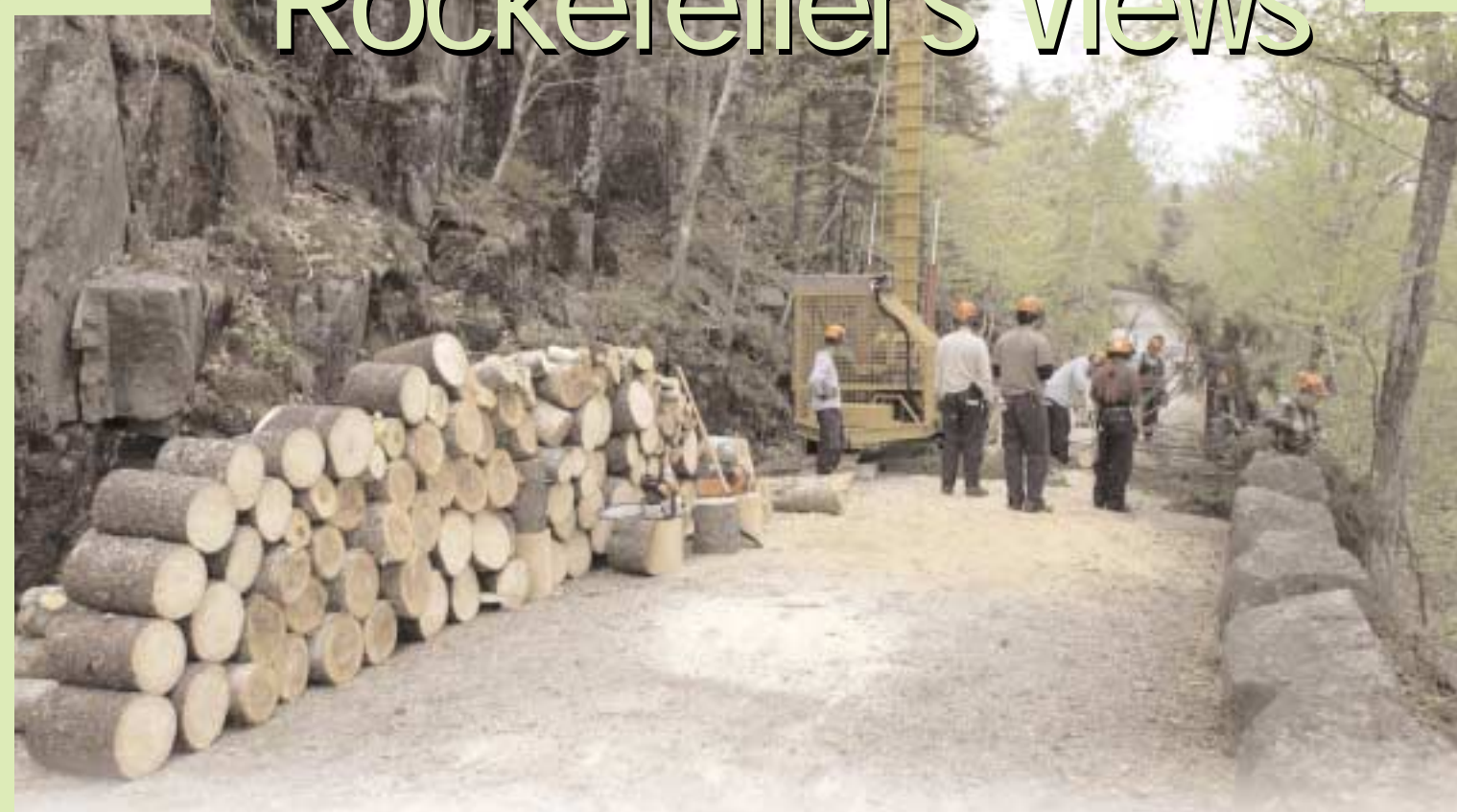


Rockefeller's Views



Forestry camp students help restore historic vistas in Acadia

IN 1913, SIX YEARS BEFORE much of Maine's Mt. Desert Island was designated as the first national park east of the Mississippi, industrialist John D. Rockefeller Jr., began constructing 57 miles of carriage roads through its heavily wooded coastal wilderness. It took nearly 30 years to complete Acadia National Park's network of roadways for non-motorized vehicles. Rockefeller's attention to detail was evident at every turn, including the use of foresters to open the legendary, breathtaking vistas.

Now those same forests along the carriage roads are getting a makeover with help from some of the best aspiring foresters in the state. Students and faculty members participating in the University of Maine's annual forestry camp are working to restore the carriage road landscape to maintain the historical integrity of Rockefeller's vision.

Fifteen years ago, the National Park Service surveyed Acadia's carriage roads and made recommendations for their rehabilitation and maintenance. That year, UMaine set up its forestry camp near Acadia to be part of the rehabilitation effort.

"We're filling a need rather than doing a project for the sake of just doing it," says forester and University of Maine faculty member Louis Morin. "We have a place to work, the projects need to be done, and the students get an opportunity to meet (and work with) park staff."

Since the 1920s, UMaine's annual forestry camp has provided students with hands-on training in forest management. The first forestry camps were held near the town of Princeton and at Nictaus Lake, in cooperation with loggers and local landowners. With changes in land use, UMaine's program was looking for a new location 15 years ago. That's when the mutually beneficial agreement was struck between Acadia and UMaine's Department of Forest Management.

During forestry camp, students and faculty spend a week in the classroom and in local, university-owned forests, learning more about the methods, safety precautions and equipment needed for effective forest management. Then with foresters like Morin and other instructors to guide them, the students head for the Maine woods.

In Acadia, the students have focused on restoring the historic vistas that made the carriage roads such an attraction. Trees selected by park service personnel as part of the multi-year rehabilitation program are cut and removed using a skyline logging system that minimizes damage to wildlife, soils and vegetation. Cables rather than skidders are used to move trees and debris up the steep terrain.

"In Acadia, people are sensitive to disturbance. When we leave the park, we don't want it to look like we've created this hole in the forest," Morin says. "You have to look at your code of ethics, which may suggest alternative ways to manage land that do not have negative, long-term impacts."

Other projects for the National Park Service have taken Morin, professor Al Kimball, and their students to other islands near

Mt. Desert. On Long Island in Blue Hill Bay and Jordan Island in Frenchman Bay, UMaine students have conducted natural resource inventories and prepared management plans. On Acadia's Isle au Haut, they updated trail maps using GPS.

Beyond the varied woodlands management experience, forestry camp means "getting up early, working 'til lunch and then working 'til the work gets done," says sophomore Molly Simonson. It also means sleeping in tents in all kinds of spring weather, occasionally enjoying a group meal of steamers and spaghetti, and playing in the three-week-long forestry camp cribbage tourney.

"Tenting out in the rain proved especially challenging; it rained a lot during our stay," says sophomore Tyler Alexander of forestry camp 2003. "Days were long, we each had to do our own cooking and we were all ready for bed as darkness fell."

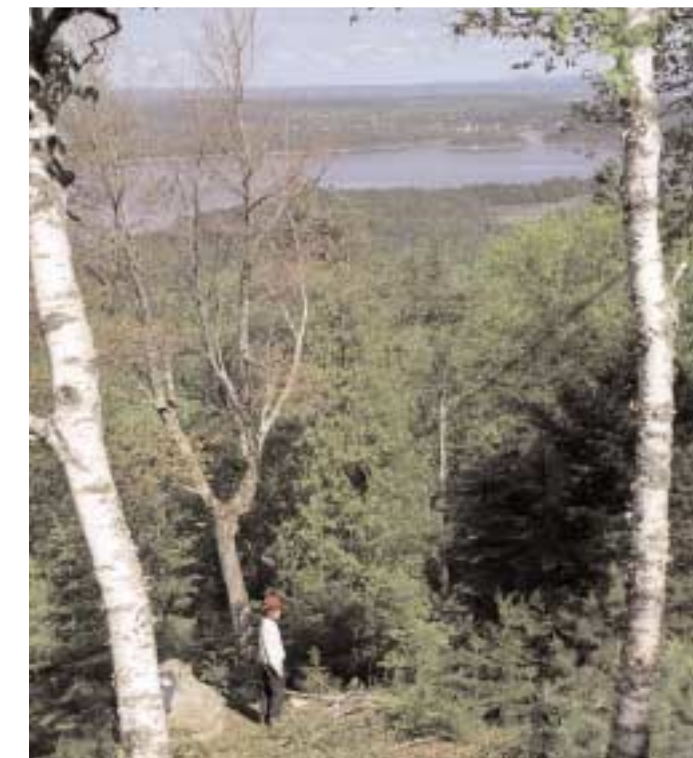
In addition, students get a crash course in field engineering, according to Thomas Coleman, a junior in UMaine's Forest Operations Program. In other words, not everything goes as planned when working with heavy equipment in the woods. That's when you learn the importance of impromptu, often creative maintenance and repair.

"Students are encouraged to think critically and on their feet, which teaches them how to deal with stressful situations," Morin said.

It's just such forestry camp experiences that Alexander says helped him most in his job last summer as a seasonal field technician for a Vermont-based forestry consulting firm.

"I think (my boss) was expecting to spend more time training me, but most of the training was unnecessary since I had learned most of the field skills at camp," says Alexander. "I think he was impressed with my 'woods sense,' being able to identify good and bad things, and to report them in an academic manner."

Chris Corio



In UMaine's annual three-week forestry camp, students learn about woods management first by understanding the equipment and methods, and then by putting both into practice.



Photos by Toby Hollis