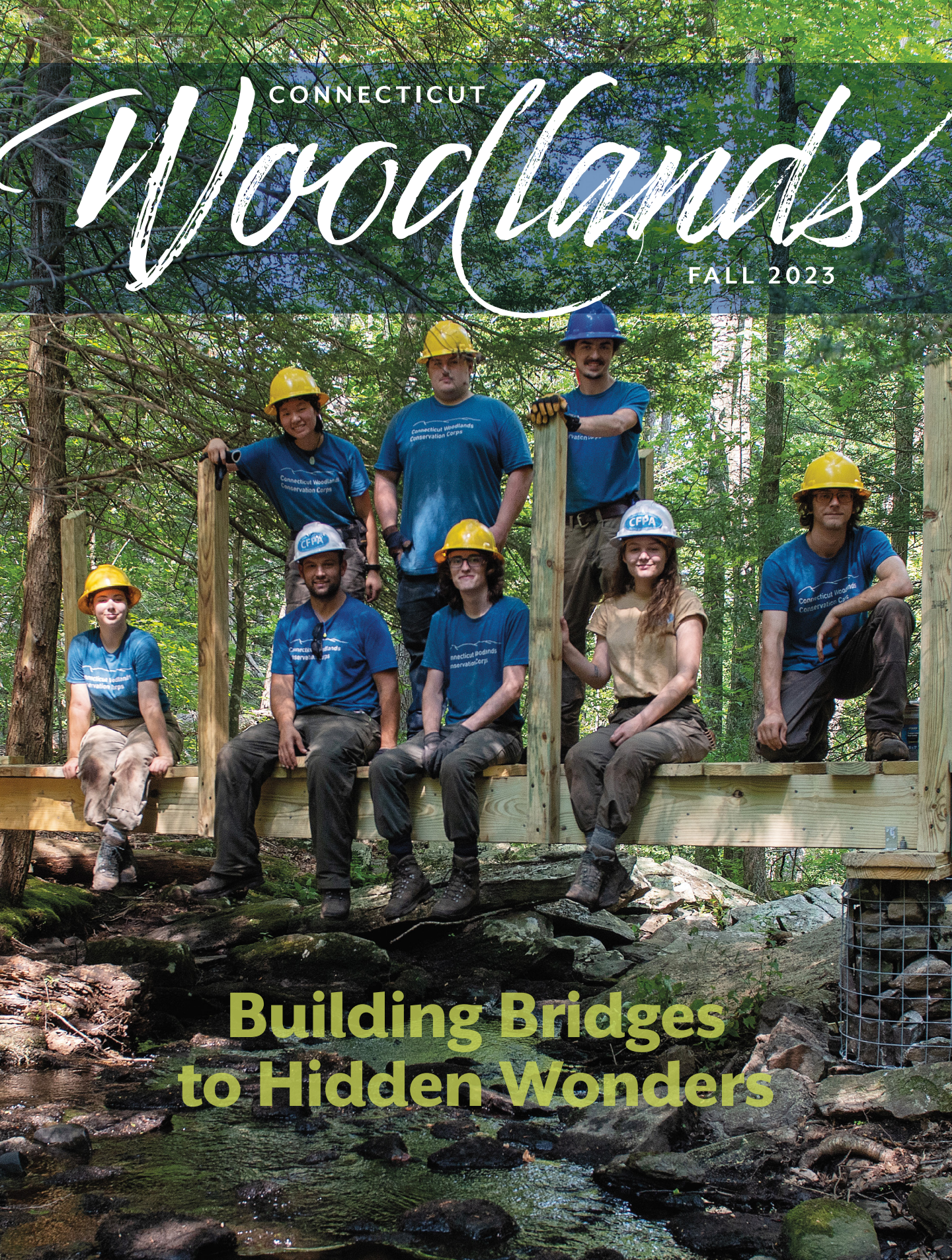
CONNECTICUT
Woodlands
FALL 2023



Building Bridges to Hidden Wonders

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION

Land Acknowledgment Statement

CFPA acknowledges we are on the traditional lands of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, the Mohegans, the Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Niantic peoples. We pay our respect to the Indigenous people who are no longer here due to colonization, forced relocation, disease, and warfare. We thank them for stewarding this land throughout generations. We recognize the continued presence of Indigenous people on this territory who have survived attempted genocide, and who still hold ties to the land spiritually and culturally. We shall be good stewards of the land we all call Quinnentucket, Connecticut.

CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Greg Gregory is nothing if not determined. This past summer, he completed the 800-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Challenge, a years-long project during which he hiked all 825 miles of Connecticut's Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails. He joined an elite group; fewer than 20 hikers are official 800-milers. But Greg has no plans to slow down. Shortly after finishing the Challenge, he was out for another 20-mile day hike in July's oppressive heat. We caught up with Greg to learn more about what motivated him to complete the Challenge and how it changed the way he feels about Connecticut.

In your essay, you describe both the joys and frustrations of completing such a daunting challenge. What motivated you to keep going throughout the years?
My motivation changed so much over the course of the project. At times I was motivated by the desire to exercise, to be outdoors, to explore certain areas, and because the

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On the cover: The summer 2023 Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps poses on a new bridge they built in Kettletown State Park. Photo by Jake Koteen.

sport itself appeals to me. But once I had hiked a certain amount of mileage inertia took over. It would have been unthinkable to stop without finishing.

How many pairs of boots did you go through while hiking all the Blue-Blazed Trails? Did you have to replace any other gear?
My best estimation is that I've gone through six pairs of boots. Aside from ripping my pants a time or two, my gear has held up surprisingly well. I'm still carrying my first day pack, although these days there are a few more safety pins holding it together.

You write that hiking across Connecticut changed the way you feel about our state. Can you explain further what you mean?
I have always loved our forests, trails, and mountains. I'd been all over the state working on previous hiking projects and thought I'd seen everything we had to offer. What I didn't expect is that I didn't just enjoy the trails themselves, but also driving and walking through the same towns and neighborhoods day after day. I loved seeing eclectic yard art, family-run restaurants, and houses where dogs greeted passing hikers. Becoming familiar with these small things made me feel like part of the communities I passed through. Connecticut still feels bigger to me than it is geographically, but now I feel connected to all of it.

What are your hiking goals now that you've completed the 800-mile challenge?
My next goal is to hike the New Hampshire Terrifying 25. I'm already three trails down and looking forward to more rock scrambles.

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Editor's Note

When I first moved to Connecticut a decade ago, I was struck by all the bright, blue blazes I saw painted on trees throughout the state. At the time, I didn't know exactly what they meant, but like others whom I've met, I assumed they were part of a trail system built and managed by the State. Little did I know that these trees represent one of the greatest treasures of our small state—the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System, a vast web of wooded walkways largely created and maintained by generations of CFPA volunteers.

Trails are portals into other worlds that exist far from the constant chatter of our screens. They lead you to hidden wonders—small brooks that only run after a heavy rain; a marsh where, if you pause for a moment, a chorus of frogs will gladly serenade you; old pines proudly standing guard like sentinels of the forest; a bobcat silently crossing your path. Trails are stories that can only be read by following them, and in doing so, they become part of your story. As you leave behind the conveniences of modern life, you learn how to trust your intuition. You rely on your own strengths. Your senses are sharpened. And you return home a changed person.

People hike for a variety of reasons. Some hike for health, others for healing. Some are motivated by a sense of community, while others are seeking solitude. Some thrive on adventure and want to push their limits, both physically and mentally, while others prefer a more meditative path. Hiking allows you to bond with loved ones and to commune with nature. Whoever you are, whatever your reasons for hiking, the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails are for you.

I'll see you outside,

Timothy Brown
Editor

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Inc.

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that protects forests, parks and the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails for future generations by connecting people to the land. Since 1895, CFPA has enhanced and defended Connecticut's rich natural heritage through advocacy, conservation, recreation, and education, including maintaining the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. CFPA depends on the generous support of members to fulfill its mission. For more information and to donate, go to ctwoodlands.org

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From the President

By Rich Croce

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

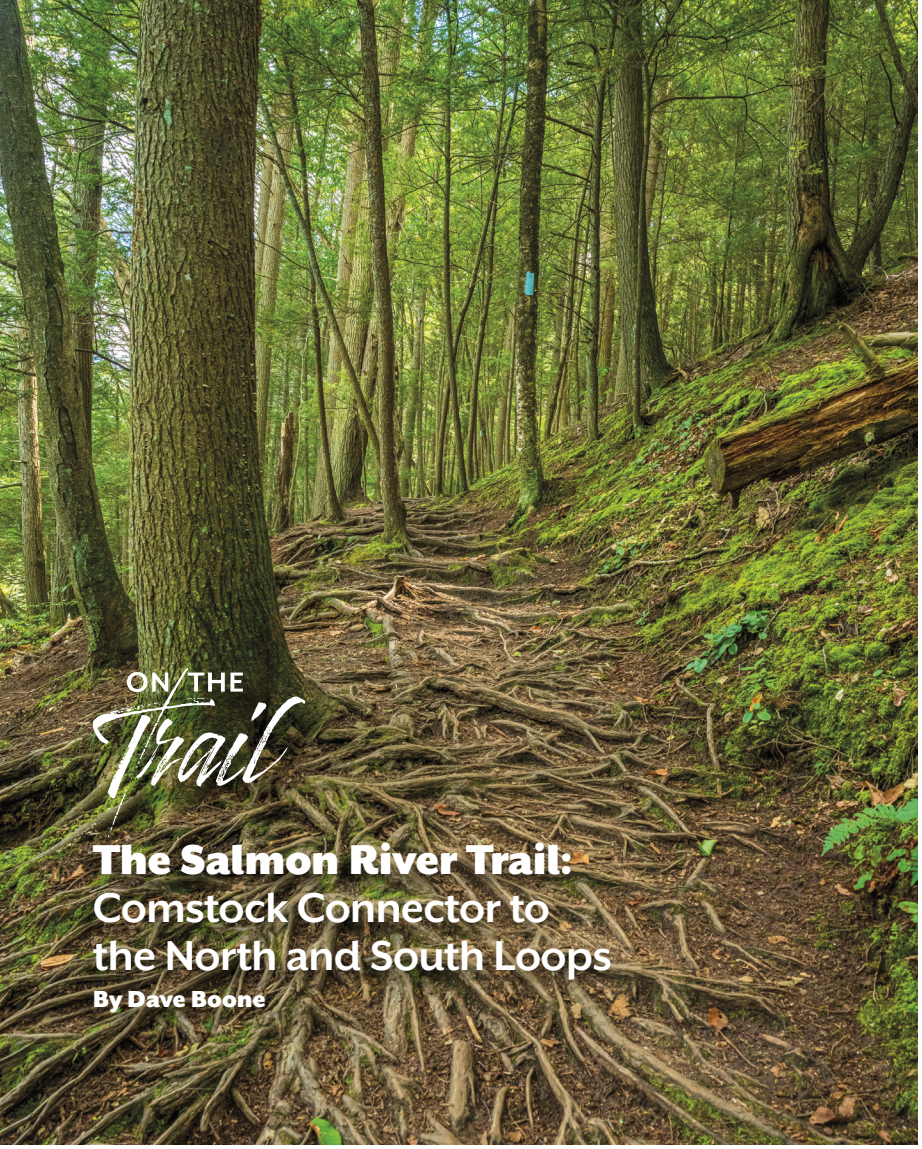
There is change afoot at CFPA. Eric Hammerling, who served as Executive Director for 15 years, has moved on to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to continue his work in conservation. Jim Little, our Development Director, has retired. We owe a debt of gratitude to both Eric and Jim for the great work they did at CFPA. With change comes opportunity and new perspectives. Please join me in welcoming Linda Pierce, our new Development Director. Clare Cain is doing an amazing job serving as Interim Executive Director as we conduct a search for a new, permanent Executive Director. We look forward to introducing that person to you soon.

I have been a member of the CFPA Board of Directors for the past nine years and served as Board President for the last four. Although my term was due to expire this coming November, I have been asked and have agreed to serve another year as President while we conduct the search for CFPA's next Executive Director. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve this great organization, which does so much for the citizens of the State of Connecticut including, but not limited to:

- Maintaining the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System, which provide unparalleled opportunity for all to get outside, get some exercise, and escape the stresses of everyday life while enjoying incredible scenery.
- Advocating at the Capitol for important environmental issues such as the Passport to the Parks, which allows free access to State Parks for cars with Connecticut license plates, and the recent constitutional amendment, which requires a public hearing before any state land is sold or otherwise transferred.
- Educating the citizens of Connecticut about environmental issues and forest management, including our Master Woodlands Manager Program and our partnership with the Windham Public Schools, where we provide opportunities for middle school students to learn about nature and explore the woods at Goodwin State Forest.

While this is a time of change for CFPA, it is also a time for us to reaffirm our core values. Our mission to protect forests, parks and the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails for future generations by connecting people to the land has not changed. We have, however, effectively added the word ALL to our mission. Our ultimate mission is to connect all people to the land, not just some. Toward that end, we have actively sought to expand and diversify our community and have made it a priority to do so in our new Strategic Plan. I think we all agree that being outside with friends and family and meeting new people along the way is something to which we all should have equal access.

Rich Croce is an attorney with an office in Middletown. He lives in Groton Long Point with his wife, Peggy, their son Gordie, and their Black Lab, Charlie, who never fails to amuse.



ON THE *Trail*

The Salmon River Trail: Comstock Connector to the North and South Loops

By Dave Boone

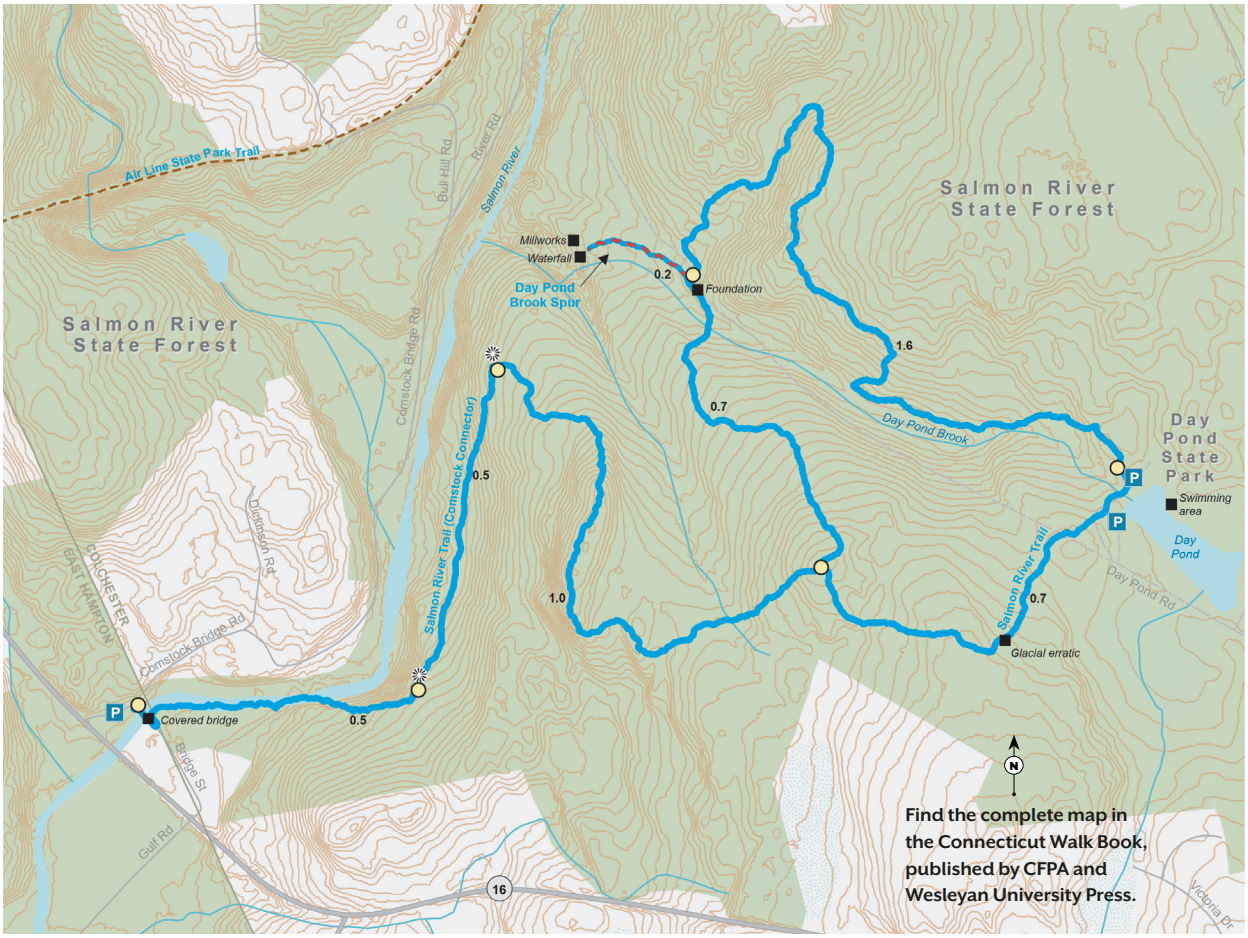
It begins at a historic covered bridge, follows the banks of one of our state's finest trout fisheries before climbing through a hemlock forest, past mixed hardwoods and mountain laurel groves. A scenic waterfall flows down through a steep ravine in all seasons. Remnants of ancient mills, sluiceways, and foundations peek out of the forest floor. A picnic area invites you to sit and take a break next to a pond. You pass an impressive glacial boulder on your return walk to the river. The Blue-Blazed Salmon River Trail encompasses all these classic features of the Connecticut landscape.

The Salmon River Trail was created by Clyde Brooks, who served as CFPA's Trails Chair from 1982 to 1990, and an honorary director for many years. Clyde maintained the southernmost section of the Shenipsit Trail from its terminus near Great Hill to Hebron Avenue in Glastonbury for over 30 years. He laid out and developed what is known as the North and South Loops of the Salmon Trail in the late 1970s and completed the "Comstock Connector" in the early 80s. The trail resembles a lollipop, with the Comstock Connector being the stick and the North and South Loops the candy.

It was my privilege work with Clyde and his small number of regulars who would help with monthly maintenance outings on the Shenipsit and Salmon. Clyde was a true gentleman and a pleasure to talk with, and he welcomed my young daughters to walk along with his crew. In 2006, Clyde retired from trail work and moved to live with family in Pennsylvania. With his blessing, I approached the CFPA Trails Committee and its Chair Weezie Perrine as to whether I might be appointed as Clyde's successor on the Salmon. The Committee agreed and since then it has been my honor to literally follow in Clyde's footsteps.

A Trail Manager's tasks tend to vary with the seasons. Spring is the time to prepare for hiker use by removing blowndown trees and branches, cleaning drainage structures, and generally surveying trail conditions. Summer requires cutting back all the new growth reaching into the trail, ensuring blazes are visible, and opening any clogged drainage structures. Fall generally calls for attention to the same matters as summer, but gratefully in a cooler and more colorful fashion! Winter is a time to enjoy the wide-open landscape, and perhaps evaluate signage needs and consider blazing changes. Throughout the year, we evaluate hiker use, unauthorized trail use, and neighbor-related issues. Fortunately, the entire Salmon Trail is on state forest land, so neighbor issues are rare. For me, being out on the trail as a steward in all seasons creates a personal and intimate connection to the landscape.

Occasionally, help is needed to address an issue or complete a project that is too big for me to handle alone. In these cases, it becomes necessary to reach out to people or organizations that in some cases have not been traditional trail maintenance partners. A good example is the replacement of the footbridge over Day Pond Brook. The bridge washed away during the heavy rainstorms in the fall of 2018. I contacted Clare Cain, CFPA Trails Director, for advice and assistance. She connected me with Chris Lawton, a fellow CFPA Trail Manager with extensive bridge building experience and skills. Chris then reached out to a local Scout troop to assist with the actual construction. Meanwhile, I needed a way to move all the lumber for the bridge to the work site, more than a mile from the nearest



paved road and across some rugged terrain. I contacted the Colchester-Hayward Volunteer Fire Department to ask if they might consider using their ORV equipment to move the building materials for the project. Gratefully, their Chief felt there was training value for the Department and agreed to assist us. This saved us days—if not weeks—of hard labor to move the materials from the park picnic area to the brook. Ultimately, we successfully completed the project thanks to these new partnerships.

The Trail and the surrounding Salmon River State Forest and Day Pond State Park offer something of interest to all hikers and outdoor enthusiasts. The forest protects the watershed beginning with the Blackledge and Jeremy Rivers, which merge to form the Salmon River near the well-known Airline Trail. The Salmon River provides superb trout fishing and is managed by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) as a "trout management area" that includes a special fly fishing only zone just upstream of the Comstock Bridge. Day Pond itself is a "trout park," which enables families and children to enjoy a relaxed fishing experience.

Another water-based feature is Day Pond Brook Falls. Reached by a blue and red blazed side trail a short distance off the main South Loop, the small brook drains Day Pond, tumbling through a steep boulder filled ravine. It's a dramatic scene, especially in the spring following a heavy rain, and in the winter.

A calendar-worthy photo op is the Comstock Bridge where the Salmon River begins with the Comstock Connector. Cross over the bridge from the DEEP parking lot in East Hampton to the Colchester side, take a sharp left to the small informational kiosk, and you are on your way toward your Salmon River Trail adventure!

As the trail manager of this jewel of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System for nearly two decades, my connection to this particular landscape continues to evolve. Trail maintenance and management rewards one with a sense of "ownership," but not selfishly, as the work is for the benefit of the public. The goal is to protect natural resources while minimizing hiker impact on the land. To me, this is the meaning and purpose of land stewardship.

Please visit the Salmon River Trail in any and all seasons. You are sure to find your adventure!

Dave Boone is a retired municipal public health director who lives in Hebron with his wife Deb. He is a life-long outdoorsman who, in addition to hiking, enjoys fishing, hunting, and cross-country skiing. He is a member of the CFPA Trails Committee and the long-time chair of the Appalachian Mountain Club Connecticut Appalachian Trail Committee.

Hiking for Dessert

After spending years hiking all 825 miles of the Blue-Blazed Trails, the author saved something special for last.

Words and Photos by Greg Gregory

On a cold, foggy afternoon in late 2019, my hiking partner and I summited Mount Marcy, the highest peak in New York. I had been casually working on summiting the highest points in each state. This was my sixth. We perched ourselves on the exposed rock to rest, avoiding any disturbance to the delicate plants and soil in the alpine ecosystem. While we snacked, we listened to a fellow hiker recount his own impressive peakbagging achievements. He had climbed six of the Seven Summits and was nearly finished with the 50 United States high points. He described his plan to "save Hawaii for dessert," a phrase that has stuck with me since.

Saving something special for the end of a long-term hiking project is a lesson I failed to learn earlier in my hiking career. After spending years visiting every Connecticut state park and forest, I finally walked into my last park, Hopemead State Park, in Bozrah. It is a lovely property, but relatively unspectacular compared to many of the places I had already explored. When I started my next project in 2021, the Blue-Blazed Trails Hiking Challenge, I knew I'd have to choose my "dessert" more carefully.

Initially, I didn't know I wanted to hike all 800 miles. The first time I sat down with the Connecticut Walk Book and a blank Excel spreadsheet to calculate how many miles I had already completed, I was surprised to learn I was more than 100 miles into the challenge. I'm nothing if not determined, so seeing the number of trails I'd already hiked was enough to convince me I had to hike them all.

Waterfall on the Tunxis Trail in Burlington.

With a goal of hiking 800 miles, I had plenty of time to consider how I wanted to finish the challenge. I would have settled for a difficult peak or beautiful waterfall, but eventually decided to plan a backpacking trip on the Appalachian Trail. While I'm a day hiker at heart, I am not immune to the unique charm of Appalachian Trail culture. The Connecticut section offers both breezy walks along the Housatonic River and steep climbs as you approach and summit Connecticut's high point, Bear Mountain. Having previously completed a short section of the trail, I planned my route so I would hit 800 miles around the summit of Lion's Head.

I still had several years of hiking ahead of me, however, before I would achieve that goal. Trail days came in all varieties. Some felt like I was out there communing with nature. For example, on my first visit to the Mattatuck Trail in Mohawk State Forest (back in 2018 before I had officially begun the challenge), I had the inexplicable feeling that this is how forests in fairy tales must look. I felt sure a unicorn was about to appear between the ferns and, when I approached Cunningham Tower, Rapunzel was waiting inside to let down her long hair. On another day, descending the Undermountain Trail on Bear Mountain, I experienced the most fleeting, transcendent euphoria. Whether a runner's high or something else entirely, I've never experienced it again.

The miles don't come easy every day, though. There are all kinds of obstacles to a good day on the trail. Some things can be fixed with a Band-Aid and a snack, but other days your legs or your mind just aren't into it. On my worst day, a fallen tree across the trail was enough to elicit an audible groan and the feeling that I literally could not get over this obstacle. Of course, I stepped over the log and finished my hike. In the small picture, sometimes all the motivation you need is that your car is still three miles away and staying put is not an option. I developed the habit of counting my paces on difficult sections and forcing myself to reach a certain number of steps before I could rest. That point, where it was a fight to lift my foot for each new step, became quite meditative. I've never been more mindful of my body and its relationship with its surroundings than when carefully choosing each step.

It is tempting to romanticize hiking, especially a massive project like this one. The long days of hard miles alone in the forest; pushing yourself to go farther, go faster—it all sounds very adventurous. It is important to remember that we're all just people out there and a certain amount of silliness comes with the territory. I'm not always the most graceful hiker. I've been chased up the Tunxis Trail by a swarm of wasps and fallen into a swamp because I was watching a water snake. One busy Saturday afternoon near the summit of Bear Mountain, I sat down on a rock to rest. Upon standing up, I discovered a nice breeze blowing through a large split right down the seat of my pants. In a panic, I jumped into the bushes where I dumped out my entire pack in search of something to repair them. I ended up making emergency pants out of my pack's rain cover. Not very breathable, but I recommend it in a pinch.

As I neared 800 miles this summer, I headed out to the Appalachian Trail amidst reports of historic flooding. Instead of backpacking the trail like I had planned, I decided to set up base camp at Housatonic Meadows State Park and do a series of day hikes. It would change the character of my trip, but it would also reduce the safety risks from the recent bad weather and allow for uncommon luxuries like showers and a reclining lawn chair. Regardless of the changes to my plan, the hiking was magnificent and included challenging obstacles like deep, fast-flowing water crossings. These flooded rivers were the most difficult water crossings I'd ever attempted and completing them was exhilarating. Over several days I completed 25 miles of trail and enjoyed talking with thru-hikers and Appalachian Mountain Club trail volunteers out surveying the flood damage.

The final push up Lion's Head came at the tail end of a 14-mile day. My previous visit to Lion's Head two years earlier had been the kind of foggy morning where you cannot see your hiking partner ahead of you. This was a clear, sunny afternoon, and even with low energy going into the last half-mile, I was excited to finally see Salisbury and the surrounding mountains. I flopped into a patch of shade on the rocky overlook to admire the view and wait for the feeling of accomplishment. When I had imagined this moment, I pictured other hikers being present, someone with whom I could share what I had achieved. But no one else was there. I didn't feel like I had expected to feel. I wasn't relieved or proud; the moment held none of the sweetness I imagined. I just wanted to keep hiking.

One of the surprising effects of completing this hiking challenge is how I feel about where I live. I was born in Connecticut and have always lived here, but thanks to my terrible sense of direction I have always felt a little disoriented and disconnected. Now that I have physically walked all over the state, these places that existed in my head as isolated landmarks have been connected by trail. Even driving by a street sign I recognize from my trail guides fills me with fond memories of my time spent there in the woods. While the bulk of my miles for this challenge were completed in three years, I counted miles going back to 2015. In that time, our forests have been impacted by severe storms, invasive insects, and drought. Being deeply immersed in our forests, seeing the damage for myself, strengthened my conviction that we must protect the natural resources we have here in our beautiful state.

If you have ever hiked in Connecticut, it is likely you have benefited from the Blue-Blazed Trails. Exploring all of them will take you through our many rich, dense forests; have you climbing with your hands on fern-covered rock scrambles on the Housatonic Range Trail; walking right through the Guilford Train Station on the Menunkatuck Trail; and admiring six-trunked white pines on the Wabbaquasset Trail. Hiking 800 unique miles is a real challenge, but it's meant to be savored. Don't forget to save something special for dessert.

Greg Gregory is a veterinary technician and a Master Naturalist. He has visited every Connecticut state park and forest. His favorite CFPA trail is the Housatonic Range Trail.

Tips for completing the Challenge

Log your miles after every hike.

Use the Connecticut Walk Book to get trail mileage.

Use a GPS app (Strava, AllTrails) to keep track of your hikes.

Reduce backtracking by making loops, getting rides, and doing bike drops.

Don't focus on speed so much that you forget to have fun!

Despite being the third-smallest state, Connecticut was recently named Best State in America for Hiking by the travel experts at Why This Place, thanks in part to its high proportion of hiking trails—a remarkable 1,455 hiking trails per 1,000 square miles. The Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System, an extensive network largely maintained by CFPA volunteers, boasts more than 825 miles. CFPA also sponsors a Hiking Challenge; prizes are awarded for completing 50, 200, 400, and 800 miles. For more information about the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails Challenge, go to ctwoodlands.org. Here are reflections from two hikers who recently completed the 800 Mile Challenge.

Arnold E. "Skip" Fredericksen

I've always enjoyed walking in the woods. As my daughters were growing up, my wife and I would take them on short hikes whenever we were on vacation. I took up solo day-hiking in my 50s as a substitute for road running. I'd hiked near my home in Peoples and American Legion state forests but didn't realize the number of trails in Connecticut until I did the Sky's the Limit Challenge in 2015 and 2016 and started doing planned hikes on the Blue-Blazed Trails. My hiking became more regular after that, focusing on long-distance trails like Tunxis, Mattabesett, and Metacomet. I hiked on weekends and half-day vacations until I retired in 2020. That's when my older daughter suggested that her sister and I join her on an Appalachian Trail thru-hike. On March 14, 2021, we started hiking in Amicalola Falls, Ga., and summited Katahdin 2200 miles and 205 days later. We celebrated my 68th birthday on the trail in Damascus, Va.

After returning home I needed to keep hiking. I finished section hiking the New England Trail, then set a goal of doing all the Blue-Blazed Trails. Other than the AT, all the Connecticut miles were done as day hikes, which makes it a lot easier to do big miles but requires looping or backtracking. Lots of planning is needed to lay out a hike, find a trailhead, and complete the hike on schedule. It was a great feeling of accomplishment to finish the 825 miles at Paradise Lane Campsite on May 22, 2023, just a few days after my 70th birthday.

Hiking all the Blue-Blazed Trails gave me an appreciation of the hard work that volunteers do to keep these trails open and clear. It is a constant battle against the weather to build and maintain bridges, repair erosion, wash outs, and damage from falling trees. Kudos to all volunteers!

Jennifer Kanaitis

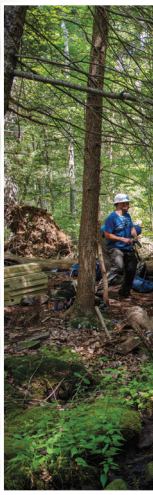
My goal to complete the 800 miles of Blue-Blazed Trails started in 2018. I heard about the Challenge from a friend in CT Trailmixers and thought it would be a great way to explore new trails throughout the state. It became a bit of an obsession over the next five years! I studied the Interactive Trails Map and read the Connecticut Walk Book for hours, mapping out my plans. I got out on the trails in all four seasons, in all types of weather, including one day where I was caught unexpectedly in a thunderstorm. I brought my friends and family along for the ride, recruiting them to shuttle me to a trailhead or to join me in the adventure.

One of the most memorable days was during a group run on the Appalachian Trail. We came across a rattlesnake! Luckily, we spotted him before he spotted us, and we all got some pictures from a distance. Another challenging day was completing my last section of the Mattabesett in February 2021 after a foot of fresh snow had fallen. We did not have snowshoes and it was tedious breaking trail. We were never so happy to see the trail head sign! I also remember the small moments, like coming across a giant tree on the Metacomet that looked like its arms were outstretched to welcome me or finding the rows of pines on the Tunxis Trail. Even the "ordinary moments" were special.

One of the reasons I loved this Challenge was it brought me to new places I would not have visited otherwise. This Challenge also fostered my confidence. Prior to this goal, I typically only hiked or ran on the trails with friends unless I was close to home. But with this Challenge, I often ventured out on my own, driving an hour or more to a place I'd never been. I found that I loved the solitude and the sense of accomplishment completing a trail by myself. Finishing the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails Challenge was truly one of the best experiences. I'd like to thank CFPA and volunteers for all they do to maintain our beautiful Blue-Blazed Trails.

Reflections of a Conservation Corps Crew Leader

By Anthony Martynski
Photos by Jake Koteen



My journey to working with CFPA's Conservation Corps program began in northern Wisconsin. Born and raised in Green Bay, I spent countless days outdoors hiking, camping, and running the Fox River trail that cuts through the surrounding farms and prairies. As I got older, I volunteered with local conservation organizations where I assisted with bird surveys and banding. In May of 2022, I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with my Bachelor of Science in biology, a minor in philosophy, and a certificate in environmental ethics. During my junior and senior years of college, I had developed a strong passion for philosophy, environmental ethics, and birds. After moving to Connecticut with my girlfriend who's enrolled in graduate school at Quinnipiac University, I learned about the Trail Crew Leadership position at CFPA and immediately applied for the job.

I started work in May, learning basic carpentry, trail cutting, chainsawing, and the use of trail tools such as saws, rock bars, pick mattocks, and cutter mattocks. My first field project was a seven-day backcountry spike in Bigelow Hollow State Park. For me, it was the most memorable spike because it was where our crew—Nick (my assistant), Lorenzo, Peter, Hunter, and I—truly bonded. We dug a latrine, drank (treated) water from a stream, and used a bear bag to safely secure our food and personal items. We considered this the "backcountry" because our trailer—with all our fresh food, water, and gear—was two miles up trail from our campsite, so we only went to the trailer when absolutely necessary.

The project involved relocating a portion of trail, removing an old decayed and broken bridge, and finding big stones to put in place for the new trail. We spent about five days selecting stones, each weighing 200 to 500 pounds, that could be properly shaped into a good stepping stone for this trail. When we found such a stone, there were two ways to move it. The first (and more difficult) method involved digging the rock up from underground using long, heavy rock bars to lift the rock, and then roll it onto a six-man carry sling. Then—working closely together—we would slowly transport the rock 50 to 70 feet through swampy terrain to where it would be set. Often, everyone ended up knee-deep in wet mud with bruised shins. The other method was to use rock bars to pry the rock out of the ground and move it to where it would be set. Once we got the rock in place, Lorenzo, one of our

most outgoing and funny crew members, would set crushed stone under the rock. By the time we finished, we had placed 33 stepping stones, which will help to make the trail safer for hikers and trail runners.

At the end of a hard, 10-hour day, we spent our evenings cooking dinner—often substituting various ingredients, such as using mayo instead of butter or adding jelly to the stir fry to give it some extra flavor—doing dishes, and playing card games such as Euchre, golf, or UNO next to a campfire before heading to bed.

My experience with CFPA is one that I will forever hold special in my heart because it taught me how to adapt to unfavorable conditions and situations in the field, including hot and humid weather, hordes of mosquitos, and other challenges that we encountered daily in the backcountry. It has also helped me to grow as a leader. I developed such a close bond with my fellow crew members it felt as if we had known each other our whole lives.

Writing the Land

Inspiring Young Poets in the Outdoors

By Jennifer Sprague

It was a chilly and damp morning in March when 18 students from Windham Middle School arrived at Goodwin State Forest for a full day of hiking and writing. The sixth, seventh, and eighth graders hiked along the trails and the lakefront, exploring the gardens and learning about native plants and birds—beech trees that hold on to their leaves in winter and frogs that lay hundreds of eggs only to leave them before they hatch. One student was especially fascinated by the colors and textures of moss.

"The excitement was palpable," said Beth Bernard, Education Director at CFPA and Program Director at the James L. Goodwin Conservation Center. "Doing this kind of learning outdoors—it got them curious. It was a nice break where they could engage their senses while they were learning." With their devices left behind, students made observations of what they saw, heard, and smelled in their field logs. Along with Bernard, their teacher, Patty Roy, and school administrator Marcus Ware, they were joined by poet V. Penelope Pelizzon. After the hike, the students spent time reading poetry and learning about literary techniques such as metaphor, simile, and imagery from Pelizzon, a professor of English at the University of Connecticut. Back at school, she worked with students to develop their poems, which they then read aloud for their peers.

While many of us engage with the outdoors through the lenses of recreation or science, the Hike & Write program fosters non-scientific thinking about nature. "Poetry is a kind of magic language that connects us to the world outside ourselves, as well as to our deepest inner imaginings," she said. "I can't think of a more exciting way to spend time, and I know there are others out there who might feel the same pleasure, given a proper introduction."

Students were selected for the Hike & Write program based on their interest in writing. Some have continued to write on their own, even after their initial poems were finished. A sixth grader who wrote another poem during a family outing was excited to bring it to school for Roy to read. "We have a lot of struggling readers and writers," she said. "We didn't pick the top academic kids, just kids who were interested in writing. It was really heartwarming just to see them embrace it."

Among the student poets were two sixth graders from the school's dual-language team who receive instruction in both Spanish and English. Those students were able to "work back and forth across languages," said Pelizzon. "Being able to think in more than one language is a great gift for a writer."

Playing with imagery, simile, and metaphor was especially fun for the students, she said. "Once you start paying

> "Poetry is a kind of magic language that connects us to the world outside ourselves, as well as to our deepest inner imaginings."
>
> V. Penelope Pelizzon, poet

attention, you hear metaphors in our everyday speech, and this is important because a new metaphor can help people perceive the world differently. Working with metaphor is one skill middle school kids have amazing capacity with; their brains are ripe for it."

This program also tackled a pressing issue: providing students with access and connection to the outdoors. Many American kids find that nature is "not easy to reach, or it feels too unfamiliar, or there's not a safe outdoor space for them," Pelizzon said. "A program like this offers a small antidote to that, a handful of kids at a time."

The 2000-acre Goodwin State Forest, with its three ponds and 19 miles of hiking trails, is a mere 15 minutes from Windham Middle School, but many students had never been there before. "People aren't aware of what the state forests have to offer us," Roy said. "One of the best things that came out of this is the students appreciating nature in a different way from going swimming or playing ball."

Pelizzon compiled the resulting poems in a print booklet and distributed copies to each student. In addition, Goodwin staff selected three poems by Alejandro Diaz, Hailee Christian, and Lily Kelly for inclusion in "Writing the Land: Channels," an anthology dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of land conservation. Due out this December, it will feature more than 40 poems highlighting preserved lands in Connecticut, Washington, Maine, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Vermont.

Pelizzon, who volunteers at Goodwin and conceived of Hike & Write, says the program serves as a model for how other environmental organizations can partner with public schools to create rich experiences for youth. She hopes it will become an annual event for Windham Middle School and envisions a statewide initiative that will train writers and naturalists to lead hiking and writing programs for students on public lands throughout Connecticut.

To purchase a copy of the "Writing the Land: Channels" anthology, visit nature-culture.net.

Jennifer Sprague is a digital marketer and freelance writer who serves on the board of the Meriden Land Trust. Her favorite outdoor activities are snowshoeing and camping.

Student poems

The Redwing Black bird Seen from Afar

by Alainy Guzman Rodriguez

A time of growth and development
After months of cold weather

In the forest where spring has arrived
Change is vast and prodigious
And beautiful to the eye

The Red Winged black bird can be seen flying from afar
With its beautiful black wings highlighted with
Markings of red and yellow

A sign spring has arrived
And winter has left

The red winged blackbird's chirps
Can be heard coming from up high
Accompanied with the sounds of the lake nearby

The lake is like a mirror, a mirror to the eye shining as bright as
Shimmering diamonds

As I'm viewing the lake something caught my eye
It's the red winged blackbird flying up high!

RAINDAYS

by Alison Gutierrez Cordero

Running outside, jumping
All over the puddles of
Imaginative endless holes.
No other day is more
Dashing and splendid
As the droplets covering
Your body with fresh water.
Spring is about to start!

Late September Snake

Edwina Trentham

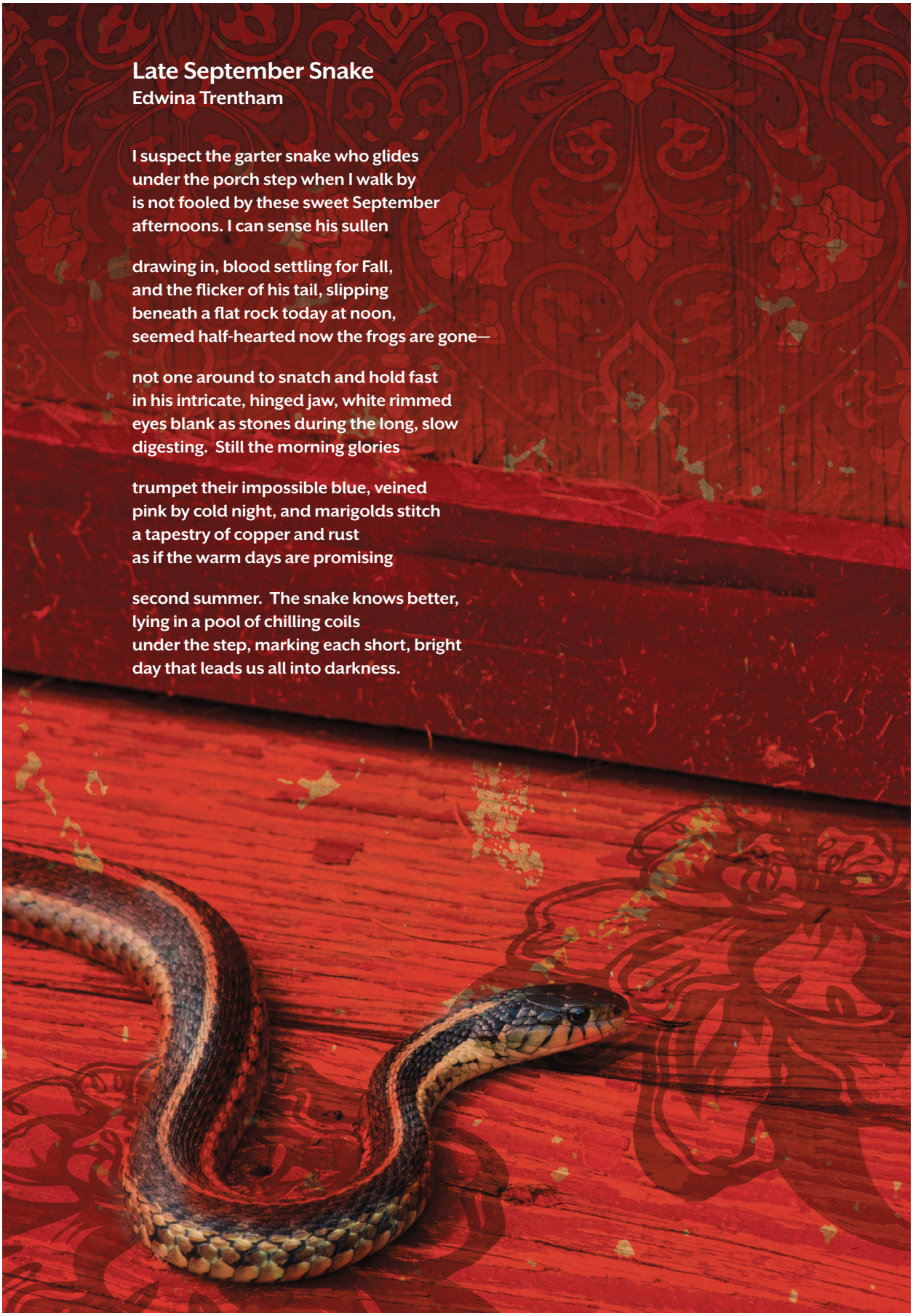
I suspect the garter snake who glides
under the porch step when I walk by
is not fooled by these sweet September
afternoons. I can sense his sullen

drawing in, blood settling for Fall,
and the flicker of his tail, slipping
beneath a flat rock today at noon,
seemed half-hearted now the frogs are gone—

not one around to snatch and hold fast
in his intricate, hinged jaw, white rimmed
eyes blank as stones during the long, slow
digesting. Still the morning glories

trumpet their impossible blue, veined
pink by cold night, and marigolds stitch
a tapestry of copper and rust
as if the warm days are promising

second summer. The snake knows better,
lying in a pool of chilling coils
under the step, marking each short, bright
day that leads us all into darkness.



Edwina Trentham taught English for 27 years at Asnuntuck Community College. She has had poems published in a variety of journals, and her work is included in five anthologies. Her collection of poetry, Stumbling into the Light, was published by Antrim House.

Sleeping Giant Evokes a Vision

A environmental literature course at North Haven High School culminates with a field trip to an iconic state park.

By Tara Stoeffler
Photos by Peter Sagnella

With stones crushing beneath our treaded shoes, we began the ascent to the tower. The sloped woodland gradually revealed some of its gems: elms, American basswoods, black birches. After some time, our class noticed a damaged strip where trees had fallen. Smaller plants had begun colonizing. We were reminded of the tornado that struck Sleeping Giant in May of 2018. Its scale of devastation remains evident today. Along the path, nurse logs provided areas for vines to flourish, as well as protection for small animals. Seeing this real-life example of succession only deepened my appreciation for nature's ability to heal and continually provide for itself—and for humans—even after destruction, whether due to natural or anthropogenic causes.

Each year, rising seniors at North Haven High School can enroll in an environmental literature class called "Visions of Nature." I have always loved being in and learning about nature, so I decided to explore a new genre with which I already had a connection. This past semester, I read essays, memoirs, and poems from noted local writers and iconic environmental authors. Two readings from our course resonated with me the most: "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks" by Edward Abbey, and "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Abbey vehemently opposes the industrial development of national parks for convenience and transportation, advocating for the preservation of wilderness. Kimmerer uses sustainable values and an Indigenous creation story to illustrate a healthy relationship between humans and the Earth. As I gained glimpses of these writers' unique perspectives—and others, like Henry David Thoreau or Annie Dillard—my own view of nature, or "vision," began to take shape.

In addition to reading a variety of texts, our class enjoyed several experiential learning opportunities throughout the year. We took frequent walks on our school's property to explore its wooded areas and recorded our observations in a nature journal as part of a larger field guide project. These types of visual assignments felt foreign at first yet came easily. They elicited not only an external discussion among our class but also an internal one that allowed each of us to focus on anything we found intriguing. These walks culminated with a field trip to Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden. For much of our hike, most of us stuck to a moderate route. A few of my peers, however, would veer off the main trail to paths that were more demanding and required a heightened level of attention to footing and balance. The Blue-Blazed Trail, for example, was intimidating. I could tell that some people were hesitant to deviate from our comfortable path, yet we all embraced the trail's difficulty and were able to meet its challenges.

I see the Blue Trail as analogous to the road that will lead us to reclaim control of our climate. We need to follow a path that calls us to be conscious of our steps, since mistakes can lead to dire consequences. It may seem daunting at first, and it may feel uncomfortable in the beginning. Like my fellow hikers, though, I believe in time we all can adjust comfortably to a reality that once seemed impossible.

With our last strides, we reached the tower. From the top, our gazes extended to the treetops that swayed in a swath of green. In the distance, sky met sea in varying shades of blue. Hawks circled just below the clouds. Our class, taught by Peter Sagnella, gathered to read aloud David Leff's poem, "Sleeping Giant," while immersed in the landscape he so vividly captured. Prior to his untimely passing in May of 2022, Leff joined "Visions of Nature" classes on their annual Sleeping Giant hike. His timeless words of admiration and reverence for this local beauty bring life to the giant in "deep, stony sleep." The land comes alive with allusions to The Legend of Hobbomock, a Quinnipiac tale in which the giant is induced to sleep by the good spirit of Keihtan. The story illustrates an intimate connection between Indigenous peoples and the land. Their relationship serves as a model for the reader to emulate. Leff also focuses on the quarrying of the giant's head, starting with its lease to the Mount Carmel Traprock Company in 1911, as evidence of human impact on the landscape. "The poetry gave the seemingly ordinary and still landscape a heartbeat," my classmate Alivia Renna said.

We headed back down the trail, already reminiscing about our day's observations. Suddenly, I saw others slowing down ahead of me, veering into a clearing on our right. I peered through thick woods and saw deep orange and brown rock peeking out among a canopy of trees. My classmates walked in its direction, lured by the enormity of the cliff ahead of them.

Needless to say, if any part of our hike confirmed Leff's assertion of this landmark's "colossal presence," it was the Sleeping Giant quarry. The lookout tower is still the focal point of the mountain, nevertheless, this was an unexpected yet remarkable scene. But the view was bittersweet. The cliff was visually stunning yet highlighted the clash of values regarding the preservation of nature. The hollowed-out scar revealed the intentions of the traprock company to obtain and transport stone, a reminder that human activity can result in irreversible damage to our planet. The quarry exemplified the merging of industrialism and the natural world, which we had previously read about in Abbey's essay. Further, it reminded us of the change that our planet is enduring as a result of an imbalanced relationship between humans and nature, as Kimmerer addresses in her work.

My own "vision" was formed as a result of my time spent in nature, both in our class and on my own, together with our study of influential environmental writers, thinkers, and activists. Most of all, our hike reinforced the importance of admiring the Earth where you are. We must make conscious decisions to experience and understand nature in order to willfully invest in its protection.

Tara Stoeffler is a 2023 graduate from North Haven High School who plans to further her education at Merrimack College. She enjoys reading and spending time outdoors with her parents, two older siblings, and best friends.

While paddling along the lakeshore, I'm sometimes startled by a bird bursting from a perch and darting over the water with a harsh rattling call. I know I won't be able to observe it by paddling to catch up because it constantly moves to stay ahead of me. This bird may be noisy, but it's also kind of shy and doesn't want any part of me.

Bird identification can be challenging, but when you see or hear a kingfisher, there is little doubt what it is. At the slightest disturbance, it takes flight and voices its wild call. Perched on a branch over the water surveying the prospects of a meal or preening its feathers, it cuts a distinctive profile. It's a rather stubby bird with a large head, short wings, a short tail, and a dagger-like bill that seems out of proportion to its overall size. Its head is topped with a shaggy crest that flutters when there's a breeze, often making it stand straight up.

CONNECTICUT'S

Kingly Fishers

By Laurie D. Morrissey

The kingfisher is also notable for its coloration and markings. It is brightly colored with a slaty-blue back and bright white underparts. In the sunshine, its feathers have a metallic sheen, an iridescence caused not by pigments but by a feather structure that shatters blue light. Between the bird's eye and its bill there is a large white dot. Furthermore, this species of kingfisher wears a clearly visible belt on its white breast. Males and females sport a blue-gray belt. Females wear two: a blue one on the upper breast and a rust-colored one across its middle. Kingfishers are among the few bird species in which the female is not only more colorful, but slightly larger than the male.

Of the many kingfisher species worldwide (including Australia's laughing kookaburra), the belted kingfisher, *Megaceryle alcyon*, is the only one native to Connecticut. You'll find these flashy birds near streams, rivers, lakes, and coastal waters (and the occasional backyard goldfish pond) where they hunt for aquatic prey. Their fishing success is due partly to their exceptional vision in which their eyes adjust to changes in refraction during their speedy dives. Like loons and other diving birds, they have transparent eyelids called nictating membranes that protect their eyes like goggles as they hit the water. If the shallow dive is successful, the bird alights nearby and smacks its prize against a branch, then positions it to slide down its beak head-first.

I've seen many a kingfisher in action, but I will never see a kingfisher nest. Their nests and nestlings are well-hidden from potential predators and curious humans like me. These birds are among the few in North America that nest in cavities they excavate themselves. Male and female work together digging a tunnel in a steep

Female Kingfisher

I've seen many a kingfisher in action, but I will never see a kingfisher nest. Their nests and nestlings are well-hidden from potential predators and curious humans like me.

earthen bank with the aid of specially adapted toes. Two of the bird's toes are partially fused, which helps them push dirt back out of the tunnel entrance as they dig.

Kingfishers select their real estate with care, digging a few test holes first looking for a nest site that is dry, protected from wind, and virtually impregnable. A good fishing lake isn't necessarily a great nesting site. The preferred address is a high, narrow bank near the food source, easily diggable, and free of roots. It's too unstable to be climbed; high enough to be safe from rising water or swimming snakes and minks; and too far from the top of the bank to be within a raccoon's reach. Besides natural banks, kingfishers often make use of human-created sites such as abandoned sand and gravel operations, road cuts, and construction site dirt piles.

The typical kingfisher nesting burrow extends three to six feet into the bank, but some go much deeper, up to 15 feet; quite a feat for a short-legged bird all of 12 inches long. If you see a tennis ball-sized hole in a steep bank, it's probably a kingfisher's nest burrow. Bank swallows, the only other bank-nesting local bird, nest in colonies and make smaller holes. At the end of the gently up-sloping tunnel, the kingfisher pair excavate a 10 to 12-inch chamber where the female lays between five and 10 eggs. The nestlings hatch three and a half weeks later and remain in the burrow until late July or early August.

As the hatchlings grow, their parents bring them fish, snails, and other small prey—partially digested at first, and later whole. Much of the kingfisher's diet is bony and scaly, but the young birds are able to digest it due to their acidic stomach chemistry. Over time, their stomachs become less acidic and they get rid of the refuse in the form of regurgitated pellets, which accumulate below the tunnel entrance.

The kingfishers' nesting strategy is highly successful, as observed by biologists such as Dan Albano, who documented his research in the 1990s. Researching the birds along a 56-mile stretch of the Connecticut River for his doctoral thesis, he observed that male kingfishers are every bit as involved as the females, and maybe more, in every phase of the breeding cycle except egg-laying. They did more of the digging, fed their mates during the laying period, and made more fishing trips. He also documented a high breeding success rate: few eggs failed to hatch and few nestlings failed to fledge. While kingfishers are common in the state and they are listed as a species of least concern, these birds (not surprisingly) are vulnerable to human pressure.

"Kingfishers have been on a slow decline since the 1960s," says Milan Bull, senior director of science and conservation at the Connecticut Audubon Society. "The cause may be due to a variety of reasons, chiefly nesting habitat loss. There are likely fewer undisturbed vertical sand banks available than were more common historically when river channels changed and banks caved in. Sand and gravel operations probably provide most of the current habitat, but kingfishers are easily disturbed from active sites."

Fortunately, kingfishers are still a frequent sight, even staying around in winter where there are open streams. They are "partial migrants" with some individuals wintering south of New England. Knowing something about these shaggy-crested "fisher kings," their hunting skills, and their domestic arrangements makes me even more impressed when I hear that telltale rattle over the water.

Laurie D. Morrissey is a New Hampshire-based writer of articles, essays, and poetry. Her work has appeared in Connecticut Woodlands since 2016 when she wrote about her father, state park ranger Bill Dougal. Her writing has appeared in Northern Woodlands, Art New England, New Hampshire Home, Appalachia, and numerous poetry journals.

Pathways

In 1886, Robbins Battell, a philanthropist and former advisor to President Abraham Lincoln, constructed a wooden tower on the summit of the 1,716-foot Haystack Mountain in Norfolk, on land which he had purchased for the purposes of conservation. Mr. Battell invited the public to climb his tower and enjoy its panoramic views, an unusual move for the time. The tower, which he named the Haystack Belvedere, was destroyed during a storm in 1924.

In 1929, Ellen Stoeckel, Mr. Battell's daughter, donated $50,000 to the state (nearly $900,000 today) to construct a permanent stone tower on the summit. Erected that same year, the Haystack Mountain Tower, or Stoeckel Memorial Tower, is 50 feet high and 22 feet in diameter. A classic example of the Tudor Revival style, which harkens back to the Middle Ages, the tower was designed by the renowned architect Erick K Rossiter who had a nearby summer home. It features locally quarried limestone, 30-inch-thick walls, helical concrete steps, and eight windows at the top. The original structure also had a red oak door hung on wrought iron hinges and a beacon light. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps built a paved road, Stoeckel Drive, from Route 272 to a parking area halfway up the mountain. The tower was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

Today, the tower is the crown jewel of the 292-acre Haystack Mountain State Park. Visitors who climb to the summit can enjoy spectacular 360-degree views—particularly in the autumn—of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and even Vermont's Green Mountains.

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