



Remembering John Kauffmann, *Conservation Hero*

By Paul Doscher

John Kauffmann explored and helped to create the 8 million-acre Gates of the Arctic National Park in northern Alaska before turning his attention to the watershed that includes Christine Lake in northern New Hampshire. Inset photo courtesy of George Hamilton.

Photo (taken from the summit of North Percy Peak) by Brenda Charpentier.

One hundred and seventy five acres of clean, clear water. Surrounded by tens of thousands of acres of conservation land. Christine Lake in Stark is one of the lesser known jewels of the Granite State. Unlike many of our popular lakes and ponds, this one is essentially undeveloped. The shoreline is dotted with just a small collection of historic rustic lodges. And this will never change. The entire watershed of Christine Lake is protected, conservation land.

Credit for much of this extraordinary achievement goes to one exceptional man: John Kauffmann.

I first met John in 1988 when then Forest Society President/Forester Paul Bofinger sent me north to discuss John's plan to protect

the land he and the Percy Summer Club owned surrounding Christine Lake. I didn't know much about Christine Lake at the time, but the idea of protecting the entire shoreline of a north country lake that shared a watershed with the recently protected Nash Stream Forest was intriguing to say the least.

I also didn't know much about John Kauffmann. I was, at the time, what Bofinger called a 'green bean' land protection specialist. Only two years into the job, Bofinger decided I was the right guy to help his friend. In the conservation business, I was to John Kauffmann like a 12 year-old little league pitcher is to Pedro Martinez. Thankfully, I didn't know what I was getting into, or I would have suggested someone more experienced for the job.

His long-time friend, the author John McPhee, summarized John's background best:

This was his path: First, after college, he was a diplomatic courier, flying the world from country to country with a briefcase chained to his wrist. He was a reporter for the Washington Star and a writer for National Geographic, and a secondary-school teacher for a couple of years before he joined the National Park Service, where he long served in its Park Planning and Special Studies division. He was instrumental in the planning of various components of the park system down here in the contiguous 48 states, most notably Cape Cod National Seashore and the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Then came 1971 and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which led to the apportionment

of Alaskan terrain and opened possibilities for national parklands on an unprecedented scale.

No one saw the possibilities in that Act of Congress more acutely than John. He put in for a transfer, got one, went to Alaska without looking back, and built himself a house. It was not a cabin. As a planner, he was given the central Brooks Range, the north of the far north. Scouting there, exploring the terrain in season after season, he backpacked hundreds of miles over sedge tussocks, where just keeping your balance is extremely difficult, let alone attempting to move forward. The specific result of John Kauffmann's studies—of his project planning and his recommendations, his years of work in Alaska—is Gates of the Arctic National Park, more than 8 million acres in the central Brooks. And his fundamental plan for



Christine Lake's shoreline remains mostly undeveloped and pristine, surrounded by conserved land in Stark. Photo by Steve Junkin.

Gates of the Arctic can be summarized in the words "Do nothing. Leave it as the wilderness it is."

I quickly learned that John's roots were also firmly planted in New Hampshire. From the time he was a child he spent summers at Christine Lake with his family at the Percy Summer Club, in rustic lodges built along the western shore. Those early summers clearly had an impact on John because later in life, when he saw the opportunity to secure the protection of the lake and its watershed, he took on the challenge with a passion. First he engaged the state and helped persuade policy makers to manage the surrounding Nash Stream watershed with an eye first toward protecting the lake and its watershed. As his contribution to the cause, he would donate land he owned immediately around the lake to the Forest Society. He persuaded the other members of the Percy Summer Club to donate a conservation easement to protect their land that encompassed all but a tiny portion of the shoreline of the lake.

I had the enormous honor of being his partner in much of this pursuit. As a land protection specialist, I spent many hours walking the land with John, hearing its history and planning for its protection.

He was a delightful hiking companion, alternately sharing his encyclopedic recollections of the long history of the summer club, and marveling at the ability of the forest to reclaim land once

pastured by cows. Once, while walking along a long abandoned access road to the lake (it had been replaced by a better road in a different location), John was suddenly attacked from above! A goshawk had built a nest in a large tree over the old road and apparently was unhappy to be disturbed by this chatting duo of humans. John, being the taller of the two of us, took a hit to head and was bleeding from the wound. He muttered something to the effect of "no worries, it's only a flesh wound," and we continued on our walk. He had more important things on his mind!

John eventually donated all the land he and his family had once owned and then took on the task of purchasing a list of additional lands that he knew were essential for the protection of the larger landscape. That landscape included not only the watershed of the lake but also the Devil's Slide, a geologically unusual peak that towers over the village of Stark. Today, the Kauffmann Forest, 2,000 acres, is one of the Forest Society's largest reservations, containing carefully managed forest, important wildlife habitat, exceptional views, and special "forever wild" places that few people ever see. One of my favorite hikes in New Hampshire is the trail that John secured from the North Side Road in Stark to the top of the Devil's Slide.

John never married, but he left behind a huge family of friends and admirers whom he mentored, taught and entertained. He was a talented musician and writer, and his serenades of old-time songs

at Percy Summer Club gatherings were loved by both young and old. He was amazingly modest for a man of such talent, and in all the years I knew him I rarely heard a story in which he was the center of attention. In fact, I didn't learn of the significance of his work in Alaska until I read his book, *Alaska's Brooks Range*, many years into our friendship. Most importantly, my most durable memory of John will always be the enthusiastic smile that always appeared on his face whenever he greeted me.

John's gift to New Hampshire was the protection of a unique and special place that he carefully tended for decades before transferring that responsibility to the Forest Society. That legacy of stewardship will be long remembered. Further, his bequests to the Forest Society, as well as the Maine Coast Heritage Trust (he lived in Maine for many years and was a donor and board member of

If you'd like to visit the Kauffmann Forest, you'll find directions, maps and trail information on the Reservations Guide at forestsociety.org.

MCHT) and Alaska's Twin Flower Fund, will help protect more land, ensure its wise stewardship and guarantee that John's legacy will never be forgotten. Y

Paul Doscher retired from the Forest Society in 2014. He remains active in conservation as a board member of the Piscataquog Land Conservancy, a trustee of Trout Unlimited and as a conservation consultant. He can be reached at padoscher@comcast.net.

Bequests Continue John Kauffmann's Work

John Kauffmann used his passion, skills and resources to build an enormous legacy in the North Country. Though he died in 2014, his work continues because he devised bequests to organizations that share his conservation philosophy, including the Forest Society.

If you would like to consider the Forest Society in your estate planning, please contact Susanne Kibler-Hacker at (603) 224-9945 or skhacker@forestsociety.org.

IN THE FIELD

Family Educational Series Mixes Wildlife, Magic and Art

The annual Bretzfelder Park Family Educational Series is a free series of entertaining programs held at Bretzfelder Park in Bethlehem each August and February. Owned by the Forest Society and managed in cooperation with the town of Bethlehem, the park was bequeathed to the Forest Society in 1984 by Helen Bretzfelder in memory of her father, Charles, and includes a classroom, educational trails, a pond and several picnic sites. For more information about any of the programs listed below, visit www.therocks.org, email us at info@therocks.org, or call (603) 444-6228.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 7-8 p.m.

Magic and Nature: A Natural Connection

Sally Sherrard of Littleton uses the magic skills passed down from her father, as well as her degree in Early Childhood Education, to create entertaining and educational programs enjoyed by all ages. With a magic touch, we will discuss animals with bad reputations and how they help our environment. We'll learn the New Hampshire state bird, tree, rock, flower, mammal, amphibian, reptile, insect and fish, through magic.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10, 7-8 p.m.

Animals with Bad Reputations

The public image of some animals is often inaccurate and responsible for many negative attitudes. Join a naturalist from the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center along with three live animals native to New Hampshire to consider the beneficial role these creatures play in our natural world.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 7-8 p.m.

Guided Walk on the Wildlife Habitat Trail

Local naturalist Priscilla Didio will lead visitors through the 1.5-mile interpretive trail, which traverses several wildlife habitats, including wetland, beaver marsh, spruce-fir forest, and deciduous forest.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 7-8 p.m.

Sand Painting for all Ages

Local artist Kristen Pabatschnig will share the connection between sand painting and the history of Native American art during this hands-on program. Participants will be invited to create a sand painting from a template or their own original design and will end the evening with a finished piece to bring home. The program is open to participants of all ages; adult supervision may be required for young children.

See more events at www.forestsociety.org.