



Pivoting in the Pandemic

By John Gregg

The Pinnacle trails have remained a popular outlet during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we hope you are continuing to enjoy them.

A walk in the woods with a friend—socially distanced and with a mask at hand, of course—is one of the best ways to relieve some stress, get some exercise, and enjoy the natural world around us.

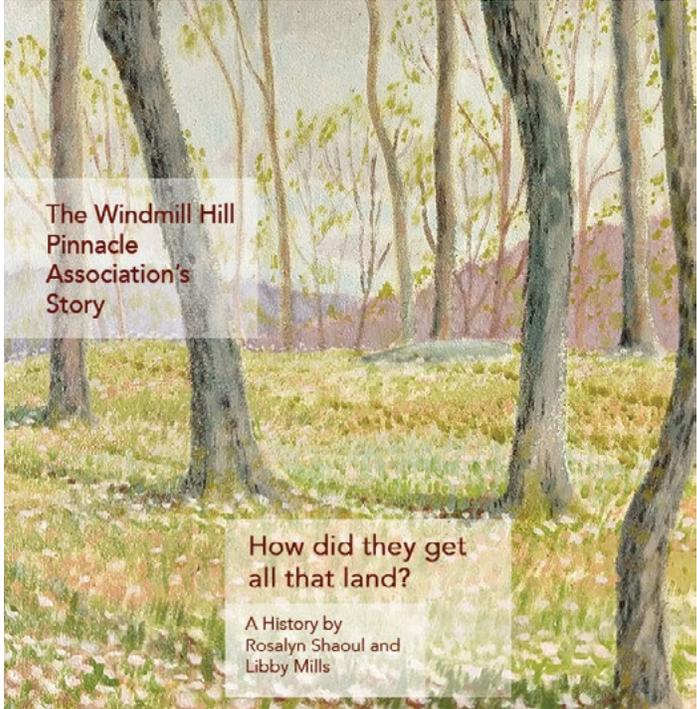
Regrettably, the ongoing pandemic has forced us to cancel much of our programming, including Accessibility Day.

But we do have something to look forward to as the weather gets a little colder. Later this fall, we will be offering a program highlighting the new book *The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association Story: How did they get all that land?*, which tells the history of the Windmill Ridge Nature Reserve and its trails, and how it came to be.

Authors Rosalyn Shaoul and Libby Mills will discuss what’s in the book—including detailed maps, graceful paintings, and key photos—and how a grassroots effort that started in Westminster West soon grew to encompass about 2,100 acres in five towns, stretching from Westminster to Grafton and including Brookline, Rockingham, and Athens.

In addition, the program will also include the first public airing of *How It All Began*, a 16-minute video on the Pinnacle Association by Wendy Wallas, co-produced with Libby and Rosalyn. The video includes footage of the dedication of the Jamie Latham Trail in 1997. Stay tuned for more details on when and how to view the program.

In the meantime, consider making just a \$25 donation to WHPA to receive a copy of Libby and Rosalyn’s book. It will help you get a better sense of all the ridgeline has to offer. It is also a fun resource for visiting friends and family. They will be able to visit eventually and enjoy an afternoon on the trails! Go to our website at windmillhillpinnacle.org to learn more and donate.



An Update on Pinnacle Trails, Cabin, and Parking
All 26 miles of Pinnacle trails remain open. Please observe social distancing and mask-wearing with people outside your household. The following are closed: the parking lot at the foot of the Holden Trail, the cabin, and the outhouse. Parking is also not allowed along the private length of Windmill Hill Road North. It’s the best way for us to limit unsafe clustering by people who aren’t adhering to Vermont’s effective COVID precautions and to comply with “Stay Safe” guidelines from Montpelier. This is an excellent opportunity to access the ridgeline and see some new terrain from another of our trailheads, which have smaller parking lots that are open. Check our website, windmillhillpinnacle.org, for ongoing updates.

Photo credit: Migrating geese by PutneyPics/Flickr

By Libby Mills

The COVID pandemic has shown all kinds of gaps, contradictions, and ironies in our society. The concept of quarantine is just one of these, but it played in my mind as I walked the Pinnacle trails in the spring of 2020. At that time, so many people were cooped up indoors, alone or perhaps with too many bodies to be comfortable—while I with my friends explored the miles of Putney Mountain and Pinnacle trails. Together, we had planned to walk from the Dummerston town line to Grafton, on as many



From left: Pat Shields, Libby Mills, Kai George, Louise Garfield. Not shown: Elizabeth Christie, Mary Stowe (photographer)

trails as we could fit into our days. Socially distanced and masked when appropriate, we obeyed the rules—but we knew in our bones that we were quarantined in paradise.

Starting on Putney Mountain Association's Hannum Trail, just north of the Dummerston/Putney town line in late March, we brushed snow from overhanging hemlocks and relished little patches of dry ground. Two months later, we were swatting away black flies as we came to the end of the Pinnacle trail in Grafton. We six oldsters who hiked the Ridgeline Trail from south to north set no speed records, but instead savored the landscape, one day each week during the emerging spring.

The sharp impact of COVID restrictions shaped our walk. Correctly distanced from each other, with no sharing of rides, each day's route was a loop as we hiked from one kiosk to another, then back again by a different trail when possible—so in the end we'd done the trail in both directions, south to north and north to south.

Our little band of intrepid women ranged in age from 68 to 91, averaging out at 78 years old. All of us had been outdoor educators, in one form or another, at some point in our long lives; three of us were active Putney Mountain Association board members, and one also served on the Pinnacle board. We knew the ridgeline in principle and were dedicated to its conservation. But walking through the Reserve mile by mile made the map come alive—moving through the forest communities, from dense hemlock on the steep western slopes to open stands of red oak, hop hornbeam, and young maple in more gentle terrain, all of it laced together with old stone walls and a few abandoned roads.

The glacial erratics warranted close viewing, with Creature Rock making the rest seem minuscule. With luck, lunch break came as we approached some open vista. Best of all may have been the range of spring wildflowers: these ephemerals were at the height of glory in the open forest canopy during the time frame of our walk. Highlights were spring beauties and hepatica in the rich woods near the Holden Trail, trout lilies on the Jamie Latham Trail, early saxifrage on the rocky Sleepy Valley Trail, and maybe most unusual for this area, the painted trillium and bunchberry nestled into the spruces of the Wetland Trail in Athens Dome.

With no exceptions, trail conditions were superb, thanks to those stewards who must have been on the ground early in the season. The variation in the trail use was notable, ranging from the worn, wide walkways on Putney Mountain to the spongy soft paths of Athens Dome. All along, the handsome green and white trail signs kept us on course. The volunteer hours given to the Ridgeline Trail deserve recognition!

The final lesson was a profound gratitude for having all of this at our fingertips when all over the globe, so many were isolated in small spaces. That, and a deepened understanding of the importance of conserving our neighboring lands. It matters!

Field Note: Rock Tripe Lichen, *Umbilicaria Esculenta*

By Vanessa Stern

My first introduction to the lichen genus *Umbilicaria* was this summer while reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. My mother read it, too, and shortly after we completed the book, she spent an evening pointing out the myriad flat, round lichens that covered many of the rocks, boulders, and trees on our property.

Umbilicaria, the "belly button of the world," as Robin calls this genus of lichen in her writing, refers to its single attachment in the middle, like a navel.

Rock tripe is the common name for various lichens of the genus *Umbilicaria* that grow on rocks, including the lichen *Umbilicaria esculenta*. This is a foliose lichen, meaning that it has two distinguishable sides, a top and a bottom.

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Remembering Arthur Westing

By John Gregg

It is with sadness and great appreciation that we remember Arthur Westing, who, with his wife Carol, was a charter member and early trustee of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association and worked enthusiastically to help it find its footing and grow.

A Brooklyn-born Eagle Scout and Marine Corps captain during the Korean War, Arthur earned a master's degree in forestry from Yale University in 1954 and completed his doctoral studies in plant physiology and ecology there in 1959.

An advocate both for peace and the environment, he taught at several academic institutions, including serving as dean of the School of Natural Sciences at Hampshire College and chair of the Biology Department at Windham College.

He also became known as an international expert on the environmental damage of war, and played a key role in highlighting the dangers from Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

He and Carol were key members of WHPA. In 1992, Arthur drafted the original charter, bylaws, and other founding documents, and also helped the organization gain nonprofit status. In addition, he wrote the original forest management plan for Pinnacle land. He contributed to trail guides, sponsored signs marking key donors to WHPA lands, and in 2008 wrote a brief history of the WHPA.

Along the way, he was ever curious, always encouraging of others, and a warm and welcoming figure to people who were new to the trails or the organization.

"His contributions to the Pinnacle Association were tremendous, and his knowledge and obvious love of our landscape was deep," said Libby Mills, a WHPA board member who became a trustee with Arthur in 1996.

Longtime residents of Westminster West and Putney, Arthur and Carol had moved to Wake Robin in Shelburne, Vt., a few years ago. Arthur died on April 30, 2020, at age 91 while he and Carol sat on a bench after a hike in the woods there.



Arthur Westing, left, with his wife Carol Westing

Field Note, continued

Like all lichens, it is composed of layers of fungus and algae, the only life form like this in the world. Scientists have been puzzled by this unique symbiotic relationship, so much so that some have tried to replicate this coupling in the lab. Partnering was non-existent until the scientists created a harsh and stressful environment. Only then did the two organisms seek out the company of each other.

Given that lichens have graced our Earth for 400 million years, their symbiotic relationship is clearly a success. Rock tripe has fed the hungry in times of famine, and is a delicacy in some Asian countries. Continued to be used medicinally today, lichen is one of earth's early healers.

I find Robin Wall Kimmerer's affectionate name for the humble lichen more than suitable. As I conjure the image of *Umbilicaria esculenta* connected to its rock home by its navel, I can't help but imagine all of humanity connected to our Mother Earth by the belly button of the world. We have a lot to learn from this ancient organism.



Umbilicaria lichen on the Undercliff Trail

NOTE: Never pick or remove rock tripe lichen, as it's very slow-growing. You can see this lichen at Creature Rock, rock faces on the Undercliff trail below Paul's Ledges, and on a large vertical rock wall alongside the trail at the height of the Athens Dome to the west of Kidder Hill Road in Grafton.

By John Gregg

The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association is run almost entirely by volunteers, with no paid staff and some contract work on the website, bookkeeping, and other services provided by local vendors.

The annual audit review is pending but WHPA is reporting that in fiscal year 2020, we had operating expenses of \$49,708, which included \$8,599 in property taxes, \$5,272 in insurance premiums, and \$4,784 for roads and gates. Other spending included costs related to outside services, such as legal fees, fundraising expenses, and printing.

All told, we had \$112,642 in total income, with almost 37 percent of the money going into the endowment to help with long-term stewardship of the ridgeline.

Thanks to your generous donations, the annual appeal raised \$16,430, unsolicited donations totaled almost \$21,000, and other revenue included \$13,538 in various grants and \$5,059 in investment income. To protect bear habitat, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department purchased the development rights and placed an easement on the WHPA Goodridge property in the Athens Dome area adjacent to the Turner Wildlife Management Area for \$38,000. Most of that money has been invested in the WHPA stewardship endowment in order to pay the property taxes and insurance.

The Pinnacle Association also benefited from more than 2,800 hours of volunteer work from trail stewards and the board, the equivalent of about \$71,500 in donated services.

An anonymous donation honoring the late Beverly Major and her husband Randy has also helped us launch the Major Fund, which, fittingly, we hope to see grow with donations from the community to



Monarch butterfly. Photo by PutneyPics/Flickr

help with major projects down the road. Bev helped found the Pinnacle Association and was the longtime chair, and Randy, who also served as a trustee, was instrumental in the development of the trail system and the Bald Hill acquisition.

We have also revised our acquisition guidelines and land management plan, which will guide our work into the future as we seek to conserve additional lands along Windmill Ridge and manage them to promote healthy forests that support wildlife such as songbirds and black bears; filter groundwater and capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; and provide recreational opportunities to the public.

WHPA is also completing a new strategic plan to guide our conservation work over the next five years.

Thank you to all our members and supporters for all you do to make our conservation work possible. If you're not already a member, you can become a lifetime member today for only \$35 by visiting our website at windmillhillpinnacle.org.

Welcoming Our New WHPA Board Members

Welcome to our new board members for 2020-2021!

- Zachary Aldrich, Cambridgeport, Vt. Carpenter, Athens Dome trail steward
- John Gregg, Westminster West, Vt. Journalist, communication background /skills
- Jay Maciejowski, Athens, Vt. Retired State Forester, government and nonprofit experience
- Lisa Merton, Westminster West, Vt. Filmmaker, nonprofit and fundraising experience
- Erin Rodgers, Brattleboro, Vt. Stream restoration ecologist, regional contacts, science

WANTED: YOUR PHOTOS! Please take photos or videos of your hikes on Pinnacle trails, in all seasons, and share them with us on our [Facebook page](#) or via email, whpa@sover.net.



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