

Fall 2005

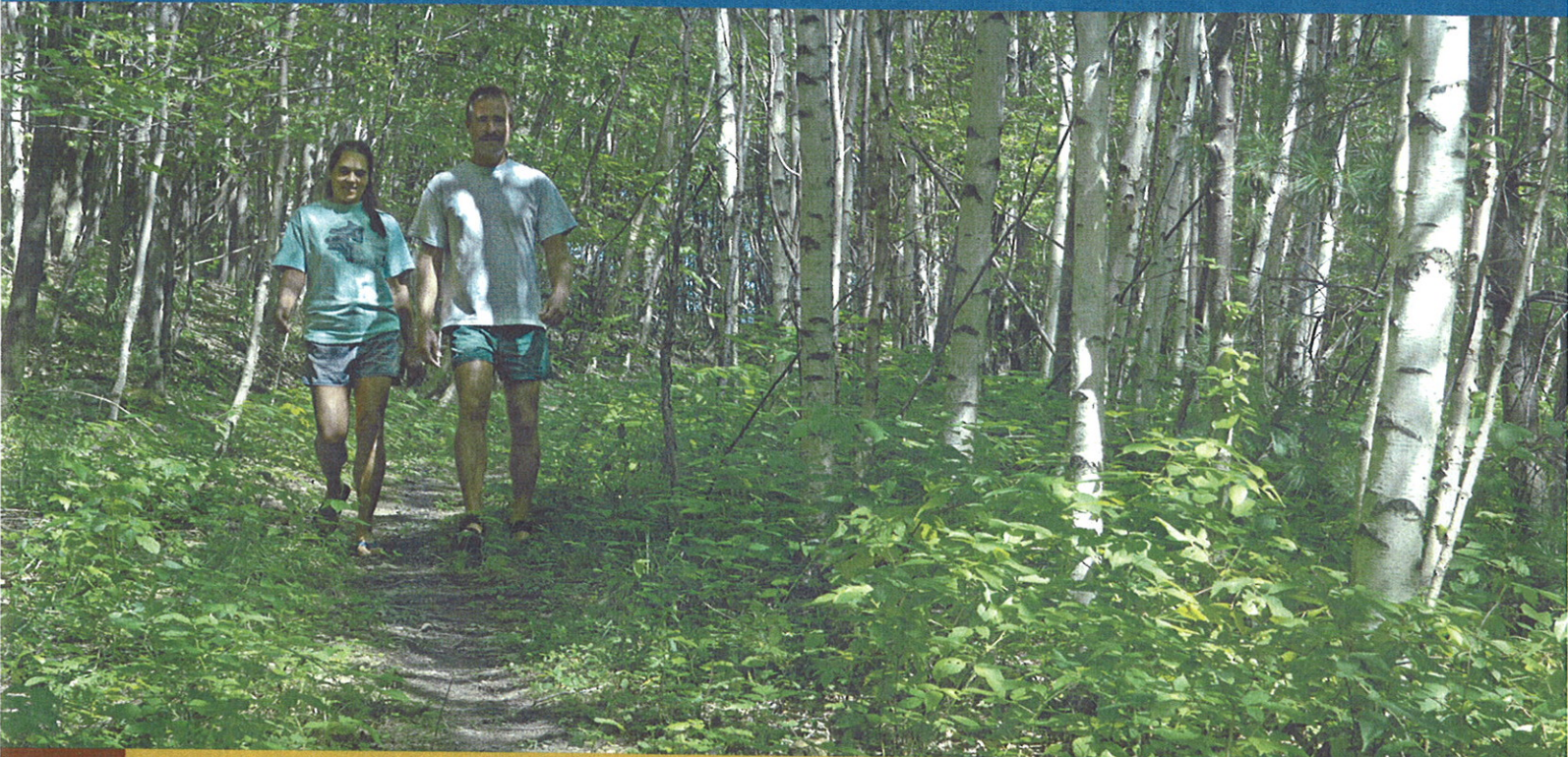
The Nature
Conservancy



SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

The Oak Log

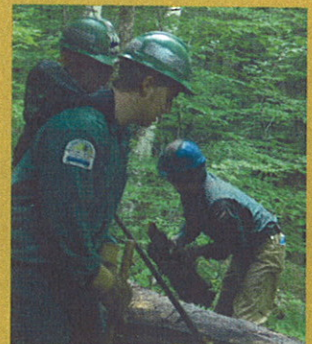
News From Vermont



Vermont Youth Build Trail to High Pond

Hidden away in the northern reaches of Southern Vermont's Taconic Mountains is a protected place where trees shed their foliage unwatched by human eyes and black bears amble peacefully to the sound of their own footsteps. Hard to find and difficult to access, the Conservancy's 2900-acre High Pond Natural Area near Brandon has long kept its natural beauty to itself. But now, with help from local volunteers and a work crew from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, a new trail is ready to lead pedestrian visitors up the area's wooded slopes to the scenic 22-acre pond, edged in lily pads, that gives this preserve its name.

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Vermont Youth Conservation Corps crew.

Conservation Update *(continued from cover)*

The Land

Most of the nearly three thousand acres of land that are now the High Pond Natural Area were initially acquired as a wildlife preserve in the 1950s and 60s by Douglas Burden. When caring for the land became too expensive for the Vermont Wild Land Foundation that Burden started in the 1970s, The Nature Conservancy accepted ownership and management responsibilities of the property.

"Large natural areas like High Pond Natural Area will become increasingly important as growth and development continue," says Rose Paul, Director of Science and Stewardship at the Conservancy. "As wildlife is pushed more and more out of developing areas, protected habitats like the forest around High Pond will be welcome havens."

In addition to old hemlock stands and acres of oak northern hardwood forest, High Pond Natural Area has an unusual red pine stand. "Most of the red pine stands in the state were planted by humans in the first half of the 20th century, but on ridgetops, particularly places where lightning strikes, you can get natural stands like the one above High Pond," says Paul.

The Trail

Although the Conservancy has owned the High Pond preserve for over 30 years, there was no good way to access it until the 2001 acquisition of a key 400-acre parcel on a nearby road. Having road access made it possible for the Conservancy to establish a parking lot and cut a trail into the woods to hook up with some of the old logging roads that remain on the property.

Conservancy staff and volunteers did preparation work for the trail, and then a skilled crew of Vermont teenagers

from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps came in to finish the job. Bringing a VYCC crew to High Pond was made possible thanks to an endowment created by the late Brenda Ross Winter, who wished to promote the involvement of young people in conservation.

The VYCC team cleared a path by trimming undergrowth and removing large logs from the trail, placed stone steps into hillsides, built dry paths through wet areas, and erected large rocks called "gargoyles" to discourage all-terrain vehicles from passing through and tearing up the ground. Then they replanted native species around the new trail structures to make the trail look like it had always been there.

"It was a pleasure being able to put a trail in at High Pond where people really care about the trail and what's happening to it," says Chris Sieverson, one of the VYCC team leaders.

"It's a fabulously beautiful undeveloped area," says neighbor Mike Horner. "That's the reason we love it—to be able to go out the back door and never cross a path or see a human track." Horner also enjoyed having the VYCC crew at High Pond and hosted a barbecue for them. "It's really nice to see kids learning together and working together," he says.

Bob Bjorklund, who bush hogged a portion of his land for use as a parking lot for High Pond visitors, was impressed with the VYCC crew's work. "I've been on the Long Trail where VYCC has worked and what they do helps out the trail a lot. It's nice for hiking."

Both Mike Horner and Bob Bjorklund, along with two other local residents, Coleine Moore and Sandy Fink, are members of High Pond Natural Area's new volunteer stewardship committee charged with keeping an eye on the preserve.