

And a River Bounds It

by Chan Lincoln

It rises from the valley floor to 350 feet above the Ware River. Numerous stone walls snake through it, marking what was once pastureland that has now grown into mature forest land. It's the home of vernal pools, hemlock groves, stands of hardwood and a field of ferns that reaches four feet high. It's the habitat of Spring peepers, grey squirrels, white-tailed deer, coyotes and now the occasional passing black bear. And the mosquito. In the valley, its earth is black and fertile and has served as farmland for generations, quite possibly since the days of the Native American. At its highest point, rocky outcroppings serve as lookout points to the river valley stretching below and to the West Brookfield hills rising off to the east.

Bounded by the Ware River, it reaches from the Upper Church Street bridge almost to Old Gilbertville Road not far from the Gilbertville line. The old road to Greenwich cuts through it, meandering along the hillside in the south and lazily climbing through its wooded forest in the northwest. A decrepit old Dodge sits decaying near the old road, resting on blocks that were put there fifty years ago when the hill was an active ski slope and the car was responsible for pulling a rope tow 800 feet up the steep slope. The rail bed of the old Boston and Maine railroad, now overgrown from disuse, runs straight as an arrow from south to north along the river patiently waiting and hoping for the creation of a rail trail that will guide people from Ware to Gilbertville and beyond.

When my cousins and I were young we knew its nooks and crannies by many names: Camp One, The Abode of the Gods, The Burma Road, Pete's Pike, Blue River Canyon and Cow Coliseum. We camped, hiked, rode bikes and played ball on it. In the winter we slid, skied and tobogganed down its many hills. It was only when we heard the clang of the bell or the shrill whistle that we returned home. It watched over my father's annual bird counts, the traditional Rug Club picnics, and a countless number of baseball and softball games with friends and relatives.



Two glacial erratics along the Ware River.

This is the land that my father purchased back in 1946 with wages he earned fighting in the South Pacific campaign of WW II and it was his prize possession. The old road to Greenwich is now named Old Stagecoach Road and three families call his original purchase their home. In July of last year an Agricultural Preservation Restriction was placed on approximately 52 acres of bottomland by the Commonwealth and this past December my wife and I gifted a Conservation Restriction on almost 124 acres of the remaining property to the East Quabbin Land Trust.

The opportunity to preserve this tract of land in a natural state, to ensure that the flora and fauna will determine its look and feel is a gift, a present from previous generations. The APR and CR have made it possible for us to pass along this gift of Nature to all future generations in perpetuity. To do so is both a privilege and the fulfillment of a legacy.

My wife and I thank the EQLT for their diligence, hard work and continual assistance in the placement of both the APR and the CR and for their future efforts in ensuring that this tract of land will remain forever wild. We hope all who share this land will enjoy and honor its natural and craggy beauty. ■

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director



With snow in the air and ice on the ground many of the land trusts outdoor projects are on hold till spring. There was a flurry of activity getting ready for the winter. Most notably was work on the trestle bridge at the rail trail. By early November we'd discovered that there were a number of hidden structural issues requiring correction that delayed the project by at least a month. Our contractor Brian Klassanos, of Willow Farm in Ware, and Bruce Peninno, the civil engineer, kept their cool and got the trestle bridge back into tip top shape. New features include four pilings at the western end, a retaining wall, a bridge timber section, several cross ties and braces for the bent caps. Needing to install the new pilings was the most time consuming, which meant digging four feet underneath the bottom of the pile cap to pour cement sonotubes and inserting needle beams on the pilings to support the western section of the bridge. As a casual visitor to the bridge you won't notice any of these new additions, but rest assured that the bridge is more than capable of carrying you and many friends from one side to the other.

Once the structural issues were fixed a dedicated group of volunteers took the next step and installed the deck timbers just before the December 19th snow storm. It took two full Saturdays to complete the task. We are grateful to Chris Buelow, Dave Davis, Ethan Gagne, Gary Gagne, Dan Hanson, Frank Hanson, Brian Klassanos, Linda Leehy, Rod Leehy, Bob Okolito, Jay Pease, Josh Pease, Bruce Peninno, Don Rich, Ginny Rich, Rick Romano, Jim Swett, Cody Towlson, and Glen Wojick for their time and sharing of their carpentry talents. Because of their efforts the trestle bridge is back in business just in time for winter fun, including skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. Once the spring weather comes the railing and curbing will be installed. Please let me know if you want to help!

Converting the old Mass Central Rail Road into an active rail trail is a different kind of initiative for the land trust but it underscores the core values of all the work we seek to do. The conservation and stewardship of critical lands is essential to our future by creating opportunities for us to get out and connect with the natural world, create linkages between protected properties for people and wildlife, and maintain natural features that are essential to a high quality of life. I can envision a time when the view of the Ware River from the truss bridge will be a central part of many people's lives; they automatically record the changes in water level across the seasons and enjoy fishing along its banks. Help make that vision a reality. Get out and enjoy the beautiful trail as it gently curves under a canopy of arched trees that shade the walkway and yields magnificent views across the fields to the Ware River. ■

Cynthia Henshaw

THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

works to foster the sustainable use of our natural and historic resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farmlands, woodlands and waters in our region of Massachusetts.

As a non profit organization the East Quabbin Land Trust envisions a regional community that continues to care for its natural environment and supports a sustainable local economy, ensuring a high quality of life for generations to come.

We welcome your thoughts, articles, and photographs on events in our area. For more information about the trust, to become a member, or request a change of address, please contact our office at:

East Quabbin Land Trust
 120 Ridge Road, PO Box 5
 Hardwick, MA 01037-0005
 413.477.8229 (tel & fax)
 email: eqlt@comcast.net

Visit our website at www.eqlt.org

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Farm Boy Makes Good: An Interview with Mick Huppert

by Chuk Kittredge

It was a week after Christmas, and two since my interview was supposed to be done, so I called Mick up and wrangled an invitation. Knowing he was a good Midwestern boy ("born on the banks of the Kinnickinnic River"), I brought along several bottles of Pabst Blue Ribbon. I got the quick bio (dairy farm raised in the Midwest, grad school in public health, (currently community health center organization president), sketched the geographic history (Wisconsin, Chicago, Eastern Kentucky, UMich Ann Arbor, Boston, Barre, Petersham). Then, between eating cheese curds and discussing the merits of various brands of replacement windows, we got down to it.

Full disclosure: When I painted Mick and Louise's house in 2005, I managed to paint one of the dining room windows shut. I'm still getting razzed about it.

EQLT: So Mick, you're coming to us from Mount Grace?

Mick Huppert: Yes. Mt. Grace has term limits - it was my last year of an 8 year term on the board.

EQLT: So you had to get out town in a hurry.

MH(bland): Something like that.

EQLT: Right. Now, what were you working on at Mount Grace?

MH: I was the treasurer for five years, and I worked on the finance committee through a period of significant growth. The last year, I was chairman of the board. I worked with the staff, Leigh Youngblood in particular - --- I also had the great opportunity of working with a board that came from across the region and is incredibly committed to land conservation

EQLT: And the financial incentives for land conservation?

MH: In most cases, families needed some compensation for putting conservation restrictions on their land. There are a variety of avenues: state, local, town, self-help grants, and deals involving local fundraising. The staff were the real hardworking people in that along with board members who could identify local support.

EQLT: Mick, what most interests you about being on the board of the EQLT?

MH: My interests are for preserving certain lands you might not appreciate as being sizable or unprotected. Religious organizations, educational organizations, summer camps - these are not usually protected. If the camps, as some camps have had to do, are burdened with more expenses every year, they may consider getting out of camping and selling their camp. You can have a camp on a lake that's been there for 75 or 125 years: it won't stay that way for very long if it has financial needs from a dwindling demand from campers.

EQLT: Right. Then it's spec houses galore.

MH: Possibly. In Petersham we have several religiously owned monasteries - members of monastic communities are getting older, they might move or scale back. It's important that the land trust have an inventory of these types of organizations.

We currently are involved in an interesting protection initiative



Mick Huppert enjoying his chickens.

with two Benedictine orders here in Petersham. Needed compensation to the organization will be provided in return for them placing a conservation restriction (CR) on some of their land.

Also, I think it's important to have a mix of people in a community engaged in land conservation.. We have to keep in mind how the land is used overall to help support the community I think what we need to do is find ways to put farmers back on farms, which often requires a certain amount of creativity, financially speaking. We need to be careful in not simply creating "land museums" that lock out working the land or not allowing young residents to live on the land.

The EQLT just helped a young farmer purchase land in Hardwick. In collaboration with a state grant we were able to make the purchase more affordable in return for a CR.

EQLT: And how do you like your new job as board member, thus far?

MH: I'm so impressed with the EQLT - it's certainly a neighborhood land trust. It's really in tune with each of their towns. I've been greatly impressed with Cynthia's vision of diversity, from the rail trail and restoring old bridges, to working with existing farms that are up for sale, to identifying the institutionally held lands, and even going further. In some sense, this is a 1-person organization with a very active board, and one that I'm proud to be a part of.

EQLT: And where do you see the land trust in the future?

MH: We need to look at things as if people are relevant, not just the land. We also need to allow for a piece of land to have one new building lot - you'll be hard pressed to get anyone to move there, otherwise. We need to be creative about putting people back on the land at the same time we are conserving it.

EQLT: Well Mick, looks like we're out of time.

MH(shaking hands): Want the rest of these cheese curds?

EQLT: Actually, yeah. ■

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Generous support from the individuals and organizations listed allow us to continue to care for our natural environment and support a sustainable local economy. All contributions are greatly appreciated and are vital to our success. Every gift is important to us and helps us to fulfill our mission. Thank you.

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Funding Field Reclamation for Wildlife

by Marion Cooper

There is a tremendous diversity of wildlife that use fields as their primary breeding or feeding sites. Song birds, small mammals, snakes and many insects can be found in grassy or brushy fields. Turning a patch of woods into a field can increase the wildlife diversity on your property. A key question is how much will it cost.

Two grant programs are currently set up to assist landowners with wildlife habitat practices, such as field reclamation. The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a national federally funded program; the funds are under the control of Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to provide financial and technical assistance to landowners. The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is federal program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. In the past few years several area land owners, including the East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT), were fortunate to be the recipients of grants from the LIP or the WHIP programs.

Over the past few years EQLT completed several wildlife enhance projects with the aid of the WHIP program, including extensive grassland and pasture restoration projects at Mandell Hill in Hardwick. Already we have seen more grassland birds nesting in the fields. The clearing at Mandell Hill began with the planning over four years ago. A main goal was to connect two large existing fields, creating an even greater grassy habitat for early successional birds. The initial clearing, stump and large rock removal was largely paid for through the WHIP grant. Extensive rock picking and additional harrowing was essential to ensure that the field could be mowed. EQLT received a significant cash gift and invested its own financial resources to cover the additional contractor costs to complete this additional phase of field creation. The total out-of-pocket cost to reclaim the five acre area was \$45,000 with just under half being reimbursed by the WHIP grant.

And while it may seem that these grants provide free money to their recipients, the reality is that the funding that these programs provide is only one consideration when taking on a habitat restoration project. Landowners and managers must also consider the time that goes into planning and maintaining their projects, as well as unforeseen costs that may arise during the course of a landscape restoration project.

Gus Block and Bruce Lockhart recently completed a LIP project on 25 acres of their property in Petersham. They feel the process was not only cost effective for them, but allowed them to harmonize their existing forestry plan on their land, which is under Chapter 61, with a wildlife plan. One significant result is that their 30-year Forest Management Plan, which was to culminate in a softwood harvest in 2031, was revamped extended the harvest horizon to 100 years - at which time their woodlot should be producing commercial grade hardwood. The main reason for this course of action is that the forest management practices for promoting hardwood growth - keeping the land open for the next few decades - coincide with the land management practices for promoting wildlife. One consequence, of course, is that Gus and Bruce will forfeit the income they would have realized with the anticipated softwood sale in 2031, another example of the underlying financial considerations

From Forest to Field

An outline of a few of the many steps necessary to convert your land

- Survey area to be cleared
- Cut, remove and sort trees for sale: pulp, cordwood, saw logs
- Collect and chip or burn tops
- Remove stumps and grind or pile
- Remove large stones and bury, stockpile, or sell
- Harrow with heavy bog harrow
- Pick rocks
- Finish harrow
- Pick more rocks
- Test soil, fertilize and lime as necessary
- Seed
- Hope for the right amount of rain

associated with their property management decisions.

Gus and Bruce have enjoyed their partnership with LIP. The LIP grant covered their out-of-pocket expenses. With the sale of the pulp wood from the clearing, the grant dollars, the ability to use their own resources; such as their sheep for the mowing maintenance, and the woody debris to protect the wetland during clearing they were able to complete their project without significant cash investment. The LIP is based on reimbursements, so they did have to put the money up front to hire loggers to do the clearing, but were very pleased with the turn around time with the LIP reimbursement. The cost of the project was covered, but one should realize these projects do require hours of planning, grant writing, and meetings. Gus and Bruce credit EQLT board member Chris Buelow for being very helpful with the writing of the initial LIP application. "Chris' knowledge of the landscape and the potential benefit to grassland birds was instrumental in this process" noted Gus. Recently they have enjoyed successes with their project beyond the financial. This past year they spotted for the first time on their property a Killdeer with young.

The East Quabbin Land Trust, and Gus and Bruce have enjoyed the success of their projects. As LIP coordinator Tracy Grazia points out "I don't think people realize how much it costs to clear an area when you are doing it to benefit wildlife and not just for the timber. The best cost-share program participants can hope for is to break even, but usually folks still end up paying for some of the costs. The one benefit LIP had over WHIP was that we allowed people to use their own time/labor as part of their match contribution. I wish we could cover all the expenses involved with wildlife management projects; more people would do them if they could get reimbursed for all of the costs."

These and many other land projects would not have been possible without the programs such as LIP and WHIP. Landowners, birders, hunters and wildlife supporters in general have been very pleased with the outcomes of many of these projects. These projects require both dedication and a financial commitment of the landowner. ■



On the Land... A Walk with Max

by Kelley Okolita

My husband Bob and I moved to Gilbertville about 4 years ago now. We bought a nice little house with frontage on the Ware River. We fell in love with the house the minute we saw it. At the time, we had three kids still at home and my sister who was disabled and lived with us and of course Max, our beloved mixed breed dog. The house was really too small for so many people but the three girls were all in High School and all horse crazy so we bribed them with horses. They got horses and we got to move to a smaller house in the part of the state where my husband grew up.

Shortly after moving in, we went for a walk to see the neighborhood more slowly than you can by a drive in a car. Met a few of the neighbors and found, at the end of the road a small trail. The trail was wide enough for two to walk side by side for most of it but was obviously an old rail bed as many of the railroad ties were still in place, though in bad condition. It made for difficult walking as you really had to keep your eyes on the ground to prevent yourself from being tripped by a railroad tie or a branch or stone intruding on the path. Max of course loved it. He ran up and down the trail and into the woods on either side, occasionally chasing after wild turkeys, squirrels or chipmunks we met on the way. We often saw deer tracks and once in a while a deer. Max was delighted.

As we went further down the trail we came to a small bridge crossing a farm road badly in need of repairs. Some folks had placed sheets of plywood across the top of the bridge to cover the spots where the top planks of the bridge were worn away or broken. Further down there was another bridge, somewhat longer in length but in even worse condition than the small bridge. This one also had sheets of plywood as well as long sheets of thick rubber across the top of the bridge again to make travel across it safer.

Max easily crossed both of the small bridges without a care. The first one I crossed fairly easily as well but was intimidated by the condition of the next bridge, not wanting to fall through. I made it across slowly and we continued on our way down the path. Not too much farther down, there is a final bridge. This one is a rather long truss bridge over the Ware River. This bridge also had been covered in sections with plywood and rubber sheets. There are some broken and missing beams and though the view is beautiful, crossing this bridge completely intimidates me though I have managed to slowly walk across a few times in order to continue on the trail. Max of course is undisturbed by the adventure (I wouldn't be surprised if behind those big brown eyes, he is laughing at me!). My husband does laugh at me. After all, this bridge used to hold trains, it certainly should hold all five feet of me with ease. If you do make it across this bridge, it is more than worth the shaking knees. You can follow the trail all the way to New Braintree. A long, beautiful walk in the woods no matter what time of year.

At the start of the walks Max would be running up and down the trail and side to side in the woods, occasionally having to wait for us to catch up to him or he would run back to us two footed

creatures wondering what was taking us so long. When we took the long trail, by halfway back, his tongue would be dragging on the ground, no more running up and down and back and forth – he wore himself out. At times, he would get in front of us and try to slow the pace down. If we weren't careful, we would trip over him.

The girls of course took their horses down the trail as far as the big bridge. They did not feel good about taking them across that for fear the horse would stumble on the uneven planks or get spooked by the places where there is no plank on top at all, just the rubber mat. Due to the condition of the trail, the horses were never brought beyond a trot.

This year there have been some wonderful changes to the trail. The trail has been made wider, all the railroad ties from the start of the trail to the big bridge have been pulled out and the trail has been smoothed out. You no longer need to watch every step you take and can go at a faster pace and enjoy more of the scenery as you walk. The two smaller bridges have been repaired completely (no more quivering knees for me!) and Max no longer has to stop and wait for me or run back repeatedly as we travel down the trail. Next year, they will be fixing the big bridge as well and my trips down the trail will no longer end at the big bridge but can continue all the way to New Braintree with no intimidating bridges to cross.



More dogs and families skipping along the trail.

Though you are walking in the woods you are also following the path of the river. The trail abuts farmland and hayfields at many points. While walking we have seen deer in the fields, hawks and eagles flying over the river, a Great Blue Heron fishing and this summer, a turkey vulture sitting up in the tree.

The horses are out on lease while the girls are in school but the neighbors talk of snowmobiling and cross country skiing down the trail this winter and when the horses return next fall, we will be out there winter, summer, spring and fall with them and of course Max. Hope springs eternal for Max, the great brown hunter. He will never actually catch anything he is after. He makes enough noise for a herd of elephants but he will be back every walk we take chasing those turkeys with delight. ■

Conserving the land, Preserving our heritage

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EQLT News | INSIDE...



Enjoying the Rail Trail

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UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY...

Sunday, February 7, 2:00 PM

Wolves, at the New Braintree Town Hall – Learn more about this beautiful and elusive animal that once roamed freely throughout the northeast. The program will focus on wolf behavior, including feeding habitats and pack structure. A wolf will be present for the program. For more information, contact Cynthia at 413-477-8229 or chenshaw@eqlt.org.

MARCH...

Sunday, March 14, time and location TBD

Making Hay, Reading and Signing – Local farmer and author John Jeppson will share his book *Making Hay*. *Making Hay* combines local history, family memoir and a naturalist's simple affection for place, Jeppson recalls his family's efforts to adapt a well-loved property to changing times. "These engaging vignettes take us to the center of a loving family and their rural retreat on the shores of Lake Quaboag in Brookfield, Massachusetts. The Jeppsons' devotion to their land, the creatures on it, and to each other makes the reader a willing participant in these quiet adventures affectionately narrated by the paterfamilias." - Marcus McCorison, former Director, American Antiquarian Society. Contact the office to be notified of event time and location.

APRIL...

Saturday, April 3, 6:00 PM

9th Annual Dinner and Auction – Come join us for a festive dinner and silent auction at the Cultural Center at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick and catered by Reed's Catering of New Braintree. Cash bar available. Tickets are \$55.00 per person. If you have an item you wish to donate for the auction, contact the Cynthia at chenshaw@eqlt.org or 413-477-8229.

SATURDAY WORK DAYS...

Join us at 9am on the first Saturdays of the month and volunteer to help with the maintenance of EQLT properties. Please contact the office at 413-477-8229 or chenshaw@eqlt.org to confirm which location will be the work site for each Saturday.