



Pinnacle News

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association FALL 2015

“Every time I step outside, regardless of the time of day, I feel better, happier. Nature helps keep me sane. In fact, it helps keep everybody sane.” Thus Randy Major describes the love of nature and faith in its restorative power that inspires his conservation work. Having recently retired from the WHPA board after 15 years of service, Randy reflected on his Pinnacle experiences in the dining room of his Westminster West farmhouse.

He was drawn into the Pinnacle’s orbit by his remarkable wife and fellow conservationist, Beverly Bruhn Major, who – along with Alison Latham, Carol and Arthur Westing, Bob Haas, Michael McKiernan, Sean Long, and Ellen Zimmerman – founded the organization in 1993. Working with Libby Mills, the Westings, and others on the Acquisitions Committee, Randy played a key role in many of the purchases that now add up to 1820 acres of permanently preserved land. His experience as a local realtor and the contacts he developed as a state legislator have proven invaluable. “Despite the inevitable failures and frustrations, land acquisition is exciting work,” said Randy. WHPA colleagues admire his skill and perseverance in the research, negotiation, and fundraising that lie behind every parcel of Pinnacle land.

Helping to build and maintain trails has been another source of satisfaction. An avid hiker, Randy’s stamina on the trail continues to impress all who spend time in the woods with

Randy Major: An Appreciation



him. He still enjoys trail and boundary marking, especially in the company of trail designer extraordinaire Roger Haydock.

As the WHPA evolved, a consensus emerged among board members that the mission should be expanded to protect lands beyond the ridgeline trail. “The Bald Hill Reserve was a triumph of the effort to broaden the Pinnacle mission to include conservation of critical lands other than Windmill Ridge,” explained Randy. One of the highlights of his time on the Board was the successful solicitation of private and public funds to finance the purchase of the Reserve’s 55 acres. Randy praises new WHPA trustee Vanessa Stern for the crucial role she played in creating the Reserve whose trails

link with those of the abutting Belows Falls Union High School Forest to provide significant public access. Randy proudly describes both the work that has taken place since the purchase and plans for the future. “We have developed a working relationship with the High School and improved or laid out miles of trails. It is a delight for many outdoor enthusiasts in that quite populated corner of our town. One planned trail leading down to the Saxtons River above Twin Falls needs to be completed. And we’re working on a routine way to maintain signs and remove trash from the most used trailhead, Cemetery Road!”

All who’ve collaborated with Randy over the years appreciate the humor he brings to the serious work of conservation. In 2005, for example, his emailed notice of an upcoming Trail Committee meeting included this puckish invitation: “Since this meeting will be held on Valentine’s Day, if we can find a volunteer to bake a Valentine cake, we will turn our meeting into a love fest to celebrate how smitten we all are with the hills of Vermont.”

– Rick Cowan

Don’t miss Randy’s hike of his beloved Bald Hill on October 17. See Events for details.



Recent Highlights

Trails. A lot of work was done earlier in the year, so our trails are generally in great shape, thanks to our trail stewards. However, trees occasionally fall across the paths. Pinnacle urges hikers and bikers to report those blockages so our trail stewards and other volunteers can restore the passageways.

Athens Dome. Two new trail stewards have been added to the crew for the ADGCC (Athens Dome at Grafton Conservation Committee) area: Josh Ferenc of Athens and Joe Lupiani of Grafton. Josh is a teacher and runner who has done the length of the trail and loves the trail system. Joe is a newer resident of Grafton. A sculptor who loves the outdoors, he will be helping his wife run the Grafton Store this fall. Please see the last page of this newsletter for an update on the Boy Scout shelter project.

Bald Hill. Trails are cleared and well maintained. A couple of fallen trees were cleared by a "good Samaritan." (If anyone knows who this might be, we'd love to know so we can thank him or her!) The wooden trail signs on the high school property are complete, and the creation of the signs for the Bald Hill parcel is to resume in the near future.

Additionally, the Pinnacle Association and Rockingham Conservation Commission are planning a gathering of interested volunteers this fall (date and place to be determined) to consider the possibilities of a trail extension from Pinnacle trails on the western edge of the town of Rockingham, near route 35 in Athens, to Saxtons River with a long-term vision of connecting to Bald Hill and the new river park in Bellows Falls. Both organizations are looking for volunteers who would like to form a group to work on possible trail connections. Those interested should contact Silos Roberts at silos@vermontel.net or at 802-869-1388.



The new, green Iron Ranger, attached to the Holden Trail kiosk, was designed and crafted by professional metal worker, WHPA volunteer, and dedicated trail steward Joe Richards, seen above at left with Pinnacle Trustee Tony Coven. The hope is that people hiking the Pinnacle trails and / or staying at the cabin will show their appreciation and support for these wonderful features and the reliable volunteer maintenance of them by placing a contribution in the donation cylinder.

From the Board

Online Donations. The new system is working well, so you now have the option of donating online through PayPal.



New Board Members. Four new members were elected at the April Annual Meeting and had special orientation presentations by Libby Mills, Andy Toepfer, and Silos Roberts on the early history of WHPA, past land acquisitions, areas of interest, and the land management plan. We're all looking forward to implementation of the new strategic plan.

Susan Roman, WHPA Chairman

Meet New Pinnacle Trustees

Hayden Lake, Putney. A forester with expertise in management for recreation and wildlife habitat, Hayden has watched WHPA grow and expand while conserving its beautiful ridgeline. He has explored the trails from Putney Mountain to Grafton.



David Robb, Putney. An avid outdoorsman, hiker, and biker, David appreciates the Pinnacle trail system and feels WHPA does an incredible job of conserving land and making it accessible to the public. He hopes his management and customer-relation skills will be helpful to WHPA and its goals.



Vanessa Stern, Westminster. A fifth-grade math and science teacher in Springfield with a passion for environmental education, Vanessa volunteered several years ago to work on the Bald Hill Conservation Committee, conserving a stunning river-front 50-acre parcel that connects to another 150 undeveloped, or conserved, acres. She hopes to contribute her time and energy to raise awareness of the value of green space in our communities, and is especially eager to inspire children, our future land stewards, to venture outside to experience nature firsthand.



Paul Wilson, Cambridgeport. A wildlife field biologist and volunteer for WHPA's Athens Dome at Grafton Conservation Committee for the past 6 years, Paul has served as a committee member, trail steward, and trail steward coordinator for the ADGCC trails. He believes Pinnacle's land conservation efforts are important for diverse wildlife habitats, habitat connectivity, and recreational trails, as well as for solace and solitude. He hopes to expand land holdings, increase the length of the trails, and help make Pinnacle lands appeal to users with diverse interests.



Schedule of Events: Weekend Strolls and More

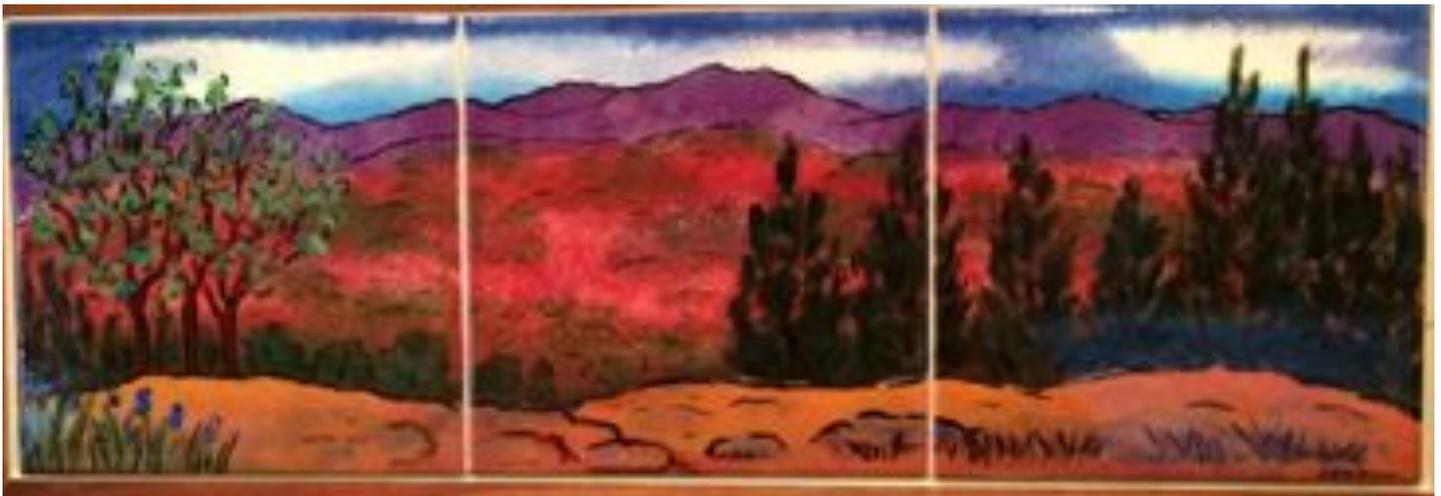
For more information and directions, visit www.windmillhillpinnacle.org or contact the program person listed below.

September 26, Saturday, 10:45 AM-4 PM. Accessibility Day. This once-a-year opportunity for a vehicle ride to a special trail site will go to Paul's Ledges for lunch via an often rough road. The program's popularity and need for four-wheel-drive vehicles make advance registrations a MUST for riders. Hikers do not need to pre-register. Bring water, bag lunch, and sweater for chilly weather. Meet at Westminster West Church at 10:45 AM or at the Athens Dome trailhead on Route 35, opposite Sleepy Valley Road, at 11 AM to carpool. Register with Bev Major at 802-387-5737.



October 17, Saturday, 2-4 PM. Bald Hill Hike. This moderate hike will include a trail along the top of steep slopes above the Saxtons River, a visit to the south side of Twin Falls, and Bald Hill viewpoints. Meet at the trail gate at the uppermost end of Cemetery Road in Westminster, right next to the St. Charles' Cemetery entrance. Bring water. Contact hike leader Randy Major at 802-387-5737.

November 7, Saturday, 1-3 PM. Spruce Swamp Hike. Camilla Roberts will lead this excursion to a Spruce Swamp in Grafton. Dress warmly, wear sturdy shoes, bring water. Meet at the parking lot opposite The Nature Museum, 186 Townshend Road in Grafton. Contact Camilla Roberts at 802-869-1388 for information and registration.



View from Paul's Ledges - tiles by Carol Keiser

Pinnacle Trustees & Officers 2015-2016

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Curtis (Tony) Coven, Westminster
John Field, Putney
Elaine Gordon, Westminster
James Jordan, Westminster
Hayden Lake, Putney
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Molly Wilson, Westminster; Secretary
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Clearing for Wildlife

With the contract from the federal NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) in hand, Pinnacle volunteers will start cutting and dropping trees this fall to enhance specific areas for wildlife. The first of three openings will be 2.4 acres in size, and the total acreage to cut is 8 acres. These sections will be in low-quality timber areas along the Pinnacle ridge starting in the north and moving south. The new patches should promote diversity in the forest canopy and provide bird species that do not frequent mature forests with a place to live. Insects and mammals will also benefit from these wildlife openings. Increased raspberries, blackberries, elderberry, and coarse woody debris will make the difference. While birds will have new food resources from the berries and insects, it is the whole food web that will get a boost from the openings, as well as the structural diversity, which will change as the forest grows back.

Unmanaged forest generally has 2-3% of the forest growing as younger forest due to natural disturbances, but Pinnacle forests are predominately even-aged forests of second or third growth. This volunteer project will add a younger age class to the Pinnacle forests, as well as grant money to the Pinnacle endowment fund, which provides income to pay taxes and insurance on the 1800+ acres of Pinnacle-owned lands.

What's in a Name?

Arthur H. Westing, WHPA Co-Founder and Trustee Emeritus, created a history of some Pinnacle trail names. Facts about four trails (A Walk through Time, Dunn Nature Trail, Five Corners, and Flame Trail) were revealed in the Spring 2015 newsletter. Here are four more.

Holden Trail: This 1.4-mile trail in Westminster was named for the Holden family that had owned the land through which it runs since before the American Revolution, until acquired by WHPA in 2001 as its second owner of record.

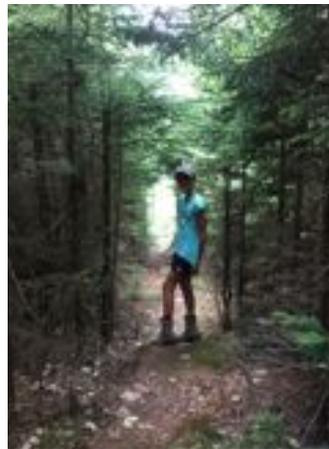
Jamie Latham Trail: This 2-mile trail in Athens and Westminster was named in memory of Jamie Charles Latham (1968–1991) of Westminster West, a dedicated outdoor enthusiast who was the inspiration for protecting the Windmill Ridge in perpetuity.

Paul's Ledges: This panoramic viewpoint (elevation, 1550 feet) along the Hemlock Trail in Athens was named in memory of Paul R. Sternfels (1951–2005) of Westminster, a WHPA Trustee (2003–2005) who, among his many achievements, had worked tirelessly to return this site to its natural beauty.

Stephen Martin Memorial Sanctuary: This magnificent, long-undisturbed 113-acre hardwood forest, with 44 acres in Rockingham and 69 acres in Westminster, was a gift to WHPA from Sarah Ann Martin (1922-2000) of New York and Saxtons River in memory of her brother Stephen Martin (1924-1945), a Marine who had been killed in action during the World War II Battle of Iwo Jima.

Online Information

A new Resources section on the Pinnacle website lists the three Pinnacle nature guides that are also available at the Holden Trail and Dunn Nature Trail kiosks. These guides are a great way to make a visit from family and friends even more special. Read them in advance on www.windmillhillpinnacle.org.



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Wanted: Your Email

If you haven't sent us your email address, please do, so we can send you our newsletter and updates or last-minute notices about special events. This means faster contact with you while saving time, money, and trees.



Back in Action

After a busy summer of Scout trips and camps, earning badges and satisfying arduous requirements, coupled with work and other responsibilities, the Boy Scouts of Troop 206 from Chester, VT, are back at work on the log lean-to near the lookout above Creature Rock in Grafton. Above, Liam Charlton raises his arms high to show progress on the supports for the roof. As part of his Eagle Scout project, Liam will direct his fellow Scouts and volunteers so the gable ends, rafters, and purlins for the roof can be completed before his 18th birthday in October. His troop will then begin work on the roof, filling log gaps, and other chores as a Troop project.

After those jobs are done, volunteers from the Athens Dome at Grafton Conservation Committee of WHPA plan to create the wooden floor. The aim is to have the shelter ready for hikers during the summer of 2016. This will be another inducement for people to hike the long Pinnacle trail from Putney Mountain to Grafton and to send us pictures and notes on that experience.

Story behind the Kiosk. This Kidder Hill kiosk, a gift from Pinnacle to the Grafton Improvement Association (GIA), symbolizes an effective partnership between the two organizations and a massive love of the land, coupled with the determination to preserve it for the enjoyment of people, plants, and animals. In 1941 Bill Brown's grandfather bought 900 acres in Grafton. He taught Bill the importance of stewardship and "how we can destroy or permanently damage what has been put in our care or how we can maintain it, enjoy it, and make sure it's here for those who come after us." Bill continued, "Being president of GIA gives me a momentary opportunity to see this continuing stewardship maintains the proper direction. And I think our trail partnership with the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association exemplifies that direction."

