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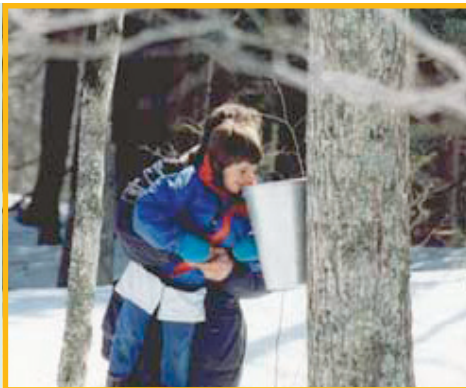
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PHOTO BY JOHN SUTTON

Fall 2025

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Explore Central Vermont

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OCT 4 - BOOTH BROS./HOOD VERMONT MILK BOWL QUALIFYING DAY

POST TIME: 1:00PM

Booth Bros./Hood presents the annual Vermont Milk Bowl qualifying day. Time Trials for the ACT - Maplefields/Irving Oil Late Models with the \$1,000 Booth Bros./Hood Pole Award on the Line followed by Triple-50 Heat Races to set the field for Sunday's Vermont Milk Bowl

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POST TIME: 12:15PM

Northfield Savings Bank presents the Toughest Short Track Stock Car Race in North America; the 63rd Vermont Milk Bowl. The ACT - Maplefields/Irving Oil Late Models will compete in three, 50 Lap segments to determine an overall Vermont Milk Bowl winner by lowest combined score for the \$12,000 prize with \$15,000 available in Lap Leader Money and an additional \$15,000 available in possible BONUS AWARDS!

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It is hard to miss the
VERMONT GRANITE MUSEUM



Vermont Granite Museum director Scott McLaughlin.

PHOTOS BY PETER COBB



Left, resident sculptor Chris Miller. Right, student intern Arielle Edelman.



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

By PETER COBB

The Vermont Granite Museum opened in 1995 with a mission to preserve and honor Vermont's granite heritage and industry.

The museum is located in the old Jones Manufacturing plant in the north end of Barre City, the longtime "granite capital of the world."

"Our vision is to create a vibrant gathering place that promotes the understanding of and respect for the people, cultures, skills, and businesses that were and are involved in Vermont's granite industry through hands-on experience, outreach, and education," said Scott McLaughlin, VGM's executive director.

Last February, after 100 years in operation, the visitors' center at Rock of Ages in Barre Town closed. McLaughlin said that closure has made the need for the museum to offer space to showcase and celebrate Central Vermont's granite industry more important than ever.

New exhibits this year focus on the science of the granite industry, as well as the people and cultures of the men and

women who founded Barre's granite industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In addition to the various exhibits, resident sculptor Chris Miller is creating art in the museum's carving studio that is open to the public. Among Miller's many noteworthy sculptures is the statue of Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, that stands atop the dome of the state Capitol building in Montpelier.

"What we do at the Granite Museum is cover not only the process of taking the stone from the quarry to the finished product, but also we feature exhibits about the population that created the industry, largely immigrants who came from Europe and North America and brought with them their ideas and their abilities and their drive to succeed," McLaughlin said.

The museum's exhibits and programming are supported by a vast collection of nearly 1,000 boxes of archival material and 5,000 historic objects. Additionally, the museum contains a caterer's kitchen, theater auditorium, and a stage for museum and public events. The grounds include an accessible 3/4-mile riverside path and sculpture park.



Explore Central Vermont | Fall 2023





Right, Sherri and Michael McPhetres of Tumbridge and Steven from Randolph.

PHOTOS BY PETER COBB



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

The 28,000-square-foot building, a former granite shed, sits on 11.5 acres. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“The museum is family friendly with dozens of exhibits and hands-on activities,” McLaughlin said. “There is something for everyone here. Anyone interested in culture history, social history, science and technology, and the arts, it’s all here.”

The museum is open May through October, Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is \$12 for adults; \$10 for seniors and veterans \$10; and \$6 for children.

But the museum is just the beginning. Visitors to the museum, especially tourists, frequently visit Hope Cemetery in Barre. It is on the “must see” list, McLaughlin said. Opened in 1899, the sculptures in Hope provide an open-air gallery of unique and beautiful stonework. There are more than 10,000 tombstones and memorials located in the cemetery. Nearly all of its stones are made from “Barre Grey” granite.

The cemetery is open to the public year-round, from 7 a.m. until dusk. It’s especially popular during the autumn, when trees that border the cemetery feature some of Vermont’s most spectacular fall foliage.

Also located in the Jones building is the Stone Arts School, which provides space where sculptors from around the world can explore traditional and modern stone carving techniques with working professionals, while promoting granite as a vital material for artistic expression.

“The Stone Arts School is committed to creating an exciting environment where sculptors from around the world can explore traditional and modern stone carving techniques with working professionals, while promoting granite as a vital material for artistic expression,” McLaughlin said.

Additional sculptures by local sculptors can also be found around Barre City, and along the Millstone Trails in nearby Barre Town.

This year, the Vermont Granite Museum celebrates its 30th anniversary on Saturday, Sept. 20.

The celebration will include demonstrations, exhibits, face painting, an indoor climbing wall, outdoor games, dancers, live musicians, and interactive art. Except for the 2020 COVID shutdown, the museum has held a fall celebration every year since 1998.

For more information, go to www.vtgranitemuseum.org.





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A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a teal long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, standing in front of a large, ornate, light-colored wooden fireplace. The fireplace has a dark metal grate and a large, colorful stained glass window above it. To the right of the fireplace is a small table with a large blue vase filled with dried flowers. The room has high ceilings and other decorative elements.

Add WILSON CASTLE *to your list of haunts*

Denise Davine, owner at Wilson Castle.

PHOTOS BY JANELLE FAIGNANT

By Janelle Faignant

In the last several years, Wilson Castle has become a hot spot for paranormal investigators, but to the castle's owner it's always just been home.

It stands so far back from the road, you might even miss it driving by, partly

because the last thing you expect to see on a long country road in Vermont is an actual castle on a hill from the 1800s.

"There's beautiful history here," owner Denise Davine said. "There's no other building like this in Vermont."

The towering brick castle is striking from the outside, with its old brick facade

and turrets peering down. Inside it's a one of a kind experience, with secret rooms off of rooms, like a small sitting parlor with a fireplace on the first floor. But it also feels cozy and nostalgic.

"Well, it's always been a home. We've never thought of it as being scary. It's been very much lived in," said Denise, 63.

"It's a calm, comforting energy," said Doug Probst, 40, of Rutland Town, who goes by Andy, the castle's main tour guide and historian.

Wilson Castle started as the dream house of Vermont physician Dr. John Johnson, who married a wealthy patient, Sarah Robbins, and was said to use her family's money to build it. The Society of Architectural Historians says Sarah's family put a stop to his spending in 1889, and they were forced to leave. Sarah died shortly after.

But Johnson had put his heart and soul into the castle. It took over seven years to build the 13,000-square-foot mansion, loaded with unique personal touches like a stained-glass window depicting William Shakespeare.

"Everybody came from everywhere to build this castle," Denise said. "The wood is different in every single room. They put so much work in this building."

Red cherry wood paneling imported from France in log form was carved in the castle's basement. A massive veranda with a view for miles has a swing that only moves horizontally. And ornate cathedral ceilings were hand painted by an Italian artist — the castle's mystique lies in the juicy details given during tours of its 32 rooms, including 84 stained-glass windows and 13 fireplaces, one inscribed with the Latin phrase "tempus fugit," or "time flies."

AM radio pioneer Colonel Herbert Lee Wilson bought it as a summer home in 1939. He designed local radio station WHWB and worked on WSYB in Rutland, which had the first directional antenna in the state.

"My grandpa bought it in 1939 during the depression for back taxes," Denise said. "My mom grew up here."

Wilson and his family lived there for many years and added to the castle's grandeur. He collected souvenirs from his travels around the world, like a hand-carved ivory chess set, and a Chinese scroll more than a thousand years old.

"He would pick up something and have it shipped because he wanted to use the castle to share with people, and it was too big and empty," Denise said. "So the tour was pretty much all around his travels."

He opened the castle for tours in 1961 while his family continued to live there, including his daughter, Denise's mother, Blossom Wilson Davine Ladabouche.



"He wanted it to be like home for everybody, so you can touch everything," Denise said.

"My grandparents, since I was a little girl lived here, and they'd leave at the end of October because it started to get cold," Denise said. "They'd get an apartment in Rutland and come back in May."

Wilson passed away in 1981 and left the castle to Blossom, who passed in 2010, and Denise has been the princess in the castle ever since. It's been in the Wilson family for almost a century.

Over the years, visitors and staff have reported all sorts of strange occurrences like footsteps and whistling, an eerie feeling of being watched and furniture moving.

A narrow, winding staircase to the third floor has no electricity, dark even during the day, leads to a maze of doors that connect in a loop — a popular spot for the paranormal groups.

"They love the spooky unkept look of it," said Brookelyn Kimball, 19, of Proctor, who has been giving tours for two years and knows everything about the castle, inside and out.

Like the wall safe that was added in 1918 by the third owner, a banker from New York who won the castle gambling, owned it for two years, and then lost it again gambling.

"I gave a tour to the banker's great-great-grandson last season," Kimball said. "I love meeting people here and hearing all the connections."

She has heard footsteps and found no one there, Andy has heard furniture moving behind padlocked doors, and



Denise had an experience, too.

"When my mom passed away, I was asking for her help," Denise said. "I said if I should keep the castle, give me a yes, and the dinner bells rang twice."

The dinner bells are wall-mounted cathedral chimes that can be heard throughout the castle, but only ring when someone taps them with a small mallet.

"I was with two other people, and we just dropped our jaws," Denise said. "That's the real-real, no explanation."

But there are lots of people who have never had a spooky experience and just enjoy exploring on castle tours.

"I've been here countless hours by myself, I've never had an experience here," said Rusty Trombley in a 2010 YouTube video.

And Andy added, "I think we're pretty skeptical. We just want to make sure that it's actually paranormal and nothing environmental."

"But if somebody tells me they're into the ghost stuff, I throw in some paranormal stories in on the tour," Kimball said.

The daily tours run five days a week, and on Thursday nights in October they'll be adding candlelight tours by reservation.

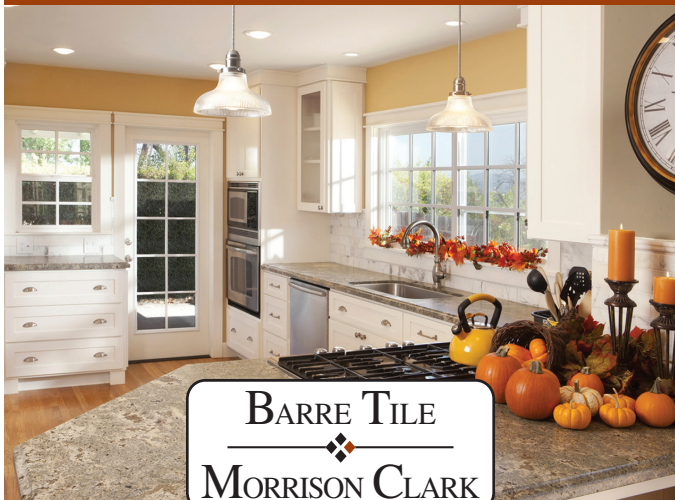
"It's so much fun," Brookelyn said, and spooky incidents or not, "People have such positive experiences when they're here."

Wilson Castle at 2970 W. Proctor Road in Proctor is open Thursday-Monday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. through Halloween. Tours: \$19 for adults, \$18 for seniors and \$7.50 for children. Call 802-773-3284, go to www.wilsoncastle.com for more information.

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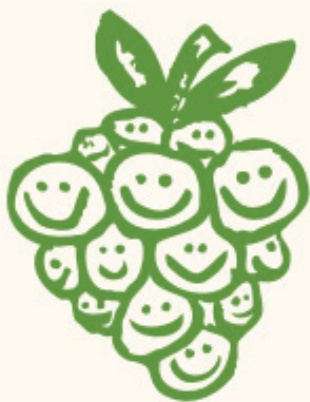
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Aldrich Library

6 Washington Street
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Located in the heart of Barre overlooking City Hall Park, the Aldrich Public Library is Barre's lifelong learning headquarters and community center. With programs and services for all ages and special events throughout the year, there's something for everyone at the library. Bring the kids to story hour, use our high speed internet to stay in touch with folks out of town, try something new at one of our programs, or just relax with a good book and enjoy the beauty of our historic building.

Barre Opera House

6 N. Main Street
802-476-0292 | barreoperahouse.org



The 650-seat Barre Opera House, a cultural center for central Vermonters since 1899, is home to approximately 50 shows and events each year. The theater, on the National Register of Historic Sites since 1973, hosts a diversity of events from local theater and orchestra to internationally known performers.

Barre Civic Center

20 Auditorium Hill
802-477-5055

The Barre Civic Center is located on Auditorium Hill in the heart of Barre City. The Civic Center is a municipally run complex that supports year round events, bringing thousands of people into the City each month. The complex consists of three buildings, the Auditorium, B.O.R. and Alumni Hall.

Auditorium Complex

The Auditorium is our most versatile building with two floors of space. It is equipped with a full gymnasium with a regulation size basketball court and locker rooms, an 18'w X 54'l stage, a commercial kitchen, and ample space for vendors and displays. It serves as a multi-purpose facility for events such as state high school basketball championships, concerts, trade shows, farm shows, craft fairs, bingo games, racing shows, auctions, annual meetings, town fairs, flu clinics, company parties, graduations and more. The Auditorium is accessible with an elevator that allows access to the ground floor, main level and the balcony.

B.O.R.

The B.O.R. serves as an excellent site for shows from mid April to early October and as an ice arena from mid-October to early March. A 15 foot overhead door in the front of the building allows for easy exhibit set-ups and tear downs. The arena has 21,500 square feet of open space all on one level. Approximately eight hundred people can view any event from the heated bleacher seating. Indoor Turf is available from the first of April until late October. This allows for sports such as softball, baseball, lacrosse, soccer and other groups the opportunity to practice and play in a warm, dry and safe indoor arena.

Alumni Hall

Our Alumni Hall is connected to the Auditorium Complex. Designed to maximize meeting space, this building compliments any trade show looking for breakout rooms or space for smaller lectures, or day seminars.



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Barre Labor Hall

46 Granite Street
802-479-5600 | oldlaborhall.org



Barre's Old Labor Hall, a National Historic Landmark, is located at 46 Granite Street in downtown Barre. Built in 1900 as a community center and cooperative grocery and bakery by Italian granite workers, the Hall is owned by the Barre Historical Society. Open by appointment and available for community and private events, the Hall is handicapped accessible with kitchen, tables, chairs and on site parking.

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802-622-0201
www.reynoldshouse1892.com



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Firehouse Museum

8 S. Main Street



The former Barre Fire Station is patterned after a station in Quincy, Massachusetts. Construction was complete in 1905 at a total cost of \$24,000 and included eight stalls for horses. The original unique weathervane of a "flying horse-drawn hook and ladder wagon"

can be seen at the Historical Society. A replica weathervane now graces the hose tower which looks like a church belfry. It was purchased in 2006 and has been transformed into a restaurant and inn.

Studio Place Arts

201 N. Main Street
802-479-7069 | www.studioplacearts.com



Studio Place Arts (SPA) is a vibrant, 3-floor visual arts center in historic, downtown Barre. Explore free exhibitions of a broad range of contemporary artwork, meet working resident artists, and explore your own creativity in art classes or workshops. For a schedule of the current

exhibits, go to the SPA website. While visiting Barre, take the Art Stroll and view stone sculptures. Obtain an Art Stroll Map at SPA or go to the SPA website for a map and slideshow.

Vermont History Center and Library

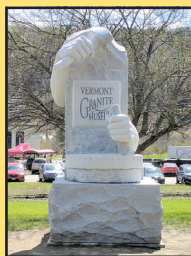
60 Washington Street
802-479-8500 | vermonthistory.org



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Vermont Granite Museum

7 Jones Bros. Way
802-476-4605 | www.vtgranitemuseum.org



The Vermont Granite Museum, a family friendly destination, is on the property of Jones Brothers Company, which made monuments and architectural elements for nearly a century. The museum offers an indoor climbing wall, interactive exhibits, activities, outdoor games, 3/4-mile trail, and pedal

cars for all ages. Exhibits at the museum highlight Vermont's granite industry and the people that made it possible. May thru October, Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



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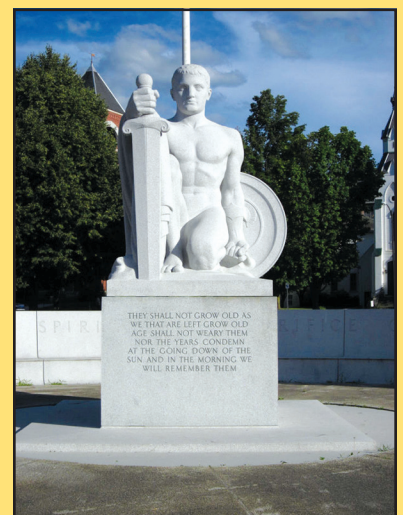
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WHAT'S BREWING?

Rutland Beer Works is your neighborhood tap room.



PHOTOS BY JENNA RICE

By Janelle Faignant

Seven years ago, Rutland got its own neighborhood brewery when Rutland Beer Works opened on Granger Street. Last year, its head brewer took over as owner and redesigned the taproom, transforming it into a great spot to try out new local craft beers, sometimes before they even hit the shelves.

“We wanted something where we have more of a direct connection with our consumers,” said Ian Harbage last year. “A place to relax and hang out.”

He took the reins last summer from original owner Dale Patterson, who opened the brewery and hired Harbage as head brewer back then.

“A lot of breweries don’t actually brew where their brewery

is,” said Sales Director Ken Vassallo, who previously worked with Harbage at Long Trail Brewing Co. at Bridgewater Corners. “It’s much more hands on here. Both of us do a little bit of everything.”

“It’s (usually) a restaurant that just has their beer. But I really like the connection of (being able) to walk through a door to our entire production facility. The authenticity means a lot to us, and it’s something we don’t want to let go of. We could go get a storefront somewhere but it kind of loses its soul.”

The brewery’s 15-barrel system has rotating beers, including taproom-only exclusives, nonalcoholic options and the popular regulars — Rutland Red, Blueberry Blonde, Lake Monster Lager and Pine Hill IPA.

“Rutland Red Ale is kind of our flagship beer,” Harbage said. “It’s definitely our number-one seller.”



PHOTO BY JENNA RICE



PHOTO BY JANELLE FAIGNANT

The taproom reopened about a year ago after a brief run in 2018 that looked very different. Today dark green walls accent a leather sofa, polished wood tables with centerpiece plants and a TV over the bar.

“Ian redid all of this himself,” Vassallo said. “He did all the painting, all the wiring, he put a lot of time and effort and thought into everything to create the space that we thought the town needed and would be a good representation of the brewery itself.”

A door just behind the bar leads into the brewery — a little like seeing behind the curtain of The Wizard of Oz.

A maze of large steel equipment, enormous vats, and an area that looks like a scientist’s laboratory, all impeccably clean.

“Ninety percent of brewing is really just cleaning,” Vassallo said.

Fifty-pound bags of grain were stacked and ready to be milled, or heaped in a vat to be cooked. Nearby, finished cans ready to ship were stacked neatly inside a metal cage over 15 feet tall.

A big part of the fun of visiting the taproom is the unique beers they serve that they come up with on their own.

“It’s mostly Ian,” Vassallo said. “He’s the one that knows how to brew and knows the science behind it.”

“When we’re going to come out with a new beer we’ll talk about what we want, about what the market wants, and then he takes all the information and figures out the recipe behind it,” he said. “The beauty of the taproom is being able to serve those experimental beers for customer feedback before going full production on everything. If people like it, great. If not, we’ll keep experimenting.”

Recently a Gelben was on tap — “light, easy drinking, not like a regular lager,” Vassallo said — that had not yet been released outside the tap room.

“We are looking at next year, releasing that in cans under a

different name, as we tweak the batch a little bit more,” he said, “but we’re both very hopeful for what that’s going to be able to do at retail.”

So how much beer does a taproom proprietor consume in the name of research?

Vassallo cleared his throat and joked, “Some things are better left unsaid.”

“It’s funny how our tastes change and how the taste palate of the public will change, too,” Vassallo said. “When we started it was pale ales, amber lagers, we went through the IPA craze. And now we’re seeing things change back to cleaner, easier beers to drink, so lagers are popular again. It’s interesting to see how the market goes, and how our own pallets develop over time.”

“I’d rather have something lower alcohol, easier to drink that I can have two or three

of, rather than have one and have my whole palate blown out,” Vassallo said. “That’s where the Gelben came from.”

“It’s fun. It’s a lot of work, it’s a seven-day-a-week job for both of us, but it is definitely rewarding because every can that goes out I have had a hand in,” Vassallo said.

It’s a neighborhood brewery at its core, and they want to keep it that way. A little like our own Cheers. They even have a Norm.

“We’ve got a few,” Vassallo confirmed with a laugh. “It’s great to see a regular following of people that come in. We know them by name, they know us, and they help us out too when we need it. One woman helped us do all the gardens out front. That was so helpful because I don’t know what I’m doing with plants. I seem to kill everything outside of hostas.”

But they’re doing pretty well with beer.

“That one, I think, we got down pretty good.”

Taproom hours Thursday 4-8 p.m., Friday-Saturday 2-7 p.m., Sunday 1-5 p.m.

“It’s funny how our tastes change and how the taste palate of the public will change, too.”

— Sales Director Ken Vassallo

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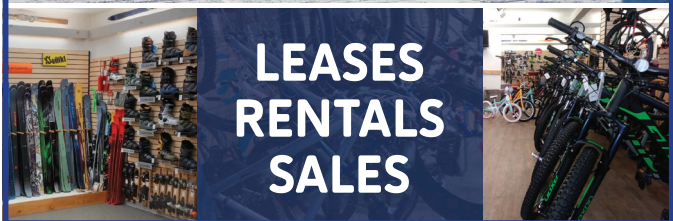


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TALKING VERMONT FORESTS

and their future with Ethan Tapper

As the leaves change and start to drop, there's really no better time to take to the woods to explore our Vermont trails and forests. For many of us, it is one of the most important reasons we live here. Our living, breathing landscape is a major contributor to our quality of life.

In 2024, forester and author Ethan Tapper wrote "How to Love a Forest." In the year since, the young Vermonter has been elevated to a bit of celebrity status for helping everyday citizens to understand "the bittersweet work of tending a changing world." Tapper has been doing a national book tour, as well as making YouTube videos about the book and its teachings and conversations. Last spring, his book was a finalist for the Vermont Book Award.

In the interview that follows, the Bolton resident discusses "How to Love a Forest," the importance of the message around conservation, and what understanding the woods means for the future of our state.

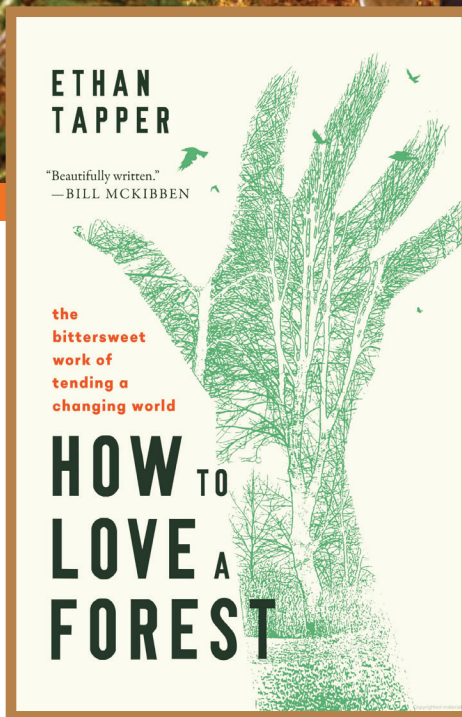


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Explore: Why do you think that this book has resonated so much with people?

Ethan Tapper: I think there's a real desire, especially among young people right now, to have a different vision for what our relationship with the natural world can be. One of the real surprises of getting to share and talk about this book all across North America to all these different people over (several

months has been the amount of people who are in their late teens and early 20s that talk to me about it. What I realized at a certain point was that this is a generation of people that have been raised their whole lives with this awareness of environmental catastrophe and climate crisis and biodiversity crisis and mass extinction, and these ecosystems just collapsing all around them. They're like, "Enough. Stop telling me all of these things and tell me what we're actually going to do about it?" Conversely, I think one thing I've been really appreciating recently is realizing that generational difference, where there's this incredibly important, powerful generation of people who are now many of our elders in our communities whose vision of environmentalism has been like the generation of the first Earth Day — Greenpeace and tree sitting, and all of these movements to stop this sort of wanton environmental exploitation and degradation, just to being like, "stop it." Now we're moving into this moment that I feel like can be about not just

what do we want to not do, but what do we want to do right? What are we — all of us — actually going to do to protect these ecosystems that we know to be so foundational to our lives and our quality of life. What are we going to do to protect all the species that depend on these ecosystems, ourselves included, and what are we going to do to live in this world as it is? For me, that was what made me want to write a book like this, because I hadn't heard a book that talked about this kind of complex relationship that we can have with ecosystems.

Explore: There had to have been a defining moment for you where you said, "OK, this is more important than just sitting around and studying what was." What was the moment for you?

Tapper: The real catalyst came at the same time that I started writing this book, which it took me about six years to get a draft that was ready to send to the publisher, and then another two years after that to actually get it published. At the same time that that was happening, I had bought this piece of land, Bear Island, which was just super degraded. It was like one of the most degraded forests I'd ever been in. And as I was writing, I was also learning about this process of forest stewardship firsthand. I had been a consulting forester and a county forester. I had managed public lands and private lands that other people owned. I had this piece of land that had every problem that a forest could have, and it felt different. It was so personal. It's no one's responsibility but mine. These choices are no one's but mine.

Explore: Later, did you go back and look at the book and say, "Well, my thinking on this is actually more solidified. I have to go back and kind of modify it?"

Tapper: The whole time, yeah. By the end of it, I probably did 20 drafts of the book, and my thinking about it changed the way I wanted to talk about stuff, changed my understanding of different things. It changed the narrative as the world changed around me. And I had changed as a person. But another thing was happening as I was working at Bear Island. I was working as the Chittenden County forester for the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and realizing that there was a real lack of good communication out there that was clearly and charismatically talking about this incredibly vital work that many ecosystem stewards were doing. I was figuring out how to talk to people in a better way. I was asking: How do we talk about this stuff? So that was also an evolving experience. That practice transferred over to my work doing public events where I would be talking about it in a way that helps people understand it a little better, in a way that resonates with them a little better. It's important that we're clear-eyed about what's happening.

Explore: To what end do you think?

Tapper: One thing that I've really come to believe is that hope



PROVIDED PHOTO

Ethan Tapper

and hopefulness is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because if you help people feel hope, if you help them understand that there is hope, then there actually is hope, because then it makes people actually feel like they can go out there and do something about it. They can go out there and do something about it, but they're not going to if they feel like it's not hope isn't accessible to them.

Explore: There are so many people who want to go to the negative because they feel like that's where they can leverage a position.

Tapper: Yes. So, an interesting thing in my own case is that in addition to running a consulting forestry company and doing this author stuff, and social media stuff, is that I would like to someday teach college courses. I'm in the process of finishing my master's degree. And what I study is: fear and trust. One part of the fear part is this concept called "protection motivation theory," which was basically a series of a theory that was created to understand how to motivate people to make positive health care decisions. How do we get people to put on sunblock, for example? One of the things that protection motivation theory tells us is that just making people afraid

does not inspire action. You have to have what we call a “fear appeal,” where you’re telling people “this is some scary stuff.” But then you have to couple that with an efficacy message — a message about what you can do about it. Or else they don’t do anything. The trust side is also interesting, because it’s another way of thinking about what motivates people to do things. I study trust in natural resources decision-making, I’ve realized that there’s this one type of trust, which is the trust that we give to people shared values with common interests, that we have an affinity for. I like to motivate people, as much as by being like, “this is a really scary thing, and this is what you can do about it.” I really like to help to try to build trust. I feel like a big important thing for me with “How to Love a Forest” was really clearly demonstrating how much I care about these ecosystems and how I’ve dedicated my life to them. I care about them intrinsically and completely, and I would do anything for them, and then I need you to trust me while I do some stuff that is a little bit hard to understand, right? The hope is that if you trust me, and you trust how much I care about these ecosystems, then you’ll be forced to understand that those actions are actually an expression of that care and compassion, even if they’re confusing.

Explore: How do you get to the point of being confident enough in what you’re saying about forests?

Tapper: It’s funny, one of the journeys that I had to take in my career as a forester was sort of like being comfortable with who I am in this profession. So, when I started being a forester, I was insecure. I wanted to be what I thought a stereotypical forester was supposed to be. I had all these other aspects of me that didn’t fit that mold, that were things like the fact that I love trees; I’m a nature dork; and I also like playing in a punk band. I just hid those things away. It was my worst nightmare that anybody that I worked with would ever find out about them. I started to realize that I don’t need to look for some other visions somewhere else of what a forester is. It’s right here, and also the importance of then modeling those complexities of me to people. It was very important for me to showcase how both of those things existed within me without contradiction. I started to really enjoy it, especially when I would do these big public events where we’d be at a project that I’d be working with a logger, there’d be trees felled and stumps everywhere and, and it’d be very important for me to let that side of myself show so that people could trust me, that I’m not just someone who doesn’t think that cutting trees is a big deal. I love forests. If I could make help people understand that about me, then when we go and look at the tough stuff, then they’re like, “Oh, so maybe it is that actually what it means to love a forest could be a little bit different than I would expect.”

Explore: So what happens next?

Tapper: I hear answers to that all of the time. I think that those are the coolest things you hear about. People change the way that I think about this thing. I think we could think about it in two ways. I talked about this in the afterword of the book. A lot of the book talks about this individual action, which is very important. But it can’t be just that. We also need larger-scale action, like political action and advocacy. A lot of the book

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is really about culture building and culture change, which is a hard thing to put our fingers on. (Many Vermont environmental organizations are) modeling the exact thing that we want to do. This is us doing the work. This is us advocating for all of these different uses and all of these different values and trying different things in different places, and this diversity of different approaches that we really need, that we know are so important to force resilience. So, what I would hope would be that in the future, people are asking what they can do right now in their communities. They want to take action to make our ecosystems healthier, even when it means taking these challenges, making these tough choices, challenging these decisions.

Explore: You have a chapter about freedoms. What is that about?

Tapper: That's my favorite chapter in the book. I would like to posit it that (studying and understanding ecosystems) is a nonpartisan issue. We all want freedom. We all, in theory, want everybody to have freedom. Obviously, the way that we interpret what it means to do that across the political spectrum varies. I think that it is something important to talk about, is to use this word freedom to talk about conservation. That's what I said when I delivered the Earth Day devotional at the State House, and I read from that chapter. It was a reminder that conservation is about freedom, which is interesting. It makes you think for a second, because when we think about conservation, it's all about restricting freedom, right? It's about all the things we can't do. Suddenly, if you're a private landowner, and your land is protected by a conservation easement, suddenly you can't subdivide it or develop it there. There are restrictions. Conservation is about just ensuring that we have this thing that we all agree that we want freedom into the indefinite future. We want to give freedom to everybody. We want your children, whoever you are, to have these freedoms. We want you to have clean air and clean water. We want you to have a vibrant working lands economy. We want you to have the ability to burn wood in your wood stove. These freedoms that we want are related to us building these forests that are climate resilient, but that's also related to our ability to provide long-term timber supply. So I'm not too proud to change the tenor of what we talk about in so far as it allows us to do this work, really important work that we want to do anyway,

Explore: Do you feel like we're that we're going in the right direction now, or do you feel that it still fits and starts?

Tapper: Fits and starts. Culturally, we're having an increasing understanding of how valuable ecosystems are to our lives and to our quality of life and to the lives and the quality of life of future generations, and we're understanding better what is actually required to protect those values. So, I feel like it's a movement, and I feel like I'm a part of it. I want to highlight the conservation community that we have in Vermont. All of these people who have spent their entire lives understanding the nuances of these decisions we got to make and helping people understand them. Find the version of these wherever you are, connect with them and ask them how you can help. They will be so excited to hear from you.

For more on Ethan Tapper go to ethantapper.com

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SEEING ALL OF VERMONT FROM ABOVE



Allis State Park manager Shea Mason and the on site fire tower.

PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

By **PETER COBB**

One of the best views of the Green Mountains is from the top of the 58-foot, 5-story, newly renovated fire tower on Bear Hill at Allis State Park in Randolph.

On a clear day, Killington, Pico and Mount Ascutney peaks are visible to the south; Camel's Hump and Mount Mansfield to the north; Mount Abraham, Lincoln Peak and Ellen Mountain to the west; and the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the east.

Similar spectacular views are available from the other 12 fire towers across Vermont that are accessible to the public. Eight of the towers are on state land — Spruce, Elmore, Okemo, Mount Ascutney, Bald Mountain, Burke Mountain, Mount Olga and Bear Hill.

Three towers — Allis State Park in Ascutney and Burke — are easily accessible, as they are only a short walk from the parking lot. Ascutney is a modified fire tower, as its height was reduced and a larger viewing platform was established making it look significantly different from the other fire towers.



Views from the stone octagon at Owl's Head.

PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

With the Bear Hill tower so close to the parking lot, the biggest obstacle to climbing to the top is fear, as some climbers are not comfortable climbing stairs.

According to Shea Mason, Allis State Park's manager, most who try make the climb.

"I think about 75% of the people who climb the tower make it to the top," Mason said.

A \$2.5 million fire towers' restoration project includes enhancing safety and performing repairs on several state-owned fire towers. Originally constructed in the early 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps for forest fire monitoring, these towers now primarily are used for recreation. Back nearly a century ago, there were 38 fire towers in Vermont, 16 of which remain standing.

"These fire towers are an important piece of Vermont's forest management history and provide a unique way for Vermonters and our visitors to enjoy our public lands," said Oliver Pierson, director of the forests division.

Restoration work has been completed on the Allis State Park tower, which included the installation of safety fencing from the handrails to the steps.

"We have been diligently working with contractors to perform maintenance work and add additional safety elements to three of the eight towers on state land this year. We finished work on the Bear Hill fire tower at Allis State Park. We also have completed work on the Burke fire tower and work is currently underway at the Okemo fire tower with the goal of completing that tower by foliage season," said Walter Opuszynski, recreations specialist for the state Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation.

Forest and Parks is using \$450,000 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to complete maintenance and

safety improvements at the Bear Hill and Burke Mountain fire towers. This initiative preserved the towers' historic character while providing better visitor access. An additional \$60,000 from the Recreational Trails Program will be used to install safety railings on Spruce Mountain, Elmore Mountain, Okemo Mountain, Bald Mountain, and Mt. Olga fire towers, with work extending into spring 2026. Valley Restoration, LLC of Litchfield, Connecticut, a company specializing in historic preservation of fire towers, is doing the work.

According to Opuszynski, the safety improvement work consists of adding fence fill between the stair railings and the stair treads, fence fill in the platform landing corners, grounding the towers, adding a railing around the stairwell opening in the cab. Some towers also will be getting metal grating for stair treads and corner platform landing flooring. The decision to add the metal grating is dependent on ease of access for future maintenance efforts and the degree of wintertime use at the fire towers.

"If there is high use in the winter, we have found that micro-spikes speed the damage and wear and tear of the wooden treads," Opuszynski said.

According to Opuszynski, the state is currently in the process of securing funding to support work on Elmore and Spruce fire towers scheduled for next year. The timing of the repairs to the remaining three fire towers (Mount Olga, Marlboro; Bald Mountain, Westmore; and Ascutney) depends on the state's ability to secure funding.

"These fire towers are linked to so many aspects of Vermont's conservation history. As I have learned more about their role, I have been amazed at how they were utilized in fire suppression, not only to protect our forested resource and real estate, but also to protect our water quality," Opuszynski said.



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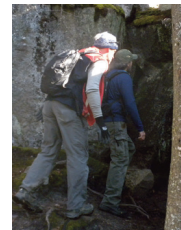
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