Connections

What makes the Squam watershed, and its people, so special? Beyond the factors of geography, history, and a deep commitment to land conservation and low-impact uses lie countless connections spanning place, people, and time. In this edition, we honor the actions of Reggie Pettitt and his daughter Betsey, Dick and Nelleke Allen, and Chip and Wendy Harris for permanently protecting their land. They join a growing number of landowners in the Squam watershed who have taken the bold step of conserving their land.

The Squam we cherish today is the result of countless actions which led to deeper community connections. Many of those actions are forgotten; some are imbedded in our institutions and community. A fascinating story of action and connection is that of Reuben Whitten, who in 1816 fed his family and neighbors when the “year-without-a-summer” posed a grave threat (see page 5). Whitten’s life-saving actions serve to connect our past to our future through the Whitten Woods project, the newest of our Squam Uplands projects. Standing on an overlook on Whitten Woods, one can see across the widest stretches of both Little Squam and Big Squam Lakes, revealing another spectacular view of the Squam watershed. Whether east or west, north or south, on snowshoes or a sailboat, Squam is beautiful at every turn.

How extraordinary it is to find ourselves, as members of SLCS and the Squam community, taking collective action today to create a connection to a brighter future. That blueprint for action is being called Squam Uplands, which prioritizes the conservation of our most visible and undeveloped portion of the watershed. Squam Uplands refers to land above 1,000’ in elevation, which covers about 7,000 acres, just slightly less than the lake surface (see page 4).

Why focus now on the Squam Uplands? It’s the source of our fresh water, the location of our working forests, and it’s where we connect with nature, hike and hunt. The Uplands define Squam’s scenic landscape, which remain unfettered by residential development, towers, and lights. In short, the quality of the lake, and the quality of our lives, is connected to land uses at the top of the watershed. Conserving the Squam Uplands expands what we’ve already accomplished together, and connects us to our future.

Roger
Allen Preserve

In December 2014 Squam Lakes Conservation Society closed on the “bargain-sale” acquisition of the Allen Preserve on Route 113 in Sandwich, with a small area in Holderness. Dick and Nelleke Allen made a generous contribution of part of the value of two parcels bisected by the Col Trail a/k/a George Road, totalling 23 acres. This Preserve adjoins the Smith Brook Conservation Area, and is an important addition to permanent protection of the natural systems and water quality in the area. This property includes 800’ of Smith Brook, 950’ of George Brook, and several acres of associated wetlands. Stonework for an old mill site is found at the confluence of the brooks. The eastern parcel includes 685’ of unbroken forested frontage on Route 113. The Preserve is primarily wooded, with some exceptional mature trees.

Dick and Nelleke acquired the land in 1979, and recently considered subdividing for family residential purposes. However, they ultimately concluded that the resources should not be fragmented, and agreed to sell to SLCS for considerably less than the fair market value.

The land was known as Meadow Brook Farm in the early part of the 20th Century. The cellar hole of the Ambridge boarding house, dating back to colonial times, is found near George Road on the easterly parcel.

Smith Brook discharges into Squaw Cove, and is the largest inflow brook to Squam Lake. The brooks are well known for Brook Trout.

The purchase was completed with financial contributions from the Squam Lakes Association, Rockywold-Deephaven Camps and several donors.

Harris Woods Conservation Area

In December 2014 Chip and Wendy Harris donated a conservation easement encumbering their 10.41 acre woodland tract off Newman Road in Center Harbor. We envision this tract as the nucleus for conservation of additional near-shore land in the lightly developed vicinity. The mature “HBOP” forest (hemlock, beech, oak and pine) has not been cut in recent years, and includes some impressive white pines and white oaks. Some large wildlife trees provide nesting, denning and roosting opportunities. Once pasture, the land has reforested since the 1880’s. Visible from Squam Lake and from Newman and College Roads, protection of this entirely developable property is critical to wildlife connectivity behind the developed shorefront in Dog Cove.
In December 2014 SLCS closed on the exceptional donation by Holderness School science teacher Reggie Pettitt of a conservation easement encumbering 213 acres of forest, field, meadow and wetland off Sanborn Road in Ashland. Reggie has taken many Holderness students on field trips on this land, and many more are sure to follow.

The Pettitt Forest is a critical element in the permanent protection of the upland area south of Little Squam because it now joins the Lake View Farm Conservation Area and the Stevens Memorial Forest (New England Forestry Foundation) with the Homestead Preserve. The result is an unbroken area of wildlife habitat of over 1100 acres. Evidence of wildlife, including river otter, beaver, bear, deer and moose is widespread. The property is in the highest ranked habitat category of the 2010 NH Wildlife Action Plan. Three unusual steep talus boulder slopes provide excellent denning opportunities for a variety of species.

Numerous hiking and snowshoeing trails exist on the forest and are available for use. A section of a major snowmobile trail crosses one corner of the property. The higher elevations are visible from Little Squam and area roads making the Pettitt Forest one of our most scenically significant properties.

Reggie has long managed this exceptional forestland pursuant to a comprehensive forestry plan with a focus on wildlife enhancement. Thinning and small clearcuts provide exceptional diversity of habitat.

In Memoriam

SLCS Honorary Director, Bertram Read, 85, passed away on March 16, 2015, in Exeter, NH. A graduate of Harvard College, he pursued a successful career in the commercial printing business. In 1976, he became president and owner of Shiver Mountain Press in Washington Depot, CT which he sold in 1990 before he and Clare, his wife of more than 50 years, became permanent residents of Holderness.

Bert was dedicated to conserving the Squam watershed and served for nearly 21 years in leadership roles with SLCS. First elected to the Board of Directors in 1994, he served as Vice-President, President, and chair of the Conservation & Acquisitions Committee (the current Lands Committee.) He was a member of numerous other committees including Strategic Planning and Stewardship, and was a volunteer monitor for over 15 years. He retired from the Board in 2003 but continued his commitment to SLCS as an Honorary Director. In 2008 SLCS awarded Bert the Dick Davenport Award in recognition of “his exceptional commitment and service to the Squam Community as a steward of its protected properties.”
The Squam Uplands Initiative prioritizes the permanent protection of land in the Squam watershed above 1,000 feet in elevation, which includes the Squam Range in Holderness and Sandwich; Mt. Prospect, Church Hill and Leavitt Hill in Ashland; and Red Hill in Moultonborough and Sandwich. The Squam Uplands area covers roughly 7,000 acres, just slightly less than the total surface area of the Squam Lakes.

The Squam Uplands area is an integral part of the Squam watershed both aesthetically and ecologically. It contains the clear headwaters of Squam’s tributaries, provides the view lookouts from Squam’s extensive trail network, comprises the majority of its managed forests, serves as critical and unfragmented habitat, and defines Squam’s scenic landscape.

This initiative is the culmination of years of planning and is built upon the strong conservation ethic that characterizes the Squam community. SLCS has been sizing the dimensions of the effort, evaluating organizational capacity, talking with landowners, testing feasibility, introducing the concept to a broad range of constituents, and reaching out to our conservation partners, including the Squam Lakes Association, Lakes Region Conservation Trust, New England Forestry Foundation, town Conservation Commissions, and The Conservation Fund. The result is a proposal that is broad in scale, unified in its approach and goals, integrated across political geographies, and compelling to landowners and potential funders.

There are two components of the Squam Uplands Initiative. First, SLCS is prioritizing its conservation efforts in the Squam watershed by focusing on the conservation of land within and adjacent to the defined Uplands area, such as Whitten Woods.

A second and complementary effort is being led by both The Conservation Fund and SLCS to conserve 6,500 acres of abutting land along the north flank of the Squam Range. Together, both elements could permanently conserve significant acreage between the Squam Lakes and the White Mountain National Forest.

In short, the Squam Uplands Initiative is an unprecedented opportunity to unify and coordinate conservation priorities, organizations, and funding.
Whitten Woods is a 414-acre property on Highland Street in Ashland named for the well-known story of Reuben Whitten (see sidebar). Located less than a mile from the center of town and the elementary school, this property has the potential to feature Squam’s first network of universal trails (accessible for all). The property ranges in elevation from 700 feet at the road, to the peak at 1,170 feet, featuring remarkable views across the length of both Little Squam and Big Squam Lakes, and up and down the Pemigewasset River Valley. Conservation of Whitten Woods will help maintain Squam’s scenic landscape and diverse wildlife habitat, while protecting the water quality of the Squam and Pemigewasset watersheds, and contributing to the local economy by ensuring the land remains a working forest.

This project is a collaborative effort between local residents, the Ashland Conservation Commission, Squam Lakes Conservation Society (SLCS), New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF), and the Squam Lakes Association (SLA). NEFF would own the parcel and manage the forest, SLCS would ensure its permanent protection with a conservation easement, and SLA would oversee trail construction and maintenance.

Whitten Woods is emblematic of SLCS’s Squam Uplands project: it’s an upper-elevation parcel with tremendous natural resource and recreational value. The property was purchased eight years ago by the Dailey family who are willing to sell it at a bargain rate. The campaign goal is $660,000, of which through leadership gifts, $475,000 is already pledged. The partners are submitting grant applications for $75,000 and leading an effort to raise the remaining $110,000 through private donations.

For more information about the Whitten Woods campaign and the Squam Uplands Initiative, go to foreversquam.org.

Reuben Whitten:
Good Deeds Spanning Generations

Reuben Whitten is a local Ashland legend. Rueben and his wife built their home above the Squam River on what was called Indian Hill, that strip of land lying between the Squam and Pemigewasset Rivers. The Whitten home is still standing, although it was moved into town long after Reuben’s time to provide some workforce housing for the mills.

In 1816, a year after the volcanic eruption of Mt. Tambora, the northern hemisphere experienced “a year without a summer.” Locally, snow or killing frost was recorded every month of the year.

During the summer of 1816, area farmers experienced repeated crop failures. However, the elevation of the Whitten’s fields and their south-facing slope allowed the family to grow wheat and produce such as potatoes and apples. The family generously provided surrounding neighbors with precious food and wheat throughout the difficult year thus saving many lives.

Reuben’s grandson immortalized the generosity of his grandfather with a stone that reads:

Reuben Whitten –
A pioneer of this town. Cold season of 1816 raised 40 bushels of wheat on this land which kept family and neighbours from staveation.

Naming this project “Whitten Woods” extends Reuben’s good deeds to a new generation of people building community in the face of a changing climate.
Presumably, forever is a long way away. But really, for all of us, it gets closer every day! How can we, the SLCS family, encourage active participation in all things Squam by those that have a bit more time before they reach forever?

We all want to instill an ethic of conservation in our kids and grandkids. We all try to do that by enjoying outdoor family activities like hiking, fishing, biking, skiing, and skating, and by setting a good example of responsible recreational use. We may send or have sent kids to outdoor summer camps for the full immersion experience. But how do we get kids (of all ages!) to be truly engaged in what makes Squam special? How do we get them to become owners of the legacy to care?

Many of us who have been around Squam for a long time have invested hard earned dollars in homes, camps, house rentals, and more. Many of us have also invested some of our hard earned vacation and/or time off to “give back” to activities we feel are important. I’m going to argue that because you are reading this, Squam is important to you. Wouldn’t it be great if we, collectively, could ensure that our kids find Squam important, too? Sure, Squam is a fantastic place to have fun with friends, make family connections, experience beauty, and create long-lasting memories. But who will carry the torch in the future? Will your family be one that helps keep the Squam in Squam?

In the spirit of providing opportunities for kids of all ages to notice and appreciate what we have, I’m going to suggest two ways that you and your family can make a difference....First, consider, as a family, helping SLCS monitor our conserved lands in the watershed. Monitoring is a fun, outdoor activity where you can learn about other properties around the lake, and meet other families who care for those lands. Think of it as a scavenger hunt, looking for markers in the woods and along the shore. And, being a volunteer looks great on college applications! For a glimpse of what it’s like, read Jennifer Beal’s article on page 7. Just so you know, Jennifer is one of two generations of Beal’s that monitor conserved land for SLCS! The Beals are one of many families that care deeply about the future. If you are interested in monitoring as a family (or as an individual, too), please give me a call at (603) 968-7900 or send me an email to pete@squamlakes.com. We can discuss the ages of your kids (remember, we’re all kids!), their interests, etc., and come up with a property or two where you can experience this lovely place called Squam!

The second way your family can make a difference is by ensuring that your children, and your children’s children if appropriate, are individual donors to the Squam Lakes Conservation Society. I suggest this not because of the money (although obviously it helps!), but because it can begin, or continue, a sense of ownership in SLCS for the next generations, and that will in turn, increase the probability that we will have engaged stewards to “carry the torch” in the future. They will receive newsletters directly so that they continue to be informed of all of the good work that is happening... and there are some amazing conservation projects that are lining up nicely! If they know how important Squam is to you, and if you are able to lay the foundation of good stewardship, imagine where we’ll be as we all get closer to forever.
An Exquisite Piece of Earth:
A Monitor’s Journal
by Jennifer Beal

I had set aside the whole autumn day for my monitor outing because one never knows what may happen along the way. The weather cooperated without pouring wet upon my effort, but clouds and chill were omnipresent.

To monitor my assigned property of woods and Squam water’s edge, I need to be familiar with my Monitor’s Report so that, after traipsing the boundary lines, I can answer the questions to the current condition of the property and report any easement violations. Keeping eyes wide open isn’t all I need: look for the iron pin boundary marker 20 yards ahead, watch out for the low hemlock twigs about to scratch my face, or the dead branches tripping my feet, or the sudden shift from firm footing to soft sloping pine needle cushion. In order to take it all in, I actually find myself almost in a trance.

When walking this conservation easement, my consciousness floats as it simultaneously engages multiple layers of sight and information. I am bewitched by this land: like Lyra’s state of mind while working the Golden Compass, mine needs to cling only lightly to seeing just one element at a time. Rather, I absorb many. Monitoring becomes meditation.

Over there, I wonder if I can find the pin I couldn’t find last year. The survey map shows it at the tip of a small point jutting into the lake. Perhaps by hopping from branch to puddle to rock, I can find the marker on the underside of a stepping-stone. Anywhere? Nope. I can’t pick out any hint of iron pin or pink flagging or scratch on rock. It’s getting colder; I turn around. Hold on! What made those sinkholes? Why, they’re like deer prints, but the marks are four feet apart. Could it be a moose perhaps? Do I really monitor moose habitat? Oh my goodness! I take a moment to pause in awe.

Now, I will walk the perimeters where house and easement boundaries meet. Have the landowners honored their promise this year? Yes, they have.

Next, I move to the other half of the property that runs steeply up and down a hillside. Will I find the pin that is in the middle of this slope? Last year it was so buried under pine needles that I had trouble locating it. There is the pink ribbon, but where is the iron rod? I dig a little. Oh... It’s four inches down this year!

The last set of markers is nowhere to be seen. We did have a major nor’easter last week. Hey, there’s a 150-foot tree lying on the ground and it’s in my way! Some storm damage. I guess I have to walk all the way around its bottom to get to my pins on the other side. The fresh scent of splintered hemlock tempts me to pick up and pocket a small fragment. I resist.

But I do have a lovely memento from my autumn day on this conserved property, this photograph. When I see it on my computer screen, I slip back to my whole day of awe. What an exquisite piece of earth.

First Fridays at the Mill Brook Preserve
SLCS’s Mill Brook Preserve
First Fridays - All Summer - 4 PM to 6 PM

The Squam Lakes Conservation Society (SLCS), SLA and SLNSC, and lots of volunteers have been tackling terrestrial invasive plants for a few years now. Join us on the First Friday of each month at the Mill Brook Preserve to continue this work and help the native plant populations on Squam Lake!

For more information, contact Pete Helm at pete@squamlakes.com or at (603) 968-7900. Registration isn’t required, but a quick call ensures we have sufficient snacks and beverages….and bring along a friend!!

SAVE THE DATES! July 2nd (Thurs), August 7th, September 4th, October 2nd
Passing it on…

Four stories about the generational transfer of property

Thursday, August 13 • 9:00 - 11:00 AM
SLA Barn • 510 US Route 3, Holderness

Do you have an old camp or lakeside property that has served as a family gathering spot? Are you considering options to ensure the place you love will continue to be enjoyed from one generation to the next?

Listen to the stories of four Squam property owners as they describe how their families have approached this important issue. Their stories will illustrate how they communicated with family members, worked with professional advisors, and set up an approach that is designed to ensure a successful transfer of their property. Hear about their challenges, limitations, triumphs and pitfalls. Have your questions answered, and share your own experience regarding this important and timeless topic. The presentation is free and open to the public.

Sponsored by: Squam Lakes Conservation Society, Squam Lakes Association and New Hampshire Preservation Alliance

For more information go to foreversquam.org.

Save the date…

Annual Meeting
August 22, 2015, 10 am
At Hilltop
Home of Austin and Leslie Furst
Center Harbor Neck Road, Center Harbor

Connecting Conservation and Theater

This summer SLCS is partnering with The Little Church Theater to bring our members a 10% discount off the regular ticket price for any LCT production. Check the 2015 Summer of Big Performances at http://www.littlechurchtheater.com and use the ticket code Squamlakesconservation113 when ordering tickets.

The Society’s mission is to preserve the unique quality and character of the Squam watershed by protecting lands for present and future generations.