

THE PATH TO POKONOKET

WINSLOW AND HOPKINS VISIT THE GREAT CHIEF

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Soon after the departure of the Mayflower on 5 April 1621, the Pilgrims turned their attention to the planting of crops and to completing the several unfinished houses at Patuxet. Bradford (1) says,

"Afterwards they (as many as were able) began to plant their corn in which serve Squanto stood them in great stead, showing them both the manner to set it, and after how to dress and tend it. Also he told them except they got fish and set with it in these old grounds it would come to nothing. And he showed them that in the middle of April they should have store enough come up the brook by which they had begun to build."

Although the treaty with Ousamequin (Massasoit = grand or great chief), which had been negotiated the previous March, had set at rest the minds of the civil authorities, their military leader, Captain Myles Standish, was far from satisfied. Just in case of trouble he insisted that he must know the strength of the enemy and how their forces were distributed. It was partly, at least, to obtain this information that it was decided to send someone to Pokonoket. Bradford says,

"... it was thought meet to send some abroad to see our new friend Ousamequin, and to bestow upon him some gratuity to bind him faster unto them; as also that hereby they might view the country and see in what manner he lived, what strength he had about him, and how the ways were laid to his place, if at any time they should have occasion."

Winslow's account (2) of this first inland journey of the Pilgrims was published in London in 1622. It is reproduced here in modern English. The distances mentioned by Winslow are, of course, estimates, and the travel time is given in some detail. This information we have used to help select the most probable route of the journey. The date of the journey as given in the published account, 10 June 1621, seems to be in error, as we will attempt to show. Bradford (1), in reporting the incident, gives a

date of 2 July 1621, while Drake (3), having apparently read both Winslow and Bradford, says that the journey was undertaken in "June or July." Other historians have repeated one or the other of the dates without question. But a critical reading of Winslow and some research reveals several inconsistencies in his text which serve to solve this almost four-hundred-year-old mystery. The pertinent passages have been underlined to call the attention of the reader to them.

A JOURNEY TO POKONOKET

THE HABITATION OF THE GREAT KING MASSASOIT

By Edward Winslow

It seemed good to the Company for many considerations to send some amongst them to Massasoit, the greatest commander amongst the savages, bordering about us; partially to know where to find them, if occasion served, as also to see their strength, discover the country, prevent abuses in their disorderly coming to us, make satisfaction for some conceived injuries to be done on our parts, and to continue the league of Peace and Friendship between them and us. For these and like ends, it pleased the governor to make choice of Stephen Hopkins and Edward Winslow to go unto him, and having a fit opportunity, by reason of a savage, called Tisquantum (that could speak English) coming unto us; with all expedition provided a horseman's coat of red cotton, and laced with a slight lace for a present, that both they and their message might be the more acceptable amongst them. The message was as follows: That forasmuch as his subjects came often and without fear, upon all occasions amongst us, so we were now come unto him, and in witness of the love and good will the English bear unto him, the Governor hath sent him a coat, desiring that the Peace and Amity that was between them and us might be continued, not that we feared them, but because we intended not to injure any, desiring to live peaceably; and as with all men, so especially with them our nearest neighbors. But whereas his people came very often, and very many together unto us, bringing for the most part their wives and children with them, they were welcome; yet we being strangers as yet at Patuxet, alias New Plymouth, and not knowing how our corn might prosper, we could no longer give them such entertainment as we had done, and we desired still to do; yet if he would be pleased to come himself, or any special friend of his desired to see us; and to the end that we might know him from others, our Governor had sent him a copper chain, desiring if

any messenger should come from him to us, we might know him by bringing it with him, and hearken and give credit to his message accordingly. Also requesting him that such as have skins should bring them to us, and that he would hinder the multitude from oppressing us with them. And whereas at our first arrival at Pamet (called by us Cape Cod) we found corn buried in the ground, and finding no inhabitants but some graves of dead new buried, took the corn, resolving if ever we should hear of any that had a right thereunto, to make satisfaction to the full for it, yet since we understood the owners thereof fled for fear of us, our desire was either to pay them with a like quantity of corn, English meal, or any other commodities we had to pleasure them withal; requesting him that some of his men might signify so much unto them, and we would content him for his pains. And last of all our Governor requested one favor of him, which was, that he would exchange some of their corn for seed with us, that we might make trial which best agreed with the soil where we live.

With these presents and message we set forth the tenth of June, about nine o'clock in the morning, our guide resolving that night to rest at Nemasket, a town under Massasoit and conceived by us to be very near, because the inhabitants flocked so thick upon occasion amongst us, but found it to be some fifteen English miles. On the way we found some ten or twelve men, women and children, which had pestered us, till we were weary of them, perceiving that (as the manner of all of them is) where victual is easiest to be got, there they live, especially in the summer, by reason whereof our bay affording many lobsters, they resort every spring tide thither, and now returned with us to Nemasket. Thither we came about three o'clock, the inhabitants entertaining us with joy, in the best manner they could, giving us a kind of bread called by them mazium, and the spawn of shads, which then they got in abundance, in so much as they gave us spoons to eat them, with these they boiled musty acorns, but of the shads we ate heartily.

After this they desired one of our men to shoot at a crow, complaining what damage they sustained in their corn by them, who shooting some fourscore off and killing, they much admired it, as other shots on other occasions. After this Tisquantum told us we should hardly in one day reach Pokonoket, moving us to go some eight miles further, where we should find more and better victuals than there; being willing to hasten our journey we went, and came thither at sun setting, where we found many of the

Nemascheuks (they so calling the men of Nemasket) fishing upon a weir which they had made on a river which belongeth to them, where they caught abundance of bass. They welcomed us also, gave us of their fish, and we them of our victuals, not doubting we should have enough were we came. There we lodged in the open fields for houses they had none, though they spent most of the summer there. The head of the river is reported to be not far from the place of our abode; upon it are, and have been many towns, it being a good length. The ground is very good on both sides, it being for the most part cleared; thousands of men have lived here, which died in a great plague not long since; and a pity it was and is to see, so many goodly fields, and so well seated, without men to dress and manure the same. Upon this river dwelleth Massasoit; it cometh into the sea at the Narragansett Bay where the Frenchmen so much use. A ship may go miles up it, as the savages report, and a shallop to the head of it; but so far as we saw, we are sure a shallop may.

But to return to our journey. The next morning we broke our fast, and took leave and departed, being accompanied by some six savages, having gone about six miles by the river side, at a known shoal place, it being low water, they spake us to put off our breeches, for we must wade through. Here let me not forget the valor and courage of some of the savages, on the opposite side of the river, for there were remaining alive only town men, both aged, especially one being about three score; these two espying a company of men entering the river, ran very swiftly and low in the grass to meet us at the bank, where with shrill voices and great courage standing charged upon us with their bows, they demanded what we were, supposing us to be enemies, and thinking to take advantage of us in the water but seeing we were friends, they welcomed us with such food as they had, and we bestowed a small bracelet of beads upon them. Thus far we know the tide ebbs and flows.

Having here again refreshed ourselves, we proceeded in our journey, the weather being very hot for travel, yet the country so well watered, that a man could scarce be dry, but he should have a spring at hand to cool his thirst, besides small rivers in abundance; but the savages will not willingly drink, but at a spring head. When we came to any small brook where no bridge was, two of them desired to carry us through of their own accords, also fearing we were or would be weary, offered to carry our pieces, also if we would lay off our clothes,

we should have them carried; and as the one of them had found more special kindness from one of the messengers, and the other savage from the other so they showed their thankfulness accordingly in affording us all help, and furtherance in the journey

As we passed along we observed there were few places by the river, but had been inhabited, by reason whereof, much ground was clear. There is much good timber both oak, walnut-tree, fir, beech, and exceeding great chestnut trees. The country, in respect of the lying of it, is both champanie and hilly, like many places in England. In some places it is very rocky both above ground and in it; and though the country be wild and overgrown with woods, yet the trees stand not thick, but a man may well ride a horse amongst them.

Passing on at length, one of the company, an Indian, espyed a man, and told the rest of it, we asked them if they feared any, and they told us that if they were Narragansett men they would not trust them, whereat we called for our pieces and bid them not to fear; for though they were twenty, we two alone would not care for them; but they hailing him, he proved a friend, and had only two women with him; their baskets were empty, but they fetched water in their bottles, so that we drank with them and departed.

After we met another man with two other women, which had been at rendezvous by the salt water, and their baskets full of roasted crab fishes, and other dried shell fish, of which they gave us, and we ate and drank with them; and gave each of the women a string of beads, and departed.

After we came to a town of Massasoit's where we ate oysters and other fish, from thence we went to Pokonoket, but Massasoit was not at home, there we stayed, he being sent for, when news was brought of his coming, our guide Tisquantum requested that at our meeting, we should discharge our pieces, but one of us going about to charge his piece the women and children through fear to see him take up his piece, ran away, and could not be pacified, till he layed it down again, who afterward were better informed by our interpreter.

Massasoit being come, we discharged our pieces, and saluted him, who after their manner kindly welcomed us, and took us into his house, and set us down by him, where having delivered our aforesaid message and presents, and having put the coat on

his back, and the chain about his neck, he was not a little proud to behold himself, and his men also to see their king so bravely attired.

For answer to our message, he told us we were welcome, and he would gladly continue that Peace and Friendship which was between him and us; and for his men they should no more pester us as they had done; also that he would send to Pamet, and would help us with corn for seed, according to our request.

This being done, his men gathered near him, to whom he turned himself, and made a great speech; they sometime interposing, and as it were, confirming and applauding him in what he said. The meaning whereof was (as far as we could learn) thus: Was not he Massasoit commander of the country about him? Was not such a town his and the people in it? And would they not bring their skins to us? After this manner he named at least thirty places, and their answer was as aforesaid to every one; so that as it was delightful, it was tedious unto us.

This being ended, he lighted tobacco for us, and fell to discussing of England and of the King's majestie, marvelling that he should live without a wife. Also he talked of the Frenchmen, bidding us not to suffer them to come to Narragansett, for it was King James his country, and he also was King James his man. Late it grew, but victuals he offered none, for indeed he had not any, being so newly home. So we desired to go to rest; he laid us on the bed with himself and wife, they at one end and we at the other, it being only planks laid a foot from the ground, and a thin mat upon them. Two more of his chief men for want of room pressed by and upon us, so that we were worse weary of our lodging than of our journey.

The next day being Thursday, many of their Sachems or petty governors came to see us, and many of their men also. There they went to their manner of games for skins and knives. There we challenged them to shoot them for skins; but they durst not; only desired to see one of us shoot at a mark, who shooting with hail-shot they wondered to see the mark so full of holes. About one o'clock, Massasoit brought two fishes he had shot, they are like Bream, but three times so big, and better meat. These being boiled there were at least forty looking for a share in them, the most ate of them; this meal only we had in two nights and a day, and had not one of us brought a partridge, we had taken the

journey fasting; very importunate he was to have us stay with them longer; but we desired to keep the Sabbath at home; and feared we would either be light-headed for want of sleep, for what with the bad lodging, the savages barbarous singing (for they sing themselves to sleep), lice and fleas within doors and mosquitoes without, we could hardly sleep all the time of our being there; we much fearing, that if we should stay longer, we should not be able to recover home for want of strength. So that on Friday morning about sun rising, we took our leave and departed, Massasoit being both grieved and ashamed, that he could not better entertain us; and retaining Tisquantum to send from place to place to procure truck for us; and appointing another called Tokamahamon in his place, whom we found faithful before and after on all occasions.

At this town of Massasoit, where we before ate, we were again refreshed with a little fish, and brought about a handful of meal of their parched corn which was very precious at that time of year, and a small string of dried shell fish, as big as oysters.

The latter we gave to the six savages that accompanied us, keeping the meal for ourselves, when we drank we ate each a spoonful of it with a pipe of tobacco, instead of other victuals; and of this also we could not but give them so long as it lasted. Five miles they led us to a house out of the way in hope of victuals; but found nobody there, and so we were worse able to return home. That night we reached unto the weir where we lay before, but the Nemascheuks were returned; so that we had no hope of anything there. One of the savages had shot a shad in the water, and a small squirrel as big as a rat, called a Neuxis, the one-half he gave us, and went to the weir to fish. From thence we wrote to Plimouth, and sent Tokamahamon before us to Nemasket. Two men only remained with us, and it pleased God to give them a good store of fish, so that we were well refreshed. After supper we went to rest, and they to fishing again; more they got and fell to eating afresh, and retained sufficient ready roasted for all our breakfasts. About two o'clock in the morning, arose a great storm of wind, rain, lightning and thunder, in such a violent manner, that we could not keep our fire; and had not the savages roasted fish while we were asleep, we had set forth fasting; for the rain continued with great violence, even the whole day through, till we came within two miles of home.

Being wet and weary, we at length came to Nemasket, there we refreshed ourselves, giving gifts

to all such as had showed us kindness. Among others one of the six that came with us from Pokonoket, having before this in an unkindly way forsaken us, marveled we gave him nothing, and told us what he had done for us; we also told him of some discourtesies he offered us, whereby he deserved nothing, yet we gave him small trifle; whereupon he offered us tobacco; but the house being full of people, we told them he stole some by the way, and if it were of that then we would not take it; for we would not receive that which had been stolen on any terms, if we did our God would be angry with us, and destroy us. This abashed him, and gave the rest great content; but at our departure he would needs carry him on his back through a river, whom he had formerly in some sort abused. Fain they would have us lodge there all night; and wondered we would set forth again in such weather; but God be praised we came home safe that night, though wet, weary and surbated.

In this account of the first journey of the Pilgrims to Pokonoket as it was published, Winslow is quoted as saying, "With these presents and message we set forth the 10th of June about nine o'clock in the morning." William Bradford (2) in reporting the journey says, "So the second of July they sent Mr. Edward Winslow and Mr. Stephen Hopkins with the aforesaid Squanto..." Weston (4) gives still another date for the journey, placing it as on the 13th of July. Drake (3) avoids the discrepancy by saying "in June or July." The Weston date can probably be dismissed as a typographical error. The Bradford date cannot be explained.

However, a critical reading of the Winslow account of the journey discloses a number of statements that tend to support the conclusion that none of the dates quoted above are correct. The statements alluded to have been underlined on the foregoing pages to call them to the attention of the reader. Let's consider them in detail:

According to Winslow he and his companion, Stephen Hopkins, arrived at the Indian town of Nemasket about three o'clock in the afternoon. In his words, "the inhabitants entertained us with great joy, [giving them] the spawn of shads, which they then got in great abundance." An abundance of shad roe in June? Unless the shad have changed their migratory habits since 1621, April and not June is the time in which shad would have appeared in the Nemasket River. Weston (4) says, "Every spring,

usually the first week in April, the shad leave the deep sea and ascend the rivers all along the New England coast." Bradford (2) also lends support by saying that Tisquantum told them that they must place shad in each hill of corn planted as a fertilizer, adding that these fish would come up Town Brook in great quantity in April.

In the message which the ambassadors carried to Pokonoket we find an incongruent statement. Winslow tells us that they were to request, "That he (Ousamequin) would exchange some of their corn for seed with us..." But by June both English and Indians would have planted their corn, by this time it should be "in leaf". In fact, Bradford (2) tells us that the Pilgrims had indeed planted their crops just after the Mayflower sailed for home on April 5, 1621.

Winslow makes it clear that the outward trip to Pokonoket took two days, that they were at Pokonoket for one day (Thursday) and, "being desirous to keep the sabbath at home" they left on their return journey on "Friday morning about sun rising." After an absence of five days the messengers arrived home at Plymouth on a Saturday night. It is apparent then that they must have started out on a Tuesday morning. But in 1621 the tenth of June fell on a Sunday. No Pilgrim would have set out on a journey on a Sunday morning. At a later date the Plymouth Court passed a law making it a crime to travel on Sunday except in a dire emergency. Those who violated this law were severely punished.

The date of June 10 is probably due to a misunderstanding on the part of the English printer or typesetter. Winslow, an ardent Separatist, did not use the Gregorian calendar because of its Roman origin. If his manuscript were still extant it would read, "we set forth on the tenth day of the fourth month about nine o'clock in the morning." To the English printer the first month of the year was March and the fourth, June. If April 10 is the correct date on which the messengers left Plymouth rather than June 10, the abundance of shad roe at Nemasket is credible and the request for seed corn understandable.

One would expect that Tisquantum, who acted as guide and interpreter for the English, would have selected the shortest route for the journey from Plymouth to Pokonoket. The first part of the journey was by way of the Nemasket Path to the Indian town of Nemasket in what is now Middleboro. This path is shown on the map in the first of the Pathways

series. Winslow and Hopkins took some six hours to get to Nemasket, about fifteen miles (as Winslow estimated) from Plymouth, an average of about two and a half miles an hour. Winslow tells us that Tisquantum intended to spend their first night of the journey at Nemasket but, after reaching that town, for some reason changed his mind and urged his charges to continue on for another eight miles where he said they would find "more and better victuals."

So, after a short stay they left the friendly Nemaskeuks and pushed on, arriving at the spot where they were to spend the night at about "sun-setting". On April 10, 1621, the sun set in this latitude at about 6:30, so that at the rate of two and a half miles an hour they must have left Nemasket about 4:30 p.m. Winslow says that the site of the Indian fish weir where they camped was devoid of houses and that they spent the night in the open air. It is difficult to understand why Tisquantum told them that they might expect "more and better victuals" there.

After fording the Nemasket River, the most direct route to Pokonoket is via the Taunton or Cohannet Path through Middleboro, Lakeville, and Taunton. Eight miles by this path would have brought the travelers to a wading place and fish weir on the Taunton River at a place called Squawbetty (now East Taunton). This was probably the site of the first night spent "in the open fields." This spot agrees with all of the characteristics mentioned by Winslow. He says that the Indians caught bass at this weir and, within the last century sea bass have been taken here. Winslow also tells us that they were sure that this ford was affected by the tide. The depth of the water at this point is still noticeably higher at flood tide. Also it is only about six miles as the crow flies from Squawbetty to the source of the Taunton River in Lake Nippenicket.

However, Weston (4) believes that Tisquantum chose to lead the Pilgrims north on the Titicut Path after fording the Nemasket. If so they must have forded the Nemasket three times in their eight mile hike that afternoon. First at the wading place near the Middleboro Four Corners, again at Muttock in Middleboro, and finally at a shallow point in the river about two miles north from Muttock. Weston has the party spend the night at Fort Hill in North Middleboro. This site is just about eight miles from the Nemasket village as Winslow stated. The remains of an old Indian fish weir are still pointed out in the river near the foot of the hill. The Fort Hill site and another in an adjoining field have been

excavated and are reported in the Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society, Inc. (Vol. XXXV, Nos. 1 and 2; Vol. XXXV, Nos. 1 and 2; Vol. XXXVIII, Nos. 1 and 2).

Although it seems strange that Tisquantum would have chosen to lead the English by this rather out of the way route, he may have had a reason as we shall see later. But if we accept the Weston route how shall we explain the fact that a different guide (Tokahamon) used the same devious route on the return journey. However, Fort Hill is, as Winslow reported it, eight miles from Nemasket. Also the head of the river (Taunton) is not far from Fort Hill. It is about five miles as the crow flies to the source of the river in Nippenicket Lake.

The second day of the journey was very warm for April and if they started as Weston believes they did from Fort Hill, they faced twenty weary miles to Pokonoket. The party consisted of two Englishmen and six Indians. After they had broken their fast they went, "six miles by the riverside" to a wading place where, "it being low water," they could wade across the Taunton river. From Fort Hill down the Neponset Path to the Cohannet Path and then to the wading place at Squawbetty is just six miles. But the Neponset Path parallels the river at a distance of from one-third to a mile. As the area was heavily forested at the time, the river was probably out-of-sight of the travelers. Would Winslow have called this path "six miles by the riverside"?

On the other hand, if we accept the more direct route as the one traveled (by the Cohannet Path from Nemasket) and allow the travelers to spend the first night in the open at Squawbetty rather than at Fort Hill, the first six miles of the journey the following morning would indeed have been "by the riverside" as the path followed the twists and turns of the river closely all the way to Cohannet.

It is, of course, possible that they may have followed the Assonet Path from Squawbetty, but this path is not by the riverside as Winslow reported.

Regardless of where their overnight camp was located, they finally arrived at the Bristol Path which they followed through Dighton, Somerset, Swansea, Warren, and Barrington to Ousamequin's village at Pokonoket.

As before mentioned, there is still another possibility that should be mentioned. Winslow in describing the spot where they lodged in the open said, "Upon this

river (the Taunton river) dwelleth Massasoit; it cometh into the sea at Narragansett..." But Pokonoket where Ousamequin (Massasoit) lived was at the junction of the Warren and Barrington rivers, many miles from the mouth of the Taunton river on Mount Hope Bay. Historians seem to have disregarded this statement probably regarding it as simply an indication of Winslow's faulty knowledge of geography at that early date. But let us for a moment suppose that the Indians suspected that the real purpose of the journey was to learn the strength of the Pokonokeuks and to discover the location of their village and the quickest route to it, just in case of trouble. After all, this is precisely what Winslow gave as one of the purposes of the journey. Might not the Indians have decided to mislead the English? To do this they may have passed by the most direct path to Pokonoket after fording the Nemasket and led them northward to Fort Hill and then straight down the Taunton river to some village near the mouth of the river. Of course, when they arrived at this village, Massasoit was not there and had to be sent for. If this is the answer to the roundabout route that Weston describes, Winslow's estimate of forty miles from Plymouth to Pokonoket is approximately correct.

Plymouth to Pokonoket via the Nemasket, Cohannet, Bristol and Pokonoket Paths is approximately 48 miles.

Plymouth to Pokonoket via the Nemasket, Titicut, Neponset, Cohannet, Bristol and Pokonoket Paths (Weston's Route) is approximately 52 miles.

Plymouth to Pokonoket via the Nemasket, Cohannet, Assonet, Bristol and Pokonoket Paths is approximately 44 miles.

Plymouth to some Indian town near the mouth of the Taunton River would have been approximately 40 miles. (This is the distance estimated by Winslow.)

THE PATH TO POKONOKET

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