



Putney Mountain Association

A volunteer non-profit conservation organization

P.O. Box 953, Putney, VT 05346

Newsletter, Fall-Winter 2001

Closing the Gap to the West

By Norman Solomon

Unique to this area of southern Vermont is an impressive, 15-mile ridgeline that runs from Saxtons River in the North to Prospect Hill and Black Mountain in the south. At its highest point the ridge rises to over 1600 feet. The Putney Mountain Association, in cooperation with the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, is working to create a contiguous, protected wildlife habitat and walking trail running the full length of the ridgeline.

Public support for this undertaking has been phenomenal. We acquired property through direct purchase, contributions, or via right-of-way easements. When a ridgeline parcel came onto the market, enthusiastic community members provided short-term interest-free loans to assist in the purchase. In some cases, the tracts were purchased directly by these supporters then sold back to the organization when grant money became available. By 2000, most of the northern corridor had been secured. PMA then focused on closing the gap between its northernmost property and Putney Mountain in Brookline.

The first acquisition was a seventy-five foot wide corridor just west of the ridgeline, running the full length of the western boundary of the Feigelson property in Brookline. This donation was made as a right-of-way easement that provides PMA with the right, in perpetuity, to build, use, and maintain a trail within the corridor. Although the Feigelsons still own the property, under Vermont State law they are not liable for recreationalists passing through their property.

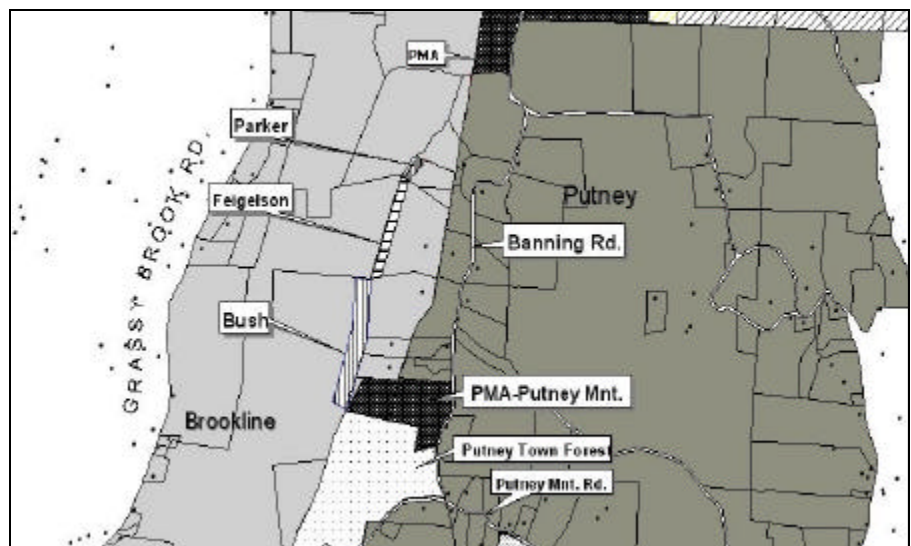
Muriel and Philip Feigelson of Tenafly, New Jersey, were senior biochemist research scientists at Columbia University before their retirement, and Philip Feigelson was also Dean of the Columbia Medical School. Regrettably, Dr. Philip Feigelson passed away earlier this year. PMA will honor him with a memorial plaque to be placed on the trail upon its completion.

The second tract acquired was a three hundred foot wide corridor running along the eastern boundary of the Maynard Bush property in Brookline. Brookline's Bush family dates back to the Civil War, and Mr. Bush is a former member of the Brookline Select Board. This 13.7 acre tract was an unconstrained transfer of ownership to PMA. The transfer of ownership to PMA came from Mr. Bush and his three sisters, two living locally and one in Texas. At the request of Mr. Bush,

PMA will erect a plaque dedicating this portion of the trail as a memorial to the parents of Maynard Bush.

Most recently, Emily and Donald Parker donated a right-of-way easement that will extend the corridor in a northerly direction. The Parker easement runs along their western boundary in a northerly direction and, unlike the other two properties, runs along an old, disused roadway, approximately ten feet wide. The Parkers are outdoor enthusiasts, and operate two businesses in Brattleboro: D & E Tree Management, and CarQuest Auto Parts.

The final link needed to close the gap is a 1600 foot stretch running from the northern tip of the Parker property to the southern end of the PMA property, and we are currently talking to property owners in this area. When the gap is closed, we'll have a magnificent hiking trail in a protected natural environment.



Our goal is to build a trail that extends from Putney Mountain summit to the Pinnacle.

Where We Came From

By Roger Haydock

The rock ledges on the top of Putney Mountain began as deep ocean muds 420 million years ago. Back then, North America was in the tropical zone of the Southern Hemisphere. The shoreline of our continent was in western Vermont, where there was a high mountain range called the Taconics. Year after year the great Taconic mountains were eroding, sending sediments such as mud and sand eastward down to the sea where they settled to the bottom. In this cold, dark, and deep ocean east of North America, the sands, limey muds, and volcanic deposits arranged themselves in horizontal layers. Who could have imagined that these muds would one day become Putney Mountain?

Around 400 million years ago, a micro-continent called Avalonia rammed into North America from the east. As it moved towards us, it acted like a snowplow, pushing our deep ocean muds and sands out in front. These sediments were shoved, folded, and jammed up against the shoreline of North America, creating a high north-south mountain range in New England, and turning our muds and sands into hard rock. This mountain range ran approximately north-south because the micro-continent Avalonia traveled approximately westward as it collided with North America. One small sector of this range was to become Putney Mountain. At first this great mountain range was quite high, but over the next 400 million years, gravity and rainfall eroded it down to a much more modest height.

During this same period of time, North America was traveling northward out of the Southern Hemisphere and into the Northern Hemisphere. As it did, our climate varied from wet tropical to dry tropical to temperate and even arctic. 350 million years ago there were great tropical forests here!

270 million years ago we were rammed again, this time by Africa. Then 50 million years later, Africa

separated from us and is still moving away from us at the rate of about one inch every year. Around this same time, dinosaurs arrived. They became extinct 65 million years ago when (as scientists now believe) a meteor hit the earth.

By about 5 million years ago, our local landscape was very roughly the same height as it is today, but the climate was warmer, more like Virginia today. There were plenty of mammals, but no humans yet.

Beginning about two million years ago, our climate became unstable and great cooling alternated with intermittent and briefer warm spells. This caused enormous slow-moving sheets of ice to progress southwards from Canada over New England. These glaciers ground down our hilltops and deepened our north-south valleys. They also stole our soils, sands, and loose rocks, and dumping them to form Long Island and Cape Cod. At its greatest thickness, the ice was more than one mile thick, and that was as recently as 18,000 years ago. On top of Putney Mountain today, there are a lot of bare ledges because the glacier removed any topsoil that once might have covered the bedrock.

If you look at that bedrock, what do you see? If you are looking at a gray lustrous rock, it is called Phyllite and it began as deep ocean mud 420 million years ago. If the bedrock happens to be

Photo credit: Eric Slayton



This aerial view of the ridgeline shows Putney Mountain on the left.

white, then you are looking at Quartzite made from what was once sand on the sea bottom. And if the rock is black, it is called Amphibolite, which was originally a volcanic deposit.

So the present day rocks on the top of Putney Mountain correspond type by type to the varying sands, muds, and volcanic deposits on the floor of the deep ocean off the shore of North America 420 million years ago.

Oh, How We've Grown!

1996	50 members
1997	375 members
2001	686 members

Give a gift of membership today. It costs only \$20 for a present that lasts a lifetime.

Special thanks to Daniel Hovis of Dosolutions for printing the master for the newsletter, and Fern Tavalin for converting the ridgeline slide to a b-map.

Update on the Monitoring Project

By Jacquie Walker

The monitoring project, which is coordinated by Rich Grumbine and Tii McLean, and was originally funded by the Davis Foundation, is ending its second year. Data has been collected by volunteers at five vernal pools and eight mammal tracking transects. Four teams of bird watchers checked for ground nesting birds on specific transects in the Nature Reserve.

The vernal pool monitors were looking especially for Jefferson Salamander and Wood Frog eggs. The data was collected in the spring and summer of 2000 and 2001

before the pools got too hot for the frogs to survive. The rare Jefferson Frog was found in one of the pools. The project will be continued into 2002.

The ground-nesting bird monitoring took place in early spring of 2001 and will continue in 2002 before the nesting season begins. To protect the nesting birds (grouse, oven birds, and assorted warblers and vireos), all trail building in the Reserve will take place

during the summer and fall months.

Although some data are available from the mammal tracking, they are not as complete as we had wished. Tracks and scat of coyote, fisher, porcupine, deer, rabbit, and a few bear were found. To have good scientific results that can be compared from year to year, monitors would have to go out tracking when snow conditions and weather were just right. This proved difficult with work schedules and other contingencies.

This winter, we are asking anyone who wants to share in the

fun of mammal tracking to do so whenever they are out in the Reserve walking, skiing, or snow shoeing, and to make a note of where and when they saw the tracks or sign. This informal survey should provide interesting anecdotal data for our records and give some idea of the health of the Reserve.

Some members of PMA were concerned about the spread of Buckthorn in the Nature Reserve. This led us to set up a simple experiment. Buckthorn was

introduced from Europe to the USA as an ornamental garden plant. Birds, who are fond of the berries, eat them and distribute them far and wide. Two plots have been laid out along the new PMA trail from the summit. In one all the Buckthorn has been pulled, in the other, none. The aim is to see if this invasive, exotic species could be controlled by pulling out the early sprouts or by clipping the larger plants two or three times a year.

Because of all these watchdog efforts, there are numerous ribbons and tags designating the various transects in the woods. As tempting as it may be to clean up the woods, please don't remove the markers. The monitors need them to collect their data.

If you would like to join any of the monitoring projects, contact Claire Wilson at 802-387-6635, or clairewi@sover.net. The only requirements are to love a walk in the woods and be willing to learn what to look for.

"The rare Jefferson salamander was found in one of the pools."

New Trails Allow Peak to Peak Walk

By Steve Anderson

You now can hike all the way from Putney Mountain to the Pinnacle, a distance of about five miles, on PMA, WHPA (Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association), or town trails. The WHPA's purchase last spring of the last tract of land separating the two organizations' holdings, plus the construction of a trail from the Pinnacle to the north end of Banning Road, achieved this long-sought connection.

The trail was laid out by Roger Haydock, Randy Major, and Ted Dodd. Volunteers from both organizations, neighbors, and a group of students from the Putney School organized by PMA

board members Kristin Dawley and Jack Bell all worked on the trail.

The two organizations have agreed to install a common marking system—small round white discs—for the main Ridge Line Trail, with different colored discs marking the side-trails.

Southern access to the new main trail is from the PMA parking area off Putney Mountain Road, where maps and trail use guidelines are available at the information kiosk. Similar facilities are located at the WHPA end, at the Windmill Hill Road and Old Athens Road kiosks.

The trail leading from the Putney Mountain summit to Banning Road was

Our New Name

The Putney Mountain Association and the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association have agreed to call the joint conservation project along the ridgeline "The Windmill Ridge Nature Reserve and Trail", prefaced by "PMA" and "WHPA" to distinguish the two sections. Our section will thus officially be called "The PMA Windmill Ridge Nature Reserve and Trail". However, we will continue to use the name "Putney Mountain Nature Reserve" informally.

relocated last August to improve the grade and distance it from a neighboring property. On the advice of Board member Rich Grumbine, trail construction was delayed for a month to allow several pairs of nesting oven birds to complete their work.

The Putney Mountain Association
P.O. Box 953
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Address Service Requested

Please let us know if your address changes.

PMA Annual Meeting

The Hooker-Dunham Theatre, Brattleboro
Sunday, December 2, 2001, 4:30pm

Speaker: Russell Brenneman, LL.B. Also:
“Land Saving Actions”

Russell Brenneman authored the first legal monograph on conservation easements in the United States, and co-drafted the Uniform Conservation Easements Act that has been adopted in 20 states.

- **Map History of the Reserve: 1946-2001**
- **Business Meeting**
- **Refreshments**
- **Surprise Special Guest**

Putney Mountain Association Membership Form

Date: _____

Name #1: _____ Name #2: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ email: _____ fax: _____

_____ I enclose \$20 per person lifetime membership fee, payable to Putney Mountain Association.

_____ I am making an additional contribution of \$ _____ for on-going projects.
Any amount over the membership fee is a tax deductible gift and very welcome.

_____ I am enclosing \$20 each for the following gift memberships:

Mail to: Claire Wilson, PMA Membership; 26 Spring Hill Road; Putney, VT 05346