

MEMORANDUM

DATE: **February 7, 2019**

TO: **Beth Kostman, South Mountain Company**

FROM: **Holly Herbster, Senior Archaeologist/Principal Investigator**

SUBJECT: **South Mountain Expansion Project, West Tisbury, MA**

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) has been asked to provide an opinion about the potential archaeological sensitivity of the proposed South Mountain Company expansion project area on Stoney Hill Road in West Tisbury, Massachusetts. South Mountain proposes to improve and expand its existing office and shop, including landscaping and grade changes around the structures. The Martha's Vineyard Commission approved the development of the property in 1998 with a condition that South Mountain's offer to avoid any impacts within 50 feet of a cellar hole on Lot 2 of the property until the West Tisbury Historical Commission (WTHC) had conducted testing in the area. The WTHC did not conduct any fieldwork in 1998 or up to the present. When contacted recently by South Mountain, a Commission member indicated that the WTHC does not have the authority to conduct any investigations and suggested that a professional archaeologist should be consulted.

PAL Senior Archaeologist Holly Herbster reviewed information on the property's land use history provided by South Mountain's owners; completed a check of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) *Inventory of the Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth* (MACRIS) to identify any previously recorded historic properties or archaeological sites within or in proximity to the project area; reviewed the town-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey of West Tisbury (Mulholland et al. 1999); reviewed available eighteenth and nineteenth century historic period maps of the general area; and conducted a site visit to examine and document existing conditions in the project area.

The MACRIS review indicated that no previously recorded historic properties or archaeological sites are located in or within .5 miles of the project area. The West Tisbury town-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey designated the general area that includes the South Mountain parcel as having a low sensitivity for both pre-Contact (ancient Native American) and post-Contact archaeological sites. Historic maps and atlases included in the 1998 town-wide survey and maps on file at PAL do not document any historic period buildings or development in the project vicinity. South Mountain's property records and the documentary sources reviewed do not contain any mention of a structure on the property or any reference to a cellar hole. Prior to the construction of the South Mountain office in the 1990s, aerial photographs depict the project area as undeveloped woodland.

Holly Herbster visited the site on January 8, 2019. There was no snow cover and the ground surface was visible. The area identified as the cellar hole and shown on some project plans as a "quarry hole" is an irregularly shaped depression measuring more than 70 feet wide that is open to the south with uneven steeply-sided slopes on the north, east, and west. The lowest part of the depression has an uneven surface and numerous rocks and boulders are visible on the surface and partially exposed. Scattered pitch pine, scrub oaks, and viney growth are present along with a thick leaf cover across

the ground surface. No evidence of a fieldstone, cut stone, or other type of foundation was visible in the base of the depression or along the slopes.

The depression does not have any of the characteristics of a cellar hole that would have been created as part of the construction of a building. PAL has documented numerous structural features across the island, including eighteenth and nineteenth century Aquinnah Wampanoag foundations and cellar holes, and residential and institutional features associated with brick, stone, and concrete buildings. The large size, irregular shape, and lack of any visible foundation materials on the south Mountain property suggests that the depression may be a natural swale. It is also possible that this area was a boulder quarry in the nineteenth or twentieth century. These were places where glacially-deposited rocks and boulders were dug out of the ground and transported for use elsewhere.

Based on a lack of documentation about any previous construction or land use in the project area, and a lack of surficial indications of construction, it is unlikely that the depression is the remains of a cellar hole. It is possible that boulders were extracted from the ground in and around the depression, but there may be no archaeological evidence of such a limited activity to confirm this.

It is also unlikely that the depression or the area surrounding it contains potentially significant Native American archaeological deposits. The natural environmental setting is not highly favorable (no freshwater source in the vicinity, stony soils), there are no recorded sites nearby, and the 1998 town-wide survey ranked this general area as having a low sensitivity for pre-Contact sites. In addition, the perimeter of the depression has been cleared of vegetation and has been disturbed by use of the property including storage and access.

Reference

Mulholland, Mitchell, Timothy Binzen, and Christopher Donta
1999 *Community-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of West Tisbury, Massachusetts*. Report on file, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, MA.