Area under consideration for designation:

Within twenty feet of either side of the centerline of **Red Coat Hill Road** – from the West Tisbury town line easterly to its juncture with Deer Hill Road

Within twenty feet of the either side of the centerline of **Shubael Weeks Road** – from the West Tisbury town line northerly to its juncture with John Hoft Road

Tisbury Special Ways Under Consideration - November 2019
**Nomination:** The nomination was received from the Tisbury Planning Board on November 7 and accepted by the Martha’s Vineyard Commission on November 21. Some highlights of the nomination follow:

This nomination is to protect some of the last visible remains of early foot and hoof passage in Tisbury. Generations have traversed these paths/trails long before the advent and introduction of the automobile and continue to this day. The narrow configurations are marked by depressions, even though surrounded by flat land, demonstrating centuries of use. The names are reminders of the past usage or person to whom it was named for. These sections appear on road maps from the 1800’s. The Town of Tisbury should protect these island treasures, from one town, West Tisbury, and continuing through Tisbury, for future generations to enjoy.

**Red Coat Hill Road** is part of an old cart path established between State Road and Lambert’s Cove Road. In the 1700 and 1800’s, when the island’s economic production was primarily farming and fishing, one could see the harbor from the highest point on Red Coat Hill. The lookout was used during the Revolutionary to surveil the harbor. On September 10, 1778¹, a British Force of Red Coats, led by General Grey, seized this high ground during a four-day invasion leaving a “red coat” on a nearby hill.

**Shubael Weeks Road** extends from the West Tisbury Line and crosses Red Coat Trail in Tisbury continuing to Cranberry Bogs along Lambert’s Cove Road. Mr. Shubael Weeks lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He was a Tisbury Selectman at the time of the British Raid in 1778.

Both paths/trails are important connections and connectors to Land Bank and Nature Conservancy trails and conservation areas in Vineyard Haven, including Duarte’s Pond and to West Tisbury.

Countless families have crossed these routes over time. They represent a unique and irreplaceable asset mostly untouched by time. Alongside the paths are parts of the great Pitch Pine forests on the island. Many are specimen trees and ancient. They contribute to the beauty of the place and create the needed environment for the propagation of nature, plant and animal.

Prior to the introduction of the automobile, these paths/trails are a modern day reminder of the ancient travel ways. Distance to town was measure in hours not minutes. Both place names are significant because of an action that took place, Red Coat raid, or a person, Mr. Weeks, a Tisbury selectman. Today, the routes are used by pedestrians, bicyclists and horseback riders as a safe means of traversing the town. The unbroken beauty of the path is peaceful and lets one think back to less hurried times. Both locations connect to West Tisbury which has protected them as Special Ways.

**Pitch Pines, scrub oaks, and conifers** are the dominant tree species stretching all along the ways. Pitch pines, or Pinus rigida extend from the mountains of Northern Georgia to Southern Maine. Like a hearty New Englander, the pine has adapted to island life. They grow in sandy soils. They have strong stout limbs. The seeds germinate anywhere there is sun and bare soil. If killed, new trees sprout from the stump. In days past, the trees were utilized to produce pitch, turpentine, rosin, and tar. Pitch² was used to caulk and seal the boards on wooden sailing vessels. Tar² was used to grease wagon axels and to preserve the fibers of ropes used in rigging. The nominated ways show examples of uncontrolled or inappropriate development and how that can alter the character or even eliminate evidence of the route. With increased vehicle usage, the surfaces of these pre-

¹ Martha’s Vineyard by Henry Franklin Norton, copyright 1923
² June 2015 article for Northern Woodlands magazine, “Yankee Tarheels: Remembering the Pitch Pine Industry of Colonial America”
Notes on Designation – Tisbury Special Ways December 19, 2019

automobile paths get widened, graded, and stabilized with hardening materials to the extent they become just another serviceable dirt road. Additional blockage, of portions of these ways, would further compromise the free flow of foot and hoof passage. Their loss would be irreplaceable.

Advantageous development would be that which, through careful locations of driveways and the use of alternative vehicle access points when available, maintains the character of the ways and their immediate surroundings by minimizing additional vehicular use of the ways, retains natural vegetation alongside the ways, and would prevent the ways being blocked. Both locations tend to be lightly traveled by vehicles, but both are routinely accessed by pedestrians, cyclists, and horseback riders.

Special Way nomination is not intended to confer or require any public right of access

Timeline: The MVC accepted the nomination on November 21, committing the Commission to holding and public hearing and vote within 60 days.

Should the MVC vote to designate, the Town will next develop and adopt regulations for the new Special Ways Zone. The Town will have up to one year from the date of designation to adopt regulations. Adoption includes a 2/3 vote at Town Meeting and a vote by MVC after public hearing that the regulations conform to the Goals and Guidelines in the Decision Designating the Island Road District as a District of Critical Planning Concern. After those two actions, the regulations immediately become law. The Attorney General does not review DCPC regulations; only the MVC review and approval is required. It is the intention of the Planning Board to present regulations at the April 14 Annual Town Meeting or a prior Special Town Meeting.

MVC designation hearing and vote: The MVC has been asked by the Tisbury Planning Board to DESIGNATE the area under consideration to be included in a new Special Ways Zone of the Island Road District. In making its determination on designation, the MVC is guided by the Critical Planning District Qualifications (full text attached).

Criteria for designation: In making determination on designation, the MVC is guided by the Critical Planning District Qualifications (full text attached). The Qualifications are based very closely on the original text in Chapter 831 of the Acts of 1977 as amended (the Act), and have guided DCPC designation since the 1970’s. The Qualifications set out criteria for designation; including the need for designation, the size and shape of the District, and Specific Qualifications for the various types of district. The Special Ways Zone of the Island Road District falls into the category Cultural or Historic Resource District.

Analysis:

The nomination appears to present compelling statements regarding the need for and suitability of designation.

Regarding the General Qualifications, the nomination makes a case for the need for designation and for the appropriateness of the area for designation: This nomination is to protect some of the last visible remains of early foot and hoof passage in Tisbury. Generations have traversed these paths/trails long before the advent and introduction of the automobile and continue to this day. The narrow configurations are marked by depressions, even though surrounded by flat land, demonstrating centuries of use. The names are reminders of the past usage or person to whom it was named for. These sections appear on road maps from the 1800’s. The Town of Tisbury should protect these island treasures, from one town, West Tisbury, and continuing through Tisbury, for future generations to enjoy.
The nominated ways show examples of uncontrolled or inappropriate development and how that can alter the character or even eliminate evidence of the route. With increased vehicle usage, the surfaces of these pre-automobile paths get widened, graded, and stabilized with hardening materials to the extent they become just another serviceable dirt road.

Regarding the Specific Qualifications for a Cultural or Historic Resource District, the nomination notes that in the 1700 and 1800’s, when the island’s economic production was primarily farming and fishing, one could see the harbor from the highest point on Red Coat Hill. The lookout was used during the Revolutionary to surveil the harbor. Red Coat Hill Road is named for its part in Grey’s Raid, when forces led by General Grey, seized this high ground during a four-day invasion leaving a “red coat” on a nearby hill. Shubael Weeks Road is named for a Tisbury Selectman from the time of Grey’s Raid.

Prior to the introduction of the automobile, these paths/trails are a modern day reminder of the ancient travel ways. Distance to town was measure in hours not minutes. Both place names are significant because of an action that took place, Red Coat raid, or a person, Mr. Weeks, a Tisbury selectman. Today, the routes are used by pedestrians, bicyclists and horseback riders as a safe means of traversing the town. The unbroken beauty of the path is peaceful and lets one think back to less hurried times. Both locations connect to West Tisbury which has protected them as Special Ways.

Pitch Pines, scrub oaks, and conifers are the dominant tree species stretching all along the ways. Pitch pines, or Pinus rigida extend from the mountains of Northern Georgia to Southern Maine. Like a hearty New Englander, the pine has adapted to island life. They grow in sandy soils. They have strong stout limbs. The seeds germinate anywhere there is sun and bare soil. If killed, new trees sprout from the stump. In days past, the trees were utilized to produce pitch, turpentine, rosin, and tar. Pitch was used to caulk and seal the boards on wooden sailing vessels. Tar was used to grease wagon axels and to preserve the fibers of ropes used in rigging.

These specific reasons for designating these particular ways are quite in keeping with the reasons detailed in Section 4.12 of the Decision Designating the Island Road District as a District of Critical Planning Concern:

Special Ways are a rare or unique resource and make an unusual contribution to the character of the Island for various reasons, often depending on the particular way. In general terms, they include, but are not limited to, roads which have been virtually abandoned or left to infrequent use. They are usually unimproved, narrow, and rustic, and generally are not committed to major vehicular travel. They also trace back to the Island’s early history, including, in some cases, its pre-colonial history. The most ancient Special Ways are among the last vestiges of the historical travel network of Martha’s Vineyard. They may provide archeological resources, or means of retracing historic accounts and development. In some cases, the ways are tied to early trades. Some Special Ways were laid out by the early Proprietors in the course of dividing commonly owned land into individually owned lots. Some Special Ways, whether or not so laid out, are referenced in early deeds for purposes of describing property boundaries and locations. They are literally paths that take us back through the history of life on the island.

Because of their ties to the Island’s past, Special Ways may have an exceptional historic, cultural or symbolic importance. The visual character of these ways is crucial to this importance. To retain this importance, however, they must not be altered in a manner that destroys their essential character. If a special way were destroyed, its replication would take extraordinary effort and expense, and in all events such replication would lack most of the historic, cultural and symbolic significance it once embodied.
For the above reasons, Special Ways are unique historical, archaeological, symbolic and cultural resources of regional and statewide significance, and may include places, landscapes, ways and views which are especially expressive of the character of the Island, the traditions of its residents, and what makes the Island of special interest to its visitors.

In terms of their present and potential use, including recreational use, the Special Ways vary in their nature. In some cases, they provide or allow for public access to a way, including as dedicated public ways, statutory private ways, common scheme ways, or otherwise. In other cases, a special way may be a private way accessible only to the landowner or easement holders, which may be few or many. The status of the way as public, private, subject to easements, and who holds what rights therein, often involves determinations based on complicated legal principles. This determination of the status is not necessary to a special way designation, nor does the Commission’s designation affect the status. Special Ways accessible to some or all members of the public offer an opportunity to experience the Island by slower means of transportation, such as walking, horse-back riding, or bicycling. Those Special Ways that are private, as well as those whose status is in doubt, may at some point in the future be made accessible through landowner agreements, court determinations, and other means, at which time they would provide recreational benefits, provided that their character had been preserved and protected. Thus, regardless of whether such ways are wholly private or subject to public rights of access, this is clearly a case where proper development guidelines at this time could preserve the character of old ways while enhancing them for existing or potential use by Island residents and visitors.

The **DESIGNATION** vote, if affirmative, should include reasons and should include **GOALS and GUIDELINES for DEVELOPMENT**, in this case the same Goals and Guidelines for the remainder of the Island Road District Special Ways Zone.

**Goals and Guidelines of the Island Road District Special Ways Zone:**

The Goals for the Special Ways are: To protect the existing character of Special Ways for all of the reasons set forth in Section 4.12 (Cultural and Historic District: Special Ways) and to retain the view of landscapes abutting these ways by preventing the injurious effects that accompany development of the way as a primary vehicular route. Therefore, new vehicular access should be on new rights-of-way, thus preserving the Special Ways for alternative forms of transportation.

The Guidelines for the Special Ways Zone are:

A. **Development Guidelines**

The Commission finds that these measures are necessary to preserve the historic, archaeological, symbolic, and cultural character of the Special Ways, including, in appropriate instances, their character as primarily for non-motorized forms of transportation. As used herein, the terms “development” and “development permit” are as defined in Chapter 637 of the Acts of 1974 or Chapter 831 of the Acts of 1977, both as amended, which shall together hereafter be referred to as the “Acts”).

1. No way or road shall be constructed or expanded within the Special Ways Zone which exceeds a width of twelve (12) feet

2. No fences, walls, or structures shall be erected, placed or constructed within twenty (20) feet of the centerline of the Special Way, except that lesser setbacks for fences or stone walls may be allowed on abutting
lots of less than one acre in size, taking into account such factors as height, transparency, materials and natural screening to prevent creation of a narrow, visually confined effect; in which case the town shall demonstrate that its regulations allowing such lesser setbacks are consistent with the purpose of this guideline. (See also Section 5.III.A regarding stone walls.)

3. Every attempt shall be made to retain a surface of indigenous sand, clay, gravel and/or grass.

4. No special way shall be paved with any impervious material, such as bituminous concrete or asphalt.

B. Uses Within the Special Ways Zone

1. Permitted Uses.

Any use permitted by the applicable town zoning district, provided that either of the following conditions are met:

The development does not result in direct vehicular access to the Special Way, or

The Special Way meets one or more of the following criteria as determined by the Planning Board

(a) the Special Way is identified as having provided the vehicular access for a specific development approved for a development permit prior to the Commission’s acceptance of the special way nomination, provided that the development permit for such development is in effect at the time of development; or

(b) the Special Way is identified as the only legal means of vehicular access for a development or a use allowed as of right prior to the Commission’s acceptance of the special way nomination (e.g., an easement over the special way provided the sole access to a landowner’s property); or

(c) the Special Way is identified as having been routinely traveled by motor vehicles prior to the Commission’s acceptance of the special way nomination and the continued vehicular use is of the same nature and extent as that which existed prior to such acceptance.

2. Uses allowed by Special Permit.

Any use permitted by the applicable town zoning district which results in direct vehicular access to the Special Way.


   i. Any development within forty (40) feet of a special place of historic value as listed on the Special Places Register of the Commission.

   ii. Paving with any impervious material such as bituminous concrete or asphalt.

Attachments:
Critical Planning District Qualifications
Correspondence as of December 19, 2019.

Cynthia Aguilar – member of West Tisbury Byways Committee, in favor
Rachel Eugster – owner, with mixed feelings
Vineyard Conservation Society – in favor, references Tisbury Open Space Plan
Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank – in favor
References:
Chapter 831 of the Acts of 1977 as amended
Nomination by Tisbury Planning Board, received November 7, 2019
*Decision of the Martha’s Vineyard Commission Designating the Island Road District as a District of Critical Planning Concern*
CRITICAL PLANNING DISTRICT QUALIFICATIONS

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ALL DISTRICTS

NEED FOR DESIGNATION

There must be a regional need for special regulations or planning to protect the district from damage or losses by inappropriate development. The Commission shall find:

• that present public or private regulations in a substantial part of the district cannot assure protection; and
• that damage to the district or impediments to proper development will be a substantial loss to the region or to two or more towns.

SIZE AND SHAPE OF DISTRICT

The district shall consist of the land and water which reasonably belong in the district for the three following reasons:

• It is the critical area or critical resource which is in need of protection.
• It is the logical planning area which should be considered in adopting a coordinated system of regulations to protect the critical resource or critical area.
• The dimensions or landmarks which form the boundary of the district are convenient and recognizable.

SPECIFIC QUALIFICATIONS

DRINKING WATER RESOURCE DISTRICT

The district is important to the protection of a regional aquifer, watershed, aquifer recharge zone or surface water supply with the following considerations:

• Development or waste disposal without special regulations in the district could endanger the quality or quantity of the water.
• Studies or expert advice indicate that the designation and regulation of the district could be effective in protecting the quality or quantity of water, and that, since public health, safety and welfare are paramount, special precaution should be taken.

FISHING RESOURCE DISTRICT

The water body in the district is particularly well suited for the production of shell or fin fish or can be made productive through good management and improvements.

FARMING RESOURCE DISTRICT

The district includes areas particularly suited now and in the future for sustaining or augmenting the Island’s food supply or other agriculture. The district must have one or more of the following characteristics:

• The district is generally being farmed or can be converted to farming conveniently relative to other areas on the Island.
• Land ownerships within the district are generally of adequate size to support farming. Soil, climate and topography are well suited for farming.

WILDLIFE, NATURAL, SCIENTIFIC OR ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE DISTRICT
The district contains an important and identifiable wildlife, natural, scientific or ecological resource. This would include but not be limited to special plant and animal life and their habitats, as well as unusual geological features, and is critical because development may disrupt the ecological balance.

**CULTURAL OR HISTORIC RESOURCE DISTRICT**

The district contains a place, landscape, way or view which is in some special way expressive of the character of the Island, traditions of the Island residents, and of special interest to Island visitors. The maintenance and protection of those values is essential to a sound local economy. The district also:

- is of exceptional symbolic or recreational importance to the residents of more than one town and is either visible or accessible to them or can reasonably be made so; or
- is rare, unique, or makes an unusual contribution to the diversity of the Island character; or
- is irreplaceable, or replaceable only with extraordinary effort or expense.

Subject to the above general tests, designations may be considered for areas which are important for their connection with the history of the region-including its geological history or the history of its Indian settlement-or which symbolize and support the traditional activities and ways of Island life, or which give us a particular understanding of the Vineyard lands and their setting in the sea. These include places which present opportunities for hunting and fishing and the enjoyment of wildlife.

**ECONOMIC OR DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE DISTRICT**

The district will include areas which have special potential for providing employment or housing for Island residents, or for accepting necessary development which might be detrimental in other locations. The district must also:

- require special regulations to create, preserve or enhance that potential, and
- be better suited or more readily available for the facility or development than other areas of the Island, considering topography, utilities, costs and environmental and social impact; and
- have adequate access, preferably from a regional feeder road.

**MAJOR PUBLIC INVESTMENT DISTRICT**

The district will include areas which have a significant impact on an existing or possible future major public investment or areas which are significantly affected by such an investment. In addition, the district must qualify as follows:

- The district pertains to a major public investment as defined in Chapter 831 as amended\(^3\), and may include airports, highways, schools, parks, beaches, preserves, public utilities and medical facilities owned or operated by a Federal, state or county agency, or by a quasi-public or charitable non-profit agency; and
- the intended use or operation of the public investment or the health, safety and welfare of the public could be impaired by improper development in the district.

**HAZARDOUS DISTRICT**

It is an area which possesses hazards due to marginal soil or topographic conditions which render it unsuitable for intense development. Factors to be considered include: Flooding, waste treatment, groundwater, erosion, construction problems, salt water intrusion and pollution.

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\(^3\) A major public facility is any publicly owned facility of regional importance except:

1. any public facility operated by a municipality primarily for the benefit of the residents of that municipality, or by any agency serving primarily the residents of one municipality;

2. any street or highway which is not recognized as or maintained as a part of the state or federal highway system; or

3. any educational institution serving primarily the residents of one municipality.
December 11, 2019

To: Martha's Vineyard Commission
Regarding: Proposed Tisbury Special Ways

I am a member of the West Tisbury Byways Committee. I am so happy to see the proposed designations of Special Way status for the Tisbury portion of Red Coat Hill Road and Shubael Weeks Road. The proposed Special Ways extend the protection of these historic roads already designated in West Tisbury.

Cynthia Aguilar
508-693-6078
119 Oak Lane, Vineyard Haven, MA 02568
cynthia693@gmail.com
Dear Ms. Taylor,

Attached please find my family's input for the hearing on the 19th regarding the proposal to add Special Ways in Tisbury.

Thanks for your help!

Rachel Eugster

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http://RachelEugster.com/
https://www.facebook.com/rachel.eugster.1
https://www.facebook.com/thepocketmommy
https://www.facebook.com/dragonsteatrio
Martha’s Vineyard Commission
Via email to Ms. Jo-Ann Taylor at taylor@mvcommission.org, from rachel.eugster@gmail.com

Re: Proposal to Add Special Ways in Tisbury

Dear Ms. Taylor and Commissioners:

It is with mixed feelings that I write to you in response to the notice of a public hearing on Thursday, December 19, to consider the designation of Red Coat Hill and Shubael Weeks Path as Special Ways. My two sisters and I own 370 Shubael Weeks Path. This property has been in the family since the early 1980s, and for the last twenty years was the year-round home of my stepmother, Elaine Eugster, until her untimely death earlier this year.

Red Coat Hill Road and Shubael Weeks Path in their current state are indeed extremely precious. But while my family and I agree with much of the reasoning in the nomination, we are troubled by several oversights.

First, we object to a process that culminates in having a proposal come forward without any notification of opportunities to speak to it, at any point before it was scheduled for a vote, going to the people who own the land these roads traverse. How can the Commission fully understand how these roads function without first talking to the people who use them, and have used them for generations?

Second, while we appreciate the importance of keeping these roads open for the public to walk on and would vehemently object to seeing them paved or widened, it is important to note that they are regularly driven upon by those of us who own them. Your statement “Today, the routes are used by pedestrians, bicyclists and horseback riders as a safe means of traversing the town” omits any mention of the families who live and summer here, who own and use these roads, and who have no other way to access their properties.

The nomination also fails to acknowledge the longstanding, ongoing, and frequently bitter disagreements—including lawsuits—over rights of way. And it fails to acknowledge the reciprocal easements registered on our deeds that the landowners along these roads have granted each other to travel along them—a reciprocity of access that is currently being disputed by the Land Bank.
This passage in particular is problematic: “Advantageous development would be that which, through careful locations of driveways and the use of alternative vehicle access points when available, maintains the character of the ways and their immediate surroundings by minimizing additional vehicular use of the ways, retains natural vegetation alongside the ways, and would prevent the ways being blocked.” No other “alternative vehicle access points” exist, and new vehicle access points would have exactly the impact on the landscape that this proposal seeks to prevent. Furthermore, in the past other landowners have already blocked access to Red Coat Hill at Deer Hill, and to Shubael Weeks where it meets Simran Road (not to mention the house that was built right on top of Red Coat Hill Road where it originally connected with State Road). No help was forthcoming from the Town when these locked gates were installed, further restricting access to our properties—not just for us, but for emergency vehicles. It is worth noting both that there have been fires in two of the houses along Red Coat Hill in recent years, and that GPS directs vehicles either to the impassable barrier at the intersection of Shubael Weeks and Simran or to the one at Red Coat Hill and Deer Hill Road. Even Google has not figured out these ways are barred.

If you truly seek to preserve the character of these roads, these gates should be ordered to be removed as part of any such designation, so that access and character can be uniformly preserved along the entire length of both roads where they lie within the Town of Tisbury.

While we appreciate that “Both paths/trails are important connections and connectors to Land Bank and Nature Conservancy trails and conservation areas in Vineyard Haven, including Duarte’s Pond and to West Tisbury,” we also object to any measure that allows unfettered access across our property and our neighbors’ to the conservation organizations while restricting access to owners.

We object to any statement or implication that this designation can limit the rights of unfettered reciprocal access granted to the landowners by the easements registered on the properties along Red Coat Hill and Shubael Weeks Path. Further, we object to any wording that implies free access for the public across our private property, without negotiating an easement with the owners and ensuring proper indemnification.

We ask that you either vote against this proposal, or refer it back for revision after substantive and meaningful consultation with landowners on how best to preserve these roads for recreational use while acknowledging the rights of the landowners to continue to freely use them, and to have the primary say in who is permitted to traverse their property.

Sincerely,

Rachel Eugster
on behalf of my sisters Erica and Sandra, & myself
Re: Support for DCPC Special Ways Designation

Dear Commissioners,

The Vineyard Conservation Society (VCS) is a local, member-supported non-profit land conservation and environmental advocacy organization working since 1965 to preserve the natural resources and community character of the Island. Please accept this testimony in support of the Special Ways DCPC nomination from the Tisbury Planning Board.

Tisbury’s Open Space Plan, adopted in 1997, recommended seeking such designation from the MVC for the Town’s ancient ways, including Red Coat Hill Road and Shubael Weeks Road (see excerpt below). The Planning Board deserves much credit for bringing this effort close to fruition. We urge your unanimous vote to designate.

The two Special Ways under consideration are historically significant, and figure prominently in the open space planning efforts across the region. They fit the description of ways intended for protection under the Island Road DCPC, and we are fortunate to have this opportunity to preserve them.

In many communities, similar old ways have been lost through encroachment and/or lack of use. Special Way designation and the associated guidelines will protect against deterioration, retain their functionality as connectors between designated conservation lands, and safeguard the visual experience of travel along our system of secondary paths and ways.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice support for this unique open space resource.

Sincerely,

Brendan O’Neill
Executive Director

From the Tisbury Open Space Plan:

Ancient ways represent a landscape feature of great historical, scenic and recreational value to the town. A concerted effort to safeguard ancient ways is therefore a priority, as this resource is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of development and change. These ways offer an alternative to the automobile for walkers, equestrians and cyclists...and can serve as green-belt connectors between conserved open spaces. Examples include Red Coat Hill Road and Shubael Weeks Road.
AN ANCIENT WAY AND GENERAL GREY

On September 10, 1778, 47 warships and 4,333 British troops under the command of General Sir Charles Grey anchored in Holmes Hole (Vineyard Haven) Harbor. Over the course of the next four days, as one of the expeditionary force Brigadiers wrote, they:

caryed off and destroyed all the corn and Roots two miles around [the] Harbour; Dug up the Ground everywhere to search for goods the people hid; even so Curious were they in searching as to Disturb the ashes of the Dead.

Tradition holds that the high ground west of Tashmoo was visited by Grey’s Raiders, thus its name: Red Coat Hill. The ancient byway which today traverses this rolling, wooded terrain is currently the focus of an effort involving VCS, the other Wakeman Conservation Center organizations and the Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank to protect this historic road and the rights of the public to travel over it.

Red Coat Hill Road is probably a remnant of the old route to the settlement at Onokemmy Bay, or Lambert’s Cove. That once flourishing community boasted of three wharves before Vineyard Haven had any, two schools, several stores, salt works, smokehouses, a brick kiln, a tannery, a large lumber yard, commercial fish weirs, cranberry bogs, even a ferry service to Woods Hole!

Prior to colonial settlement, this region called Chikamaug (anglicized: “Chickenmoo,” from the Algonquian term for weir fishing station), supported a sizable population and a complex system of native trails. Red Coat Hill Road was based on these earlier Chickenmoo trails.

Today, this special ancient way serves as a walking trail connector between two of the Land Bank’s major conservation land holdings. A network of other intact old ways eventually links the hiker or horseback rider with the 22 acres of conservation-protected public trails at the Wakeman Center. In the past, VCS has sponsored guided walks along these ancient ways as part of our monthly walks program.

Along with Wakeman Center colleagues Sheriff’s Meadow Foundation, Vineyard Open Land Foundation, Trustees of Reservations and Martha’s Vineyard Garden Club, VCS has asked the Massachusetts Land Court for Intervenor or Amicus Curiae (“Friend of the Court”) status in upcoming land registration petitions in order to ascertain public rights of passage on the Red Coat Hill Road and another ancient way.

VCS intends to support the position of the Land Bank that these old ways represent a vanishing historical and open space resource, and that they should be reserved for public passive recreational use. A decision upholding those rights would be a valuable precedent which could help stem the rapid loss of ancient ways Island-wide.
December 9, 2019

Martha’s Vineyard Commission
Post Office Box 1447
Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts 02557

Dear commissioners,

Please register the land bank’s support for the proposed designation of the Red Coat Hill and Shubael Weeks Roads as special ways.

These peaceful roads are illustrations of the island’s history, with their deeply worn surfaces and their tracking through quiet woodlands. Protecting them from alteration is a respectful thing to do.

The land bank encourages the designation. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

James Lengyel
Executive Director