

# Indian grinding mill found to be "pothole"

BY GORDON B. SEAVEY

**WESTFORD** — What many have thought over the years to be an original Indian grinding mill on a hillside in Westford now may be considered the work of nature some 15,000 years ago, - to be exact, a pothole, a geological phenomena

But this doesn't mean that the Indians didn't take advantage of it to turn the device into a grain mill.

Located on a hillside on an outcropping of granite gneiss alongside a bridle path, it is opposite the Captain Peletiah Fletcher house (circa 1720) on Lowell Road. It is a hole about 30 inches deep and a foot across. Its sides are smooth from the probable action during the glacial period, of rushing water whirling particles of sand and gravel around at high speed in a grinding action.

And it's very possible that the Indians, who were known to have farmed the rich Stony Brook Valley below, later poured grain into the deep depression, dropped in a rounded stone to act as a pestal and stirred the mess with a pole. That's where, perhaps, Indian corn mush got its name.

**ALL THIS** explanation comes

from no less a person than Dr. John W. Salisbury, a resident of Acton for 12 years until moving to Washington, where he is chief of the department doing research on geothermal prospects for easing the energy crunch.

In viewing the "Indian rock", he quickly determined that the hole has all the earmarks of a geological process, the eroding of weaker rockbeds by the combined action of water swirling abrasive materials in a compact area. In other words, it is a good example of what geologists term a pothole.

There have been many theories over the years as to its origin and possible use. It is recalled that some 50 years ago, a geologist from Wellesley College surmised that it was a true Indian grain mill, even to the point that the squaw who milled the grain was left-handed! This was deduced because one side (the left) is worn more greatly than the right.

Dr. Salisbury, a graduate of Amherst who earned a doctorate in geology at Yale, is the person who predetermined the type of soil and surface that the U. S. astronauts would find when they landed on the moon.

**WHILE VACATIONING** two years ago at Forge Pond (he reports the area having been the bottom of a glacial lake), he made a brief study of Littleton's Tophet Chasm area. He analysed the 80-foot deep cleft worn in the bedrock as having been created by a giant waterfall. At that time he reported, "It may well have been hundreds of feet high to provide the terrific erosive force to carve out of bedrock the truly impressive plunge hold and chasm as we see it today."

What may be a true Indian-developed mill however, can be seen alongside Hunt Road on Frances Hill. It is a three-foot boulder, dug from his orchard by Carl Anderson who spotted an unusual depression on top. Adding a rounded stone, it makes a perfect example of a crude mechanical device to pulverize corn.

History buffs may be somewhat disappointed in Dr. Salisbury's explanation, but science is science and fact is fact. But let's say that Westford still has among its many Indian relics two known grinding mills: one which nature first fashioned and the second which the redskin himself developed.