



Update

F.O.P. Newsletter, Summer 2012, V. 26, No. 2

From the President

Greetings, as I write this, the sun is breaking through the clouds after another much needed rainfall. We can all breath a little easier, though we know what comes with the warmer temps and bursts of greenery. We must remember that even bugs have their important role to play in the natural world!

It is unfortunate that bugs are not the only hazard faced at Pisgah Park these days. Timber harvesting is now a prime state activity in the Park. Here is a brief background on the commercial harvesting in Pisgah. In 2008 a cut occurred in the southeast section of the Park, along the Jon Hill Road. That harvest was over an 82 acre parcel. The upcoming harvest will be in the northwest corner of the Park, accessed from the Horseshoe and Winchester Roads and the area of impact is 132.7 acres. The stated purpose is for harvesting timber and wildlife habitat management.

The Friends and most folks in southwest NH were under the impression that Pisgah was a “Park” and that commercial harvesting would not become part of the State’s management plan. Private lands were taken in the 1970s, not to construct a timber reserve but to provide a park for the whole state [particularly the citizens of southwest NH] to enjoy for recreational purposes, including hunting. The Friends of Pisgah Council is still trying to understand how Pisgah State Park became designated as a Reservation, as was recently stated in the Introduction of the Pisgah State Park Management Plan. The idea of a Park for the southwest corner of the state began back in the 1960’s as a vision of the N.H. Division of Parks. In 1967, the state legislature authorized \$1,000,000 for the project on the condition that matching federal funds could be secured. In 1968, the Governor and Council approved the proposal for the multi-purpose recreational State Park, when the state was awarded matching funds through the Land and Water Conservation Funding Act [LWCFA], under the National Park Service.

The State claims the Park has always been open for commercial harvesting. In the state’s timber management plans for the Park, over 65% of the Park will be impacted. **It is stated that such timber activities may also restrict recreational use** if there is a conflict with forest product extraction. In other words, recreation is not the primary purpose of Pisgah Park. What process was used in reclassifying Pisgah as a state reservation? When did such a process occur and who was involved in making such a decision?

In reviewing early official documents related to the creation of the Park, it is clearly stated that the land is to be purchased for the purposes of **multi-use outdoor recreation. Since when is commercial timber harvesting outdoor recreation?** We have asked for and done searches for an amendment to the original agreement stating that commercial timber harvesting is permitted on the property. No such documents have been discovered, thus far. There is mention of forestry and wildlife management, not commercial timber harvesting. When the question about the value of wildlife habitat and forest health improvement in a healthy, natural environment, is posed to most wildlife biologists the consensus is that the natural landscape has managed to take care of itself for millions of years. Timber cutting is not a valid wildlife management technique.

We need forest products. Commercial forestry is vital to New Hampshire’s economy. However, tourism, including outdoor recreation, is an equally important economic contributor. Pisgah’s 13,000 plus acres of near wilderness are rare. Pisgah State Park must continue to be protected now and for the future. I for one, will do everything I can to preserve this incredible resource for present and future generations. I hope you will join me in this worthwhile endeavor.

Kathy Thatcher
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Wicked Big Puddles

Overview

The next time you walk past a wicked big puddle in the Pisgah woods, take a closer look! Spring is prime **time for vernal pools, temporary ponds that form when melting snow and spring rain fill shallow depressions in the forest floor. Vernal pools often dry out completely by mid to late summer**, a wet-dry cycle that prevents fish from establishing permanent residence. Because they are free of fish that might otherwise eat amphibian eggs or larvae, vernal pools provide critical breeding habitat for a host of forest-dwelling amphibians. Such “obligate species” – wood frogs, spotted salamanders, and Jefferson salamanders are the most common vernal pool species in our neck of the woods – depend on these ephemeral ecosystems for their survival.

The Life of a Vernal Pool

The life of a vernal pool begins in earnest in March and April, when, on the first warm, rainy nights of spring, wood frogs and spotted salamanders clamber out of their underground burrows and make their way to vernal pools to breed. Some of these species are quite long-lived (spotted salamanders can live up to 30 years!) and return, year after year, to the same pool; in many cases, it’s the very pool where they themselves were born.

The spring amphibian migration is highly weather dependent, but courtship and egg laying typically occur by mid to late April. (This year’s unusual spring prompted an exceptionally early pulse of migration, with wood frogs first appearing on March 16.) When wood frogs are chorusing, you can easily follow their raucous quacking to the nearest vernal pool.

Spotted salamanders are less cold-tolerant than wood frogs, and thus often migrate later, with spotted salamander egg masses typically remaining visible in local vernal pools through late May. Larval frogs and salamanders have gills for breathing underwater, but they are in a race against time to develop lungs before their pools dry out. By the time August draws to a close, many of our local vernal pools will no longer hold water, and juvenile wood frogs and spotted salamanders – if they have grown lungs in time – will find their way to the forest floor, to live the rest of the year under a protective layer of leaf litter, damp soil, and rotting logs.

So What?

Vernal pools are ecological jewels – exquisite and fleeting – but their beauty is only one reason to steward them carefully. In addition to providing specialized breeding habitat for amphibians, vernal pools serve as important wetland stepping stones for turtles, birds, and even small mammals as they move through upland landscapes. They’re hotspots of biodiversity, too – more than 550 species (primarily invertebrates, such as caddis flies, fingernail clams, and fairy shrimp) have been documented in New England vernal pools! Their alternating wet & dry stages are also thought to give rise to unique soil biogeochemical processes, different from those that occur in permanently-flooded wetlands or drier upland forests.

The amphibians that rely on vernal pools also exert what one researcher described as a “powerful influence” on the ecology of their surrounding forests: They are important predators (the next time you see a spotted salamander, thank her for eating so many mosquito larvae when she was a wee lass in the vernal pool!) and important prey. Their underground burrows help facilitate gas exchange at the root level for trees and other forest plants and, from an ecosystem perspective, much of the forest’s energy is contained in – and transferred through – the bodies of amphibians. One study in Massachusetts found that the biomass of vernal-pool breeding amphibians was greater than the biomass of *all* the breeding birds and small mammals *combined* in the 53-acre forest surrounding a single vernal pool; imagine how the Pisgah woods would change if we lost our amphibians!

Because vernal pools are small, seasonal, and temporary, they are especially vulnerable to impacts from development, clear-cutting, and nearby roads. (One study in western & central Massachusetts found that road kill rates commonly found on even relatively quiet rural roads could be high enough to lead to local extinction of spotted salamander populations in as few as 25 years.) In efforts to protect vernal pool amphibians from road mortality, Ashuelot Valley Environmental Observatory – the citizen science arm of the Harris Center for Conservation Education – trains “Salamander Crossing Brigade” volunteers to count migrating amphibians and safely usher the animals across roads throughout southwest New Hampshire each spring. Such heroic efforts are, thankfully, unnecessary in Pisgah State Park, where vernal pools and the uplands that “feed” them are protected from road impacts, another benefit of the park’s large size.

Tell Me More!

Want to learn more about vernal pools in the Monadnock Region? Interested in joining the Salamander Crossing Brigades next spring? Dying to learn how to tell the difference between wood frog and spotted salamander eggs? Visit www.aveo.org or drop me a line at thelen@harriscenter.org!

[Editor's Note: Vernal pools are an important part of our ecosystems but published information is limited. The state of Massachusetts has very active vernal pool enthusiasts who started the Vernal Pool Association (see www.vernalpool.org). In addition, the state government has published a book that appears to be the best available for New England. The book title is [A Field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools](#) (3rd Printing, May 2009) by Leo Kenney and Matthew Burne. It is available from Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Fund, MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581. For information about salamanders and such, you might wish to consult some small books such as: [An Instant Guide to Reptiles & Amphibians](#) by Pamela Forey and Cecilia Fitzsimons (Longmeadow Press) or [Peterson's First Guide. Reptiles and Amphibians](#) by Roger Conant, Robert Stebbins and Joseph Collins (Houghton Mifflin Co.).]

Brett Amy Thelen
Harris Center for Conservation Education

Some Images from Vernal Pools and a Bluebird Photo



Spotted Salamander (from this year's migration!)
Courtesy of Christina Chappell.



Vernal Pool on Horatio Colony Property Courtesy Russ Cobb



Spotted Salamander Eggs Courtesy of Brett Amy Thelen



Photo Courtesy of Cornell University Website

**Haven't Renewed Your FOP Membership for 2012?
Use Form on the Address Page – Do It Now!**

Bluebirds in the Park

Catching a glimpse of a single or pair of bluebirds can be such a pleasing experience. One of Pisgah's specialties is that it is a safe haven for wildlife. While hiking on South Woods Trail earlier this spring, a flock of bluebirds was witnessed on the edge of the wetlands on the South Woods Trail. They perched and rested in the trees in-between jaunty trips to get mouthfuls of emerging insects off the ground. This large group of beautiful bluebirds was an unusual sight. It's one of the gifts we might receive when we hike in Pisgah.

The Eastern bluebird is a vision in blue with an orange-brown breast and white belly. The brighter looking males and grayer females are medium sized songbirds of about 7 inches. Their nest of grasses holds 4-6 pale blue eggs. Their nest sites can be holes in trees or in nesting boxes. Sightings of these elusive bluebirds have become uncommon in the East possibly because of competition for nesting spots with starlings and sparrows.

Visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to listen to the Eastern bluebird's song.

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/eastern_bluebird/id

Laurel Powell

Back by Popular Demand!

During the past year when the foliage has allowed clear views of the areas off hiking trails, Pisgah enthusiasts have come upon curious remains of structures near the boundaries of Winchester, Hinsdale and the Hinsdale Town Forest on the northeast end of Kilburn Pond. Here lies the site of the Arthur D. Little Research Company. Luckily, FOP knows the historic details thanks to Clifford "Skip" White of Chesterfield who was an employee of A. D. Little Research Company. From 1960 to 1970, Cliff was a researcher for Little then he became its caretaker until the site was decommissioned. Cliff documented the site with photographs taken during 1959 and 1960 when his father was head researcher. Cliff has led many guided hikes describing every aspect of the facility. We feel so fortunate to have such a clear history of this interesting place.

The Little Company was a research company. You name it, they did it! Little's work in Pisgah was to study adequate magazines for the storage of various explosives. Private companies interested in mining and excavation contracted the work. Some of their contracts were related to the government's armed forces, but not more than 20% thus avoiding government control. Little also contracted with many other companies that used explosives in construction and transportation such as Consolidated Coal.

"THINK LITTLE"

Got an interesting invention or unique thought?

In the 1960s, you might have contacted the Arthur D. Little Research Co. to test out your idea. Their motto was, "Huge advances & inventions grow from little ideas." The history of the Arthur D. Little Research Co. has a chapter that is set in a secluded spot by Kilburn Pond in Hinsdale, NH from 1958 to 1967. Nestled at the northern end of Kilburn Pond near the boundaries of Pisgah State Park, the Hinsdale Town Forest and Winchester are some odd and intriguing remains encased in cement. Hikers, skiers and hunters wonder what was once there.

In the late 1950s, the Arthur D. Little Research Company whose main offices were in Cambridge, Massachusetts was commissioned to study adequate magazines for the storage of various explosives. This small project was contracted by private companies that were interested in mining and excavation work. So, the A.D. Little Company looked for a site that was within a 100 mile radius of their home base in Cambridge. They studied topographic maps looking for open places without houses or busy public roads nearby. They considered a place in Stoddard, NH but chose the wilderness of Pisgah.

Wakefield Dort of Chesterfield leased some land to Little in September/October of 1958. The leased land had been cleared by logging done by Cersosimo who had built a few buildings; a horse shed, choppers' cabin for housing and an 8' x 12' building with a stove. Another appealing feature to Little was a system of roads including the logging roads and the roads built by the town of Hinsdale to access their water supply. At this time, the State of NH had not established Pisgah State Park.

Pisgah was a perfect fit! George White of Chesterfield was hired and worked for Little from 1959 to 1960. His son, Skip, joined him after his tour of duty in the army. Upon George's death in 1960, Skip continued his father's work with his cousin, Newton Darling. The road leading to the research site is off the Kilburn Trail near the foot bridge that heads up to the Kilburn Loop and Pisgah Ridge Trail. If you hike these trails on the north end of Kilburn Reservoir today you will see remains of the buildings and magazines.

Three gates at various locations were erected for safety reasons. Signs on the trees stated “Danger Explosives!” and barbed wire surrounded the site. The first site when hiking up Kilburn Trail was located a distance away from the main cluster of structures. It was the magazine which was a storage facility for explosives. Gate # 2 was just past the pond and the foot bridge. All that is left now are cement foundations but then it was a collection of buildings clustered beneath the hemlocks. Included were a grinding station to prepare chemical explosives like ammonium nitrate, a power generator storage shed, an open storage shed for materials such as lumber, two protective structures or bunkers used as observation posts when a blasting experiment was about to begin, an Army Deuce and a half, two and a half ton vehicle that was adapted so that they could use the truck chassis for transporting things around and the body became a machine shop with lathes, drill presses and all sorts of tools, and a cement magazine in order to keep caps separate from the ammunition. Today, you still see the cement remains of the cap magazine with screening that was added to the magazine to provide ventilation and also to keep out animals. Most obvious to hikers now-a-days are the walls woven with rebar or reinforcing rod. These structures had been used for testing explosives. Today pine and birch trees are growing around the walls. Skip White’s Dad got to thinking that Little’s home office in Cambridge was called “Acorn Park”, so maybe this site should be known as “Kilburn Park”. George made the letters and put up the sign on the heated storage building. The sign is now displayed in the FOP Museum in Winchester.

You may notice wires on the ground as you hike up Kilburn Trail. These were used for electric power. There was a crank telephone and an intercom system with outside speakers. It was just used on site. If someone from the company was interested in coming up to the site to visit or observe, they would first ask on the intercom whether it was safe. At first, the telephone wires were attached up on the trees, but they found that the trees swayed so much in the wind that the wires were constantly being rubbed. The protective covering wore away. So, they laid a shielded cable telephone wire on the ground. Some of these lines are still lying along the ground to the right of the trail. A few light sockets can still be seen on the trees.

Upon completion of the research at this site all the buildings were either sold and moved or torn down. The Kilburn Building was sold and is currently situated on the Hickey now Chickering property on Route 63 west of the Kilburn Trail entrance (toward Chesterfield). It is in a field behind the white farmhouse on the left hand side of the road. Often metal work that was needed was commissioned from Little in Cambridge but it was also handy to use local businesses such as the Streeter Machine Shop on Main Street in Hinsdale. David Freitas remembers delivering new or repaired metal pieces for his welder step-father, Russell Mears, owner of the shop.

So now that you know the history, when you next hike to Kilburn, imagine signs on the trees stating “Danger Explosives!”, gates blocking access to the area, local men such as Bill Mitchell and “Bub” Hubner plowing and sanding the steep icy, snow covered road leading up to the pond. Look for the remaining wires on the ground and the electrical outlets up on the trees for the street lights, crank telephone, intercom system and speakers. Imagine the students of Chesterfield School being disturbed by the siren that sounded prior to the explosions. Access to the historic site is from the Kilburn Trailhead on Route 63 in Hinsdale.

Do you hear the echoes still resounding through the woods?

Laurel Powell - FOP Historian
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At Arthur D. Little Explosive Test Site in 2009



On the Trail

Monthly Trail Hikes and Maintenance

The FOP Trails Committee manages hikes and trail maintenance outings with volunteers on the second Saturday of each month. We normally meet at the Kilburn Trailhead on Route 63 in Hinsdale at 10:00 a.m. and hike or drive plus hike to the work area. We generally plan to be back to the starting point by 2:00PM. Note some of our projects below. The FOP web site (www.friendsofpisgah.org) has advance information. Write-ups and photos also are on our web site after each second Saturday outing. Bring lunch, water and tools or use our tools. We go out in most any weather (bug season included) but very poor conditions can force cancellation or postponement of the planned outing.

In addition to the second Saturday work/hike, volunteers work trail maintenance projects once a week on Wednesdays from mid-April to mid-December. Why not join us occasionally or regularly?

For more information call John Herrick at (603) 256-6301.

Pisgah Trail Maintenance – February 11, 2012

We met at Kilburn at 10:00, and about quarter after, headed for Horseshoe road to get some trees that are down on South Woods trail. We had a big crew of 3 and we snipped a few face slapper limbs that hang into the trail on the way down to the swamp area. We noticed that the bridge needs some work that is where the trail starts to go around the swamp. There we found a couple trees across the trail. The trail was very icy in spots and made it slow going. We stopped at the old car site, took some pictures and looked around a little and then continued on to the old sawdust pile where we found another tree across the trail. After that we continued on to the old view site of the swamp, where I took a few more pictures and then had our lunch. After lunch we decided to head back and we thought it would be fun to take a tour back through the old road instead of the trail, so we walked up through the swamp trying to follow the road and we were able to follow it back to the beaver dam next to the bridge that needs work when the dog started barking at a beaver. We were able to see the beaver and it was trying to scare away the dog. It was looking and then splashing water all over the place. We grabbed the dog and went across the ice when we found the tree with the lichen. From there we just walked back to the cars and went home.

John Herrick

Pisgah Trail Hike/Maintenance – March 10, 2012

We met at Kilburn and two folks showed up there. The rest met at Horseshoe Road trailhead, because some of those participating expected primarily a hike and understood this was to be our starting point. Present were council member Matt Edson, Jon Thatcher, Jesse Palmer, Brattleboro resident Brian [apologies Brian, we neglected to get your last name!] and the undersigned, We did not take a chain saw. We took the Old Chesterfield Road to the Reservoir trail and found one tree across the trail. Jesse had brought an ax so we used that to get that to cut the tree and then used a large stick to move the butt end off the trail, We then ran into a lot of ditches that needed draining so we use quite a bit of time doing that although what we intended to do on this Maintenance Hike was to work on the North Pond Trail. By the time we got to North Round Pond, clearing debris and culverts as we made our way, the sun had come out and a gray, chilly day had turned into a beautiful one to be wandering through Pisgah. It was noon as we arrived and we kept working on the trail all the way down to the pond. There were a couple of more large trees across the trail so we took some turns swinging the ax. Brian got some lessons from Jessie and John Herrick and we three chopped through the log in about 5 minutes while others worked on cutting back the mountain laurel and hobble bush.

By the time we ate lunch it was already after 1:00 pm. We had hoped to head back along the North Ponds Trail, but had to opt for a more direct route owing to the time. We talked and decided to take a short cut back so we walked across North Round Pond on the ice despite the fact that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the pond was water. The ice was very solid and so we showed the newer hike participants the old growth trees and hiked around the pond to a view. On the Lily Pond side of the pond you can see both ponds. From there we hiked down to the Lily Pond traveling through old growth and an amazing display of beaver activity. The stream exiting the pond was all open water and wide so we had to walk across the beaver dam which turned out to be pretty easy. After that it was all trail heading back. We made one more stop at the bench we had made last summer. Then we took regular trails back to the cars, only clearing some small branches along the way. Arrived at the parking lot about 3:30 pm.

*John Herrick, Trails Chair
Kathy Thatcher, President*

Pisgah Trail Maintenance – April 14, 2012

David Weisel, Matt Edson, Becky & Dewy Ouger and their daughters Olivia and Grace, John Hudachek and Gizmo joined Friends of Pisgah trails chief John Herrick at the Kilburn trail head at 10:00. Using rakes and shovels, ruts on the road to Kilburn Pond were smoothed. Jesse Palmer, alias the Ax man, joined us half way to Kilburn Pond. We removed sticks and cut brush from the side of the trail down to the Kilburn Pond Dam by noon. Matt used his brush cutter and several others used loppers to trim back the brush encroaching onto the trail. At this time the majority called it a day and returned to their vehicles at the Kilburn trail head. Meanwhile David, Jesse, John Hudachek and Gizmo continued around the entire Kilburn loop. Numerous trees and branches were carried off the trail, some after being cut by the ax. These last members of the work party returned to Kilburn parking area by 3pm.

John Hudachek

Trail Photos



Jesse & Dave Move Tree from Trail



Brian, Kathy, Matt, Jon and Jesse at Old Growth
On March Weekend Hike/Work Day



Jesse the Woodchopper



Kathy Thatcher, Matt Edson & Friends
Gizmo and Nellie Bear

Photo Credits.

Top Left column-John Hudachek, Top Right column-John Herrick.
Bottom left – John Herrick, Bottom right – Jeff Newcomer

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First Class Mail

Please use the form below and send to the address shown if you wish to join FOP, renew membership or give one as a gift. The Friends of Pisgah maintain a nominal dues structure with the intent being to encourage as many individuals and families as possible to join. Over half of the student/single/family dues provides for printing and mailing the Update and the Annual Picnic notice, as well as for the fine food at the picnic. Dues are as follows: student - \$10, single - \$15, family - \$20, group (club) - \$30.
 Cut here -----

Date: _____ Name(s): _____ Address: _____ _____ _____ Phone: _____ (Home) Phone: _____ (Work) E-mail: _____ Questions? Call Kathy Thatcher (603-363-4482) or John Hudachek (603-363-8897) Send form and check to: Friends of Pisgah, Inc. PO Box 134 Chesterfield, NH 03443-0134	<u>Category</u> (Check applicable boxes) ◇ New ◇ Renewal ◇ Gift ◇ Student (\$10.00) ◇ Single (\$15.00) ◇ Family (\$20.00/address) ◇ Group (\$30.00) ◇ Donation \$ _____ Name/Address of gift giver _____ _____ _____	<u>Willing to Assist On Committee for:</u> ◇ Annual Picnic ◇ Educational Programs ◇ History/Archaeology ◇ Membership ◇ Newsletter Articles ◇ Planning & Strategy ◇ Fund Raising ◇ Public Relations/Park Info ◇ Rails to Trails Advisory ◇ Trails/Maintenance ◇ Wantastiquet-Monadnock Greenway ◇ Other _____
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