

A DOCENT'S DIARY

By Jan Cunningham

It was in the early spring of 2023 that I first encountered Land Trust staff member, Polly Jones on the top of Beech Hill. I had been hiking up on quite a regular basis for a few years now, and it was on one of those walks that I discovered the Hut at the top was... *open*. I told Polly how much I loved this place, and she encouraged me to become a docent. After hearing the responsibilities, (fill the dog water bowl, chat with the visitors), well, who could resist? Not I.

Especially when she said I would have the KEY to the Hut. It was like waving a Dove chocolate bar in my face. Oh, and I could set my own hours. Now a whole chorus line of chocolate bars were dancing in front of me, doing a tango... I quickly agreed on the spot! And because I'm a nerd of a particular type, (lists, pens, papers, maps, charts), I began to document some of my most memorable experiences over the summer.

My recollection is that in the first few weeks I behaved. I began reading all the handouts, the trail guides, the fat notebook with the history and the construction of the Hut... I may have even written a crib sheet for myself so when visitors approached, I could be standing at attention, fully alert, and ready to answer. But I would soon learn, you can't predict what Beech Hill might inspire....



Entry #1: Ghost Hunter

In July, a mother and her son came up to the Hut. The boy looked to be about 6 years old, and he would come to the door a few times and give me a side wise glance and then step back in. The mom said he was a shy kid and not to be offended. The next time he appeared at the door, he stood on the mat and asked me point blank if there were any ghosts in the house. Shy Kid had disappeared, and *Ghost Hunter* came to the front! No ghosts, I said, but he assured me that there was a graveyard down that path to the left. I told him that we needed to check it out. So off we marched with his mother trailing behind in honest bewilderment. She whispered that he never talks to strangers. I told her it was the *magic of Beech*. We never found the graveyard but between the three of us we consumed all the chocolate in my pack as we sat on the bench in complete contentment after our search.

I have many more stories from this past summer but confined to a reasonable newsletter length, you'll have to read about *The Great Geologist*, *The Coffee Couple*, *The Kids and Kites*, *The Chandelier Dangler*, and *The Trolls* (not the internet kind, but, you know, trolls), in a future entry post.

I thought at the beginning of my docent year on Beech that it would be all about giving back in service to a place I love, getting to be part of a bigger community that loves it dearly. And it was all of that — but in the end, Beech continues every day to enrich *me*.



Jan Cunningham (Camden)
Beech Hill Docent



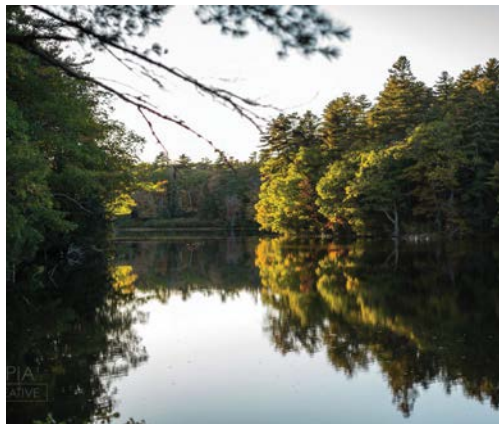
PRESERVING PARADISE

By Elisabeth Wolfe

Tantalizing smells of moss and pines, echoing calls of great horned owls, emerald beams of light on forest floors. All this and more convinced me of the need to preserve this place I have come to love. It is 23 acres on the edge of the existing McLellan-Poor Preserve in Northport.

This is land that has been heartily used over the years. Originally it must have been an old farmstead, given the hollowed out, abandoned stone foundation near Herrick Rd. In 1981, when we moved from Oregon to the property across the street, it was an active gravel pit. The quarry was soon tapped out and left abandoned to the outdoor play of a couple of slightly wild Cunning boys and their friends. Poplar Fort was built; frogs and the stray duck inhabited a watering hole left by the excavation. We didn't own the 40 or so acres then but dreamed of adding it to our existing acreage and allowing it to grow back to its former beauty. Through the generosity of the previous owner, we eventually bought it and continued to roam the old trails. Then we forged a few new ones to create a cross country ski loop that bordered Brewster and Ramsey Brooks that drained into the Little River. It became our church. Pirate's Cove, Reservoir Loop, Fiddler's Crook labelled to solidify memories of our explorations.

So we wondered—how to move forward with this long used, somewhat abused land? One answer came when a local company offered to fill in the over 10-acre gravel pit with clean fill. The



moonscape soon became a wide-open blank slate ready for horticultural paint. Still, what to do? As I hiked the McLellan-Poor Preserve, the answer became clear: Add it to the existing 77 acres that had previously been saved from development. Enlarge the existing preserve to aid in carbon capturing and do a little bit to help mitigate the effects of climate change. Create a greater opportunity for our community to have amazing experiences in nature as I have been so blessed to have.

In December 2023, my husband Michael Cunning and I donated the 23 acres to Coastal Mountain Land Trust. Thanks to Ian Stewart and Heather Rogers for paving the way and making it a seamless process. This donation means not only can our family continue to traipse throughout this land and the other 77 acres of McLellan-Poor, but our entire community can bask in its beauty and wildlife.



Elisabeth Wolfe (Belfast)

Land Donor

*Waldo County Conservation Initiative
Committee Chair*

THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Working together to chart the course ahead



2023 Annual Meeting and Volunteer Celebration

You may recognize by now that this is a special edition of the newsletter written by and from the perspective of current members. When our team reflected on our accomplishments this past year and stories we might want to feature in this newsletter for Land Protection (conserving our first preserves in the towns of Waldo and Morrill), Stewardship (opening a new trail at the Marsh Meadow Preserve), and Community Engagement (45 free events, and connecting more and more kids with the outdoors), we kept coming back to the root of what made it possible — YOU — our members. Whether you joined one of our committees this year, helped us stuff envelopes, monitored trails, brought a friend to one of our events, or simply renewed your membership, I want you to know that it all adds up and makes a tremendous impact.

As we embark on our strategic planning process this year, your insights, ideas, and perspectives will be invaluable as we chart the course for our organization's future. Your involvement will ensure that our plan for the future reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of our community. Thank you for being a member and I look forward to keeping in touch with opportunities throughout the year for you to continue to contribute and shape the direction of Coastal Mountains Land Trust!

Executive Director

IN MEMORY

Recognizing four long-time members and volunteers at the Land Trust

John Doncaster served four terms on our board, one as president, between 1995 and 2012. He was deeply involved in the effort to conserve Bald and Ragged Mountains and was the original author of the title *Happy Wanderers*, a name he gave to the hike series he led throughout the coastal mountains.

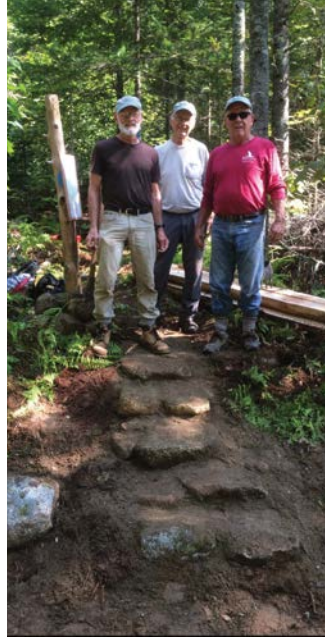
Pat Renn was a member of the Land Trust's first board of directors in 1987. Speaking with her daughter shortly after her passing, we learned that amongst her many accomplishments, Pat felt that the conservation of Beech Hill, which led to the creation of this organization, was one of her proudest accomplishments.

Jeff Colquhoun, a local painter known for his beautiful depictions of Maine's natural landscapes, served as member of the Land Trust's Board of Directors in 2015 and was a regular visitor to our preserves and trails.

Doug Warren was a member of the family that was responsible for the donation of the Hattie Lamb tract to Fernalds Neck Preserve. Doug, a long-time trail steward, also gifted an additional two acres to the preserve in 2008.

THE ALLURE OF TRAIL CREW WORK

By Dan Reeve



After moving to Northport several years ago, my wife and I were pleased to find that one of Coastal Mountains Land Trust's preserves was only about a mile from our house. This made it a perfect destination for walks. On one of our walks, we found that a fairly large spruce tree had fallen across the preserve's trail and had nicely blocked it. Since I had a chainsaw and had cut firewood for years, my first impulse was to get my saw and clean up the mess. Fortunately, I had a second thought, and that was to call the Land Trust, report the problem, and ask how I should proceed. Chainsawing on the preserve without permission seemed like a dubious undertaking. Several days later, I met with the stewardship manager for this area, and we took care of the problem tree. As we talked about the work involved with caring for preserves, he correctly guessed that I might be someone he could recruit to join the group of Trail Crew volunteers who generally meet one morning each week to maintain the preserves.

Joining the group of volunteers seemed like an intriguing idea to me, so I did it. I quickly came to appreciate that helping to maintain the preserves was rewarding in two quite different ways. First, because the Land Trust has so many preserves, there seems to be an endless work list of tasks to be done to keep each one accessible, inviting, and safe for hikers. Encouraging people to get out and enjoy beautiful natural areas is one of the important goals of the Land Trust. As a volunteer member of a trail crew there is a great deal of satisfaction in seeing the obvious improvements we can make in the trail system with just the effort put into a few work sessions. Keeping trails open, building stairways, adding bog bridging to wet areas, and building real water spanning bridges are

all typical types of projects that a trail crew will undertake. Another task that is important, but not directly associated with the trail system, is making sure the boundaries of the preserves are clearly marked and easy to walk along. This is important to deter or detect encroachment, such as logging, on the preserves. I find that clearing boundaries can be fun because it may take you to places that you might ordinarily avoid, but which can be quite interesting despite their steepness, wetness, or other challenges.

In addition to the satisfaction that volunteers derive from the improvements they make to the preserves, I find that there is also a lot of personal pleasure that comes from getting out for a productive morning in the woods every week. The volunteers that I have worked with all come from different backgrounds, so there is quite a variety of experience and knowledge within a group of volunteers. You can usually count on learning something interesting or useful from your colleagues every week, and they are a congenial group to be part of. There always seems to be a need for more volunteers, so I would encourage anyone who enjoys working in the great outdoors to come and give it a try. It might just be a perfect fit for you too.



Dan Reeve (Northport)
Wednesday Work Crew Volunteer

OTTER TRAILS LEARNING ON THE LAND

By Coral Breuer



A poem by Otter Trails

Bluebirds are singing
We are singing beside them.
The trees dance along

The trees are dancing
we are dancing with the trees
the chickadees sing

“We’re Otter Trails! It’s like a summer camp, but all the time. We are out in nature, like an adventure program. It’s a place where you do stuff outside and inside for 6 hours every day. We play games, make ecosystems, learn about interesting topics, and we sweat on our foreheads!”—Current Student

As an outdoor educator who has a lifelong love of children, nature, farming, and the sea, it’s fulfilling to lead this three-day-a-week homeschooling enrichment program. We believe in the power of learning together and so the children (ages 8–11) focus on nature education and life-learning through community engagement. Our community-driven approach fosters collaboration and shared experiences, allowing students to grow both

academically and socially in a supportive environment. We actively engage with our local community, venturing out to explore and learn from the world around us. Since September 2023, we have been using Head of Tide Preserve in Belfast as our classroom. Our students have connected with the land, giving names (like Turtle Town) to their favorite spots along the trail and discovering bountiful wildlife within the woods. Since arriving at Head of Tide, Otter Trails students have fostered a sense of connection to the Preserve through trail projects with Land Trust staff and hosting a luminary walk for members of the community. Having access to conservation land and these partners is so enriching for these students.

After a trek up Bald Mountain I heard a student say proudly — *“It’s very rewarding to get to the top! I got up the mountain!”* — and after returning from a rainy walk on Mount Megunticook another say — *“So much rain! We tucked under a tarp, singing for a long time. It was so fun!”*

At Otter Trails, we believe in the magic that happens when work and play become indistinguishable. Connection to nature and the community inspire this fusion.



Coral Breuer (Belfast)
Lead Outdoor Educator,
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Stewardship staff and
volunteers walk supplies
up the Little River

I JOINED THE BOARD!

By Keelia Liptak-Jay

Nice to meet you! I joined the Land Trust Board in December and am proud to be a part of this organization! Growing up in the woods in Vermont, I was instilled with a love for the outdoors. I first connected with the Land Trust through my work as a Project Coordinator for Community Health at Pen Bay Medical Center and Waldo County General Hospital. I fell in love with their mission and soon became a founding member of the Happy Wanderers program, where Community Health and Coastal Mountains Land Trust collaborate each month to connect people and get them moving outdoors. I hope to meet you out on the trails this spring — you'll probably see me walking with my two best pals Penny and Lina!



Keelia Liptak-Jay (Tenants Harbor)
Board Member

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Belfast, Belmont, Morrill, Waldo, Swanville, Brooks,
Knox, Searsport, Stockton Springs, and Prospect

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