

ACADIA

The Friends of Acadia Journal SPECIAL 40TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



BAKER ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

RESTORING A HISTORIC BEACON
OF ACADIA'S MARITIME LANDSCAPE

PEOPLE POWERED

VOLUNTEERISM WITH FRIENDS OF
ACADIA FOR 40 YEARS AND COUNTING

CARING FOR THE CARRIAGE ROADS

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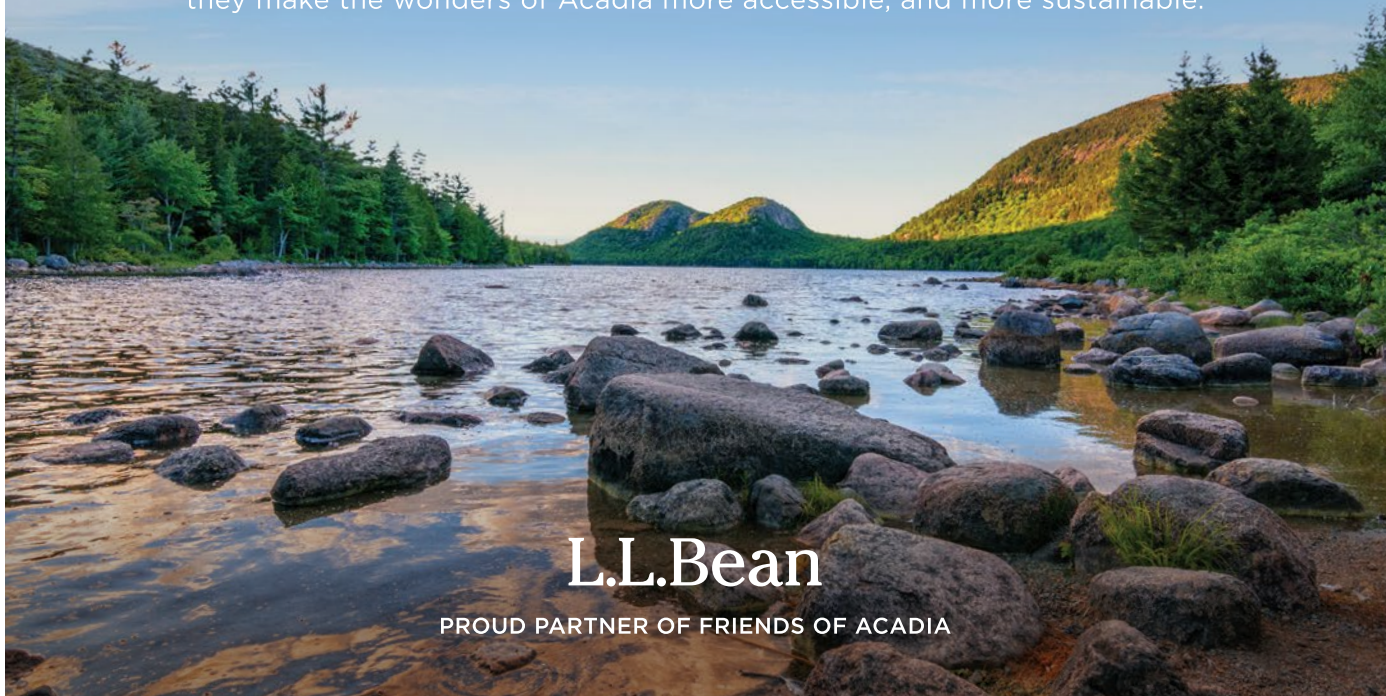
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ACADIA

The Friends of Acadia Journal

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*A Magazine About Acadia National Park
and Surrounding Communities*

Friends of Acadia preserves, protects, and promotes stewardship of the outstanding natural beauty, ecological vitality, and distinctive cultural resources of Acadia National Park and surrounding communities for the inspiration and enjoyment of current and future generations.

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Baker Island Lighthouse at dusk.
RIANNON JOHNSTON/FOA



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WHERE IN ACADIA?

While not the longest bridge in Acadia, crossing it takes a steady foot and a brave face for heights.

You'll find this place where peregrines soar, hikers climb, and rungs guide the way.

In 2004, the Acadia Youth Conservation Corps and Acadia National Park trail crew collaborated to give this bridge a fresh start, thanks to funds from the Acadia Trails Forever endowment.

If you think you can identify the location of this scene, email us at editor@friendsofacadia.org and include a personal story or memory with your answer. We'll print our favorite responses in the next issue of Acadia and send a Friends of Acadia hat to a randomly selected correct respondent.

READERS RESPOND TO "WHERE IN ACADIA?"

Schoodic Peninsula and Little Moose Island

Thanks to the readers who responded to our "Where in Acadia?" question in the spring magazine and correctly identified the location as the low-tide waters between the Schoodic Peninsula and Little Moose Island (pictured on the right) in the Schoodic section of Acadia National Park.

Below are a few of the correct responses that we received from members!



LILLY LAREGINA/FOA

"This issue's 'Where in Acadia' reminds me of Little Moose Island on the Schoodic Peninsula. My family and I have hiked that island several times and are always amazed by its wonders. Feelings of solitude abound on this wonderful little island that can only be reached when the tide is right. Dramatic cliffs, ocean breezes, and amazing views add to the enjoyment. When there you encounter few people willing to make the trek, but it is well worth the journey."

- Greg Russo, Arlington, VA

"I'm pretty certain this is Little Moose Island over at Schoodic. As a deckhand for a local tour company, I got to see this island from the ocean quite a few times, and I always delighted in looking for seabirds from the boat."

- Asher Panikian, Bar Harbor, ME

"Assuming that the picture is the bar at Little Moose Island. In the early 2000s, I brought in four trail experts to consult with Gary Stellpflug and me about the management of Little Moose Island and its trails. There were more than three miles of social trails on this small island, and no trail had ever been built intentionally by the park service. At the time, seven state-listed rare plants called Little Moose home. We then closed off more than a mile of these trails successfully using signs and brush and installed a registration box to help educate visitors about the fragility and importance of the flora. But visitors could still get to see and explore all of the significant areas there. We saw regrowth beginning the next year, but it required attention every two years to cut back the trail corridors we retained to keep visitor traffic on the trails. This is where Ridge Runners, Summit Stewards, and Rec Techs came in. I spent many happy hours doing this 'work' with them to protect the island. I love all those mats of black crowberry and the bold coast features. You have to know the tides to avoid a wet exit, but exploring Little Moose and getting that land's-end experience is unparalleled in Acadia. And the tip of Little Moose shows up on older maps labelled as Schoodic Point. No doubt George Dorr petitioned the Board of Geographic Names to move it so his mainland park district would have a prominent named destination."

- Charlie Jacobi, Bar Harbor, ME (retired from Acadia in 2017)

Celebrating 40 Years of Friends of Acadia

More than a century ago, people in this community came together to do something extraordinary. They created the first national park east of the Mississippi and the first in the nation established entirely from lands gifted to the American people.

Forty years ago, a new generation of friends drew inspiration from that same tradition of civic stewardship. They were volunteers, neighbors, and people whose own lives had been shaped by Acadia.

As you'll read in the pages of this magazine, the 1980s were a difficult time for the National Park Service. Federal budget cuts had strained staffing and resources, and Acadia's trails and carriage roads were in rough shape. For this group of friends, it was a call to action—and the beginning of what would become Friends of Acadia.

In the years that followed, Friends of Acadia got organized and went to work, taking on the deteriorating trails with a mix of volunteerism, fundraising, education, and advocacy that set the standard for our approach today. Friends of Acadia helped secure millions of dollars in federal funding to restore Acadia's trails and carriage roads and raised matching funds, establishing first-of-their-kind endowments to help care for them in perpetuity.

I first visited Acadia with my wife, Lydia, in 1993. On many return trips over the years, I had the chance to witness firsthand the remarkable progress of those restoration efforts, and the difference that committed people, working together, could make.

Over the following years and decades, Friends of Acadia expanded its work to help the park take on new issues. To address congestion, we helped launch and expand the Island Explorer, which has now carried more than 10.6 million people through

the park and surrounding communities car-free. We've invested in education programs to inspire and engage the next generations of park stewards. And we've helped restore treasured historic landmarks, including carriage road bridges, lighthouses, and the Carroll Homestead.

And as the challenges facing Acadia have evolved, Friends of Acadia has been a committed and nimble partner in helping the park adapt.

As increased visitation and environmental change place new pressures on Acadia's ecosystems, we are supporting science-driven restoration and conservation work in the park's wetlands and summits to strengthen their resilience for the future.

We are working with the park to expand attainable housing so Acadia can attract and retain the skilled, dedicated employees it needs to care for this extraordinary place.

And we are working to make Acadia more accessible and welcoming. This summer, that included a new partnership with MDI Wheelers to expand free, assisted rides on the carriage roads for people who cannot bike on their own.

Forty years after that first group of friends stepped up to support Acadia, the spirit behind this work remains much the same: people coming together to care for a place they love.

To each of you reading this magazine, thank you. None of what you'll find in these pages would have been possible without the sustained generosity, energy, and commitment of our volunteers, members, donors, partners, and friends. I hope you see your own hand in this 40-year story and know that you are helping write its next chapter.



—Eric Stiles

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



"And as the challenges facing Acadia have evolved, Friends of Acadia has been a committed and nimble partner in helping the park adapt."



VISTA VIEWS from the carriage road overlooking Jordan Pond.

RHANNON JOHNSTON/FOA



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A Remarkable Partnership

As a park manager, I'm not supposed to have "favorites." Just like a parent, I love all of Acadia's resources equally. And to be fair, I work hard to provide a steady and balanced hand at work, making sure that every corner of the park gets the protection it needs.

With that said, I feel most connected to the foundational experiences that made me fall in love with national parks when I'm ascending one of Acadia's granite peaks. While hiking, I often reflect on the power of trails.

Some of the most transformational moments in my life have been the experiences I've had on trails in national parks. I vividly remember my first experiences in the backcountry while serving as a high school volunteer at North Cascades National Park, experiencing that intoxicating feeling of interconnectedness with the natural world. I remember the first hikes I did with my wife and kids as a young family, building memories and sharing that sense of curiosity and wonder. I remember the pride I felt when my eldest child asked if we could go on a backpacking trip after they graduated high school—knowing the experiences they had growing up on trails had just as much an impact on them as it did me.

Forty years ago, Acadia's trails were named one of the most endangered trail systems in the National Park Service by Backpacker magazine. That fact is hard to believe, looking at the trail system today. The pristine stonework and craftsmanship of our trail crew can be seen around every turn. I can say with confidence that had Friends of Acadia never existed, our trail system would not look as good as it does today. The establishment of the Acadia Trails Forever endowment in 1999 played a critical role in the park's ability to restore the historic trail system to its former glory.

The power of the trails endowment endures. On my last hike up the Bubbles Divide Trail, I took note of the outstanding shape the trails were in following the restoration work our trail crew did over the past few summers.

I wonder how many people had caught the hiking "bug" after hiking this beautifully restored trail. How many families have made core memories, sparked the love of the outdoors with the next generation, or fulfilled a life-long dream by finally cresting a mountain summit in Acadia?

None of those moments would have been possible without the support from Friends of Acadia.

Friends of Acadia's commitment to helping the National Park Service achieve excellence is stronger than it has ever been, and you can see it in every corner of the park. The park crew re-grading the carriage roads is using equipment donated by Friends of Acadia. The seasonal custodian cleaning park restrooms has a place to live because of the newly constructed housing spearheaded by Friends of Acadia. The dozens of kids from central Maine seeing the ocean, some for the first time, while attending the Schoodic Education Adventure were able to travel because of a grant from Friends of Acadia. To list everything we have accomplished together in 40 years of partnership would be an impossible task.

The foundation built by Acadia National Park and Friends of Acadia in our first 40 years together is unshakeable. I look forward to what the next 40 years have in store for this remarkable partnership.

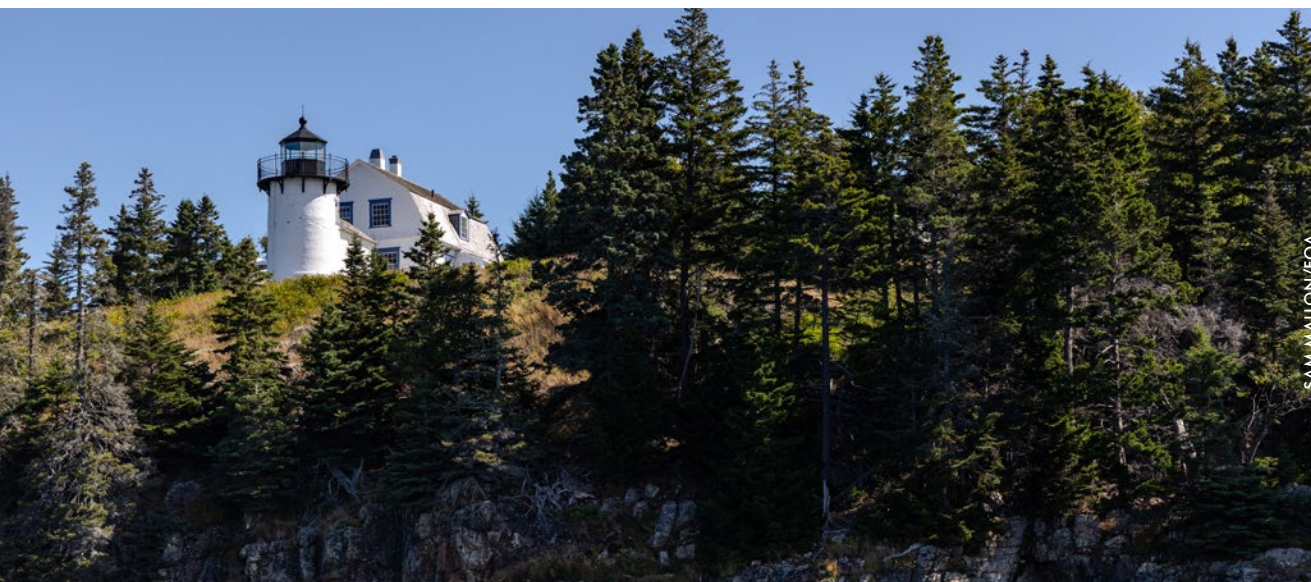


—Kevin Schneider

SUPERINTENDENT'S VIEW



"Friends of Acadia's commitment to helping the National Park Service achieve excellence is stronger than it has ever been, and you can see it in every corner of the park."



THE BEAR ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE, originally built in 1839, is seen atop the cliffs of Bear Island.

SAM WALLON/FOA



TAKING CARE OF THE CARRIAGE ROADS

Today's historic carriage roads are a testament to the power of community support, public-private partnerships, and a multi-year restoration effort.

BY SHANNON BRYAN

On any given summer day, the Eagle Lake Carriage Road is lively with parkgoers. Cyclists pedal the lakeside stretches, gravel crunching under their bikes' tires. Walkers saunter along, marveling at how the sun twinkles through the tree cover. Friends pose for big-smiled selfies with the mountains across the lake, and families escort the youngest among them in strollers or bike trailers.

The MDI Wheelers ride here, too. Volunteers pedaling specialized two-person trikes bring people with mobility limitations onto the carriage roads to immerse themselves in remarkable views.

Five years ago, the Eagle Lake loop was the final seven miles of Acadia National Park's carriage road network to be reconstructed as part of a multi-year effort to restore all 45 miles of the park's historic carriage road system. The road surface and subsurface—that sensibly engineered layering of stone—was rehabilitated along with drainage features, stone walls, and rock slopes. This section reopened in 2021, capping a significant restoration effort that began nearly 30 years earlier.

You'd be hard-pressed to imagine it today, but a generation ago, with limited funds and staff, Acadia's carriage road system

faced significant maintenance hurdles. Like many national parks, Acadia suffered from a lack of federal funding during the later decades of the 20th century. Much of that shortfall hit the budgets for infrastructure and maintenance.

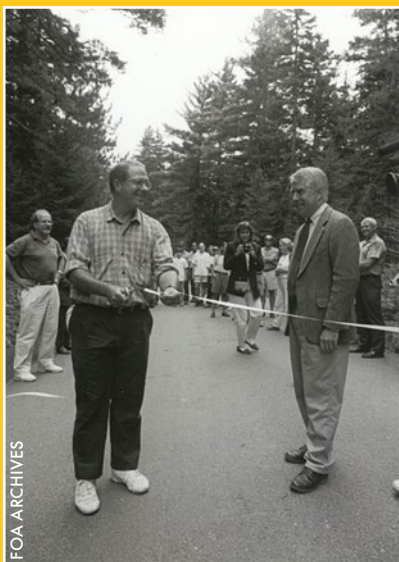
Built between 1913 and 1940, Acadia's carriage road system was financed and constructed by John D. Rockefeller Jr. for use by horse-drawn carriages.

Generally 14 to 16 feet wide, the carriage roads were excavated more deeply than typical gravel roads to create a durable foundation.

"The carriage roads are a road style that is built of various layers of stone," said Keith Johnston, Acadia's chief of facility maintenance and operations. "The base is large stones, anything from the size of a desk to soccer-ball-sized stones. The layers of stone get smaller and smaller as you build the road base up, so you've got a good porous understructure where water can move through it."

Rather than lying flat, the roads were built with a "crown"—a six- to eight-inch rise at the center—to direct water toward the edges and improve drainage.

Following the natural contours of the land, the roads offered travelers sweeping views from carefully curated scenic vistas



TOP TO BOTTOM: Undated NPS photo shows the condition of the carriage road before rehabilitation. • Frederic Bourke (left) and Charlie Tyson prepare to cut the ribbon during a ceremony to celebrate the completion of the carriage road reconstruction project in Acadia National Park as Duane Pierson (rear left) and Len Bobinchock (rear right) look on. • Acadia National Park staff Don Beal and Keith Johnston facilitate training on dry stone masonry with the trails and carriage roads crews while restoring a retaining wall along a carriage road in the 1990s.

“The initiative to restore and permanently maintain the carriage roads was among the very first projects at Acadia that showed the power of matching federal appropriated funding from Congress with private philanthropic dollars raised locally. It’s also where the purpose and potential of our young—at the time—organization really took hold.”

designed in collaboration with renowned landscape architect Beatrix Farrand. Locally quarried pink granite coping stones served as guardrails.

The carriage roads also featured numerous stonework structures, including culverts and retaining walls, 16 unique stone-faced bridges (a 17th bridge is on a carriage road just outside park boundaries), and two gatehouses.

In 1960, Rockefeller donated 45 miles of carriage roads to the park.

But over the next few decades, the park didn’t have the resources to care for them.

When now-retired Roads Foreman Merle Cousins first arrived in Acadia in 1972, the carriage roads were in bad shape.

“They were in such poor condition; they were rutted and there were washouts and rockslides,” he said. Vegetation stretched wildly into the carriage roads and crowded out Rockefeller’s diligently curated vistas. “Of the 16 bridges on Acadia’s carriage roads, at least seven [were so overgrown] you couldn’t even see the bridge until you were on it and saw the water.”

The overrun vegetation blocked the sunlight, “so the roads never dried,” Cousins said. “The roads were wet and damp, and horses and carriages would leave ruts and cracks.”

Coping stones had tumbled by the dozens down hillsides. On Eagle Lake, Cousins said, they found 30-40 coping stones that had rolled down to the water’s edge.

It’s a testament to the carriage roads’ original design and construction that they endured for as long as they did without regular attention. But even the best engineering struggles to stand

up under decades of visitor use, heavy rains, drainage-clogging debris, and creeping roots.

By the 1990s, the carriage roads were in dire need of a major overhaul. But such a monumental project on a historic and complex system would cost millions of dollars the park did not have.

Founded just a few years earlier in 1986, Friends of Acadia offered to be part of the solution.

Friends of Acadia board members Frederic “Rick” Bourke and David Rockefeller, son of John D. Rockefeller Jr., joined forces to fund a pilot restoration of more than a mile of carriage road in the valley known as the Amphitheater to test the feasibility of a larger rehabilitation and determine the cost per mile.

“At that time, I was working for the park’s roads division, and they asked me to be inspector for this section of test work,” Cousins said. “I did that all summer, making sure that one-mile section was up to standard, from the road to the culvert sizes and the stone wall rehab.”

It was. And by its completion, it was clear there was great interest in rehabilitating the entire 45-mile system.

Armed with data from that test mile, Friends of Acadia, the National Park Service, and members of Maine’s congressional delegation came to an agreement: the federal government would provide \$4 million in funding to restore the carriage roads, and Friends of Acadia would raise \$4 million (the equivalent of \$9.7 million today) to create an endowment aimed at generating funds to care for the roads in perpetuity.

Energized by the federal matching



commitment, Friends of Acadia launched its carriage road capital campaign and “Give a Foot” community fundraising program, inviting local residents and businesses to sponsor one-foot sections of the renovation for \$17.05 per foot. Through the generosity of lead donors and broad community support, Friends of Acadia reached the campaign goal in 1996, creating the landmark Carriage Road Endowment that continues to support the carriage roads today and in perpetuity.

“The initiative to restore and permanently maintain the carriage roads was among the very first projects at Acadia that showed the power of matching federal appropriated funding from Congress with private philanthropic dollars raised locally,” said David MacDonald in 2021, during his tenure as Friends of Acadia’s president. “It’s also where the purpose and potential of our young—at the time—organization really took hold.”

Restoring Acadia’s Carriage Roads

Restoration work began in 1993, and Cousins was appointed carriage roads supervisor.

“I was on there from day one,” he said. “After we got the funds, we could hire the

people. We had the equipment and all the materials we needed.”

Work kicked off with Aunt Betty Pond Carriage Road.

Once park users realized what we were doing, Cousins said, “people started waving and giving a thumbs-up when we’d be out there.”

Carriage road crowns and subgrade layers were restored. New surface materials were applied, replacing thousands of cubic yards that had been washed away over the years. Woody vegetation was removed from roads, shoulders, and ditches. Drainage systems were reestablished to deter erosion. Coping stones were reset or replaced.

Over the course of the restoration, Congress allocated an additional \$2 million to the effort.

Between 1993 and 1995, nearly all of Acadia’s carriage roads were rehabilitated—excluding that seven-mile section of Eagle Lake Carriage Road, said Johnston.

“Eagle Lake was in the best condition at the time,” he said, as it had been one of the only sections that was relatively maintained over the years. “It was deferred because the [original] federal dollars weren’t enough to do it all.”

RESTORING THE CARRIAGE ROAD VIEWS

Acadia National Park’s carriage roads include 182 historic vistas. These notable views reveal sweeping scenes of shimmering lakes, the rise of a mountainside, or the deep blue of the Atlantic Ocean. Others subtly showcase the rustic stonework of a granite bridge or wind-waving grasses and wildflowers in a meadow.

Working with renowned landscape architect Beatrix Farrand, John D. Rockefeller Jr. designed the vistas in tandem with the carriage roads in the 1920s and 30s. Those vistas highlight what he considered to be some of the most beautiful views in the world.

Over time, the same competing priorities and lack of funding that led to the carriage roads’ state of disrepair affected the vistas, too. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Acadia National Park arborist Jeff Grey led vista restoration efforts, which were funded by a mix of entrance fee dollars, maintenance funds and other federal appropriations, as well as funds from Friends of Acadia. Volunteers also supported the effort.

Last summer, with support from Friends of Acadia’s Carriage Road Endowment and hands-on effort from volunteers, park staff circled back on that earlier work, restoring vistas that had become overgrown. They worked on 43 historic vistas, reclaiming beautiful views of Acadia’s natural and historic landscapes.

See before and after images at friendsofacadia.org/vistas

“I’m extremely proud. ... I felt we brought [the carriage roads] back to John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s standards and his ideas about how the experience should be.”



RHIANNON JOHNSTON/FOA

ABOVE: Views of Connor's Nubble are restored during a vista restoration project on Upper Mountain Carriage Road, led by the NPS Trail Crew and with volunteer support from Friends of Acadia's Drop-in Stewardship program, Groundwork Bridgeport, and SCA AmeriCorps.

BELOW: Rebuilding a historical dry-laid stone box culvert as part of the Eagle Lake Carriage Road construction in Acadia National Park in 2021.



ASHLEY L. CONTI/FOA

Additional federal funds to restore Eagle Lake came through in 2021. When the work was complete, the reopening of this final handful of miles marked the official conclusion of the momentous project.

Cousins, who retired in 2008 before the Eagle Lake section was completed, is rightfully gratified by the work of so many hands.

"I'm extremely proud," he said. "The big thing is the history. I felt we brought it back to John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s standards and his ideas about how the experience should be."

Maintaining a Treasure

Keeping the carriage roads in tip-top shape is a priority for today's park crews. A walk-around in early spring, following winter snowmelt and spring rains, also helps the road crew identify areas that need attention—washouts, clogged culverts and ditches, or dangerous hanging tree limbs.

"As soon as they're dry enough to get a vehicle out, the crew goes out on the carriage roads," Johnston said. "They get all the trees out of the way, get any deep ruts marked, coned, or filled, and they get carriage roads open to the public as quickly as possible."

Regular maintenance during the season involves removing and replacing that single top-most layer of stone.

"It's about an inch deep and comprised of what we call 'the carriage road mix,' a highly engineered aggregate mix that several local companies are able to make for us," Johnston said. "When we do a major rehabilitation, we take off the top two courses

of stone, re-crown it, restore all the ditching, and then bring the coping stones back into the appropriate 16-foot width,” he said. Then they reapply the top two layers.

What fewer visitors see is the critical—and complex—drainage system. There are more than 100 miles of “back drains” that help move water away from the park’s carriage roads. Johnston describes them as a “spaghetti of cuts and carves and handmade drainages in the landscape that was intended to protect the roads from watershed.”

Those, too, needed to be restored and continue to be maintained.

Crews likewise use visitor use data to adjust maintenance cycles. For example, on heavily used carriage roads, bike tires tend to wear down the carriage road surface more quickly.

They’ve also come to understand how the tree canopy over the carriage roads impacts the longevity of the surface.

“The tree canopy was directing rainwater onto the road surface and not allowing it to naturally fall dispersed on the road and make its way to the ditches,” said Johnston. “The tree branches concentrate water in very specific areas and were creating small rivulets, which then became washouts.”

A trimmed-back canopy also allows the carriage roads to dry out faster after winter snowmelt or heavy rains. “They’re more aerated,” Johnston said. “They get more airflow, and they’re not as soupy for as long.”

Johnston’s predecessor started a program to remove the overhead canopy, trimming it back off the roads. “Those sections have seen much less loss of surface aggregate as a result of the canopy work,” Johnston said.

“We’re still learning ways and techniques to do a better job being stewards of the roads and resources by tackling it from different angles.”

Closing the carriage roads during “mud season,” when rain and snowmelt soften the gravel surface, helps a great deal. That concept was first implemented by Cousins during his tenure.



ART WOOSTER of Seal Cove, ME (left) and Gloria Higgins of Southwest Harbor, ME, look out over the vistas of Eagle Lake during a ride on the carriage roads with the MDI Wheelers.

“I’ve seen a beautiful section of carriage road where someone got on a bicycle and left a rut an inch deep for a mile and a half,” Cousins said. “When it rains, where does the water go? That rut gets bigger and bigger and you get a whole washout. Then you’ve got to repair it.”

Cousins was also the mastermind behind Friends of Acadia’s annual Take Pride in Acadia Day, which started in 1991—the year the Carriage Road Campaign was announced. Every fall, volunteers take to the carriage roads to rake leaves and clear drainage, helping to prevent erosion during the winter storms and spring thaw, and reducing the need for costly repairs.

“At the time, we didn’t have enough hired help to clean all 45 miles of ditches and culverts,” Cousins said. “It certainly helped and made things clean. And it was also a great thing for the public; people come year in, year out to help.”

Over the years, the original \$4 million

PRESERVING THE CARRIAGE ROAD BRIDGES

In Acadia, no other human-made structures are as iconic as the historic bridges on the carriage roads. Made from local stone, they appear to emerge from the landscape itself.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. financed 16 of the 17 stone-faced bridges, each unique in design, to span streams, waterfalls, roads, and cliffs. Acadia National Park employs two full-time masons to help preserve the park’s historic stone structures.

Rotating restoration and maintenance of the carriage road bridges is funded in part by the Friends of Acadia Carriage Road Endowment and by donations from the 2019 Friends of Acadia Annual Benefit Paddle Raise.

To preserve and catalog the original mortar and ensure historical accuracy in restoration projects, samples are permanently stored as references in the park’s archives.

Read more and watch bridge restoration work in action: friendsofacadia.org/masons.

endowment created by Friends of Acadia has grown with additional gifts and investment returns, allowing Friends of Acadia to grant more than \$200,000 from this endowment and other funds to the park each year. This funding supplements and amplifies federal dollars, including revenue from park entrance fees, and helps sustain the program when federal budgets fluctuate.

Friends of Acadia's support helps fund park staff salaries, materials, and equipment. In 2024, Friends of Acadia purchased a new excavator, two dump trucks, and a diesel tractor for Acadia National Park—helping to ensure that the carriage road system is continuously maintained and repairs are completed when the unexpected happens.

That new equipment replaced some of the park's aging fleet.

"We're still using the grader that Friends of Acadia bought in 1993. Friends of Acadia also purchased the original dump trucks for the carriage roads," said Johnston. "We managed to keep the fleet and the equipment going, but they are long past the end of their useful life. Friends of Acadia is investing in some newer equipment that's smarter, smaller, easier to use, less impactful to visitors."

HOW YOU CAN HELP KEEP THE CARRIAGE ROADS IN AMAZING SHAPE

Stay off the carriage roads during "mud season" in early spring. As the snow melts and rainy days keep the carriage roads soft, the park closes the carriage roads to deter damage at this sensitive time of year.

Slow your roll when riding bikes on the carriage roads. Not only is that a courtesy for all the other visitors walking and riding the park's carriage roads, but it also helps keep the carriage roads' critical top layer of gravel in place. Hard stops and fast corners deplete the carriage road surface more rapidly.

And join us in caring for the carriage roads during our annual Take Pride in Acadia volunteer day on Nov. 7!

Looking Forward

Shifting weather patterns, which lean toward more frequent and more intense storms, may test the limits of the carriage roads' original design and 100-year-old infrastructure. Park managers are also closely monitoring both how visitors use the carriage roads and the park's growing number of users, as they consider the best ways to protect them for the future.

But whatever changes or challenges may come, the park is in a decidedly better position to meet them thanks to a public-private partnership created three decades ago.

"Acadia contains the best and most extensive example of a historic carriage road system in the United States," said Acadia National Park Superintendent Kevin Schneider. "The carriage roads are in outstanding condition for visitors to enjoy thanks to Friends of Acadia and generous private philanthropy."

Thanks to donor support, congressional action, and the expertise of the National Park Service, the carriage road system will continue to connect people with the scenic, natural, and cultural resources of the park for generations to come. ■

SHANNON BRYAN is Friends of Acadia's Content and Website Manager.

PARK VISITORS RIDE BIKES along the Eagle Lake Carriage Road.

WILL NEWTON/FOA





ACADIA TRAILS FOREVER

In 1999, Friends of Acadia and Acadia National Park undertook a \$13 million campaign to restore Acadia's trail system and establish the first privately endowed trail system in national park history.

BY SHANNON BRYAN

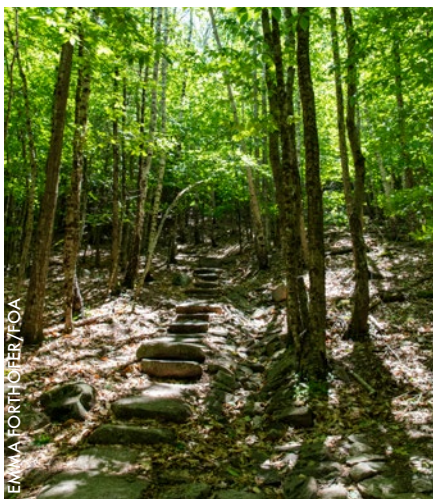
Acadia's Perpendicular Trail feels like a lucky rock-spilling accident. Amid a massive tumble of granite blocks, artfully positioned boulders and rock steps—more than 300 of them—welcome hikers along the gratifyingly steep route up Mansell Mountain.

Well blended on the talus slope, the trail's granite steps look so right in their place, as though the stones themselves plotted the route. Higher up, the trail enters the woods, stealing by lichen-covered rockface, over a mountain stream, and past moss-topped glacial erratics seemingly left there by ancient giants.

Although trails like this feel almost naturally occurring, they're a testament to expert human hands.

Maintaining trails that are so deeply histories and intertwined with the landscape, while also ensuring they stand up to time, weather, and increasing boot traffic, is an art form and a balancing act for the park.

"We want the park to stay the living history that it is, but also accommodate today's visitation," said Dave Schlag, Acadia National Park's trails foreman. "Why was the trail here in the beginning, and why are we rebuilding it? We want to honor those parts of it."



OPPOSITE: A visitor climbs steps refurbished in 2020 on the Hunters Brook Trail up the side of The Triad. **TOP:** Christian Barter (left), now-retired trail crew supervisor, and a member of the Acadia Youth Conservation Corps move large rocks while working on trails in Acadia in 2004. **BOTTOM:** The Emery Path in Acadia.

This nuanced work takes resources: Dedicated staff with trail-building expertise and institutional knowledge; a cadre of extra hands to assist crews in tackling an array of projects and upkeep; and reliable annual funding that supports consistent maintenance and heavier lifts when needed, materials and equipment included.

Today's approximately 158 miles of well-maintained trails—on Mount Desert Island, the Schoodic Peninsula, and Isle au Haut—are also a testament to the collaborative effort of an interdivisional

team that includes staff well-versed in the park's wildlife, resource management, and cultural history. Together, they consider historic and environmental factors when assessing when and how any trail work will be completed.

But rewind a handful of decades, and Acadia's trails told a very different story.

LANGUISHING TRAILS

Acadia's trail system evolved over the course of centuries. The Wabanaki created early trails on this land while hunting, fishing, gathering, and trading. Beginning in the 1880s, before Sieur de Monts National Monument was established, Village Improvement Associations in Bar Harbor, Seal Harbor, and Northeast Harbor built and maintained trails, as did the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) a handful of decades later.

But the 1940s and 1950s marked a shift in focus away from the park's trails and carriage roads.

The Mount Desert Island Fire of 1947 burned 10,000 acres of park land, forcing park leadership to dedicate a great deal of their budget to addressing the devastation left behind.

That shift, coupled with decreased visitation, led to the abandonment of around 100 miles of trail in the early 1950s. Prioritization of automobiles and inconsistent funding through the 1960s and 1970s only exacerbated the funding shortages, and Acadia's trails, like the carriage roads, fell into disrepair.

Gary Stellpflug, retired Acadia National Park trails foreman, first started in the park in 1974 as a seasonal. "When I got there, [the trail crew] was minimalist," he said. "You could get all of them into a crew cab."

By the 1980s, Acadia's trails and carriage roads were showing serious signs of neglect.

Park staff maintained what they could, but in the 1980s, the trail crew dropped down to only one permanent position—Stellpflug—and a few seasonals each summer. They did their best to remove fallen trees, blaze trails, and trim back vegetation, but didn't have the resources for more.

Seasonal crew sizes fluctuated greatly. "One year I had one guy," Stellpflug said. "It was me and one guy."

Those work-study seasonals were typically brand new each year and their seasons didn't last very long; as students, they needed to hustle back to school come

August. They were limited in what they could accomplish.

"It was a trail crew, but it was nothing like today," Stellpflug said.

"The trail system was in really sad shape. It was so dilapidated," said Chris Barter, recently retired trail crew supervisor who started in Acadia National Park in 1989 as a seasonal trail worker under Stellpflug. "It was kind of like visiting ruins. There was all this old stonework that had been built, some of it 100 years earlier, which was in varying states of falling apart."

"On all the signature stone paths we have, like on the east face of Dorr Mountain, there were loose steps or whole staircases piled at the bottom," he said. "There were collapsed walls. And anything that had a gravel surface on it, it was pretty much gone."

When hiking Acadia's trails in the 1990s, Barter said, you could spy remnants of old routes and stonework.

"There were these isolated pieces that were perfectly intact, and you could really see what the whole system had been like," he said. "But those were really the exception."

Witnessing the troubled state of Acadia's trails, volunteer groups stepped in to assist with trail maintenance. In 1986, Friends of Acadia was officially formed as an all-volunteer organization dedicated to restoring and preserving Acadia National Park.

But despite ardent efforts by Acadia National Park's small crew and dedicated volunteers, the park simply did not have the resources and staff to keep up with continuing deterioration. In August 1991, Backpacker magazine included Acadia's trail system on a list of the most endangered trails in the country, illustrating the story with a photo of Jesup Path so overgrown with vegetation that the trail is invisible under clumps of weeping grasses.

"It was no problem for me to walk around the park and identify projects," Stellpflug said. "I couldn't go more than half an hour and say, 'God, we've got to fix that.'"

Acadia needed a game-changing solution.

ACADIA TRAILS FOREVER

Inspired by the success of the carriage roads campaign (read more on page 8), Friends of Acadia launched a second campaign to address the deteriorating trails.

The mission was clear: restore Acadia's trail system to the highest ecological and aesthetic standards and the most exacting historical specifications. It was a tall order,

but in 1999, Friends of Acadia and Acadia National Park undertook a \$13 million campaign called Acadia Trails Forever.

This campaign aimed to fund the rehabilitation of 130 miles of existing trails, reopen some abandoned trails, and construct new village connector trails to link town centers with the park. Similar to the funding approach with the carriage roads, the campaign also sought to establish an endowment to maintain the restored trail network in perpetuity.

The arrangement, which then-Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt called “a landmark initiative,” included \$9 million to be raised by Friends of Acadia (the equivalent of close to \$18 million today) and \$4 million in federal funds, the majority of which came from park entrance fees.

The campaign reached its goal in just under one year, and Acadia became the first privately endowed trail system in national park history.

Much of the success of the campaign is a credit to Ruth and Tris Colket, summer residents of Bar Harbor, who pledged a lead gift of \$5 million, including \$2 million outright and a \$3 million challenge grant. The challenge spurred an outpouring of community support. Of the 1,000 contributions, 60 percent were gifts ranging from \$5 to \$100.

“A lot of smaller donors wanted to give because they love to use the trails,” said Stephanie Clement, Friends of Acadia’s vice president of conservation, back in 2011. “I think trails are starting to come back into fashion.”

The Acadia Trails Forever model has since been adapted by other national parks and their partners to ensure trails have the consistent support they need to stay well maintained.

REBUILDING THE TRAILS

In Acadia, those first years following the campaign saw an impressive amount of work and skill development.

“The builders that built so much of Acadia’s original work had a very specialized skill set,” said Barter. “That had really faded from the culture at large—people who could do dry stone masonry and cut stones, people who knew how to move big, heavy objects around,” especially on trails where mechanized equipment couldn’t go.

After decades of thin staffing, the park was able to hire a robust

crew and re-establish project teams with supervisors to efficiently manage the work. They began rebuilding skills and know-how that had been lost over the decades.

“We really set out to learn those specialized skills and have a teaching apparatus in place for people as they came in to learn how to do what we did safely and effectively,” Barter added.

They hosted a trails conference in Bar Harbor, which Friends of Acadia helped sponsor and where they met and learned from expert trail builders from around the country.

Working with the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, the park created the Acadia Trails Treatment Plan, a guide to restoring and preserving Acadia’s trail system in line with the “pathmaker” construction styles of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and village improvement societies.

Stellpflug left Acadia National Park for a spell in 1991. He returned in 1999 to a totally different program.

“There’s money, there are trucks, there are people,” he said, remembering what it felt like to return. “The program was more reliable. Friends of Acadia certainly had stabilized things. For a couple of years, our government funding fell through, but the endowment would kick in, so you could maintain a viable program and keep people coming back.”

Within the first decade following the Acadia Trails Forever campaign, more than 3,000 steps, 16,760 square feet of walls, and 259 culverts were repaired or constructed as trails like Schiff Path, Valley Trail, and Emery Path were restored. The overgrown Jesup Path was revamped with a more than 2,000-foot boardwalk, guiding visitors through birch forest and above grassy wetlands. A sturdy new boardwalk was built on the western portion of Jordan Pond Path. Five miles of village connector trails were built and 1.8 miles of abandoned trails reopened.

With a consistent program and returning crews, institutional knowledge grew.

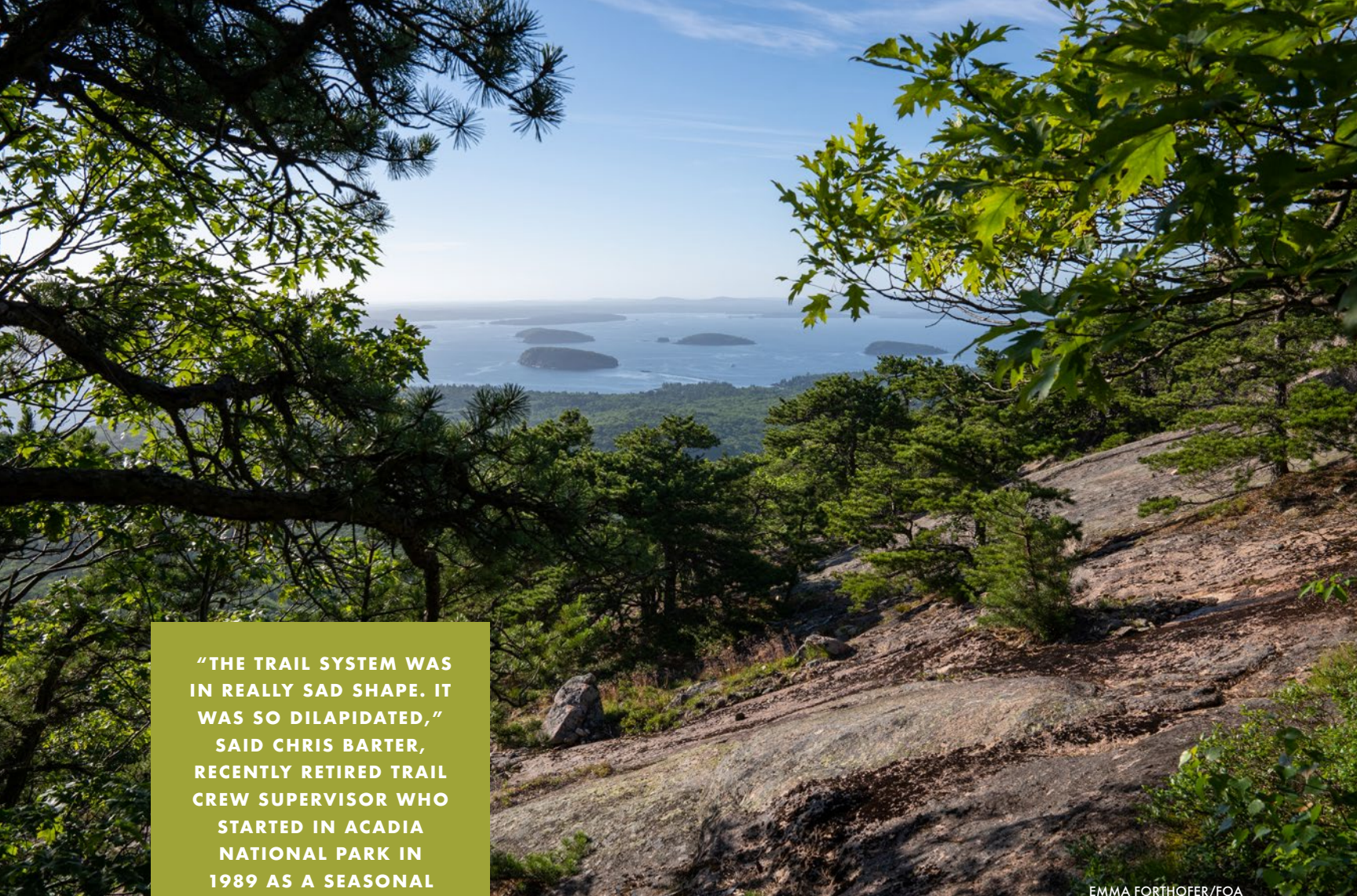
In the decades since the trail rehabilitation began, work has continued in earnest, with major rehabilitation projects focusing on the Perpendicular Trail in 2007, the Valley Trail in 2010 and 2017 through 2019. In recent years, trail crews have built new stone stairs on the Bubbles Divide Trail, repaired storm washouts on Ocean Path, and worked with volunteers to rebuild boardwalks and bridges on Hemlock Path and Hunter’s Beach Trail.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Ladder on Canada Cliffs Trail • Rehabilitation of the Valley Trail in 2010 • Trail signs near Canada Cliffs.

OPPOSITE TOP: A view of the Porcupine Islands from the Schiff Path on Dorr Mountain.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Ruth and Tristram Colket provided a \$5 million foundational gift for Acadia Trails Forever, helping complete the \$9 million private fundraising goal two years ahead of schedule in July 2000.



"THE TRAIL SYSTEM WAS IN REALLY SAD SHAPE. IT WAS SO DILAPIDATED," SAID CHRIS BARTER, RECENTLY RETIRED TRAIL CREW SUPERVISOR WHO STARTED IN ACADIA NATIONAL PARK IN 1989 AS A SEASONAL TRAIL WORKER UNDER STELLPFLUG. "IT WAS KIND OF LIKE VISITING RUINS. THERE WAS ALL THIS OLD STONEMWORK THAT HAD BEEN BUILT, SOME OF IT 100 YEARS EARLIER, WHICH WAS IN VARYING STATES OF FALLING APART."

EMMA FORTHOFER/FOA

GHOST TRAILS BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

Among the miles of trails that have been given new life over the years are some that were nearly lost altogether. At its peak, Acadia's hiking trail system contained about 230 miles of trail. In the late 1990s, it was estimated that approximately 100 miles of trail had been abandoned, meaning they were no longer marked, mapped, or maintained.

Reviving some of them was a goal of the Acadia Trails Forever initiative.

Trails were abandoned for a slew of reasons. Damage caused by the fire of 1947 on Mount Desert Island buried many. Recreational hiking in Acadia dwindled. As the forest grew during the decades that followed, those paths became increasingly indiscernible, existing only as memories on out-of-date maps. Lean resources kept the park's attention on more popular trails.

"We explored miles of abandoned trail in this park to find what's out there," said

Keith Johnston, Acadia's current chief of facility operations and maintenance, who was a trail crew leader in the early 2000s.

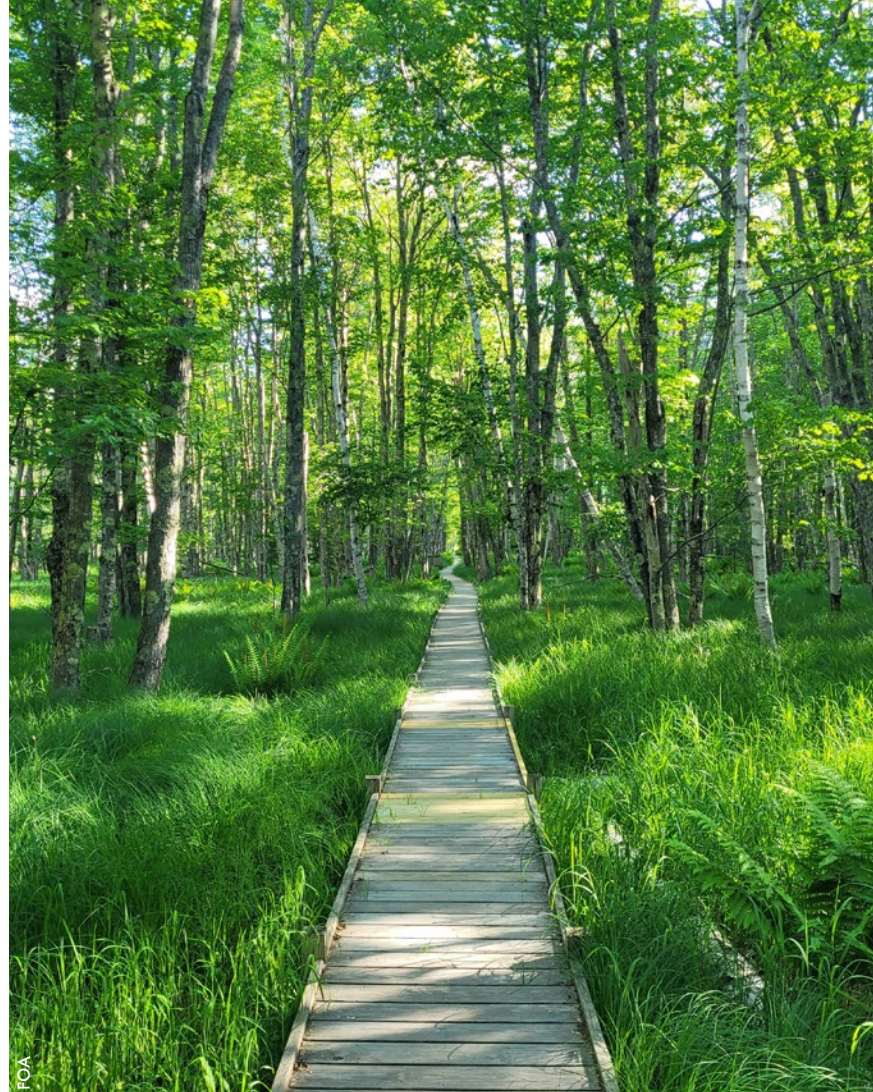
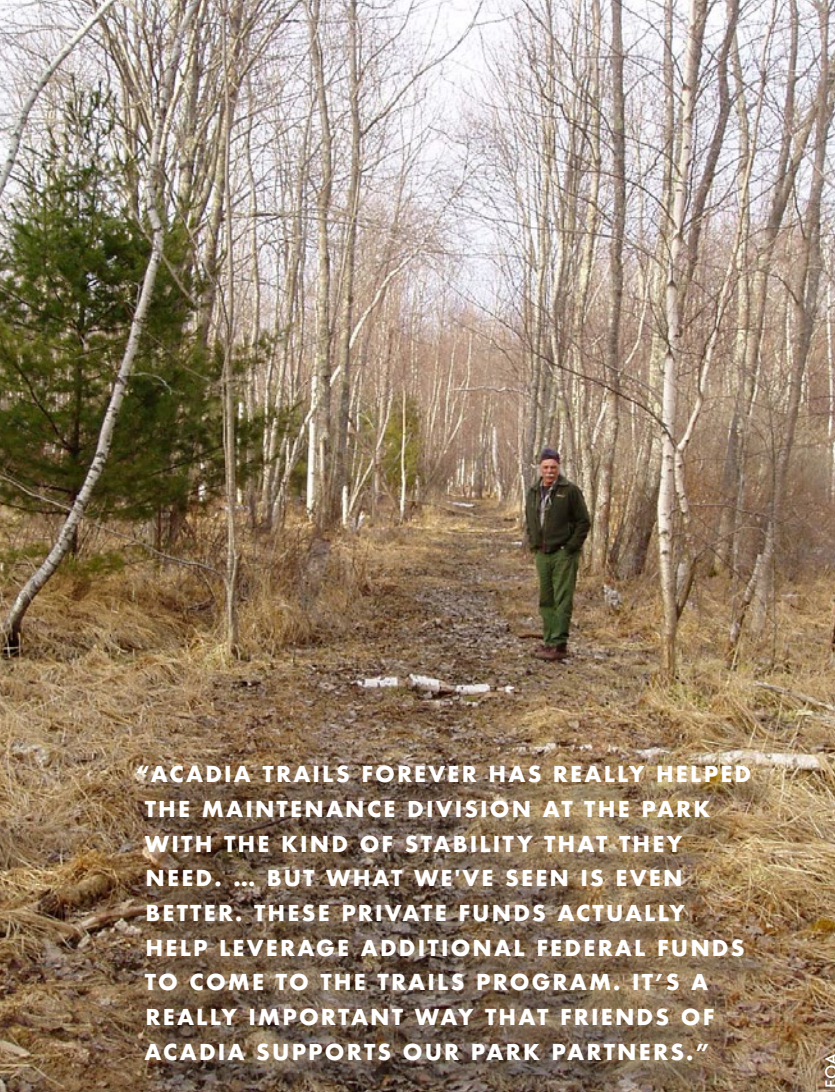
All of Acadia's trails—including abandoned trails—are listed in the Hiking Trails Management Plan, published in 2002. The plan served as a guidebook for park managers as they determined which trails within Acadia National Park would be rehabilitated and maintained. An evaluation rubric assessed each trail's cultural and natural resource significance, connection to communities and neighborhoods, as well as visitor experience criteria, helping prioritize the work.

They also used visitor use data, collected over multiple seasons by Resource Specialist Charlie Jacobi, who retired from Acadia in 2017 after 33 years.

Among those forgotten trails was Homans Path, located on the east side of Dorr Mountain. It was built around 1916 and named for Eliza Homans in honor of her donations of large tracts of land that



FOA



later became part of Acadia National Park. By 1941, it disappeared from maps.

Decades later, Homans was largely unrecognizable. The only remnants of the original trail were a set of stone stairs that stopped in the middle of an open ledge and didn't connect to another path or lead to the summit of Dorr.

Rehabilitating every abandoned trail wasn't the park's goal. In some cases, existing trails were already meeting the needs of the unmarked one (connecting one trail to another or providing walkable access from town into the park). In others, it's a simple matter of budget.

"We can't afford to maintain what we have, never mind add to the inventory," said Johnston. "We have always struggled to have enough resources to take care of the things that are already under our purview."

For Homans Path, its cultural history and location landed it near the top of the evaluation list.

Homans Path was put back on the map thanks to work completed in 2002. It connects to Emery Path, and at its base, a

gravel-surfaced segment was constructed to meet with an open section of Hemlock Road, near the Jesup Path. Friends of Acadia volunteers assisted park crews with the work.

"All told, in about twenty weeks of work, Acadia National Park put one of its most unique and highly crafted trails back on the map," said Johnston at the time, who was then the trail crew supervisor. "It's only appropriate that this trail, named for one who donated the first lands that were to become Acadia, is preserved, maintained, and open for all to enjoy."

Another trail brought back from the brink is the previously abandoned Canada Cliffs Trail, which connects with Valley Trail and Beech Cliff Trail and provides access to Echo Lake Beach.

Work on this trail was completed in 2010, and at the parking area entrance to Canada Cliffs, trail crews installed a set of stairs which had first been used as temporary stairs at Sand Beach while work was being done there. In a forward-looking move, crews prefabricated those stairs so they could be "recycled" at Canada Cliffs once

the Sand Beach work was complete.

"There is a special joy in reopening an abandoned trail. It's a bit like discovering Machu Picchu," said Barter. "There were trails that very few people even knew were there."

VILLAGE CONNECTOR TRAILS

Village Connector Trails re-establish the long tradition of walking or biking into Acadia National Park from towns and neighborhoods.

Outside park boundaries, these connector trails are made possible thanks to the generosity of local landowners who agree to allow pathways to cross their properties.

They enhance the character and walkability of Mount Desert Island's villages, and they reduce the number of cars on park roads and at trailheads. Connector trails complement the Island Explorer buses, providing another option to get into the park, out into quiet landscapes, or to in-town destinations.

Among the goals of the Acadia Trails Forever campaign was to establish five

OPPOSITE: Jesup Path before and after renovation.

BELOW: Maine Conservation Corps works to build the bridge on the Great Meadow Loop Trail in 1999.



village connector trails. The Great Meadow Loop was the first and has since become an appreciated path for hikers and birdwatchers alike. Then came Western Mountain Connector, connecting the end of Lurvey Spring Road to Western Mountain and Mill Field Roads—and is open to bikes and horses as well. After that were the Giant Slide Trail, Schooner Head Path, and Duck Brook Connector (“a short gem of a hike in its own right,” as noted in the 2011 park trail report).

The work of bringing those trails to life—coordinating with landowners, establishing agreements, and overseeing the building of the trails—was led by Friends of Acadia’s Marla O’Byrne and, later, Terry Begley.

ACADIA TRAILS FUTURE

Every spring, the park’s trail crew hikes each trail in the park to identify issues that may have come about since the previous season. It’s an annual routine they call “cruising.” Whether it’s a downed tree over the trail, rotting bogwalk, faded blazes, or eroded terrain, issues are gathered up and prioritized for repair as part of the park’s ongoing trail maintenance.

Trail maintenance is an ever-cycling affair, but reliable funding enables early attention to issues while they’re less costly to repair and enables park managers to plan ahead and prioritize work years into the future.

“Acadia Trails Forever has really helped the maintenance division at the park with the kind of stability that they need,” Clement said. “There will always be a trails program, even if all federal funding were to go away. But what we’ve seen is even better. These private funds actually help leverage additional federal funds to come to the trails program, which is great. It’s a really important way that Friends of Acadia supports our park partners.”

The Acadia Trails Forever campaign launched 27 years ago at a time when the park sorely needed it. Those who loved Acadia

answered that call—and the difference they made can be seen and felt underfoot across every trail in the park today.

“I’m still floored when I think about the conservation legacy that the Colketts and others who are part of the trails campaign provided to future generations,” said Clement. “What a gift it has been to all park visitors to make sure that our trails are in good shape moving forward.”

Today’s visitors might not believe the monumental work that went into restoring Acadia’s trails. In many ways, that is the point. The stone steps, coping stones, drainage, walls, and carefully shaped paths now feel as though they have always belonged there—a testament to the people who planned, funded, volunteered, and worked to rehabilitate mile after historic mile. “We really believed, and the trail crew still does, that what we were doing mattered,” Barter said. “People can hike this trail and have this experience in a way that they just couldn’t have if we didn’t do the work that we did. But it’s also about preserving something that’s going to last.”

For Barter, the rehabilitation of Acadia’s trails carried forward the same care, creativity, and devotion that shaped Acadia’s earliest paths. “We call it rehabilitation,” he said. “But I think it was really another generation of artistic construction in the same way that [George B.] Dorr’s was and that the CCC was—all that joy pouring from our hearts and souls is still out there in the woods. I like to think that you could kind of feel it when you’re out there hiking on the trails.”

And perhaps that is the greatest measure of the campaign’s success. Nearly three decades later, visitors are still climbing those steps, crossing those stones, and following those trails into the heart of Acadia—often unaware of the extraordinary effort that made the experience possible, but benefiting from it with every step. ■

SHANNON BRYAN is Friends of Acadia’s Content and Website Manager.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

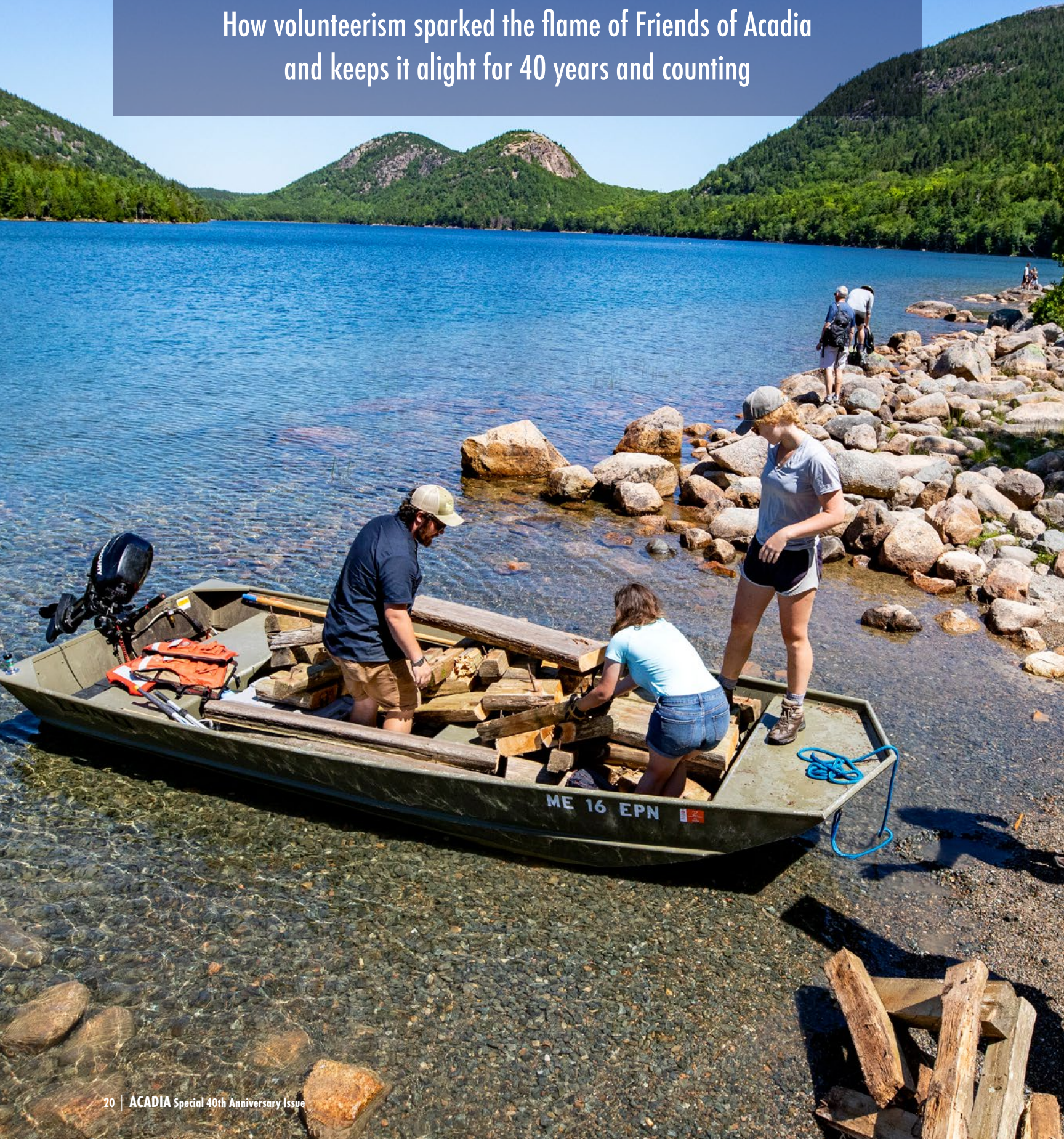
In 2022, Acadia’s trail system was added to the National Register of Historic Places, recognizing the national historic significance of these trails and their ties to the history of Mount Desert Island and the establishment of Acadia National Park.

The National Park Service had been working on the National Register nomination for several years, and Friends of Acadia helped fund the research and writing for the nomination.

“This recognition is a testament to not only the historic significance of these trails, but also the incredible dedication of the National Park Service staff, partners, and volunteers who continue to preserve them today,” said Acadia’s Superintendent Kevin Schneider when the news was announced.

PEOPLE POWERED

How volunteerism sparked the flame of Friends of Acadia
and keeps it alight for 40 years and counting





OPPOSITE: Friends of Acadia's Stewardship Crew and volunteers use a boat to transport materials while constructing a new bogwalk on the Jordan Pond Path in 2018.

ABOVE: Volunteers enjoy chili and cornbread at the 2022 Take Pride in Acadia Day.

BY ELIZA WORRICK

When chatting with longtime Friends of Acadia stewardship volunteer David Opdyke over a cup of coffee, two subjects made his eyes light up and a smile spread across his face: his grandsons and the Jordan Pond bogwalk.

"I'm partial to raking ditches," Opdyke said when asked about his favorite volunteer tasks, "but I like the special projects. Bogwalks are my pride and joy."

When Opdyke's grandsons come up from New Jersey for a visit, he'll take them through the park to see, touch, and stand on projects he had a direct hand in creating. Strolling along the Jordan Pond bogwalk with them, he says, "You see that? Your grandfather built that."

"We're passing on to the next generation a love of the park and the area, which makes me feel good. It's not just the old geezers."

HISTORY OF VOLUNTEERISM AT FRIENDS OF ACADIA

Loving Acadia National Park is easy—everyone reading this story feels it deeply. What becomes more challenging is translating that love into something tangible. Friends of Acadia was founded on that very alchemy.

In 1982, the Downeast Outing Club was created by a group of local outdoor enthusiasts and fans of Acadia National Park.

By the 1980s, Acadia's trails and carriage roads were showing serious signs of neglect. This compelled some members of the Downeast Outing

Club to mobilize and approach Acadia's Trails Foreman, Gary Stellpflug, to offer their volunteer services as a group. Stellpflug took them up on their offer, and before long, this crew was out cutting back vegetation, removing debris from trails, and eventually tackling larger projects like helping Stellpflug rebuild a bridge on the Hunters Brook Trail.

In March of 1985, Acadia's Chief of Park Operations, Joe Abrell, announced in the Bar Harbor Times that there would be no funds available for trail maintenance due to federal budget cuts. That summer, the concept of creating a "Friends" organization for Acadia gained real traction thanks to Downeast Outing Club member Marianne Edwards and Acadia's Deputy Chief of Interpretation, Lois Winter. Friends of Acadia formed in 1986, and the park's neglected carriage roads became the organization's first fundraising priority.

To further codify and strengthen the relationship between Acadia National Park and Friends of Acadia, the Trails Committee was founded in 1990 with members from both organizations. This group decided which projects to take on and what they would need in terms of human power and tools. That same year, Friends of Acadia published its first official call for volunteers in the Bar Harbor Times, with several opportunities for trail and carriage road work. They likewise began purchasing tools, gloves, and water bottles for volunteers to use and donated a shed to store everything in at park headquarters.

As interest and participation in volunteering grew, the park created a volunteer coordinator staff position in 1993, a role that still exists today. Four years later, the park came to Friends of Acadia with a proposition: Friends of Acadia should hire their own volunteer coordinator to supervise volunteers and free up park personnel. Chris Corwin was hired as the first trail crew leader (today's stewardship crew leader) in 1997. Mike Alley stepped into the role in 1998 and, together with the park's Volunteer Coordinator Jonathan Gormley, continued to shape what is known today as the Drop-in Stewardship Volunteer Program. Over the years, this program has become the most tangible expression of not only love for the park, but the relationship and trust between Friends of Acadia volunteers and Acadia National Park staff.

STEWARDSHIP CREW AND THE DROP-IN STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Back in the coffee shop with David Opdyke, the subject of his start with the Drop-in Program came up. In 2011, after retiring from a long career in banking, Opdyke was ready for a change and had no intention of sitting around doing nothing. "I had my fill of studies and planning and accounting for things; I wanted to do something I could see and that made a difference."

Opdyke got to chatting with his neighbor, who happened to be Jonathan Gormley, and learned about the Drop-in Program. Opdyke could join other volunteers for a few hours on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to do things like cut back vegetation from trails, clear drainage features, and weed carriage roads. "He said, 'Just show up,' which I did in June 2011, and I've been doing it ever since."

"I think the base importance of volunteer programs for me is community," said former Stewardship Manager Nikki Burtis. Burtis held this position for five years. Working in concert with Acadia's current Volunteer Coordinator Dianna Sproul, Burtis witnessed firsthand how this program impacts volunteers like Opdyke. "We're all friends of Acadia, and that allows folks that maybe have just moved to the area, or just retired, or have just gone through some sort of life change, to find like-minded individuals and community there."

Opdyke isn't the only volunteer who found volunteering in the park after a major life change. "Acadia is kind of a calling," said Brian Sale, Friends of Acadia's new stewardship manager. After retiring from the United States Air Force, Sale was living in Colorado and decided to take his first ever trip to Maine in May of 2024. "I spent one day in Acadia, and when I walked down to Schoodic Point, I said, 'Yep, this is where I want to be.'" Stewardship and conservation initiatives were things he'd long had an affinity for, so when he got back to Colorado and began plotting his move to Maine, he was thrilled to learn of Friends of Acadia's Stewardship Program. "By September of 2024, I had moved here and started volunteering with the Drop-in Program, and I've been doing that ever since."



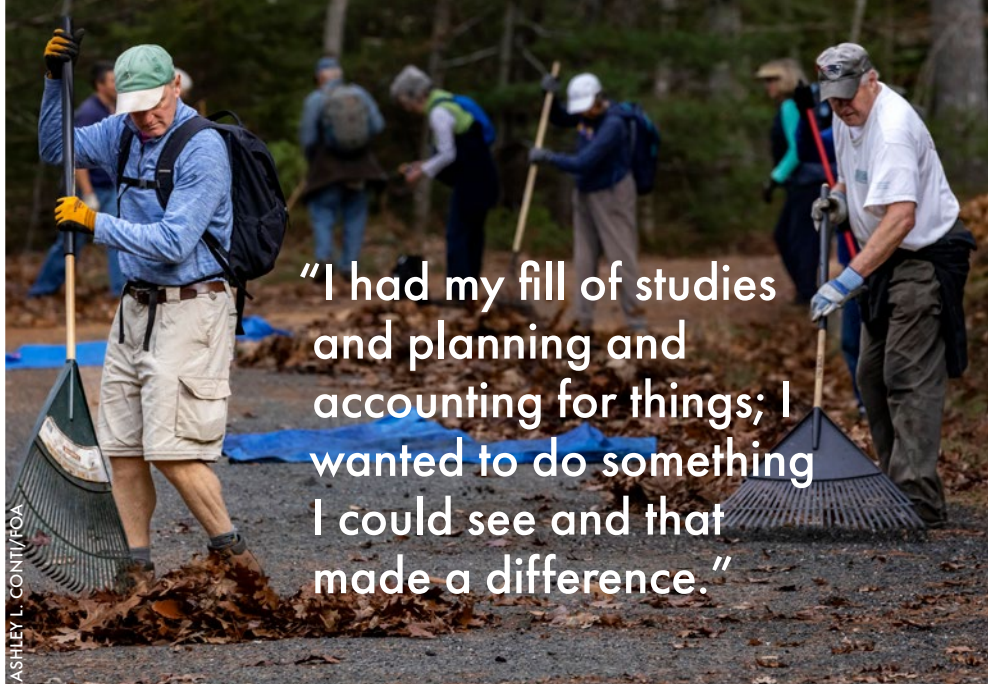
JULIA WALKER THOMAS/FOA



JULIA WALKER THOMAS/FOA



NATHANIEL BOECHAT/FOA



ASHLEY L. CONTI/FOA

"I had my fill of studies and planning and accounting for things; I wanted to do something I could see and that made a difference."

It wasn't long before Sale transitioned from being a repeat volunteer to becoming a Volunteer Crew Leader (VCL). Typically, VCLs are drop-in volunteers who show up regularly and demonstrate the potential to lead untrained volunteers. Like the Drop-in Program, the VCLs have grown and changed significantly over the years.

"My first training was half an hour with one of the assistant stewards over a beer," said Opdyke, who has been a VCL for most of his 15-year volunteer career. "In the last five or six years, we've gotten really organized."

The pandemic helped usher in some big changes to the program, including the creation of a 70+ page handbook to document the roles, responsibilities, and

expectations of a VCL. It also includes instructions, work outlines, safety protocols, and necessary tools for each project that the VCL might encounter. VCLs are expected to read this handbook annually as it gets updated each winter. "They have to do a driving test at the beginning of each season and keep current with their CPR and first aid," explained Acadia's Volunteer Coordinator Dianna Sproul. "It's a serious responsibility that people are taking on to be VCLs," she continued. "Just as impressive as the work is the commitment and the responsibility and all the steps they've taken for training to be capable of managing these volunteer groups."

Opdyke isn't shy about acknowledging this responsibility.

"I love doing it. I take it seriously, and it's been extremely rewarding," he said. "What I find really valuable is that it's one thing to teach VCLs how to use equipment and things like that, but we teach leadership. These are life skills, so to be part of an organization like that, it makes me really proud—I'm happy to be contributing to it."

Recently retired Acadia Trail Crew Supervisor Chris Barter knows firsthand how much of a difference volunteer stewardship work makes, and how much it enables park staff to do more.

"When I started here in 1989 ... we spent the entire season brushing trails, putting down paint blazes, and maybe cleaning a few water bars (drainage channels cut diagonally across trails to divert surface



FOA

OPPOSITE L-R: Volunteers collect trash in Somesville during a particularly wet Earth Day Roadside Cleanup in 2025. Volunteers celebrate during the 2024 Take Pride in Acadia Day. • Terry Begley and Jonathan Gormley show off cakes created for Take Pride in Acadia Day in 2000.

ABOVE L-R: Volunteer Crew Leader David Opdyke moves materials during the rehabilitation of the Seaside Path in 2019. • Volunteers from the Downeast Outing Club rake leaves during Take Pride in Acadia Day in 2022.

water),” he said. “Now all of that is done by volunteers. And they honestly do it better than we did because this is what they love to do. They do it every week, and they just do a beautiful job of taking out the vegetation that needs to be taken out—and not a twig more—for the trail to be usable.”

VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN EVENTS

Two of Friends of Acadia’s largest events are centered around volunteer work, acting as bookends for the park’s seasonal operations. Earth Day Roadside Cleanup, held for 25 years on the last Saturday in April, tasks volunteers with bagging up trash left behind after the winter along the roads of Mount Desert Island and Trenton. Take Pride in Acadia Day, typically held on the first Saturday of November nearly annually since 1991, is an opportunity for volunteers to help park staff “put the carriage roads to bed” by removing leaves from carriage roads and adjacent drainage ditches, which helps deter winter erosion. Both events usually yield hundreds of volunteers and have become a way for fans of the park to express their love in a tangible way.

“Trail work is not always visible, but you can see leaves getting removed, and you can see trash getting collected,” said Burtis. “So, there’s a really poignant visual—you can see things happening.” ■

ELIZA WORRICK is Friends of Acadia’s Digital Marketing Manager.



ABOVE RIGHT: Undated photo of Earth Day Roadside Cleanup volunteers.

BELOW: Volunteers and staff pose at the volunteer shed at Acadia National Park headquarters.



SCHOONER HEAD PATH

Project Timeline: 2007-2008, 2022

Project: One mile built by Friends of Acadia volunteer crews in 2007 and 2008 (excavation, gravel, revegetation). After storms in 2022, that same stretch of trail received a total resurface with grade dips (finished in 2024).

Rehabilitation of the Schooner Head Path began at the site of Oldfarm near Compass Harbor and ended at the Schooner Head Overlook. Before work began towards the end of 2007, Barter recalls the trail being “in just terrible shape.”

“There was going to be a lot of gravel surface and a lot of ditching that needed to be dug by hand and a lot of revegetation that needed to be put down with care along the sides and covering over the scars from construction,” said Barter. The relatively smooth path surface was built to welcome wheelchairs and other accessibility devices.

Friends of Acadia’s Stewardship Crew Manager Mike Alley and Volunteer Crew Leader Cliff Olson brought drop-in crews out twice a week to work alongside Barter’s team.

In 2022, a huge washout storm left a massive mark on Acadia. “Some of the worst damage that we saw on the trail system was to the Schooner Head Path because it’s all gravel and it’s all graded and there aren’t checks and steps,” Barter said.



It wasn’t long before a mix of park staff and volunteer crews, including an Appalachian Mountain Club group, were out on the Schooner Head Path to give it some love. Drop-in volunteers took over from there.

The silver lining of the storm damage was that it provided crews with the opportunity to improve upon the work done in 2007 and 2008.



JORDAN POND BOGWALK

Project Timeline: 2016-2020

Project: Entire length of west side of Jordan Pond – 4,500 ft.

Rebuilding the bogwalk on the woodsy west side of one of the park’s busiest trails was a unique rehabilitation project.

“It was a huge undertaking—more than 4,000 feet,” said Acadia’s Volunteer Coordinator Dianna Sproul. “That’s an extreme amount of work across multiple years ... and it was a huge accomplishment with a lot of effort and so much coordination.”

Sproul and former Trails Supervisor Chris Barter acknowledge the amount of work that went into the removal process alone.

During the COVID pandemic, the park allowed a group of experienced volunteers to continue working on the bogwalk in 2021. A unique feature of the Jordan Pond bogwalk is the number and size of the pull-off stations scattered along the trail that allow people to pass each other.

40 YEARS OF IMPACT

Thank you for making the last 40 years possible! Read more about our collective accomplishments in our most recent Impact Report: friendsofacadia.org/impact



1990 1.4-mile demonstration restoration project on the Amphitheater Carriage Road section completed.



1993 Friends of Acadia provides matching grant that allows the park to hire a biologist to monitor and interpret endangered nesting peregrine falcons.

1996 The Carriage Road Campaign meets its goal, creating an endowment to maintain the carriage roads in perpetuity. (Read more on page 8.)

1996 Friends of Acadia begins hiring Recreation Technicians to assist park staff in efforts to understand visitor use data and trends.

1997 Friends of Acadia hires its first field crew leader to expand volunteer projects in Acadia National Park.

1997 Friends of Acadia begins Village Connector Trails project to improve pedestrian and bike access to Acadia National Park.

1985 Marianne Edwards and a group of park volunteers discuss the need for a community organization to help Acadia National Park. Park Superintendent Ron Wrye approves the idea.

1987 The first Journal of Friends of Acadia is distributed as an insert in area newspapers.

1986

1995

1990

1986 Friends of Acadia is incorporated with an initial contribution of \$50 from Marianne Edwards.

1988 Friends of Acadia has 350 members.

1991 Friends of Acadia launches a campaign to restore Acadia's carriage roads.

1991 The first annual Take Pride in Acadia Day draws 57 volunteers to rake leaves and clear drainage on Acadia's carriage roads, helping to prevent erosion during the winter storms and spring thaw, and reducing the need for costly repairs.

1991 Friends of Acadia begins support of Acadia Youth Conservation Corps.

1997 Friends of Acadia works with state and local partners to avert a clear-cut on 1,600 acres on the Schoodic Peninsula adjacent to park lands.

1997 The Ridge Runners program is established and endowed.



1997 Wheelchair-accessible carriages are donated to Acadia National Park, with an endowment for their ongoing maintenance.

1989

Friends of Acadia's first fundraising campaign raises \$25,000 to relight Bear Island Light.

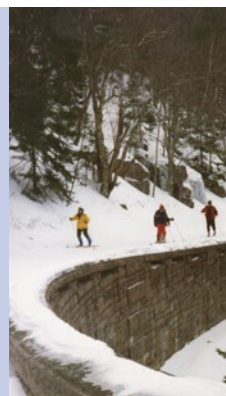


1998 Working with the park, Friends of Acadia achieves a first-in-nation legislative jet-ski ban on all ponds inside Acadia.



1999 Acadia Trails Forever, the campaign to restore and endow the trails of Acadia, is announced and receives the first-ever \$5 million gift to a conservation organization in Maine, making Acadia the first national park in the nation with an endowed trail system. (Read more on page 14.)

2005 The Acadia Winter Trails Association is endowed by the family of Elizabeth R. (Leila) Bright in her memory and in honor of her love for skiing in Acadia. The fund provides ongoing support for grooming equipment, safety and training, fuel, and volunteer and staff support.



2005 The George B. Dorr Society for Planned Giving is established.

2005 The Acadia Land Legacy partnership is established to purchase privately owned properties within park boundaries from willing sellers, protecting the land until it can be acquired by Acadia National Park.

2007 Friends of Acadia purchases and protects 64 acres of land within the park boundary—25 acres on Acadia Mountain and 39 acres of land within Northeast Creek estuary.

2007 Friends of Acadia purchases 369 acres in Trenton to facilitate the development of the Acadia Gateway Center. Roughly 150 acres were later sold to the Maine Department of Transportation for construction of the center and wetland mitigation. Friends of Acadia facilitated construction of the Trenton Community Trail, and donated 217 acres of land to the Town of Trenton for public enjoyment under a conservation easement.

2007 L.L.Bean Acadia Research Fellowships fund nine scientists working in the park, researching topics including water clarity, seabirds, and brook trout.

2008 Acadia Quest is introduced, challenging young people and their families and mentors to explore, discover, and protect Acadia.

2000 The first Earth Day Roadside Cleanup is held, with volunteers clearing trash from roadways in communities surrounding Acadia.

2005

2000

2002 L.L.Bean pledges its first \$1 million to support the Island Explorer.

1999 Friends of Acadia co-develops and co-funds the Island Explorer bus system. (Read more on page 34.)

1999 The Acadia Youth Conservation Corps is endowed with an anonymous gift. Each summer, the eight-week program employs high school students from Maine and beyond, offering them the opportunity to work

alongside myriad teams at Acadia National Park, from the trails crew to vegetation management. Launched in 1970, the program has grown over the years to give AYCC members a broad hands-on experience of the park while growing their personal strength and perseverance and enjoying the close camaraderie of their fellow teen crew.



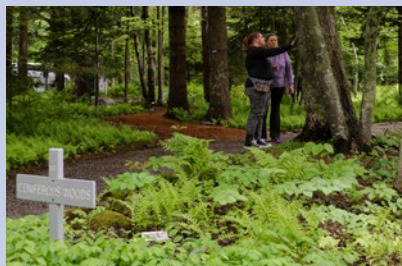
2006 Friends of Acadia begins funding the Schoodic Education Adventure (SEA) program, with support from L.L.Bean. The SEA program connects Maine middle-school students to Acadia's forests and coastline through an immersive, three-day field trip on Acadia National Park's Schoodic Peninsula. Students spend their days investigating marine life in tidepools and examining layers of soil. They plot data-collection sites, scout for crabs, and get acquainted with Acadia's geologic history.

2009 The accomplishments of Acadia Trails Forever's first 10 years include 5.6 miles of Village Connector Trails built; 1.8 miles of abandoned trails reopened; over 3,000 steps, 16,760 square feet of walls, and 259 culverts repaired or constructed.

2009 Friends of Acadia begins funding the seasonal Acadia Raptor Intern position, supporting Peregrine Falcon and Hawk Watch programs that collect data on raptors and educate park visitors.

2009 Through a partnership with Canon U.S.A., Friends of Acadia begins supporting Acadia's Invasive Plant Management Team as it works to manage 29 invasive plant species. This funding allows for consistent monitoring and removal, early detection, and experimentation.

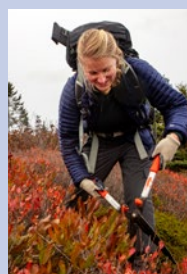
2010 The Wild Gardens of Acadia volunteers become part of Friends of Acadia. Created in 1961 and maintained by dedicated volunteers, the Wild Gardens features more than 400 native plant species in 13 sections that represent natural plant communities found throughout Acadia. (Read more on page 38.)



2011 Lower Hadlock and Round Ponds are protected through Acadia Land Legacy.

2014 The Island Explorer transports its five millionth rider.

2014 Friends of Acadia hires the first Cadillac Summit Steward team to protect Cadillac Mountain's fragile alpine environment and engage visitors in its stewardship. Later combined with the Ridge Runners program to become today's Summit Stewards, this team educates visitors, maintains trails and cairns, and assists with emergencies.



2015 Friends of Acadia begins the Yellow Bus Fund grant program to support transportation expenses for local schools bringing students to Acadia.

2015 Friends of Acadia provides a matching grant to support an ambitious vista-clearing program along Acadia's motor and carriage roads.

2016 The community-based Acadia Centennial engages more than 450 local partners to "celebrate our past and inspire our future." Friends of Acadia is honored with a National Park Service Director's Partnership Award for its role in the celebration.

2018 Friends of Acadia raises funds to restore the historic Bass Harbor Head Light Station and support ongoing maintenance, including a new roof in 2025.

2010



2013 Friends of Acadia funds water-quality monitoring at Jordan Pond, considered one of Maine's clearest lakes, with leadership support from Canon U.S.A.

2013 The Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program at Acadia, now Acadia Teacher Fellows, is significantly expanded with support from Friends of Acadia. Through an immersive four-to-six-week experience in the park, teachers from Maine and beyond gain tools and training to bring outdoor learning into their classrooms.

2015

2015 Friends of Acadia partners with the park, Yawkey Foundations, and Musco Lighting to replace 90-plus outdoor lights at the Blackwoods and Seawall Campgrounds with dark-sky-friendly fixtures.



2015 The 1,400-acre Schoodic Woods property opens with a new campground and trails, becoming a permanently protected part of Acadia National Park. Friends of Acadia maintains an endowment to support its long-term upkeep.

2017 Friends of Acadia launches the Outdoor Classroom grant program to help local schools build outdoor education spaces.

2017 Friends of Acadia launches a new Acadia for All grant program to help reduce access barriers for youth groups.

2020 The Acadia Resilience Fund is established, enabling the park to offer virtual educational programming for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020 Volunteers and park staff completed the multi-year reconstruction of the 4,500-foot raised bogwalk on the west side of Jordan Pond. (Read more on page 20.)

2020 Friends of Acadia joins park supporters in advocating for the Great American Outdoors Act, passed in 2020 to address deferred maintenance in national parks. At Acadia, funding supports a new maintenance facility and upgrades to the Schoodic Institute's water treatment system. Friends of Acadia continues to advocate for renewed funding to address the remaining maintenance backlog.



2023 Friends of Acadia purchases a boat with a landing craft design for Acadia, allowing park staff to better care for the park's remote islands.

2023 The first Save Our Summits hike takes place, bringing volunteers together to carry soil to Acadia's peaks to support vegetation restoration. (Read more on page 42.)

2024

Friends of Acadia's Raise the Roof campaign raises \$10 million, unlocking an additional \$21 million in federal dollars and a \$2 million grant from the National Park Foundation to support seasonal employee housing. Friends of Acadia completes the Dane Farm housing complex, and Acadia National Park breaks ground on Harden Farm.



2024 Friends of Acadia also purchases six two-bedroom townhomes in Trenton, known as Jordan River Road, to support seasonal staff working in Acadia, including Island Explorer bus drivers.

2024 Severe winter storms cause significant damage across Acadia. Volunteers and donor funds help Acadia address immediate safety issues, and Friends of Acadia helps secure federal storm recovery funding.

2025 Friends of Acadia raises more than \$200,000 to restore the Carroll Homestead, one of the last remaining examples of 19th-century farm life on the Island.

2025 Friends of Acadia joins park supporters around the country in successfully lifting the hiring freeze for seasonal national park employees. Together with the community, Friends of Acadia also supports the park during the nation's longest government shutdown.

2025 Park staff, with support from volunteers, help restore Acadia's views, working on 43 historic carriage road vistas.

2025 Friends of Acadia exceeds 5,000 members.

2020

2019 Friends of Acadia raises funds to support restoration of the park's 17 historic stone carriage road bridges.

2021 Friends of Acadia provides support for the creation of Cadillac Summit Road Vehicle Reservation System, which dramatically improved congestion, safety, and protection of fragile alpine ecosystems.

2021 Friends of Acadia funds a comprehensive accessibility study to help identify and remove barriers for visitors with disabilities.



2021 The Eagle Lake Carriage Road is restored, completing the park's decades-long effort to restore all 45 miles of the park's historic carriage road system.

2022 Friends of Acadia launches an initiative to add 130 beds for Acadia's seasonal staff, purchasing the Kingsley Inn the following year as the first step.

2022 Friends of Acadia leverages federal funding for climate-focused habitat restoration at the Great Meadow Wetland and Bass Harbor Marsh.

2024 The Island Explorer celebrates 25 years and 10 million riders. Since its launch in 1999, the bus system has eliminated an estimated 4 million private vehicle trips within the park.

2024

Acadia celebrates 35-plus years of successful invasive plant management. Thanks to continued monitoring and maintenance, sustained funding from partners like Friends of Acadia, and research support from Schoodic Institute, invasive plants now cover less than one percent of Acadia National Park. In contrast, other eastern national parks have an average invasive plant cover of nearly 14 percent—and in some parks, it can reach up to 40 percent, according to the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program.



2025

2026

2026 The Acadia Gateway Center officially opens for its first full season.

2026 Construction begins on the new East-West Connector Trail at the summit of Cadillac Mountain to improve safety and accessibility.

2026 Friends of Acadia raises funds to restore the historic Baker Island Lighthouse. (Read more on page 45.)



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

A seasonal job with Friends of Acadia can be a trajectory-shifting experience leading to careers in conservation and public service. Meet some of our former staff and hear how their experience here helped pave the way for the engaging work they're doing today.

BY JULIA WALKER THOMAS

Seasonal teams have long been essential to the Friends of Acadia's mission, contributing energy, skill, and a fresh perspective to projects ranging from trail stewardship to education to community engagement.

Over the decades, seasonal staff have formed a living legacy—one that extends far beyond a single summer or field season. Many are drawn by the park's striking landscape but leave with something deeper: a sense of purpose, a connection to place, and often a path that carries their experience into careers in conservation, public service, and beyond.

JORDAN GIBEALT Summit Steward (2019)

Traveling from Middletown, Delaware, to Acadia National Park for his first seasonal position away from home, Jordan Gibeault arrived with a mix of excitement and uncertainty. What he found was a community of peers and mentors united by a shared commitment to conservation and visitor experience.

On his first solo trail rove along Ship Harbor Trail, Gibeault encountered a cross-section of Acadia's remarkable diversity: dense spruce forest, the distant call of a loon, and a harbor seal moving through the water nearby. The experience underscored what makes Acadia so special—not just its beauty, but its accessibility.

"Few places allow visitors an experience like that," he reflected.

As a Summit Steward, Gibeault often stationed himself at busy trailheads along Park Loop Road, including the Beehive, where he developed a deep appreciation for the link between Leave No Trace

principles and preventative search and rescue. By guiding visitors to follow Bates cairns and blue blazes, he helped ensure hikers stayed on durable surfaces while avoiding fragile vegetation—protecting the landscape while also reducing their injury risk.

Collaborating with National Park Service staff gave Gibeault insight into the many possibilities within public lands careers and helped clarify his own direction.

Today, Gibeault serves as a backcountry ranger at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where he patrols hundreds of miles of trails and supports visitors navigating remote terrain. The same skills he developed as a Summit Steward are now part of his daily work.

Gibeault sees his season at Friends of Acadia as a turning point. It was there that he discovered not only a love for public lands, but also a sense of purpose in serving the people who visit them.



DR. RYAN SHARP Recreation Technician (2008)

Originally from Syracuse, New York, Ryan Sharp came to Friends of Acadia via Athens, Georgia, where he was pursuing a Ph.D. His 2008 season as a Recreation Technician would shape both his career and sense of purpose.

He describes that summer as nothing short of "magical." Days were often spent walking Acadia's trails, engaging visitors in conversations about Leave No Trace principles. Other days were devoted to trail work and keeping the park clean. The experience offered an opportunity to know Acadia National Park intimately, not just as a visitor, but as a steward.

An overnight trip to Isle au Haut with the team stands out in his memory. Working on the island for several days and staying in a rustic cabin fostered camaraderie and a sense of adventure.

Sharp recalls especially the experience of working alongside seasonal Ridge Runners

(a precursor to today's Summit Stewards), balancing a sense of fun with a shared commitment to the job.

Most influential, however, was Resource Specialist and "visitor use guy" Charlie Jacobi, now retired from the National Park Service. He was a mentor whose guidance and example left a lasting impression. Through that mentorship, Sharp was introduced to the field of visitor use management and was connected to a broader network of professionals.

Today, he serves as a Professor of Outdoor Recreation and Park Management in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee. The hands-on experience, professional connections, and exposure to on-the-ground park management directly informed Sharp's academic and research path. And his summer as a Recreation Technician was "the best job I have ever had."

CINDY PEARCE Stewardship Assistant (2019)

Traveling from Asheville, North Carolina, to join the Stewardship Crew, Cindy Pearce quickly found herself immersed in the physical work of trail stewardship and the vibrant community that defines a season in Acadia National Park.

She recalls everyday moments on the job: being shown wild blueberries growing trailside by a fellow crew member or learning (and quickly forgetting) the scientific names of trees while working. Some memorable moments came outside work hours, when she explored the park with her husband. These small experiences made her feel not just like an employee, but like someone truly living within the landscape.

Pearce's work as a Stewardship Assistant centered on hands-on trail projects. She recalls a multi-day effort digging a drainage ditch alongside a trail to better manage water flow—an experience that highlighted both the physical demands

of the work and the power of teamwork. While building a gravel path and restoring the surrounding edges with earth and moss, she enjoyed watching a trail evolve over time through steady, collective care.

"Being surrounded by people who genuinely cared about the land and each other made every workday feel purposeful," she reflected.

Today, Pearce serves as director of operations for Naventure's Pisgah operations in Pisgah National Forest, where she oversees campgrounds, group sites, and recreation areas within a busy national forest system. Her work continues to center on creating meaningful outdoor experiences—both for visitors and for the teams she leads.

The foundation for that work, she said, was built during her time at Friends of Acadia where she developed a guiding philosophy: that meaningful experiences in nature inspire people to protect it.



ALEX DELUCIA Ridge Runner (2000)

Before arriving in Maine, Alex DeLucia's work centered on guiding and personal recreation—helping people enjoy the outdoors firsthand. His Ridge Runner position in 2000 marked a shift in perspective. Rather than being a user or facilitator of recreation, he found himself stepping into the less visible but essential world of stewardship. That transition, he said, was a "game changer."

Immediately following his season at Acadia, DeLucia began a career with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). What started as a seasonal position soon evolved into a long-term role spanning decades. Over time, he moved into year-round work within the AMC's trails department, spending much of his career coordinating and supporting volunteer engagement in the field.

That continuity allowed him to maintain a meaningful connection back to Acadia even as his work expanded.

Through AMC's programs, he helped lead trail volunteer efforts in Acadia, often based out of the organization's camp on Mount Desert Island. Those seasons brought him back to familiar terrain, working alongside park partners and reconnecting with colleagues in the field, including long-standing figures in Acadia's stewardship community such as Charlie Jacobi, Gary Stellpflug, and others.

DeLucia now serves as the Director of Trails and Recreation Management for the Appalachian Mountain Club, managing trails projects across a vast geography—from Virginia to Maine. Looking back, DeLucia traces much of his professional identity to that early Ridge Runner experience, when appreciation for public lands became hands-on responsibility for their care. That shift defined the trajectory of a 25-year career dedicated to trails, stewardship, and the people who maintain them.

SAM MALLON Acadia Digital Media Team (2021–2023)

For Sam Mallon, three seasons with Friends of Acadia's Digital Media Team (ADMT) defined how she saw both storytelling and the natural world.

During her first week, she and fellow ADMT members hiked the Beehive for sunrise. She describes it as one of those “rare, almost cinematic mornings: fog rolling over cliffs, clouds dissolving above the ocean, and light breaking slowly across the landscape.” It was the kind of scene photographers spend years chasing—and it clarified that she was exactly where she needed to be.

Mallon's work brought her into close contact with the park's scientific and stewardship teams, where she captured conservation work in action. Following the park's Invasive Plant Management Team to places like Baker Island and Great Meadow, she documented hands-on ecological management work: cutting thistles, monitoring vegetation, and learning directly from scientists working in the field.

At one point, she set her camera down and picked up clippers, joining the work herself.

By the end of her seasons in Acadia, Mallon says her trajectory shifted. What she had once imagined as a traditional journalism path expanded into environmental storytelling rooted in science, fieldwork, and collaboration.

Today, Mallon works primarily with OceanX aboard the research vessel *OceanXplorer*, where she serves as a digital imaging technician and assistant editor. In that role, she manages and organizes vast quantities of scientific media collected during deep-sea expeditions—submersible dives, aerial surveys, and onboard filming—ensuring that data and imagery are preserved, cataloged, and ready for post-production storytelling.

Mallon is still doing what she first discovered in Acadia: translating complex environmental work into something others can see, connect with, and understand.



JESSE WHEELER Acadia Youth Conservation Corps (1995)

Participating in the Acadia Youth Conservation Corps (AYCC) in 1995 was “transformational” for Jesse Wheeler—an experience that introduced him to trail work and a lifelong career with Acadia National Park and the National Park Service.

“AYCC allowed us to feel pride for the work we did,” he said. “Even if the quality of the finished product wasn't nearly as good as the professionals.”

One project that left a strong impression was working on the Beech West Ridge Trail, where the crew cleaned water bars and completed general maintenance. The work was muddy and physical. Wheeler especially remembers a crew leader named Peaches who led the team through stretches and taught proper tool techniques.

“It made the work fun as well as dirty!” Wheeler said.

He also recalls feeling genuine support from National Park Service trail staff, especially mentors like Christian Barter and Pete Coleman. Through those relationships, he gained confidence and an introduction to stewardship work within the park service.

“Getting an introduction to the NPS and learning how to work hard until we accomplished our tasks” gave him both direction and motivation, he said. After AYCC, Wheeler spent three seasons as a Biological Science Technician in Acadia's botany program before continuing on to Cape Cod National Seashore, where he monitored wetland flora. He later worked with the National Park Service Inventory & Monitoring Division measuring forest health before returning to Acadia to lead the park's invasive plant management team.

Today, Wheeler serves as Vegetation Program Manager for Acadia National Park, overseeing projects involving invasive plant management, native plant restoration, and forest insect pest management.

Wheeler remains deeply appreciative of his own time in the program and how AYCC has evolved over the years to be even more enriching for participants. ■

JULIA WALKER THOMAS is Friends of Acadia's Visual Storytelling and Visual Assets Manager.

RIDING INTO THE FUTURE



BY PERRIN DONIGER

Island Explorer buses have carried more than 10.6 million passengers since service began in 1999. Supported by broader transportation investments, the service is one of the biggest tools to help the park manage visitation over the next 40 years.

On a bright, sunny day at Hulls Cove Visitor Center, Island Explorer bus ambassadors help first-time park visitors board a bus bound for Sand Beach. Elsewhere in the park, a group of friends looks over a trail map on a bus winding its way toward Jordan Pond. At a village stop, a family with backpacks steps aboard while a cyclist lifts a bike onto the rack. A driver offers directions to a pair of hikers. Someone settles into a window seat and watches the island pass by—spruce and fir, pink granite, a flash of blue water through the trees.

Acadia is one of the smallest national parks in the United States

and also one of the busiest. Visitation has climbed steadily over the past decade, reaching more than 4 million visits in 2025—the busiest year in the park’s history. With those crowds come familiar pressures: the circling of cars around packed parking lots and the slow crawl of traffic through village centers and along park roads during the busiest weeks of summer.

Over the last 27 years, the Island Explorer has emerged as one of the most important tools for the park and its surrounding communities to mitigate traffic and parking congestion. Since its start in 1999, the bus system has carried more than 10.6 million passengers, helping to keep an estimated 4 million private vehicle trips off the roads and more than 56 tons of smog-causing pollutants and 37,000 tons of greenhouse gases out of our air and atmosphere.

“The bus system has become one of the most important tools for protecting both the visitor experience and the character of Acadia and its surrounding communities,” said Stephanie Clement, Friends of Acadia’s vice president of conservation. “Every full Island Explorer bus that you see going by represents 10 to 14 personal vehicles removed from the road. That really adds up.”



RHIANNON JOHNSTON/FOA

THE ORIGIN OF THE LITTLE BUS THAT COULD

Almost 35 years ago, Acadia's 1992 general management plan identified alternative transportation as an important part of the park's future.

"Acadia was one of the first national parks to identify the need for an alternative transportation system," John Kelly, management assistant at Acadia National Park, told Friends of Acadia in 2024. "Even back then—imagine that—we were still dealing with huge amounts of traffic and parking congestion."

Before the Island Explorer officially launched, Downeast Transportation and park leaders tried smaller experiments. One early shuttle linked campgrounds near the head of the island to downtown Bar Harbor and Sand Beach. Riders paid a \$2 fare and usage was modest.

Paul Murphy, Downeast Transportation's executive director, described the moment the idea sharpened into something larger.

"We approached Friends of Acadia with an idea: if we could eliminate the fare, it would increase ridership," he said.

Friends of Acadia agreed to support the test, offering to cover the \$4,000 Downeast Transportation was making in passenger revenue

to allow the buses to be fare-free. The result was immediate and striking: ridership increased by 600 percent.

That early success gave the new project legs—or should we say wheels.

In 1999, thanks to a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Island Explorer launched with eight fare-free, propane-powered buses running on six routes from the end of June through Labor Day. The following year, the fleet expanded to 17, and ridership rose quickly: more than 142,000 riders in the first season and more than 281,000 by 2002.

From the beginning, the Island Explorer grew through partnerships—with the U.S. and Maine Departments of Transportation, Acadia National Park, Friends of Acadia, and local towns and businesses all coming together to plan and support the new public transit system.

It was a huge partnership effort, Clement explained. "There were 27 organizations that signed the original partnership agreement, and everyone chipped in to help in various ways."

Friends of Acadia participated both as an early funder and co-planner.



JULIA WALKER THOMAS/FOA

ABOVE: Paul Murphy, executive director of Downeast Transportation; Stephanie Clement, vice president of conservation for Friends of Acadia; and John Kelly, Acadia National Park management assistant, pose for a photo after celebrating the completion of the Acadia Gateway Center. Murphy, Clement, and Kelly worked on the project over decades, seeing it go from idea to completion. **OPPOSITE:** Ribbon-cutting ceremony at the grand opening of the Acadia Gateway Center in May 2026.

One of the first innovations was the development of a “front-door service,” as park leaders described it. Routes connected inns, campgrounds, and village centers with some of Acadia’s most beloved destinations, making the system easier for visitors to use and providing value to hospitality businesses, encouraging their support.

It also helped the bus become woven into everyday life on the island.

Some of the bus’s earliest adopters were Mount Desert Island high school students, Clement said. They rode the bus to get to summer jobs, beaches, and gathering places without depending on a car—or parents.

As bus ridership expanded, L.L.Bean became one of the most important private partners supporting its growth. Friends of Acadia helped facilitate the company’s first major sponsorship in the early 2000s, and over the past 24 years, L.L.Bean’s contributions and pledges have totaled \$5.5 million.

That support helped sustain operations, add additional bicycle access to buses, and expand service into the fall.

Today, along with L.L.Bean’s significant support, a portion of

Acadia National Park entrance fees provides more than 70 percent of the Island Explorer’s annual operating budget. The remainder comes from grants from the Federal Transit Administration and Maine Department of Transportation, as well as support from local municipalities, businesses, and riders’ on-board donations.

Last year the system carried more than half a million passengers along 12 different routes to more than 100 different destinations, ranging from Seawall to Otter Cliff to the Schoodic Peninsula.

“It’s made many happy customers,” Clement said. “People can take the bus into the park and truly have that car-free, carefree kind of experience. And to be able to take those one-way hikes over the mountains and hop on a different bus and get back to your destination is really an amazing experience.”

“In the beginning, there was huge skepticism,” Murphy said. “People questioned, ‘All these buses rolling around the island; who’s gonna ride ‘em?’ It was just foreign to the community. But over the course of [more than] 25 years, that question has been turned on its head. And the question now is, ‘What would we do without that bus system?’”

RIDING INTO THE FUTURE

This season, the Island Explorer service expanded again. Select routes through the park began on May 20, a month earlier than previous years. The new start date aligned with the opening of the Acadia Gateway Center in Trenton, which opened for its first full season this summer. The center offers visitors a new sense of arrival: a place to gather information, buy a park pass, leave their car, and board the Island Explorer for a day in the park without the uncertainty of crowded lots and limited parking at popular destinations.

"The Island Explorer and the Acadia Gateway Center are really the biggest tools that will help the park manage visitation over the next 40 years," Clement said. "I know I'm a transportation geek, but I really think that the Island Explorer has been one of the best things that has happened over the last 28 years that I've been at Friends of Acadia. And it will help us carry forward into future growth." ■

PERRIN DONIGER is Friends of Acadia's Vice President of Communications and Marketing.



ONE-WAY HIKES IN THE PARK VIA THE ISLAND EXPLORER

In addition to saving you the hassle of finding parking at a favorite trailhead, the Island Explorer makes it easier for hikers and bicyclists to enjoy one-way outings. "People can be dropped off at one trailhead and picked up at another," said Clement. "This opens up so many more hiking opportunities in the park." Riders can request a stop or flag down a bus anywhere along a route where it is safe to do so. In summer, most routes run every 30 minutes. Hop on board to explore these memorable one-way hikes:

OCEAN PATH

Take Bus 3 to Sand Beach. Sunbathe or continue along the path past countless scenic vistas to Thunder Hole and then on to Otter Point. Pick up the bus again there, or at any point along the way. Total hiking distance: 2.2 miles.

SIEUR DE MONTS TO GORHAM MOUNTAIN

Step off Bus 4 (Loop Road) or 10 (Blackwoods) at Sieur de Monts, hike across Huguenot Head, Champlain Mountain, and Gorham Mountain, and return to Bar Harbor on the Sand Beach bus route. Total hiking distance: 4.1 miles.

SIEUR DE MONTS TO JORDAN POND HOUSE

Hop Bus 4 or 10 to Sieur de Monts. Check out the Wild Gardens of Acadia before heading south through the Great Meadow along the Jesup Path. Pick up the Kane Path and watch for birds along The Tarn, then continue southwest across the park on Canon Brook Trail to Jordan Pond House. Your popovers will be well earned, and Bus 4 (Loop Road), 5 (Jordan Pond), or 6 (Northeast Harbor) will take you back to Bar Harbor, Halls Cove Visitor Center, or Northeast Harbor. Total hiking distance 5.2 miles.

BROWN MOUNTAIN TO EAGLE LAKE BY BIKE

Pop your bike on the rack of Bus 6 (Northeast Harbor) and ride to the Brown Mountain Gate House. From there, bike north on the Brown Mountain Connector and turn right on Hadlock Loop Carriage Road. Take in views of Hadlock Falls and Hemlock Bridge before eventually turning right on Upper Mountain Carriage Road. Follow Seven Sisters/Bridges Carriage Road north to Aunt Betty Pond Carriage Road and past Betty Pond itself. End your ride at Eagle Lake lot and return to Bar Harbor on the Island Explorer's Bicycle Express or to Northeast Harbor via Bus 6.

WILD GARDENS OF ACADIA

Continues to Blossom After 65 Years

One of the largest native plant exhibition gardens in the national park system, the Wild Gardens of Acadia dazzles visitors with more than 400 plant species.

BY ANNE KOZAK

For 65 years, the Wild Gardens of Acadia has showcased the native plants of Acadia National Park in 13 plant communities—communities of native plants similar to those visitors encounter as they walk or bike the carriage roads or hike seaside and mountain trails. But the gardens' beginnings were inauspicious and serendipitous.

In 1960, Janet TenBroeck was intrigued by lists of flowers “not to be picked,” lists with names of native plants. Subsequently,

she sponsored two competitions for local garden club members and others to grow these plants. As she noted in her handwritten piece, “As I See It,” her desire to display these plants so the public could view them led Hal Hubler, Acadia’s superintendent at the time, to offer her a place to grow those plants in the park. In her remarks at the 25th anniversary of the gardens, Betty Thorndike, another founding member, said Hubler’s “offer of a three-quarter-acre site in the park for our garden came like a burst of fireworks exploding with undreamed-of possibilities. It might be called serendipity.”

In 1961, that three-quarter-acre site at Sieur de Monts Spring that the park chose for the gardens was a mass of tangled blackberries and red maples scarred by the 1947 wildfire, but it did have stands of royal and cinnamon ferns along a brook



IN THE GARDENS' EARLY YEARS, Elizabeth Thorndike (left), Elizabeth Owens (center), Janet TenBroeck (right), and other committee members organized plant sales to raise funds for the gardens—a tradition that continues today.



ASHLEY L. CONTI/FOA

that flowed through the gardens. While TenBroeck preferred a site farther west, the park preferred this site because of its proximity to the Nature Center, restrooms, and parking lot.

At the suggestion of Dorcas Crary, another of the founders, the Wild Gardens committee, a group of volunteers dedicated to the idea of creating an exhibition garden to showcase the area’s flora, divided the plot into habitats—initially 12 and now 13. The park



helped in cutting brush, clearing trees, and laying out paths. Some years later, TenBroeck noted that “we took an undifferentiated piece of land and made it seem as if the deciduous and coniferous woods, meadow, bog, and pond were always there.”

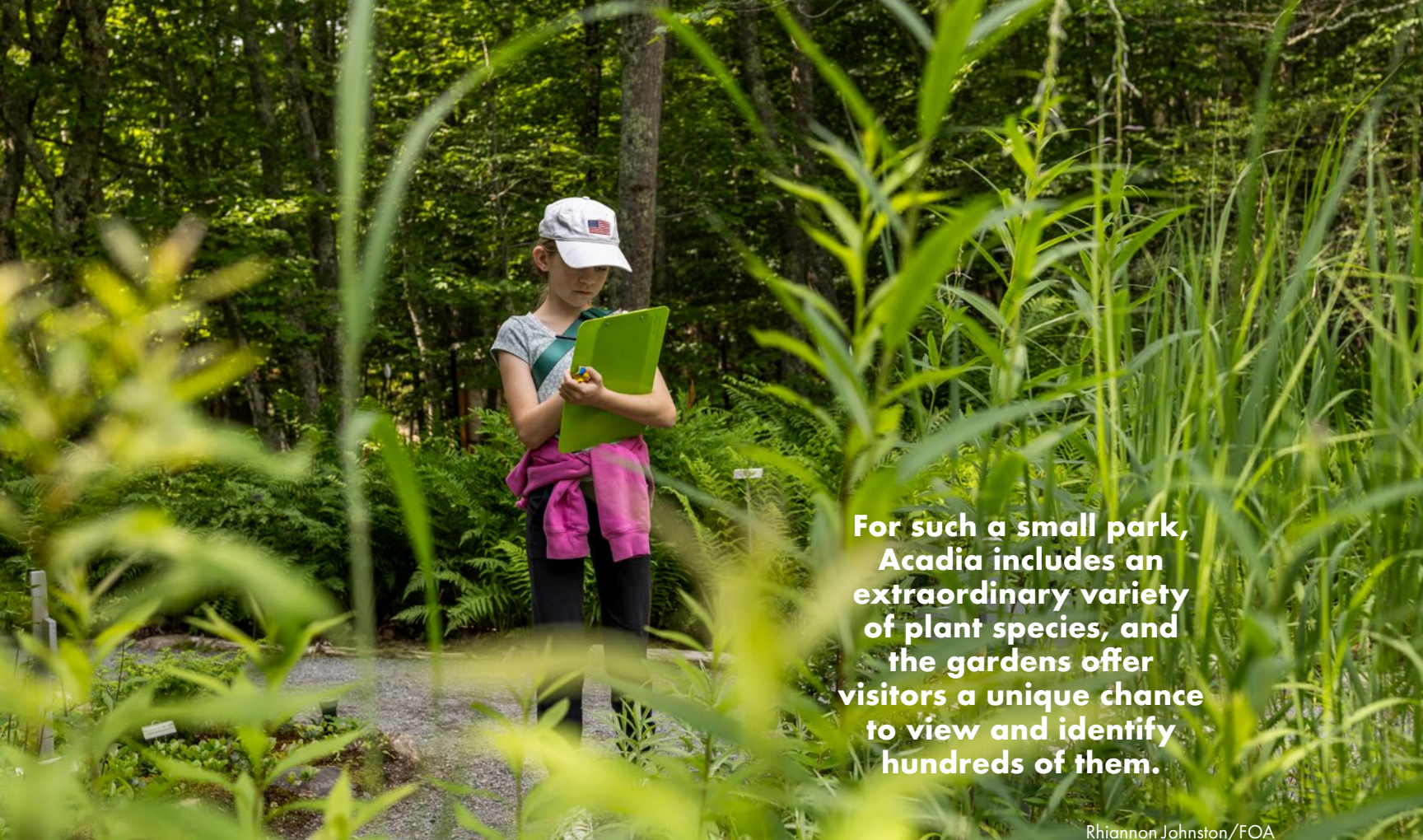
Over the years, the Wild Gardens of Acadia were maintained almost entirely by volunteers, supported by gifts from committee members, interested individuals, and community groups, as

well as from plant sales, postcards, and a garden brochure. As archival notes and Thorndike’s garden diaries show, founding committee members purchased materials, paid interns in fall and spring, and paid the salary of Ted Mitchell, who each week in the 1960s and 1970s worked in the gardens weeding and preparing beds for the new plantings volunteers collected outside the park.

As Acadia’s season extended and

the number of visitors increased, core committee members in the late 1990s realized that they had neither the physical nor financial resources to maintain the gardens and oversee daily operations.

To ensure the gardens’ long-term viability, the committee needed a mechanism that would provide regular funding. The committee raised enough funds annually to support an additional intern, but it did not have the funds to hire a head gardener.



For such a small park, Acadia includes an extraordinary variety of plant species, and the gardens offer visitors a unique chance to view and identify hundreds of them.

Rhiannon Johnston/FOA

ABOVE: Lydia Neuffer, 10, works to complete the Wild Gardens of Acadia Junior Botanist Scavenger Hunt.

RIGHT: Junior Ranger badges of Emily Nelson, 10, after she was sworn in as an Acadia Junior Ranger near the Wild Gardens of Acadia.

In 2004, some committee members presented the park and Friends of Acadia's then-President Ken Olson with three options: The park could assume full responsibility for staffing and operations; the gardens could simply be let go; or the Wild Gardens committee, Friends of Acadia, and the park could work jointly to find a sustained funding source.

Fortunately for the Wild Gardens committee and the park's many visitors, the park and Friends of Acadia agreed to work with the committee to find a viable financial plan. After six years and the efforts of many, the park and Friends of Acadia entered into an agreement that made the Wild Gardens of Acadia's volunteer committee part of Friends of Acadia.

In addition to economic security and freedom from many administrative tasks, the merger allowed Wild Gardens committee members not only to focus more on the plants and visitor interactions but

also to hire a head gardener to oversee daily operations.

With the help of Friends of Acadia staff, the committee developed an endowment—the Founders Fund.

Each fall, the co-chairs continue a tradition begun by the original committee—sending a letter describing the various activities, events, accomplishments, and highlights of the gardens that year. Annual funding from the endowment, which has steadily grown over the last 10 years, supports the salary of the head gardener and educational activities developed by interns—scavenger hunts and coloring pages, both of which are a hit with younger visitors.

The Junior Ranger program, conducted by Acadia's interpretive staff, takes place



Rhiannon Johnston/FOA

on the lawn by the Nature Center, an area within 50 yards of the gardens. To become a Junior Ranger, youngsters complete a workbook centered around typical park experiences. Often, they must identify a specific tree or plant, and those in the gardens are labeled. Another task requires the children to ask a question of a ranger, and anyone with a name tag, including

the gardens' staff and volunteers, fits that requirement. Once the Junior Rangers are sworn in, many return proudly displaying their newly earned arrowhead badge.

And it is not only younger visitors who enjoy the gardens but those adults who come individually or with a tour group.

In 2024, visitation crested at just under 100,000; while it appeared the gardens would welcome a similar number in 2025, the government shutdown forced the committee to close the gardens during the peak foliage season—always a period of high visitation. The number of visitors was

also slightly lower during COVID, although staff and volunteers created a one-way path through the gardens, and many called it a place they could find respite.

The COVID year brought another benefit. The committee sought greeters; while initially they helped with ensuring groups kept distance between one another, these volunteers highlighted what was currently in bloom and, using the map at the entrance, pointed out the specific habitat where visitors might find these. The greeters still welcome visitors, and visitors often return to ask them specific questions. The greeters, docents, and



LEFT TOP: An undated image of the gardens.

LEFT BOTTOM: Anne Kozak makes plant cages out of chicken wire.

BELOW: Volunteer Betsy Fenton arrives to volunteer at the gardens in 1979.



other volunteers who weed and rake paths all enhance the visitor experience.

For such a small park, Acadia includes an extraordinary variety of plant species, and the gardens offer visitors a unique chance to view and identify hundreds of them within a small space. Visitors can stroll past more than 21 species of native ferns, view carnivorous pitcher plants and sundews from the bog, watch tadpoles dart around pond-lilies, and enjoy the late summer golds and purples of goldenrods and asters. All are marked with both Latin (scientific) and English names, for many visitors are botanists and others are non-English-speaking. From May to November, there is always something in bloom.

In a 2012 article in Friends of Acadia's Journal, David Donovan, a seasonal interpretive ranger and volunteer, referred to the gardens as a "unique and wild teacher." Donovan and his wife have visited countless national parks, "but nowhere [else]," they said, "did we find a perfect, quiet place to learn the names of the plants that call these national parks home." ■

ANNE KOZAK is co-chair of the Friends of Acadia Wild Gardens of Acadia Committee, professor emerita and the former director of the College of the Atlantic's writing program, and a celebrated journalist on Mount Desert Island. She has been volunteering with the Wild Gardens of Acadia for the past 54 years and is the co-author of "The Wild Gardens of Acadia."

SUMMIT RESTORATION IS IN THE BAG



Since 2023, more than 700 Save Our Summits volunteers have hiked 13,000 pounds—6.5 tons!—of soil to the summits of Acadia’s mountains, helping to restore 151 square meters of eroded terrain.

BY LAUREN KNIERIM

At the summit of Sargent Mountain, 20 sweaty hikers pull black plastic bags from their packs and pile them together on the granite terrain. Inside each bag is anywhere from five to 25 pounds of soil, which has now traveled from the base of Sargent Mountain to its summit, 1,373 feet above sea level.

For their soil-carrying efforts, the distinguished Soil Hero sticker is bestowed upon each of these volunteers. Coveted by many—and proudly pasted to water bottles throughout Acadia National Park and beyond—this sticker is the mark of a Save Our Summits volunteer.

These Soil Heroes are part of an initiative to bring back native summit vegetation on Sargent and Penobscot Mountains.

Despite harsh conditions, Acadia’s mountains host around 145 plant species, many rare and more commonly found further north or on higher mountains. In addition to strong winds and high sun exposure, these plants must also contend with millions of visitor footsteps.

The summits are a highlight for Acadia’s visitors, but visitors can lose their way on the open granite, and while trying to find their way back to the trail or looking for a spectacular view, they can step on the low-lying vegetation, causing it to die. Without plant roots to hold it down, soil washes away in heavy wind and rain events. Without soil, those plants can’t grow back.

Plants obviously need soil, but soil accumulation is a slow geologic process and can take hundreds of thousands of years. Acadia’s mountains needed soil soon to successfully restore their summit vegetation. So how do you get thousands of pounds of soil to the summits of two mountains?

The first idea was to use a helicopter to drop the soil onto the summit. Another, a highline system, a series of ropes and pulleys that are used to bring in materials for maintaining Acadia’s trails. Maybe a pack of mules?

Cost and logistics made those approaches prohibitive. Instead, with collaboration from Schoodic Institute and

Friends of Acadia, the current Save Our Summits (SOS) plan began to take shape: Why don’t we just hike the soil up? Inviting volunteers to help was additionally appealing because it added an educational and community-building aspect to the project.

So, throughout the summer, volunteer hikers meet at the parking lot of Parkman Mountain carriage road to save a summit. After quick introductions and a much-needed group stretch, they begin their journey along the carriage roads to Waterfall Bridge, where a pile of soil awaits them. They weigh anywhere from five to 25 pounds of soil to carry, which has been sterilized to avoid bringing any unwanted seeds or pests to the already sensitive summits. With their soil safely tucked away, hikers leave the level surface of the carriage roads for the steep climb up the Hadlock Brook Trail.

After a short scramble up an open granite face, the group emerges above the tree line and, turning around, is greeted with views of Somes Sound and beyond. Now on the

open granite trail, this is a great time for them to exercise Leave No Trace principles. Principle No. 2: Tread on durable surfaces. Granite is a durable surface, meaning it can handle lots of visitor footsteps without degrading. The vegetation growing in its cracks, however, is not durable. Staying on the granite trails helps protect the summits' plants, which is what SOS is all about.

Whether volunteers are heading to Sargent summit or to Penobscot, along the way they'll find restoration plots, where Schoodic Institute's restoration crew and ANP's vegetation crew have turned volunteers' soil into restored areas.

These areas were once gravelly spots on the outskirts of vegetation but are now home to about four inches of soil, covered and tucked tightly in with biodegradable erosion control fabric.

Scientists, technicians, and resource managers at Schoodic Institute and Acadia National Park continue to look for the most efficient way to restore summit vegetation. They test methods like adding native seeds to some plots, compost to others, or building tiny "dirt castles" to simulate the natural microtopography of the summit. Now with three years of restoration plots to pass along their way, volunteers can see exactly what their hikes up the mountain are helping achieve.

After their quick lesson on summit restoration science, volunteers make one final push toward the summit. Upon reaching the assigned drop-off point, they pull out their soil bags, and after one final challenge to heft the bags over their heads for a victorious group photo, they finally relinquish their soil to the mountain.

Save Our Summits has seen quite the evolution since its first hike in 2023. The program began as a one-day "hike-a-thon," a single hectic day lugging soil to Sargent and Penobscot. With the addition of scheduled hikes with groups like Boy Scout troops and university students, more than 200 volunteers brought soil to the mountains in 2023.

The 3,750 pounds of soil that year was used to establish 29 restoration plots across Sargent and Penobscot.

Since then, Save Our Summits has become a regularly scheduled program in Acadia. In 2024, hikes became a weekly summer event, and in 2025 and 2026, doubled to twice per week. With so many new hikes to lead, a new volunteer opportunity arose: the Save Our Summits Volunteer Leader.

In 2025, the first set of SOS leaders stepped into their new roles. These volunteer leaders are essential in making other volunteers feel comfortable and welcome, increasing capacity for National Park Service programs, and most importantly, ensuring no one gets lost on the mountain.

Since that first hike-a-thon in 2023, more than 700 volunteers have helped save a summit and more than 13,000 pounds of soil have been used to restore 151 square meters. The program frequently sees familiar faces, with many volunteers returning throughout the season to share the program with their families, set a new personal record, or to spend the morning doing something good with their community.

After trading their soil for a hard-earned sticker and with their good deed done, 20 new Soil Heroes take a well-deserved break. ■

LAUREN KNIERIM is the Community Volunteer Ambassador at Acadia National Park.



RHANNON JOHNSON/FOA

Major Restoration Projects

Friends of Acadia and Schoodic Institute partner with Acadia National Park in collaborative and forward-focused approaches to keeping Acadia resilient and adaptive in the face of climate change. In addition to summit restoration work, other projects include:

GREAT MEADOW WETLAND

Park staff, Wabanaki communities, and partner organizations are collaborating to address issues in the Great Meadow Wetland, ranging from invasive plant management to disruptions in water flow.

Last year, the park's trail crew and dedicated volunteers constructed a new 500-foot-long raised boardwalk along the Hemlock Path, which allows water to flow freely and improves the hydrology of the wetland. Work is also underway this summer to install a new culvert to replace an undersized one.

In addition, a \$308,000 grant from the Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program, awarded to Friends of Acadia this winter, will expand restoration efforts to watershed areas above and below Great Meadow.

BASS HARBOR MARSH

In Bass Harbor Marsh, experimental plots are being used to test the effectiveness of native plants in preventing the spread of invasive glossy buckthorn.

Read more about restoration projects: friendsofacadia.org/restoration

ASHLEY L. CONTI/FOA



ANNUAL BENEFIT RAISES FUNDS TO RESTORE THE BAKER ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

The 2026 Annual Benefit & Auction on August 8 was a blend of reflection and forward momentum as we honored Friends of Acadia's 40 years of impact and looked ahead to Acadia's future.

More than 430 people gathered under the tent at Gate House Farm in Northeast Harbor for an unforgettable night to celebrate and support the park. A highlight of the event was raising more than \$400,000 to help restore the historic Baker Island Lighthouse, one of Acadia's most treasured maritime landmarks.

"For generations, Baker Island Lighthouse has stood as a symbol of safety, resilience, and connection," said Eric Stiles, Friends of Acadia president and CEO. "We are grateful for the extraordinary outpouring of support we received from many generous donors who stepped forward to help ensure this beloved landmark remains part of Acadia's landscape and story far into the future."

Held on the beautiful property of longtime Friends of Acadia supporter Rick Savage, guests at this year's Benefit enjoyed a lively cocktail reception featuring an oyster bar from Sweet Peas, along with a silent auction showcasing original artwork by local artists, handcrafted jewelry, distinctive home goods, and one-of-a-kind experiences.

The evening continued with an elegant dinner prepared by Trillium Caterers, a spirited live auction, and dancing late into the evening with Sultans of Swing.

Led by Benefit Committee Chair Lesley Draper, the 2026 Benefit Committee devoted countless hours throughout the year to create an unforgettable evening of community, generosity, and support for Acadia National Park. Young Friends Chairs Lesea Berry, Sydney Francis, and Charlotte Chilton also played instrumental roles in welcoming and engaging the next generation of Acadia supporters, helping carry that spirit of stewardship and philanthropy forward.

"The energy under the tent was incredible," said Jen Byer, Friends of Acadia special events manager. "Throughout the evening, there was a shared sense of excitement, generosity, and hope for Acadia's future as friends and supporters came together to celebrate a place that means so much to so many."

Friends of Acadia also extends its sincere thanks to Chilton Trust, the event's lead sponsor for the past 13 years, for its

steadfast commitment to Acadia. Special thanks as well to Interactive Brokers, the Patron Leadership Sponsor, and to Morgan Stanley, the Marquee Sponsor, for supporting Friends of Acadia's 40th anniversary and helping advance the work that will sustain Acadia for generations to come.

"This event would not be possible," Byer continued, "without the support of our sponsors, the extraordinary generosity of the Savage family who hosted us on their beautiful farm, and the many businesses, artists, craftspeople, and individuals who donated incredible auction items and volunteered their time to help Acadia National Park. Thank you to everyone in our community for your support of the park through this event and throughout the year." ■



A LIGHT THAT ENDURES

Paddle Raise for Baker Island Lighthouse

BY JEN BYER

For nearly two centuries, the Baker Island Lighthouse has stood watch at the southwestern entrance to Frenchman Bay, guiding mariners past the shallow shoals of the Cranberry Islands. Established in 1828 on Baker Island, one of the five Cranberry Islands off Mount Desert Island, the Baker Island Lighthouse was the first light station in Frenchman Bay, and its history is inseparable from the story of Maine's maritime heritage and the people who once made this remote island their home.

A few decades earlier, William and Hannah Gilley, along with their three children, moved from Mount Desert Island to Baker Island around 1806–1812. William likely fished seasonally from the island in previous years, as did the Abenaki before him. The small Gilley family cleared fields, built homes, and lived year-round on Baker Island. When the lighthouse was built, William was appointed as its first keeper. The Gilleys would eventually have 12 children, some of whom left the island and others who chose to stay. Descendants of the Gilley family lived on Baker Island for 123 years.

The original light tower was replaced by a 13-meter-high white brick lighthouse in 1855, and the light was automated in 1966.

Today's visitors to Acadia National Park can still experience the lighthouse, keeper's house, and surrounding historic landscape, but nearly two centuries of wind, salt air, storms, and exposure have taken a significant toll.

A comprehensive assessment by the National Park Service revealed cracking masonry, crumbling surface material, and failing paint that threaten both the historic structure and visitor safety if left unaddressed.

Thanks to sustained stewardship, including through the dedicated support of the nonprofit Keepers of Baker Island, meaningful progress has already been made. Brush clearing restored historic views of the lighthouse, the oil house roof was replaced, asbestos removed, and the keeper's and Gilley houses stabilized. The National Park Service has also secured funding for lead paint remediation—clearing the way for the next critical step.

The most urgent need now is the expert rehabilitation of the lighthouse tower itself. This work will include specialized masonry repairs, restoration of historic window openings and ventilation, and essential safety improvements—all performed according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation. Stabilizing the tower now will protect irreplaceable 19th-century craftsmanship and ensure the lighthouse remains.

More than \$400,000 was raised during this year's Annual Benefit to restore the historic Baker Island Lighthouse. These funds will help safeguard an iconic beacon of Acadia's maritime landscape—ensuring that future generations can continue to experience this history and see the light that has guided sailors, and stories, home for nearly 200 years. ■

JEN BYER is Friends of Acadia's Special Events Manager.



NPS

A Legacy Shines Across 40 Years

For Friends of Acadia, this year's Paddle Raise was a meaningful return to the organization's earliest roots.

In 1989, Friends of Acadia's first major project was helping restore Bear Island Lighthouse, a beloved landmark at the entrance to Somes Sound. That early effort helped define what Friends of Acadia could be: a partner to Acadia National Park, a convener of people who care deeply about this place, and a force for protecting the park's historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Help us continue to light the way forward. Join us in helping restore the Baker Island Lighthouse.



RHANNON JOHNSTON/FOA

NEW MEMBERS

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

Anonymous (7)
Christopher Amar
Kristen Anderson
Jennifer Ashburn
Sarah Atwood
Denise Avellino
Amelia Baran
Debby Barton and Ray Carrion
Marsha Barton
Michael Bassett
Tim Beck
Lincoln Benedict
Joe Beninghof
Aline Benoit
Kasia Bloch
John Bluthardt
Scot Bowen
Peter Braham
Judy Bruce
Eliza Burden
James Campbell
Kristen Card
Michelle and George Caughey
Christopher Chamberlain
Lena Chung and Paul Shim
Serena Cole
Tracey Cole
Peter Collins
Caroline Colvin and Kale Hyder-Colvin
Warren Cook
Janet Crahan
Susan Creane
George Crist
Jennifer Dorr White
Juliette Drake
Melinda Dutton
Lynette Eastman
Ann Eling
Wayne Elliott
Jim Filer
Julie Fitzgerald
Emily Follo
Anthony Fortunato
Kevin Garrett
Kyle Garrett
Maggie Giles
Michael Gordon
Lesley Gorski
Allen Grafton
Pam and Rich Griswold
Kathryn and Kirk Hachigian
Louise Halstead
Pam and Bob Handley
Lisa Haynsworth
Elisabeth Heyward
Suzanne and Hank Horowitz
Gwen Houser
Abigail Huntington
Susan Jacoby
Alice Johnson
Jacqueline and Alex Kadesch
Lynne Kemen
William Kennedy
Joanne Kimata
Michael Klein
Michael Langager
Josie Lawlor
Ian Leavesley
Samantha Lee
Theresa Lesiak
Marley Liszczyński
Radha Lyengar
Kevin Ann Marcyes
Steven Martel

David Martins
BC McKinney
Mary Michelotti
Evan Miller
Ann Mott Taylor
Barbara and Bob Muskas
Walter Mutter
Lauren Naylor
Jennifer and Daniel Newhall
Corianne O'Donnell
Yamini Ohol-Gupta
Laura and Robert Peabody
Rebecca Peters
Kathleen Petersen
Jason Pickering
David Piper
Kristi Potter
Lauren Potter
Leah Potter
Alex Powers
Terry Powers
John Quinn
Verity Ramirez
Eleanor Raynes
Kathryn Rensenbrink
Helen Rosati
John Rosenfeld
Doris and David Rowlands
Seamus Russet
Shawn Sabine
Disha Sahni
Tina Scheer
Jodie Schiffer
Mark Scholefield
Kirk Siegel
Bruce Specia
Leanne and Rocky Stone
Rebecca Strauss
Wendy Strong
Nathaniel Sznycer-Taub
Christine Todd
David Torre
Mary Ellen Tuccillo
Daniel Ungier
Pamela Van Summern
Sara Wallace
Cheryl Walsh
Catherine and Brent Walton
Mildred Wang
Richard Wellman
Ellen White
Kilie Young

NEW TRAILBLAZERS

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

Ruth Anderson
Jennifer Beach
Scot Bowen
Ann Bradford
Josie Briggs and Jurgen Schnermann
Donna and Ray Chalifour
Nancy and Phil Crevier
Sydney Fisher and Dallas Dixon
Jodi Lockhart
BC McKinney
Corianne O'Donnell
Alex Powers
Verity Ramirez
John Sagaser
Disha Sahni

IN MEMORIAM

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

Cortland "Cort" Bassett
Patricia Bazar
Ethelyn and Ben Breeze, Sr.
Susan Browder
Ken Cochrane
Charles Nelson Conover
Robbie E. "Grunch" Corley, Jr.
David and Kitzi Crofoot
Andrea Danyluk
George DeWolfe
George D. Ferrell
Cathy Fioravanti
Judith Fischer
Larry Goldfarb
Sprague W. Hazard
Arthur Horsch
Randy Houser
Katrina Hummel
Edward Jackson
Bryan Jones
Svend Jorgensen
K9 Darel
Howie Katz
Ed Lightcap
Luke
Dan Mackell
Ted Madara
Mr. and Mrs. Manton B. Metcalf III
Toby Mills
Sean Patrick Montgomery
Joe Murphy
Peter C. O'Brien
Cliff Olson
James Milton Owen
David C. Parker
George Wharton Pepper
Dodie and Eliot Pierce
George W. Price
Baby Sahni Rabbani
Hilary S. Reed
John D. Rockefeller Jr.
Vicki Rougeot
Carl Rubinstein
Hank Schmelzer
Heide Schoenbrod
Nora Searle
Anthony Smalley
Frances Cochran Smith
Wesley Smith
Nancy and Herb Spowls
Kenneth A. Stalberg
Jane Ingraham Thomas
David Trawczynski
Jo-Anne Volpe

IN NOMINE

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

The Acadia to Katahdin Virtual Racers
Maya and Madeline Baitman's
birthdays
Mason Burdick
Nikki Burtis
The Cross Country Winter Trail Groomers
Judy Haynes
Laurie and Arthur Horsch
Helen and Philip Koch
Anne Kozak
Al Lagoy*
Miles and Alice
Hank Schmelzer*

Kenneth A. Stalberg
Barbara and Richard Sturgeon
The Thorndikes

*Deceased

2026 ACTIVE STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEER CREW LEADERS

Lee Allen
John Baird
Michael Bieber
Jake Bison
Joey Engling
Mike Engling
Randy Ewins
Peter Fleisher
Doug Heden
Kay Keaney
Jim Lemmon
Jim Linnane
Tami Montorsi
Mark Nadel
Barb Nealon
David Opdyke
Martha Plaza
Tim Schorer
Ruth Yeiser

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Since Summer 2025

Jill Brown
Bob Hartley
Mary Heffernan
Katie Kowski
Cora Olgayay
Alan Rosenquist

NEW BUSINESS MEMBERS

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

Allen Insurance & Financial
Comcast
Norton Stoneworks
Oxbridge Group
OneEquity Partners
Quest Diagnostics
Sony Music
Viasat
Waters Technologies

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January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026

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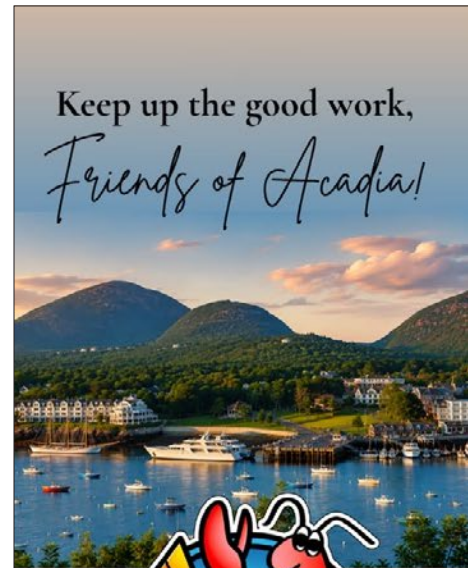
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Celebrating Three Extraordinary Friends

Each year, Friends of Acadia recognizes outstanding individuals who have gone above and beyond in service to Acadia. In this anniversary year, it feels especially fitting to honor three people whose contributions to the park are best measured in decades rather than years.

Each of our 2026 Annual Award recipients, Jim Linnane, John Kelly, and Becky Cole-Will, has made our park stronger, more resilient, and more welcoming. We are delighted to recognize the lasting impact of their leadership and deep commitment to Acadia.

Excellence in Volunteerism Award: Jim Linnane

This year, we honored Jim Linnane for more than 20 years of outstanding volunteer service.

Jim began volunteering with Friends of Acadia in 2005 as a Stewardship Volunteer working to improve and maintain the park's trails and carriage roads. Since then, he has lent his hands and good cheer just about everywhere, including the winter sign shop, our membership table, and the Wild Gardens of Acadia. Over the years, Jim has become a mentor to many, introducing new people to the idea of volunteerism and inspiring others, through his own dedication, to keep showing up.

Friends of Acadia is hardly alone in benefiting from his generosity. Jim gives his time to an extraordinary roster of conservation and community organizations across Mount Desert Island.

When asked about his years of service, Jim characteristically brushed aside the praise. "My experience is really just longevity and enjoying it," he said.

Thank you for your hard work and years of care, and for sharing your love for the park with so many.

Distinguished Public Service Award: John Kelly

John Kelly, Acadia National Park's management assistant, has devoted 39 years to the National Park Service, including 26 years at Acadia.

Over those decades, John has helped guide some of the park's most consequential planning and transportation work. Friends of Acadia has been fortunate to work beside him on the Island Explorer, the former Acadia Night Sky Festival, major transportation planning efforts, and countless projects that required patience, diplomacy, and a long-term view.

John's skills at planning and partnership building have helped the Island Explorer grow from its early days through its 10 millionth rider. This year's opening of the Acadia Gateway Center for its first full season marks another major achievement. John helped advance that vision over many years, navigating the complexities that inevitably accompany ambitious projects and bringing together people with different perspectives around a common purpose.

His deep institutional knowledge, strategic thinking, and extraordinary ability to listen have made him an invaluable partner to both Friends of Acadia and the communities surrounding the park.

Marianne Edwards Distinguished Service Award: Becky Cole-Will

We were proud to present our highest honor, the Marianne Edwards Distinguished Service Award, to Becky Cole-Will, Acadia National Park's chief of cultural and natural resources.

Becky has spent her career advancing the stewardship of both Acadia's natural and cultural resources. She has championed science-based conservation while ensuring that cultural heritage and human stories receive the attention they deserve.

She has helped strengthen relationships with the Wabanaki Nations, working in collaboration with the Tribes to advance the practice of co-stewardship in Acadia. Through her work with Wabanaki experts, she has helped restore access for traditional sweetgrass gathering within the park and worked to integrate Indigenous Knowledge into park restoration projects and archaeology.

We are grateful for Becky's remarkable expertise and her equally remarkable willingness to share it generously with Friends of Acadia and the wider community.

To Jim, John, and Becky: thank you for your decades of service to Acadia. Your accomplishments and ongoing work will strengthen Acadia long into the future.



—Bill Eacho

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



"It feels especially fitting to honor three people whose contributions to the park are best measured in decades rather than years."



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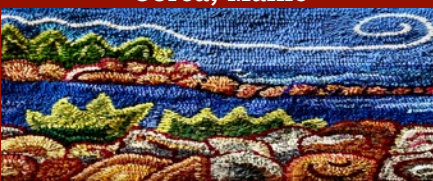

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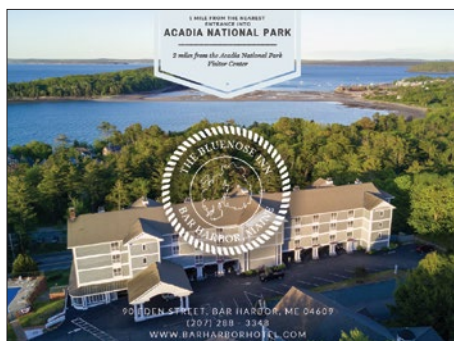


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