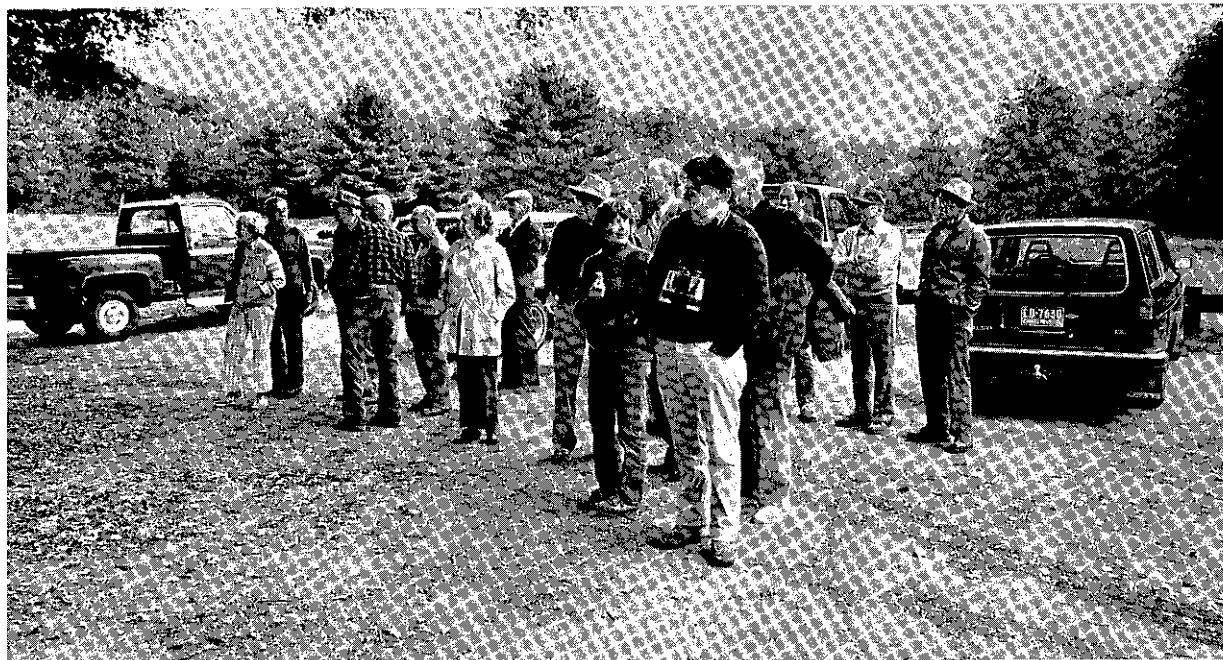


The Steep Rock VISTA

Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Volume 1, Number 1: FALL 1987



Caroline Norden

Trustees during field trip in Steep Rock

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friend of Steep Rock:

As the fall colors reached their peak, a magnificent week of Indian summer in mid-October brought large numbers of hikers and picnickers to Steep Rock Reservation. But the leaves are now mostly gone, and it is again time for my report to you — and for our annual appeal for your financial support.

This year we are making this letter part of a new regular Steep Rock newsletter, which makes it possible for us to report more fully than before on the events of the past year.

Highlights include important gifts of land from Elinor Van Deventer, Shirley McKennee, Dan Carew, Ted and Hollis Clark, and Gus Hauser and Ken Greif. We have also replaced the bridge in Hidden Valley, and we have begun marking trails to make it easier for you to recognize where you are when you get deep into the reservation.

For the first time — at least in recent memory — the annual picnic was postponed one week because of rain. Some 470 people — a record — had indicated they would attend on the original date, and more than 200 did attend on the rain date, a cloudy and cool day that at least presented no downpours, with a good time had by all. Many thanks to picnic co-chairmen Bunker Burr and Fougrie Smith.

As we announced at the picnic, we are pleased to welcome new trustees Bert Read, Penny Bardel, Bob Frost, and Art Potter. They succeed Don Smith, Ned Swigart, Bud Materne, and Estelle Bronson, who are retiring (under our new board rotation policy) after many years of dedicated service to the Association. We owe heartfelt thanks to these retiring trustees for all their support and help.

You will see from the financial report that our expenses in the past year were unexpectedly high. The damage caused by last spring's flood — when the Shepaug rose to its highest level since the disastrous 1955 flood — added considerably to our outlay. So did the need to replace the Hidden Valley footbridge. To top it off, we determined with regret this fall that our forester's truck had reached the end of its useful life and had to be replaced.

To keep Steep Rock well-cared-for we depend entirely on contributions from our friends, and this year we need your help even more than usual. All contributions, large and small, are important.

Many thanks.

George Ward
George Ward
President

THE FOOTBRIDGE IN HIDDEN VALLEY IS REPLACED IN COMPLEX OPERATION

We discovered this spring that the main support beams were rotting in the suspension footbridge across the Shepaug in Hidden Valley. The bridge had to be replaced, but that was easier said than done. We chose a truss design developed at the Drexel Institute, and we had the replacement bridge built by Arthur Deacon and Sons off the site, in Litchfield. It was constructed of pressure-treated wood, in two 50-foot sections. When the time came to bring it to the crossing, the contractor decided to carry it on a flatbed trailer as far as the Rumsey School soccer field, and from there a forklift and a tracked excavator each lifted one end of a section and inched along the old railroad bed until they reached the site.

They installed one section on the abutments one day, then went back and brought in the second piece. It was a tricky bit of engineering and Yankee ingenuity, and our hats are off to our longtime trustee Don Smith and to our forester Vinnie Forese, who devoted many days to the project — not to mention the skillful and patient Deacon folks.

We expect — and sincerely hope — we won't have to go through this exercise again for at least 25 years.



Rachael Comunale of the Montessori School trims a hemlock

WE'RE HARVESTING THE LAST OF THE RED PINES



Early this summer, Steep Rock staff spotted rust color in the needles of the remaining red pines in Hidden Valley. The rust color is a symptom of the red pine scale that has infected red pines throughout the state in the last 40-plus years. Fifteen years ago the trustees cut 22 acres of the species before the trees were affected, and the lumber was sold to a log-home company. A few small patches were left standing, and they are now infested with the scale. We will have these cut this winter, after the ground is frozen, and we urge hikers and skiers in Hidden Valley to steer clear of the logging areas for safety's sake.

WORKING ON THE PARKING

The parking "system" along Tunnel Road in Steep Rock grew up like Topsy — shaped by chance and convenience — and it is now doing much more harm than good to the reservation. When people park their cars every which way, they often do damage to tree roots and ground vegetation. Some areas along the river are completely without vegetation and are susceptible to erosion, which isn't good for the river or the riverbank. In others the existence of fine old trees is now seriously threatened.

So we plan to regulate the parking — close off fragile areas, particularly close to the river's edge, such as the stretch along Mitchell's Hole, and open new spaces in areas where parking will do less harm. To protect the maples in the center of the riding ring parking lot, we have already enlarged the lot to give the horse-trailers more maneuvering room, and we'll soon fence off the trees in some way.

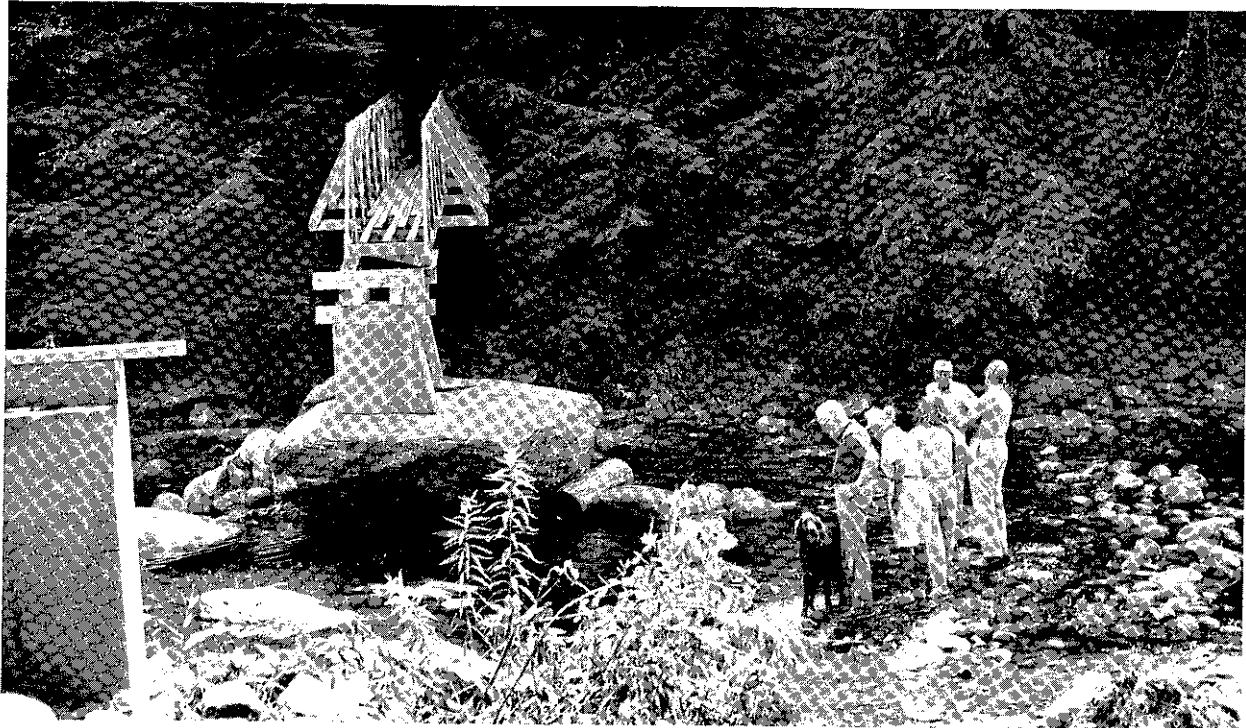
We may erase your favorite parking spot during this process, but we hope you'll applaud our motives and help us by cooperating.

GUNNERY, MONTESSORI STUDENTS HELP WITH TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Students in the Gunnery Outing Club along with 32 Washington Montessori Senior School students have been helping the Association maintain its trails this fall. The Montessori students split up into small groups and, during two rainy afternoons, trimmed branches and picked up fallen limbs on almost all the trails in Hidden Valley.

The Gunnery Outing Club, which was reactivated last year by enthusiastic faculty members, spent a morning cleaning out water-diversion ditches and building new ones on main trails to Steep Rock cliff.

Many thanks to the faculty and students!



Vincent Forre

THE HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID THREATENS STEEP ROCK GROVES

A new insect invader in Connecticut may cause extensive damage to the old groves of eastern hemlock that dominate Steep Rock's woods. The hemlock woolly adelgid, a tiny sap-sucking insect that probably came to us from Asia, was first noted in the state in 1985 and has devastated hemlock stands in the southern half of the state. It hasn't been seen in Litchfield County yet, but if it does spread here, Steep Rock will be faced with some tough choices as to the proper response.

We'll be very grateful if all our visitors keep a sharp lookout for the telltale signs of the insect. Look for masses of cottony white egg sacs, like the business ends of Q-tips, lining new twigs between the needles. The furry look of the egg sacs is what gives the adelgid the name "woolly." The sacs can be noted most months of the year, if they're here.

FOUR HARD-WORKING INTERNS

For a number of years Steep Rock has been able, with the help of the Washington Garden Club, to offer paid summer internships to young Washingtonians. Traditionally we've had one intern per year, but this past summer we hired four of them — Lissy Dyer, Matthew Gorra, and two veterans, Paul Swigart and Tod Lintner — each of whom worked for a month. They waded through hip-deep poison ivy to blaze boundaries; they inventoried and mapped parking areas, interviewed visitors, and spruced up trail-entrance barriers.

We plan to hire interns again next summer. We always look for candidates who want work experience in conservation. If you know of a young person who might be interested, let us know.

GIVING THE GIFT OF LAND

Since last year at this time, Steep Rock Association has received several generous and important donations of land. These welcome additions include about 30 acres from Elinor Van Deventer along the Roxbury Road (Route 199), approximately three acres given by Ted and Hollis Clark at the corner of Nettleton Hollow and Old Litchfield roads, 11-plus acres from Gus Hauser and Ken Greif on West Mountain Road, three acres along the river on River Road from Shirley McKennee, and three-and-a-half acres alongside the main trail up to the Steep Rock cliff from Dan Carew.

If you would like to consider giving land to Steep Rock, please get in touch with Bert Read, the new chairman of our land preservation committee. Remember that this is one of the best ways to preserve the quality of life in Washington. It makes an unmatched gift to your children and to the community.

Another way to protect the environment and the rural character of the town is the gift of conservation easements to Steep Rock. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that permits the land to remain in private ownership while permanently protecting it from excessive development. Three hundred and twenty-five acres have already been forever protected by such action. An admirable example of this kind of gift is the conservation easement recently given by Tom and Beryl Smith on most of the northern section of the old Pearson farm.

TRAIL BLAZES ...

- We've hired tree specialist Phil Lovell to tend to the 80-odd maples along the upper end of Tunnel Road. He'll be removing dead limbs, doctoring old wounds, clearing away competing vegetation, and giving breathing room to roots that have been deeply covered by road-grading ...
- Trout fishermen will continue to have fish to catch in the Shepaug, thanks to a continuing arrangement between Steep Rock and the Washington Rod and Gun Club. The flyfishing-only stretches above the Hidden Valley foot-bridge and below the Clamshell will be open not only to members of the club, which will stock the river, but also to any holder of a special permit, available at a modest fee from the club (see Harry Wright, president) ... The other areas of the river are not limited to flyfishing and may be fished in season – with any kind of artificial lures – by any Washington resident or guest with a state fishing license ...
- In the past camping in the reservation has been mostly limited to supervised groups with special permits, such as Scouts, but Washington residents have also been allowed to camp if they received informal permission from the staff. Recently, however, some individuals have abused the privilege by breaking the reservation's rules and leaving trash behind. The trustees have decided to require all campers to have written permits in their possession, and also to require that an adult or an organization take ultimate responsibility for the actions of campers. Camping has also been restricted to certain designated campsites ...
- Thanks to the work of Don Smith, hikers in Steep Rock can follow color-coded markers to the Steep Rock cliff (white), the Pinnacle from Bee Brook (blue) or from Sabbaday Lane (white), and the Quartz Mine (red). The Pinney Trail in the Steep Rock section has been blazed in white ... We have also been finding, clearing, and re-marking Steep Rock's boundaries with red blazes. If you own property adjacent to Steep Rock and would like to know where the boundaries are, contact our executive director, Caroline Norden ...
- We'd like to have more volunteer help to carry out projects – trail work, boundary marking, graphic design, map making, carpentry, forestry, research. Caroline – or any trustee – would love to hear from you if you're interested!

Steep Rock Association Operating Income and Expense Statement Year Ending 8/31/87

Operating Income	
Contributions	\$40,278
Picnic Contributions	\$823
Sale of Books & Maps	\$1,276
Interest	\$493
Total Income	\$42,870
Operating Expenses	
Forester & Exec. Director	\$24,138
Patrolling	\$1,877
General Maintenance	\$4,137
Pickup Truck Expenses	\$3,948
Insurance	\$2,097
Postage/Printing	\$3,250
Dues/Subscription	\$150
Picnic Expenses	\$1,075
Steep Rock Book	\$968
Other Expenses	\$1,687
Total Expenses	\$43,326
NET INCOME (Loss)	(\$456)

Note: This does not include the cost of the new Hidden Valley bridge.



George Ward and Spencer Byard during trustees' field trip

Caroline Norden

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Helen Wershebe

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Caroline Norden

FORESTER
Vincent Forese



Caroline Norden and Arthur Potter during trustees' field trip in Steep Rock

Charles R. Robinson