The True Jewels of Holbrook Island Sanctuary: Phil & Pat Farr

SHEILA MOIR

Phil Farr certainly didn’t plan to spend his last days as manager of Holbrook Island Sanctuary sitting in his recliner recovering from hip replacement surgery. He expected to be putting the park to bed for the winter as it returns to seasonal operation, just as it was when he started over 30 years ago.

Holbrook Island Sanctuary was added to the list of state parks in 1971 with a donation of land from Miss Anita Harris and was looked after initially by Jack Butler and then by Polly Brown. After years working with Maine Maritime Academy, the Kerr American Mine, the Sheriff’s Department, the Brooksville Volunteer Fire Department (as chief for 14 years) and the Forestry Service (including two years as the tower person on Blue Hill Mountain), Phil was hired as a seasonal ranger in the spring of 1978, and he and Pat, who have been married for 42 years, became full-time residents at the park in the early 1980’s. When Miss Harris died in 1985, the position of park manager was created, and after having to interview for the position even though he was already there, Phil was hired.

Phil remarks that when they arrived, “There was absolutely nothing in the house or the shop. Not a screwdriver, not a chair, not a thing.” The house, probably built in the late 1800’s, was in “fair to poor condition”—no cupboards in the kitchen and just 2x4’s for shelves, plaster falling off the walls. At least there was electricity, since Miss Harris had paid to have a power line run in for Jack Butler. Over the years, as winter projects, the Farrs renovated the place, making it into the cozy home it is today.

One of the challenges in the early days was getting to and from the park. The main roads are town roads and were kept plowed “as good back then as it is now.” The real problem came with mud season. Before the roads became impassable, they would move a car up near the main road. To get groceries, Pat would hike out to the car, and when she came back, with luck, Phil would get a vehicle up the road to pick her up. Sometimes they’d have to use the riding lawnmower, Phil driving and Pat bouncing behind in the cart with the groceries. One spring, three vehicles were stuck on the road at the same time, and once planks had to be laid over a washed-out section so that Phil could get out for a doctor’s appointment. Phil says, “Mark [Blake] has done a lot of work on the roads over the years, and now they’re passable.”

When Phil took over, the entire park consisted of one grill and two picnic tables down by the beach. After filling out “truckloads of paperwork for each project,” he began to open up the park. Miss Harris’s will only allowed them to use old roads, which could only be upgraded to walking paths. For example, the Ice Works trail was once a road that was used in the winter to haul ice from Fresh Pond to the Hutchins farm.

Phil had some help from a seasonal ranger for a few years, but he soon found he could hire young people through the CETA and TDC programs. Lots of Brooksville kids worked summers at the park, including Sammy Gray, Michelle Condon, Eric Churchill, Craig Limeburner, David Rankin, Elizabeth

(Continued on page 7)
News Flash! Community Updates

Tinder Hearth Bakery

Construction continues on the new oven and commercial kitchen at Tinder Hearth in West Brooksville. Once completed, the bakery will provide fresh sourdough breads to the Peninsula year-round. The new construction, timber-framed with hand tools and the help of countless volunteers, houses a nearly completed wood-fired brick oven. The oven was designed by the late Alan Scott, an Australian who brought brick ovens back into common use in the United States in the 1970s. As well as providing a new workspace, the bakery will also have a small customer area and improved accessibility for patrons. Tinder Hearth welcomes the community to stop by and check on the progress during the work week.

Greenhouse Project

The seeds planted at last year’s SELF Reliance Conference, sponsored by Reversing Falls Sanctuary and the Good Life Center, are sprouting all over the Peninsula. Twelve families, including the Brooksville Elementary School, have received their orders of polycarbonate for the building of their greenhouses. Ordering as a nonprofit group, we obtained materials at a discount rate with crating and shipping fees nominal due to the size of the order. Ah, the benefits of working in community! The dream of extending the growing season, encouraging the growing of local food, and building community interdependence is being fulfilled right before our eyes.

Thanks to a Petty Foundation Grant, the greenhouse for Brooksville Elementary School is now visible on the horizon. With community volunteers, Tony Ferara and Tom Adamo have almost completed the school greenhouse. Final insulating and raised-bed preparations are now in the works.

We are still in need of volunteers for the duration of this project; some carpentry skills are a real plus at this stage. If you are interested, please call Tony Ferrara at 326-8564 or Tom Adamo at 326-8868.

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Farmers’ Market

Second Year Success! The biggest day was Aug. 11 with 35 vendors. Products sold included meat, seafood, seedlings, sugar cookies, soaps, wooden spoons, books, pottery, preserves, sauces, hats, jewelry, goat cheese, note cards, blueberries, whimsical wooden folk art, wooden crafted bowls, fresh-cut flowers, beeswax candles, sushi, local artists’ paintings, and fresh locally grown vegetables of every description.

There is some interest in having small pre-holiday markets in November and December. Anyone interested in working on this or any other local foods project, contact Jackie at 326-0780 or eatlocal@vegemail.com

Last date of Farmers’ Market for 2009 is Tuesday, October 6.
According to the American Library Association, “Summer reading programs began in the 1890s as a way to encourage school children, particularly those in urban areas and not needed for farm work, to read during their summer vacation, use the library and develop the habit of reading.” While the Brooksville Free Public Library (BFPL) hasn’t been around since the 1890s, it has offered a summer reading program for years as a way to encourage school-age children to continue reading during the summer and as a way to develop new interests through reading and by participating in special programs that are offered. This year almost 20 pre-school and school-age children set reading goals of anywhere from four to forty books. Bri, the Reader Dog (and her owner Pier Carros), visited the library every Thursday evening and listened to children read their selected books.

In addition, Jane Ploughman, the library director, and two volunteers, Judy Madson and Zanna Elliot, organized a variety of programs for children of all ages based on this summer’s theme “Be Creative @ your Library.” Judy and Zanna led workshops on making folded books, collages, and fairy houses. Pier Carros showed children how Bri can paint. These arts and crafts programs were rounded out by programs offered by community members—yoga with Debra Bomba and Matilda, drama with Becky Poole, and music with Tim Semler.

One ongoing project that developed during the planning of the summer reading program is the EarthLoom Project. The library is partnering with Brooksville resident, Susan Merrill, founder of the worldwide EarthLoom Project (www.earthloom.org) to house a simple seven-stick weaving loom in the library as a creative and educational project for the community. The EarthLoom Project’s mission is to “encourage the weaving of the fabric of community, to bring neighbors, neighborhoods and communities together in activities that will help transcend differences and forge bonds between individuals and groups.” This collaborative project is in line with one of the Brooksville Free Public Library’s mission statements to serve as a cultural and educational center for the entire community. Everyone is invited to weave on the loom as we create multiple weavings made up of materials such as sheep’s fleece, cotton fabric, bark, shells and other materials. The weavings can also include words, poems, photographs, music and other artifacts. One of the ideas behind this project is to create weavings for individuals residing in Brooksville who are nominated by other community members to receive one of the weavings as a way to get to know these individuals and to show appreciation for what they give to the community.

The loom was set up in mid-July and we are now finishing a second weaving. Our goal is to create four to six “community appreciation” weavings. We have received many positive comments during the last month and a half, including the following comments from one weaver who wrote in the Weaving Journal:

“My husband, our two kids and I came from California to visit our friends here. We stopped by the library to use the Internet. I saw this weaving project and was very touched by this earnest community effort. My daughter, Kyra (age 8) and I did two rows of weaving. She wove in two shells. We had fun. We are sure to remember this library and this town.”

For more information about this project, please call Jane Ploughman, 326-4560 or Susan Merrill, 326-9503.
When the beets she was canning exploded, showering beets on the counter, the ceiling, the walls and the cat, Judy became only the most recent victim of the unique chemistry of Brooksville’s soil that causes root vegetables grown here to become powerful explosives.

This was first observed by Abednego Brooks, an early settler, when the potato he was baking blew up, propelling the oven door across the kitchen, through the wall, and into the shed. An observant fellow, Brooks immediately saw the potential of this phenomenon. The native Wabanakis had also observed this oddity, but to their everlasting sorrow they devoted their energies to developing popcorn as a weapon of mass destruction. This is memorialized (in their amazingly compact language) by the word “Winniaguamauk,” which means, “the place where we keep our Gatling gun with which we will drive the pasty-faced invaders into the sea.” In any case, the Indians were routed at the battle of Walker’s Pond by Brooksville settlers hurling exploding parsnips and were driven forever into Sedgwick— which explains a lot.

Washington’s victory at Yorktown can be largely attributed to the panic gripping the British under a barrage of exploding potatoes, fired from the American cannons. The source of this terror-inducing weaponry has long been a carefully guarded military secret…so closely guarded that the true origin of the American victory is hardly known outside Hancock County, Maine.

The fabulous Blodgett fortune was founded on the sale of purple-top turnips to both sides during the Civil War for use as hand grenades. President Lincoln delegated Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin to thwart the sale of Brooksville turnips to the South. But after a brief visit to our village, Hamlin became a K-Street lobbyist for Brooksville interests and saw no need of a second term as Vice-President. Tapley-owned schooners sailing out of Harborside continued to run the Federal blockade with impunity.

To this day, recruits in Boot Camp are taught the importance of strict obedience by the hushed and solemn words, “Just remember the Maine.” Alas! Seaman Condon, the cook (who should have known better), ran short of onions for the fish chowder he was making and borrowed a few from the magazine—thus provoking the Spanish-American War.

A careful examination of the bombs that anarchists hurl in political cartoons will show that, in fact, they are Brooksville rutabagas. And this, of course, has led to the final reversal of Brooksville’s fortunes. When Franklin Roosevelt was able to incorporate the anarchists into the Democratic Party, the market for exploding rutabagas collapsed, and Brooksville sank into the somnolence from which it has still not quite recovered.

Yet, our obscure and remote village must be proud of the role it played in this country’s early growth and success. But not too proud. When, the next day, some of Judy’s beets fell out of the chandelier into my Shredded Ralston, I could only sigh and wonder why we had not settled in a quieter place.

For instance, Brooklin.
A Ferry Road Surprise

Hey, Have you ever had a really scary near-death experience with a bear? Well, we did. This is what happened. On a late afternoon the mosquitoes were out. We have friends visiting from London, England, and wanted to invite them to play. So, we walked down their driveway and ate three blackberries, but we were not alone. Next thing we see is two grizzly bears eating blackberries too. We froze. Then they growled and chased us to the top of the driveway. Then we ran all the way back to Hannah’s house and told everyone about our experience. On the way we saw Hannah’s cousin’s dog and yelled, "It’s a black bear!” But it was really Lady, the dog. Then we got home safely, knowing we were okay. It was a very scary moment, but it’s over and we have nothing to worry about except for seeing more grizzly bears! But now you know our story and just be lucky it’s not you!

Written by Hannah Peasley, 9, Brooksville, and Anna Sharp, 9, Royersford, PA

[Editor’s note: Only black bears live in Maine (cubs can look brownish). Grizzly bears are found in Western USA.]

Seven Brooksville Elementary Graduates Head to GSA

This summer the Ellsworth American ran a sobering article on the dropout rate of Maine high school students, stating that twenty percent fail to complete graduation in four years. Unfortunately, Hancock County ranks among the worst counties.

Here in Brooksville this year seven students are starting their freshman year at GSA. These students say they will miss the “homey” feeling at BES, the high teacher/student ratio, the caring, helpful atmosphere, and “the little kids.” They know that they will meet lots of new friends in high school, but still have their old friends from Brooksville with them. New challenges of academic courses greet them but some look forward to the greater freedom.

At this time all seven plan to go on to college. Tessa Clifford would like to be a teacher. Sara Clifford aims for University of Maine at Farmington and work in daycare or as a pre-K teacher. Shiann Closson hopes to be a veterinarian. Will Ludlow wants to major in math or engineering in college and be an engineer or banker. Wesley Moore’s ultimate goal is to be a cardiac surgeon. Aaron Osborn plans to go to college to be an engineer or open a garage and auto body paint shop in Brooksville or nearby. Olivia Perkins isn’t sure, a fashion designer or a vet. If a designer, she’ll design shoes from sneakers to high heels, casual dresses, and everyday clothes.

We all need to support our newest high school students as they proceed through their next four years. We hope they hold on to their dreams and enjoy the journey at GSA, experiencing all the opportunities offered there and feeling secure enough to ask for help and guidance. Good luck! Your Brooksville community is rooting for you. JM

The Breeze staff thanks the BES students who assisted with interviewing their eighth grade schoolmates: Bridget Limeburner, Jessie Andrews, Aidan Byrne, Taylor Allen, Savannah Leaf, and Katrina Limeburner.

Readers Comment on Bagaduce Tides

“Way too much on tides, more than I ever want to know.”

“Great article. Thank you, Bob. Haven’t paddled the Bagaduce correctly in years. Now there is hope.”
Activities

Brooksville Elementary School
School Coastal Cleanup, Sept. 16, volunteers welcome • Playground Celebration, Sept. 17, 5:30–8 pm • Open House with barbeque, Oct. 8, 5 pm • Holiday Fair, Dec. 4 • Info: 326-8500 • www.brooksvilleschool.org

Brooksville Free Public Library
Hours: see box to right • Info: 326-4560 or www.brooksvillelibrary.org

Brooksville Historical Society
meets every second Wed. of the month at 7 pm at the Town House. All are welcome • Info: 326-0899 • ralphandbec@gmail.com

Majabigwaduce Chapter DAR
2nd Monday of each month, 6:30–8 pm, Brooksville Town House • Info: 326-8570 • hotchkiss@midcoast.com

Neighborcare
Neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteers provide free health-related services, respite, transportation, errands, etc. Call Jeannie Gaudette for assistance or to volunteer at 326-4735

Contemplative Prayer
Time and date to be announced • Info: 326-8564

West Brooksville Congregational Church, UCC
Worship: Sunday, 10 am • Rev. Allen Myers • Info: 326-8283

Brooksville United Methodist Church
Buck’s Harbor Sanctuary: Sundays, 9 am • Rev. David Vandiver • Info: 326-8564 • david@mainelywired.net

Brooksville Community Center
Call for information about events or rentals • Betsy Jones, 326-8296

Brooksville Friends and Neighbors
1st Wed. of every month, 6:30–8 pm, Town House • Info: 326-0916

Open Mic
Weekly, Sundays evenings until further notice • Info: Tim or Lake, 326-9266

Meditation
Tibetan Buddhist: Thursdays, 6–7 pm • Info: Philip & Lydia Osgood, 326-4047

Brooksville Yoga
Unique combination of yoga and Yamuna Ball Rolling • Tues., 4:30–6 pm, Beginners • Wed., 9–11 am, Continuing • Instructor: Alison Chase • Info: 326-4205

Get Strong, Get Healthy
Exercise at the Community Center • Mon., Wed. & Fri., 7:30–8:45 am • Leader: Sylvia Wilder • Info: 326-4801

Brooksville Farmers’ Market
Every Tuesday through Oct. 6, 9–11 am, Community Center parking lot.

To List Your Event
Call or e-mail information two weeks before Sept. 1, Dec. 1, March 1 & June 1:
Joan MacCracken, 326-0916
e-mail: joanmacc@aol.com

Brooksville to Alaska
Brooksville Elementary School seventh and eighth grade students are planning to be in Anchorage, Alaska in March 2011 for the start of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race. They have been working since January 2009 to raise funds for this educational trip. The funds will be used to pay for transportation, housing, food, and activities for twelve students and two school chaperones. Items from their booth at the Farmers’ Market, such as calendars with scenes of Brooksville, hats and t-shirts, are available by contacting Mrs. Lepper at 326-8500 or nlepper@brooksvilleschool.org or stopping by the school. For more information, check out the school web site at www.brooksvilleschool.org. Watch for future articles about the trip.
Snow, and Billy Blake. “We’d go out and you spent the morning on your hands and knees crawling up through these brush piles and thick stuff. The trail around the mountain, it took us four days to locate that.” Phil measures park development this way: when Polly Brown was there, she had an 18” push mower. Now there are two 42” riding mowers and one for the island.

Both Phil and Pat agree that what they’ve enjoyed most in their time at the park has been the kids that have worked there, watching them grow, watching them learn. In the early 1990’s, they discovered a program called Landmark Volunteers, through which groups of 13- to 14-year-olds and an adult leader spend two weeks doing public service. The kids were generally from upper-middle-class families and had done little manual labor before. “To see these prissy little girls all of a sudden don these hard hats and hammers, it was wonderful,” says Pat. The volunteers stayed in the barn on Holbrook Island, hastily furnished the first year with army cots and yard sale furniture. They couldn’t use power tools because they were too young, but they did “anything that came up”—clearing trails, shingling, painting buildings, building buildings, cleaning and flooring the pig shed, gathering up miles and miles of old fencing from the Hutchins farm. “It would do a parent’s heart good to see these kids. These kids just worked their hearts out.”

The Farrs wanted helpers that they didn’t have to supervise as closely as young teens, and with funding from the Friends of Holbrook Island Sanctuary, they were able to hire college-age interns. The basic job requirement was a good attitude, and Phil found that it was usually the young women rather than the guys that met that standard. When the summer began for the interns, they stayed in the house, sometimes for two or three weeks, until things were ready on the island. So Phil and Pat really got to know them, and, “You hated to see them go. Just like you’d hate to see your own kids go off to college.” Many have kept in touch over the years; a wedding invitation arrived last week. The interns were challenged with new things—running an outboard, teaching autistic children how to build birdhouses, constructing a boardwalk—and with the Farrs’ help, they rose to the challenge.

In fact, Phil and Pat sum up their greatest accomplishment at Holbrook Island Sanctuary as the kids. “The park, any idiot can come along and clear a trail, mark it with a paintbrush. But the kids—we’ve been through hundreds, a couple hundred anyway.” And their time at the park has made a difference in these young people’s lives. Phil says, “I’d sit right down and talk with them and I’ll tell them just the way it is. Open, honest communication.” Pat adds, “Those kids would tell him things I know they’d never tell their parents. He doesn’t judge the kids. And he allows the kids to do their own thing. He’s not there micro-managing. And if they make a mistake, it’s a mistake and you take care of it.” Meanwhile, Pat handed out homemade whoopie pies and hugs.

“But it’s also seeing the park grow. Seeing it be used. People enjoying it.” The park headquarters was hospitality central. People would arrive at dusk mistakenly thinking they could camp. Sometimes they were invited to sleep in the house, sometimes they ended up pitching a tent on the lawn at the Farr’s own house on Coastal Rd. Many visited because of all the cemeteries in the park, and they shared family stories of Brooksville inhabitants from the past. Someone might spend the day just lying on the lawn reading a good book. The downside to living at the park was that the Farrs were always on call. “You never get away from it, so you have to go with the flow.”

What will they miss most? “The kids. It keeps going back to the kids. And the park. We love it out here. And it’s going to be quite an adjustment to even move three miles up the road.” Phil relates, “She told me, she said, ‘We can’t move home.’ And I said, ‘Really?’ ‘Yeah, there’s a streetlight and traffic going by.’” But from now on, when you need their phone number, you can look under “Farr, Phil and Pat” instead of “Maine, State of, Holbrook Island Sanctuary.”
**The Brooksville Breeze**

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Brooksville Friends & Neighbors (BFN)
P.O. Box 101
Brooksville, ME 04617-0101
Phone: 326-0916

Newsletter By:
Joan MacCracken,
Sheila Moir, Peter Beaver,
Judy Tredwell, Jean Webster,
Katherine Clifford, Gail Page,
Leslie Moore

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**Tell us who you are:**

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**Summer Resident? Don’t Live in Brooksville?** To receive *The Breeze* by e-mail, send us your e-mail and a donation. No e-mail? If snail mail required, we’d appreciate a donation.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for articles

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A special thanks to all of you who have sent in donations to offset the cost of printing the Brooksville Breeze. We are happy to be able to continue to provide the quarterly newsletter free to all our residents.