traces of that period in the
hill’s history testify to the need and power of humans to change their
environment. Today, however, the forest has reclaimed the land and healed
most of the scars, demonstrating that the damage done by our use of the
natural world is not necessarily irreparable.

The history of Mine Hill actually begins over 500 million years ago, with
the geologic forces that laid the foundations for all the natural processes
and human activities that have shaped the hill. Thus, this report begins with
the geologic history of the area. The next section of the report concentrates
on ecology, and the final part discusses the human history of Mine Hill.