

SPRUCE KNOB NEWS

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Jim Underwood, A Tribute

By Dave Martin, Program Officer, Appalachia Program

Jim Underwood died this winter after a relatively short illness, leaving a rather large hole in our small community here in Pendleton County. As we



Jim joined TMI at its inception and was active as an employee, board member, and trustee until he died.

look around the Spruce Knob Mountain Center it seems that there is hardly an item or a place that doesn't bear his fingerprints, either literally or figuratively. In so many ways this place remains the manifestation of Jim's work. Some of us worked directly with him, building yurts, patching things together, doing more with less. But while we think of Jim building things with his hands (and he was constantly building beautiful things with his hands) his real art was in inspiring others. That may have been by the loan of some tool, but it was as likely through the loan of a

book, or some piece of advice or wisdom he had picked up along the way. Above all he was a thinker, a believer in the dignity of work, and the ability of a small group of people to accomplish the impossible; to quite literally transform the world.

In the early nineties there was quite a group of us who congregated here on Spruce, and last fall when it became apparent that Jim didn't have long to live many of us reconvened here to talk with him again.

Jim—Continued on Page 7

Director's Column

In the daily rush of taking care of business, it's easy to let the "immediate" override the "essential," at least until the balance suddenly shifts. That shift happened last fall, when long-time TMI icon Jim Underwood was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

You didn't have to know Jim personally to be af-

ected by him. Indeed, by visiting our Spruce Knob Mountain Center, you begin to know Jim, for his essence permeates the structures and the spirit of the place.

We were lucky that Jim defied convention and prognosis (which surprised no one) and managed to attend our fall Pig Roast. A

crowd of Jim's extended family from all corners of the country arrived to meet with him, share memories, thank him, and celebrate the essence of his time on Spruce Knob.

The next few months allowed for a protracted closure.

Director's—Cont. Page 7

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TMI WORK WEEKEND August 24-26, 2007

Come join us for a weekend of construction, repairs, music and fun. Call us and let us know you're coming!



The yurts at the Spruce Knob Mountain Center.

Randolph County Outdoor Education Program

For the last 3 years, The Mountain Institute's Appalachia Program has been working closely with Randolph County Schools to offer a 2 ½ day residential program for every 5th grader in the county, at Camp Pioneer in Beverly, WV. The program is rooted in the county's rich natural resources and cultural heritage. It offers the students an opportunity to learn about local issues, and begin to develop decision making skills regarding matters such as water quality and land management. Randolph County Outdoor Education Program combines classes from different schools to give the students a chance to make new friends that they will later see in the middle schools.

The most important aspect of this program is that it is purely community-based. Along with The Mountain



Photo by Nathan Hayes

Institute, organizations such as 4-H, Izaak Walton League, WV Division of Natural Resources, Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife, Rich Mountain Battlefield Foundation, Canaan Valley Institute, and dozens of talented local musicians and artists all pull together to make this an extraordinary community-

based program.

Recently, we have piloted a day camp for a few 2nd grade classes. The 2nd graders spent their day out at Camp Pioneer in Beverly, WV, investigating different habitats. They performed an experiment to see different rates of deposition in a pond environment. They also learned about forest succession, identified different types of trees, and examined living and non-living things in the field session. The curriculum for this program was developed by John and Linda Aliveto, 4th and 2nd grade teachers, respectively, at Midland Elementary School in Elkins, WV.

For questions about the Randolph County Outdoor Education Program please contact Nathan Hayes at nhayes@mountain.org or by phone at 1-800-874-3050.

Teaming Up with Trout Unlimited

During the '06 course season, TMI partnered with Trout Unlimited (TU) on a number of stream bank restoration projects. Brian Moore, TU Potomac Headwaters Director, has played a key role in making this happen. Brian supplies all of the trees and TMI supplies all of the 'kid power'.

We have integrated a few hours of service work into our regular Mountain Learning courses, where TMI instructors and their student groups meet with Brian in the Big Run headwaters streams, right in our own backyard. Brian then discusses the major project that they will

all be working on and why it's important to maintaining good stream water quality. Together, TU and The Mountain Institute have planted thousands of trees in the Big Run headwaters riparian zone. This, with some of Brian's other work, such as fencing to keep cattle out of the streams, will help maintain the health of Big Run and its native brook trout population for many years to come.



Pendleton County Middle School students planting trees with TMI and TU. Photo by Beth Altemus

SKMC Building Updates

We have completed a long-standing structure that everyone has grown to know and love. It has been through a series of names, acronyms, and building strategies. Last summer, our friend Jim Underwood informed us of large amounts of insulation and 'space age' building material that we could rescue from the clutches of the landfill, if we would go pick it up with him.... So we did. One thing has led to another, and we now have, minus a few finishing touches, a brand new staff house and yes, it is round. All it really needs now is a name.



During All Staff Day, the coveted 'Waterfront Yurt', begins its long journey to its new resting place.

We have also created a staff apartment attached to the Earth Shelter. It has a bedroom, living area, shower, and kitchen amenities. Our very own Chris Royer spent many a day working on the apartment and it too has become another great home for TMI Staff.

Another exciting project is the relocation of our 'waterfront yurt'. After its many years resting on the shore of one of our ponds, high tide brings the water a bit too close for comfort., so we up and moved it in classic TMI fashion.

NFES Students Pilot “Reading the Landscape”

“I can learn this so much better when I see it outside!” This was the excited cry of a sixth grade student from the North Fork Elementary School in Circleville after investigating outcrops of Greenbriar Limestone at the Spruce Knob Mountain Center. Though it sounds like she was paid to say that, it was a genuine and spontaneous expression of enthusiasm that warmed the cockles of her TMI instructor’s heart. This particular young student was visiting the mountain with her class as part of a pilot run of the new “Reading the Landscape” program. With generous donations from the Toyota WV and the ECA Foundation, TMI was able to fund trips for the fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes at NFES to visit Spruce for two days each to investigate their local natural landscape.

Paula Waggy, retired Pendleton County science teacher, developed a series of lesson plans which build upon each other and are tailored to the curricular needs of each grade level. They are also designed to help teachers fulfill multiple West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives. The model allows for a student to experience the “Reading the Landscape” trip each year from grades four through six, with each year preparing the student for the next while building upon the last.

From October 17th-20th, nearly fifty students and three teachers joined TMI staff in exploring a wide variety of

environmental topics. For their first day all students were introduced to the plant kingdoms. By collecting specimens from Spruce Knob and putting them under dissecting microscopes they discovered strange new landscapes within the nooks and crannies of lichens, mosses, ferns and many other plants. After identification they assembled their specimens into plant presses which they took back to school to share with their fellow students.

Each grade took part in a different activity on the second day of their trips. The fourth graders explored the Sinks of Gandy cave to discuss local geology and cave formation and visited Spruce Knob to investigate plant and tree adaptations in high elevation environments. The fifth graders delved into topographic map reading and used a compass to navigate their way to the top of Spruce Knob while the sixth graders explored regional geology. By visiting outcrops of four different rock units and collecting strike and dip measurements and rock characteristics of each, they were able to figure out how these rocks formed and what force pushed them up into the Appalachian Mountains.

Once back at school the students compiled their plant press samples into booklets and hall displays and assembled picture montages to document their findings to share with their younger peers what they had learned. The sixth

grade even composed and recorded a song to commemorate their foray into rock investigations. For weeks afterwards one could walk down the halls of NFES and still feel the excitement of students and teachers about their trips to Spruce.



TMI instructor, Bret Bjorkman, assessing the stream with a group of students.

Photo by Kim Clements

Compost Anyone?

We have already acquired the Guest of Honor for this year’s End of the Season Pig Roast. He’s a young pig that weighed around 20 pounds when he first arrived to Spruce. His small size, amazing speed and agility, and incredible intellect enabled him to escape numerous times from different pens and then evade capture by pursuers from all angles. His hard work, determination, ability to outmaneuver the enemy, and training in advanced evasive tactics earned him the name, The Colonel. He has already more than doubled in size and is as happy as a pig in slop.



The Colonel’s first whole day in his new pen. Only his head will fit through the fence. He won’t escape this time!

Photo by Josh Nease

Scholars Academy Reunion

Alumni of the Scholars Academy will hold their annual summer get-together at the Spruce Knob Mountain Center August 3-5. This informal gathering gives alums a chance to re-connect with graduates from their year, meet others who preceded or followed them, and interact with current staff of The Mountain Institute. Dan Tompkins (Scholar, ’94) will provide details and organization: (dan_tompkins@yahoo.com) (note: underscore between his first and last names).

YES, I want to keep the heart of The Mountain Institute beating strongly!

Enclosed is my gift of:

- \$25 \$100 \$500
 \$50 \$250 Other \$ _____

Mail your gift to: The Mountain Institute
Appalachian Program Office
100 Campus Dr; LA108
Elkins, WV 26241

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- I'd like to send a check payable to The Mountain Institute.
 I'd like to charge my contribution to my credit card.
 Mastercard Visa

Amount \$ _____
Cardholder \$ _____
Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____ Date _____

Landfill Gas Project Tours NC Energy Projects with Carbon-Neutral Trip

As part of its goal to create awareness about methane gas-to-energy project potential in West Virginia with public landfills, TMI led a tour of three landfill methane projects in North Carolina. Representatives from three WV landfills, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Solid Waste Management Board, participated. More than 60 gas-to-energy projects operate in the 5 states that surround West Virginia; none are yet operational in The Mountain State.

Each landfill visited on the tour captures methane gas as it decomposes from solid waste, preventing this potent greenhouse from escaping into the environ-



Methane-fueled greenhouses at Green Energy Park, Dillsboro, NC.

Photo by Evan Hansen, Downstream Strategies, LLC

ment. In addition, the gas is used in a wide range of ways by the different facilities to support enterprises: It is used as a substitute for natural gas to fuel businesses (a biodiesel company, a blacksmith's forge, and greenhouses), to fire turbines (creating electricity, sold back into the power grid), or to incinerate sewage sludge at a wastewater treatment plant. Some of the facilities also are generating revenue from federal and state programs that provide payments for creating renewable energy or for voluntarily reducing/eliminating carbon emissions.

Landfill—Continued on Page 7

Almost Heaven Star Party

For years now, we have been boasting the darkest skies east of the Mississippi River. In the past, there were a few star gazers who recognized this and visited TMI to look deep into the night sky. Now, thanks to NOVAC (Northern Virginia Astronomy Club), our site hosts one of the largest star parties in the east, the Almost Heaven Star Party (AHSP).

What is the Almost Heaven Star Party? It involves plenty of amateur astronomers, their many different

types of telescopes, millions of stars, planets, far off galaxies, good food, and great company. AHSP brings many of its members and other astronomers to The Mountain Institute for a long weekend of camping, star gazing, and outdoor adventure. AHSP has a list of scheduled events for guests and TMI provides healthy meals and outdoor leadership. In 2006, over 200 astronomers spent the long weekend camping on the high plains. AHSP is set for August 8-12, 2007. For more information, go to www.ahsp.org.



AHSP astronomers on the deck at Spruce, looking for solar flares. Photo by Kimmy Clements

Spruce Knob Mountain Center 2007 Schedule of Activities

- | | |
|---|--|
| April 4-10 New Staff Training | July 13-16 Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins |
| April 12-15 Polecats | July 13-15 NOVAC Monthly Observing |
| April 13-15 NOVAC Monthly Observing | July 17-20 Managers' Meeting |
| April 16-20 Randolph County Outdoor Education Program | July 19-28 Hero's Journey |
| April 22 All Staff Day | July 21-22 TMI Board Meeting |
| April 23-27 St. Albans School, Washington, DC | July 29-August 2 Youth Ecology I |
| April 30-May 4 Randolph County Outdoor Education Program | August 3-5 Scholars Reunion |
| May 3-4 Augusta Heritage Retreat | August 6-8 B-WET Teacher Training |
| May 7-11 Winston Preparatory School, New York, NY | August 8-12 Almost Heaven Star Party |
| May 14-18 Riverdale Country School, New York, NY | August 12-18 Women's Journey |
| May 15-18 Maret School, Washington, DC | August 19-24 Staff Training |
| May 18-20 NOVAC Monthly Observing | August 30-31 WFR Review |
| May 19-20 Passion For Teaching | August 31-September 2 D&E College, Woods |
| May 21, 24-26 PC Gifted, Pendleton County, WV | September 1-9 WFR |
| May 24-25 North Elementary, Elkins, WV | September 7-10 NOVAC Monthly Observing |
| May 29-30 JE Robins, Charleston, WV | September 10-12 Clendenin Elementary, Clendenin, WV |
| May 30-June 2 Burley Mountain Trekkers, Charlottesville, VA | September 13-14 Midland Elementary, Elkins, WV |
| June 4-6 Langley School, Washington, DC | September 17-20 Roland Park Country School, Washington, DC |
| June 8-10 TMI Work Weekend | September 20-21 Midland Elementary, Elkins, WV |
| June 14-16 West Virginia Wesleyan College Retreat | September 24-28 Landon School, Washington, DC |
| June 15-17 NOVAC Monthly Observing | September 28-30 Hero's Weekend |
| June 19-22 WV Rock Camp | October 1-5 Shipley School, Philadelphia, PA |
| June 22-25 Art of Nature | October 5-7 Garret College Survival Weekend |
| June 28-July 1 WV Wilderness Coalition | October 9-12 Gilman School, Washington, DC |
| July 1-7 Adventure Odyssey | October 12-14 NOVAC Monthly Observing |
| July 1-7 Youth Ecology II | October 22-26 Burley History, Charlottesville, VA |
| July 8-14 Astronomy Camp | |

Spruce Knob Building Fund Established with \$20,000

The Appalachia Program's annual year-end appeal was challenged by a donor in December '06 to launch a building fund for improvements at the Spruce Knob Mountain Center. With a dollar-for-dollar matching opportunity on the table, a 3-week whirlwind appeal generated nearly \$10,000 from TMI's friends, leading us to start the year with \$20,000 to apply to our much-needed projects at our mountain site. Our list of needs is long, including upgrading of water systems, replacement of the roof on the large yurt, and renovation of the "shower shack." Increasing

demand for programs also means that our accommodations are inadequate to house all the staff we need, and our physical infrastructure imposes limits on the numbers of visitors we can host. The Program is working on development of a "master plan" for the Spruce campus that allows us to increase our impact and develop additional programs while minimizing the "footprint" of our infrastructure.

Many, many thanks to the 70+ generous donors who supported the launch of this important fund.



The beautiful lichen garden on the 35 year old, cedar shingle roof on our largest yurt, Ulan Bator. Photo: Josh Nease

Jim Underwood, continued

I mentioned that in some ways we were living out his ideals. With characteristic bluntness he exclaimed “well I hope they’re your ideals!” To which I could only say, well, of course they are. Yet when we came here we were searching. Most of us knew what we didn’t want, but not so much what we were looking for, and we came to this place. With Jim as a mentor we created a community. We learned what we believed in, and yes, formulated our own ideas. But the foundation for the building was already here. Spruce would not be the way it is without Jim’s input and insight, not physically, and not

philosophically. We owe him a debt of gratitude for giving us the example and encouraging us to believe that we could create a world we care to live in.

Above all he was a thinker, a believer in the dignity of work, and the ability of a small group of people to accomplish the impossible; to quite literally transform the world.

-Dave Martin on Jim Underwood

We still talk about Jim as if he is down the road in Franklin, and joke about some of the funny things he said or did. About his categorical statements that “we weren’t there to make friends, we were there to change the world,” or his

gruff comment to an unruly bunch of 8th graders on Spruce Knob: “I’m going to speak now for 25 minutes. If anyone interrupts me I’m going to start over.” But for all of his humor, and for all of his sometimes absurdly hard work, he was always most interested in the principle of these things, and the social ideas he was examining as he built a better world. He made us reconsider things we thought we knew, seek the beauty in hard work and simple things, and invest ourselves and our labor in service to others. In short, we became better people for our association with him.

Director’s Column, continued

Jim’s extraordinary will, and his openness to share his journey with others, capture a lot of his essence. It was lovingly documented by family and friends, and the transcript from a “Caring Bridge” web site established shortly after his diagnosis can now be viewed on TMI’s web site (www.mountain.org/underwood.cfm; click on “Read Journal Entries”). It’s an inspiration, and a guide for living.

Jim’s journey ended - or perhaps he would say the next one began - at the close of February. As you read through our newsletter, know that each impor-

tant piece of what we do - whether it’s serving educational needs, promoting concern for the environment, exploring alternative energy, or perpetuating a vision and an ethos for Spruce Knob - has elements of Jim at its core.

Thanks, Jim.

Brent Bailey
Director, Appalachia Program



Home school students using their newfound map and compass skills to find their way to the summit.

Landfill, continued

With carbon emissions in mind, TMI purchased “carbon offsets” to negate the environmental impact of the tour. The trip was estimated to produce almost one metric ton of carbon dioxide emissions. That amount of carbon can be reduced elsewhere through climate-friendly investments (tree planting, renewable energy projects, installation of carbon-reducing technologies at powerplants). TMI’s \$10 purchase from The Climate Trust (www.carboncounter.org), supports investments in carbon reduction projects, and rendered the tour “carbon-neutral.”



The 2006 Pig Roast created one of the largest pre-dinner circles in TMI history!

Photo by Kimmy Clements

5th Annual End of the Season Pig Roast

The Appalachia Program crew will once again be hosting our end of the season gathering. Bring a covered dish if you like and your musical instruments. We’ll make an effort to get invitations out to everyone, but you know that paperwork isn’t our strong suit. Drop us a note or give us a call and let us know you’re on your way.

When: October 20, 2007

Where: Spruce Knob Mountain Center



Conservation, Culture, Community

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appalachia](http://www.mountain.org/appalachia)

It is the mission of The Mountain Learning Programs to help people become powerful, secure, knowledgeable individuals with a clear vision of their responsibilities and potential for improving the human condition and the natural world.

TMI's program season begins in April and continues into November. We work with public and private schools and groups from all over the Eastern United States.

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