



# WILDPLACE

## OTTER'S DAY OFF

By Ned Olmsted, FOP council member

As two of my fellow trail crew members and I worked our way along a remote leg of the Kilburn Pond Loop clearing blowdowns in the Pisgah backcountry, I paused to catch my breath and take in the morning's beauty. A cold front had delivered a cloudless sky and a crystalline clarity to the atmosphere. The temperature hovered just below freezing, and the snow on the ground and nestled in hemlock boughs was still light and fluffy. We were deep in the woods and yet from the west, riding on the clear air, we could hear the whistle of a freight train as it lumbered north toward Brattleboro on the far side of the Connecticut River. The snow conditions were perfect for animal track identification; deer



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Matt Edson

Greetings!

The spring 2025 Friends of Pisgah newsletter provides a look back at our accomplishments in '24 and alerts you to projects and activities on deck in the months ahead. The best way to get a feel for what we were up to in '24 is to watch FOP Council member Chris Meidell's wonderful video presentation recapping our collective efforts. Here's the link: [https://youtu.be/mCFkeggN\\_L8](https://youtu.be/mCFkeggN_L8)

This summer a variety of infrastructure efforts are scheduled, especially an ambitious round of much needed maintenance on many of the bridges within the Park. As bridge rebuilds get underway, we will be reaching out to our volunteer base to lend a hand.

As the year unfolds, please be on the lookout for Facebook and email postings detailing information on how to participate in volunteer workdays on the Park's vast network of trails, as well as in special events co-hosted by FOP and fellow regional outdoor organizations. We hope you will join us for FOP sponsored outings, a few of which include guided hikes to natural features in the Park, our annual canoe/kayak paddle on Pisgah Reservoir, full moon hikes and other fun, family-friendly activities.

Friends of Pisgah is grateful for your ongoing financial support and the invaluable contributions you make when you volunteer your time helping us maintain this magnificent Park.

and coyote prints repeatedly crisscrossed the trail and later, where the hemlocks gave way to a chain of beaver ponds, we stopped to ponder a single-file set of tracks left by something large heading out onto the ice.

By mid-afternoon with the snow beginning to clump underfoot, we neared our turnaround point. Climbing one last hill thinly covered in oak and ash, some standing grandly, others tilted or hung up in the canopy, we stumbled upon a strange gouge in the softening snow descending the slope from above us, intersecting the trail, and disappearing into the shadows of a ravine below. The luge-like track, clearly not human made, carved an impressive trough as it shot down the fall line between the trees. We peered into the gully and conjectured what and how long ago had indented the slick and uniform chute. After weighing the possibilities, we agreed that what we were looking at was an otter slide.

It seemed odd, though, that we'd discovered signs of otter activity in an upland wood a mile or so away from the nearest



body of water. River otters have a high metabolic rate, and in winter, needing to increase their protein intake, they sometimes roam far afield searching independently for food sources, primarily fish, which they hunt provided they're able to access an open lead or claw through thinly formed ice. We figured the otter

who'd plowed this slide was on its way cross-country to some hidden pond only it knew about and had hastened its journey with a quick downhill coast.

Before we headed back, I walked a little way off the trail hoping to make out more otter tracks meandering into the distance. I scanned across to the opposite side of the ravine, which was rimmed by an outcropping, and there in a narrow cleft in the rocks spotted a perfect natural toboggan run worn-smooth by an otter. It was obvious that it had slid down this even steeper chute, climbed back up and done it again, and again. The scene reminded me of childhood sledding parties where after a wild descent I'd trudge back up the slope, my ascending footprints paralleling the sled run where patches of dirt and grass were beginning to show through the compacted snow.

This new discovery threw our assumptions about a determined otter in search of food in a new light. Did it whimsically detour to a more challenging slide because it looked like fun? Maybe the cleft was its original destination all along, and the rocky outcropping was a frequently visited otter playground. Wouldn't such seemingly carefree behavior expose a preoccupied otter to predators? I didn't have all the answers, but the visual evidence certainly supported the often-made contention that otters are, indeed, capable of what humans would call spontaneous and unstructured all-out play.

I tried to imagine the exuberance and the sheer joy this otter must have felt as it careened down the snowy slopes. The wildness of this image stuck with me for the rest of the afternoon, as did the thought that perhaps I'd just barely missed being in the presence of a kindred spirit.

## NEW SPUR TRAILS IN THE PARK

In an effort to make the Park's many dramatic natural features more accessible to hikers, eight spur trails have recently been created. Most of the spurs diverge from the main trail by fewer than a hundred yards and lead to interesting topographical configurations, habitat vistas, and other hidden gems. Although the spurs do not appear on the official Pisgah State Park Trail Map, they are clearly marked by signs indicating the nature of the feature. Enjoy these detours off the beaten path!

**Merganser Point:** off the Lily Pond Trail a rustic bench sits on a point jutting into Lily Pond from which it's often possible to spot flocks of Merganser ducks feeding through open leads in the ice or hanging out among the lily pads in late summer.

**Kilburn Canyon:** a short distance below the Kilburn Pond Dam, this spur veers east from the Kilburn Loop Trail



a small rocky gorge cut by the cascading Baker Brook.

**Hideout Rock:** a steep path descends from the overlook on the north end of the Reservoir Trail to a spacious but well-hidden nook (easy to imagine smugglers taking shelter there) formed by a overhanging granite slab.

**Broad Brook Vista:** this short spur departs Old Chesterfield Road below Fullam Pond Dam and leads to an open crest overlooking the Broad Brook valley as it fans out on its run down to the Ashuelot.

**Weeping Rock:** just off Broad Brook Road, stands a thirty-foot-high outcropping of schist whose ledges and cracks seep water year-round and provide footing for lush maiden-hair ferns.

**Chain of Ponds View:** a continuous chain of ponds interspersed with granite islands and beaver meadows follows the course of Baker Brook south for two miles after it exits Kilburn Pond. This spur is reached off the Kilburn Loop Trail at its southeast extremity and offers a view of several links in the chain.

**Herrick's Ledge:** accessed from the Davis Hill Trail, this spur ends at one of the Park's few panoramas opening to the northwest. Herrick's Ledge rises high above Rt. 63 with views of Chesterfield in the near distance and the Green Mountains on the horizon.

**Windthrow Rock:** reaching this natural feature requires crossing a beaver dam, scrambling up a smooth granite outcropping which drops precipitously into Baker Pond, and skirting the root table of a huge windthrown hemlock on its summit. The spur to Windthrow Rock leaves the Town Forest Trail near its northern terminus.



## IN THE WORKS FOR 2025

By park manager Kim R. Nilsen

What might the new year bring in terms of projects and improvements in Pisgah State Park? Here are some planned items and some 'hope so' ideas. Some of these will require state sign-off.

1. Replace four bridges in the park, heavily refurbish several others, and double deck as many as sixteen existing bridges. These will be funded by a Recreational Trails Program grant

that is already earmarked for Pisgah. However, the grant may be subject to termination because of the administration's planned budget cuts.

2. Complete the rebuild and hardening

of the Hinsdale Trail in the southwest quadrant of the park.

3. Possibly put a roof over and siding on one span in the park, creating a fine covered bridge.

4. Fill a major depression in the lower Fullam Pond Trail.

5. Plan for the possible creation of a single-track bicycle path sometime in the latter years of the decade.

6. Improve more historic sites within the park and make them more accessible.

7. Continue to upgrade and smooth the roads in the park.

8. Install three or four swing gates to replace the heavy bar gates in various locations.

9. Create additional very short spur trails to features in the park that are very close to the existing trails but are invisible to the recreating public now.

10. Solve several persistent erosion problems on remote trails by creating bypasses and closing off the troubled footage.



## FOP NEWS MAKERS

### **Pisgah State Park and Harris Center for Conservation Education Sponsored Hike**

By Jack Kondos

On December 19, Harris Center ecologist Brett Amy Thelen and Jack Kondos of Friends of Pisgah led a relaxed ramble along Pisgah State Park's revamped Habitat Loop Trail. The 3.5-mile roundtrip features extensive wetlands, stone walls, cellar holes, and tranquil streams. Along the way, we took our time to savor the sights and sounds of the December woods, explore both natural and cultural history, and enjoy wetland vistas of beaver lodges and dams.

A dozen winter hikers met at 9 a.m. at the Pisgah State Park trailhead on Horseshoe Road in Chesterfield and returned by noon. Several folks had never hiked in the Park before, others not in quite a while. Many noted that the trails were in excellent condition, and expressed interest in visiting the Park again soon.

The Harris Center organizes a number of conservation focused events including this series of "Easy Going Hikes." This initial collaboration has led to the discussion of organizing another co-led exploration of the Park in the summer or fall of 2025.

### **Annual Canoe and Kayak Outing on Pisgah Reservoir**

By Jack Kondos

The Friends of Pisgah hosted the popular Annual Canoe and Kayak event on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> on a fine, mostly sunny and relatively mild day. This FOP's yearly outing took place on remote Pisgah Reservoir in the southeast quadrant of the park. It featured numerous islands, a varied shoreline with stunning rock formations and bays. This largest body of water in the park, distant from any highway, offered an opportunity to paddle in a wilderness setting, something that is rare in southern New Hampshire.

FOP volunteers loaded and shuttled boats and gear from the Route 119 parking area to this pristine body of water up a steep and rocky four-wheel-drive track. Participants brought their own boat, paddle, lunch and water. A life preserver for each person was and always is mandatory in Pisgah or on any state-managed body of water, for that matter.

This year, seventeen paddlers enjoyed a picturesque Autumn paddle. Some observed it was 'about as good as it gets in early October including a light following wind for the return' to the put in. Sightings of beaver, waterfowl, and brilliant foliage were reported.

### **Monadnock Happy Trails Association Report for 2024**

By Laura Susmann

The Monadnock Happy Trails Association is a local horseback riding club and member of Friends of Pisgah. MHTA sponsors two workdays per year in the park, generally spring and fall. Members also participate in scheduled FOP workdays. In April, MHTA members brushed back the Orchard Trail and sections of the Snow Brook Trail under the guidance of park manager Kim Nilsen. The MHTA fall workday was held in conjunction with FOP's scheduled workday and included trimming along the Chestnut Hill Trail and inspection of the trail conditions in general. In September, fifteen MHTA members enjoyed a ten-mile trail ride along Old Chesterfield and Jon Hill Roads, and the Orchard and Snow Brook Trails. Several riders had never experienced the Pisgah trails and exclaimed that they would return to explore further. Pisgah State Park is truly a hidden gem in the Monadnock region.



PHOTO: MHTA gals working on the Orchard Trail: Mary Page, Sharon Thomsen and Laura Susmann .

## NEWS MAKERS CONTINUED

### Sled dogs return to Pisgah

By Peggy Kipp

With global warming, life can change. Ten years ago, teams of sled dogs were running in the park frequently, training for races. Snow then was plentiful. I ran my team there and on the Keene rail trail whenever I wanted to. Gradually snowfalls diminished and dog teams had to travel north to train.

Dog mushers, as sled drivers are called, began to develop rigs to train on "dryland". We used ATV's and other light-weight wheeled rigs built for the dogs to pull. Dryland races have become more popular as snow races are often canceled.

Then the state of New Hampshire designated three specific parks to facilitate dog powered sports in NH. Dog powered means that the dogs are the engine. This can be by pulling any wheeled rig; a bike, a scooter, an ATV or even a car if you have watched the movie "Snow Dogs".

Pisgah State Park was one of the parks chosen to facilitate dog mushing. Since I was already running a team of Siberian Huskies in the Park, I introduced myself to Kim Nilsen, the Park manager and explained the new designation. While this was new information to him, he very enthusiastically assisted me in creating mushing friendly, safe trails. As well, the Friends of Pisgah has fully supported dog mushing, even inviting me to become a Council member.

This winter, as you are enjoying yourself in the Park you may see a local sled dog racer in his UTV being pulled solely by 10-12 dogs or other mushers, like myself, harnessing up at the Visitor's Center and taking off with rigs or sleds. We are always willing to show folks our dogs and teach folks about mushing. So feel free to ask us.



PHOTO: Running sled dogs utilizing a nonpowered ATV.

## FOP MEMBERSHIP APPEAL

The Friends of Pisgah is an entirely volunteer-run nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to support the work of maintaining trails within New Hampshire's Pisgah State Park.

### JOIN AND BECOME PART OF THE FOP COMMUNITY

As a member, you'll receive our spring and fall newsletters as well as notifications via Facebook and e-mail about upcoming workdays, outings, hikes, and special events.

### BECOME A NEW MEMBER OR RENEW

Visit our website — <https://www.friendsofpisgah.org/> — for a printable form or use the attached membership form on the last page. For a video highlighting the many activities your membership fee make possible, please enjoy this short graphic presentation by FOP Council member Chris Meidell. Here's the link:

<https://youtu.be/dMpwPosHMmA?si=Rz1gPFmXRo7jqeFU>

The Friends of Pisgah thanks you for helping sustain this extraordinary all volunteer-led, conservation-focused organization.

EDITOR: Ned Olmsted LAYOUT: Kim R. Nilsen

## PARK MANAGER'S REPORT

Pisgah State Park has had, since its inception, a single state employee at the helm. It is the largest park by far in New Hampshire's park system. At 13,300 acres in size, spanning more than 22 square miles, it is impossible for a manager to make meaningful improvements without help from volunteers on an ongoing basis.

In 2024, more than 1,500 hours of time from Friends of Pisgah volunteers and hundreds and hundreds of hours from volunteers with Mt. Pisgah ATV Club were donated to make real and visible improvements in Pisgah. Think about it. The park manager works about seven months full time and four months part time. The total time amounts to about 1800 hours. If you add in the volunteer efforts, they make up what amounts to an entire second employee and then some.

Just this year, two of the longest roads in the park were upgraded, standing water in roads was eliminated, the three-story-tall visitor center barn was freshly painted, and the Pisgah garage on Horseshoe Road had its south face refurbished and painted.

There's more. The Hinsdale Trail had copious amounts of work done to restore the treadway including the refurbishing of the many bridges on the trail, Parker Trail received its first real substantial bridge in forty years, Fullam Pond Trail had a good deal of drainage work completed, sixty new signs went up, and puncheon spans (bog bridges over moist soils) were added. To top it all off, all trails and roads in the park – 55 miles of them – were cleared of forest debris and brushed back in the spring and the fall, some of them again during the summer months and early winter, as well.

And then there is the contribution from volunteer groups of building materials, paint, heavy equipment operation, grass seed, hay and straw for landscaping, and hand and power tools.

Some volunteer efforts came about courtesy of small groups such as the Monadnock Happy Trails equestrian club, snowmobile riders, and dogsledding enthusiasts.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child. In Pisgah it takes several thousand hours of volunteer time year after year working in concert with the park manager to raise Pisgah's horizons, to make the park safe for all user groups, easy to navigate, and a pleasure to recreate within during all four seasons.

## THE FIFTH SEASON

A legendary 'tween-season will soon be upon us, given projected late winter snow totals. Snow melts, ice thaws, water flows downhill, mud multiplies. In old New England, we actually have a fifth season. You know it well. Mud Season.

In Pisgah State Park, mud season is gated away. Mud season is off-limits time. When frost begins to thaw out of the trails and roads, the park – all parks in the state, really – have to be shut down to all user groups except for those who come on foot.

Why? Trails and roads can be ravaged by use by machines and horses during mud season. Ruts become water channels. Erosion increases readily on any slope. Standing water infests the treadways.

Please, when the gates do close as mud season comes on, refrain from entering the park with anything but walking or hiking shoes. Help us keep the park's trails and roads in decent condition so that wholesale restoration of the pathways is not required.

## DONATIONS

Donations directly support the Friends of Pisgah's work in helping to maintain trails within Pisgah State Park and play a significant role in enhancing the experience of the many user groups who frequent it. Your donation can accompany your membership dues, or if you would rather donate online, go to [www.friendsofpisgah.org](http://www.friendsofpisgah.org).

If you would prefer to donate in-kind, i.e., lumber, tools, or equipment, these gifts would be most welcome. To do so, please go the website and click on the contact tab so you may email us. Or, go to the Friends of Pisgah Facebook and post a message. Here's the link:

<https://www.friendsofpisgah.org/>



## BECOME A MEMBER

Please use this form and send your request to the address shown below if you wish to join Friends of Pisgah, renew a membership, or give one as a gift. The Friends of Pisgah maintain a nominal dues structure with the intent to encourage as many individuals and families as possible to join.

Most of the dollars raised through membership goes, as we say, On The Ground, meaning we use the funds to improve trails and trail infrastructure in the park and organize events for members and the public to participate in.

### ANNUAL DUES

Student: \$10.00

Single: \$15.00

Family \$20.00

Group (club) \$30.00

You may purchase your membership by sending a personal check to the following address:

Friends of Pisgah, Inc.  
 Post Office Box 134  
 Chesterfield, NH 03443

So that we may keep you informed, please fill in the following items below.

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 FIRST NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 LAST NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 STATE AND ZIP CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

If you might have an interest in volunteering, what sort of effort might you wish to provide?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> trail maintenance         | <input type="checkbox"/> social media posting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> infrastructure building   | <input type="checkbox"/> fundraising          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> website development       | <input type="checkbox"/> grant writing        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public relations          | <input type="checkbox"/> council member       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> event planning            | <input type="checkbox"/> guiding hikes        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> newsletter (twice a year) | <input type="checkbox"/> beautification       |

