



The Hemlock

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“When spring came, even the false spring, there were no problems except where to be happiest.” ~Ernest Hemingway (*A Moveable Feast*)

Ice and Ides

~Bob Myers (LHU Director of Environmental Studies)

Late in the afternoon on Sunday, March 15th, I saw a Facebook post announcing that the ice on the Susquehanna River had broken. I grew up on Water Street, but I can only recall seeing the ice break once: four years ago, on February 19th (my birthday). This winter the river seemed to freeze early, and it seemed unlikely that it would ever thaw, so I was anxious to see the ice leave. Accordingly, my wife and I quickly drove to the Woodward Township Boat Park and joined the crowd of people who were watching the symbolic end of a long, difficult winter.



The river itself was visible in narrow, muddy brown channels along the bank. In between was a jumble of large slabs of broken ice that were rushing past at a surprising speed (I later clocked them at about 5 mph). Scattered among the slabs were limbs of large trees that had been snapped off by the power of the ice and water. On both sides of the river a wall of ice formed; remnants of that wall are still evident two weeks later.

We walked onto Jay Street Bridge for a different perspective. Looking down at the ice was disorienting—it almost made you feel as if you were falling into the river. I suspect that this is the feeling of the “sublime” that early 19th-century nature writers described: the feeling of awe at the power of nature/God. And there was no mistaking the power.



1918 Ice Flood. Lock Haven Express (July 28, 2011)

I've seen pictures of the ice floods, when glacier like sheets of ice were thrown onto Water street, destroying everything in their path.

I was surprised by the number of people that had gathered to watch the breakup. I felt that such an event should be celebrated with alcohol and large fires on the banks. Had such arrangements existed, I probably would have stayed all night, but it was cold, so after about a half an hour we left.

Later that night I realized that the ice had broken on the Ides of March. As an English professor, I knew that the Ides had something to do with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but I didn't know much other than that one should be wary of it. A quick internet search revealed that the Ides of March was an ancient Roman holiday that marked the Roman new year and involved such renewal festivities as picnics, drinking, and revelry. The Ides also became linked to the Roman Mamuralia, a festival marking the new year. One of the main events of the Mamuralia involved dressing an old man in animal skins and then beating him with white sticks and *perhaps* driving him from the city (the sources disagree on this aspect of the ritual, but my guess is that few would remain after such treatment).

I doubt that today we could get away with involving any of our seniors in Mamuralia festivities. But I still feel that the end of the winter should be celebrated. I certainly don't hate winter and I make a point to get out as much as possible, but there's just no question that the return of the warm temperatures is welcomed by all of us. So happy Spring, Mamuralia, Ides to all of you!

Briar Bush Nature Center: Abington's Best Kept Secret

~Melissa Eldridge (LHU Alum and Briar Bush Public Programs Educator)

Briar Bush Nature Center, located in Abington, Pennsylvania, rests on 12.5 acres of forested land and serves as an oasis and refuge for wildlife in the middle of suburbia. People of all ages flock to Briar Bush for its beautiful landscape, peaceful environment, and effortless ability to connect one with nature. However, Briar Bush did not have its start as the beloved nature center it is today.

In 1908, newlyweds Everett and Florence Griscom moved to Abington and purchased the property currently known as Briar Bush Nature Center. As an effort to combat urban development, the property became a refuge for wildlife and residents alike. The Griscoms welcomed Scout groups, school groups, and avid birders to their refuge while

sharing their knowledge and love of the outdoors. When the Griscoms passed in 1962, residents of the area, led by T. Russell Frank, advocated for the protection of the property from development by urging Abington Township to purchase the land. Their strong efforts resulted in the purchase and preservation of the Griscom property. In 1974, township residents created a private non-profit group, The Friends of Briar Bush, in order to meet educational and community objectives.

Today, Briar Bush Nature Center invites people of all ages to experience and explore the wildlife refuge formerly owned by the Griscoms. Briar Bush honors the Griscoms by fulfilling its mission: to provide environmental education to individuals and groups of all ages through on-site and outreach experiences, protect and nurture a nature wildlife habitat, and promote conservation of natural resources by increasing awareness and understanding of the environment. Throughout the years, Briar Bush Nature Center has become known as Abington's Best Kept Secret.



During the summer of my junior year as a Recreation Management student at Lock Haven University, I searched for seasonal positions at various nature centers in the environmental education field. I wanted more experience in this field since I aspired to become an environmental educator after graduation. While researching local nature centers, I stumbled upon Briar Bush Nature Center's website. The Half-Day Summer Camp Counselor announcement described

the exact experience I was looking for: creating and implementing environmental education lessons for four and five year olds in a summer camp setting. I was offered the position for the summer and it was one of the most experiential times of my life. I learned many aspects of environmental education during orientation, while shadowing educators in various programs, and through hands-on experience when camp began. This experience verified my aspirations and interest in environmental education.

As a senior in Recreation Management, I was required to complete an internship for ten weeks, working approximately 40 hours a week, while writing papers and completing a special project for the agency. As students were searching for internships across the country and globe, I knew that I could gain more of the experience I was looking for at Briar Bush so I applied for the Full-Day Summer Camp Counselor position. That summer, as the Full-Day Camp Counselor, I gained even more valuable experience that included useful information for aspiring environmental educators, practice creating and implementing lesson plans for six and seven year olds, and encountering struggles and finding solutions. Throughout the summer, I created a proposal for the implementation

of a garden on the Center's ground to be used for environmental education lessons for groups and summer camp since I have a deep interest in gardening.

The summer was coming to a close and the Executive Director approached me to suggest applying for the open full-time Public Programs Educator position offered at Briar Bush. I was very eager to apply. I loved every aspect of Briar Bush: the staff, the grounds and facilities, the programs, and the members of the community. Although I was very eager and full of hope, I was also doubtful. As a recent college graduate, I felt that I would not measure up to those who may be applying for the same position who have more experience in the field of environmental education. During my interview, I presented an activity that I would conduct for children aged six and seven. I thought the interview went well, but again I was doubtful.

The next day, I showed up for camp and was again approached by the Executive Director. She informed me that the staff had made a decision and they would like me to join the Briar Bush team as Public Programs Educator. I was surprised, ecstatic, and grateful to have landed a full-time position straight out of college, especially at an organization I loved.

Since then, I have been working at Briar Bush Nature Center planning public programs, conducting programs for people of all ages, developing new programs, updating existing programs, and learning more valuable information as I go. It has been a wonderful experience working for an organization that is dedicated to teaching people of all ages about the natural world while fostering in them a love and appreciation for it.

Thinking Better by Getting Greener: Using Attention Restoration to Improve Cognition
~Lynn A. Bruner (LHU Psychology Professor)

Have you ever noticed how tiring it can be to sit still and focus on one thing? You arise from your chair after intensive work at your computer feeling both physically and mentally depleted, wondering why you are so tired. It turns out that the screen and desk time you've been putting in may be more strenuous than you imagine. In our distraction-filled environments, the simple act of paying attention to the task in front of us can be incredibly challenging. For instance, as I'm concentrating on typing these words, many sounds are calling for my notice: voices in the hall, the constant whirr and hum of the HVAC system, the occasional buzz from the smartphone I've forgotten to silence. I see a notification come up at the bottom of my computer screen telling me I have yet another e-mail, and out of the corners of my eyes I see the books, articles, student papers, and folders haphazardly piled on my desk. Somewhere in the back of my mind I also know that with a click of the mouse, I could escape this writing task, whether to check Facebook, read that e-mail, or even do some online shopping.

Focusing my attention on only one activity is a fairly large order in these circumstances: in fact, maintaining extended attention is what cognitive psychologists refer to as a resource-intensive task, which is why it can seem so tiring. In 1892, early American psychologist William James noted that what he called directed attention, the kind of voluntary attention we use to attend to information that is essential but not necessarily personally important to us, takes a lot of mental energy. In order to use directed attention, we have to inhibit our impulses and control our responses to distractions; thus, our capacity for directed attention is limited, because we get fatigued. On the other hand, suggested James, there are occasions in which it is possible to pay involuntary attention. That is, some things just fascinate us, and we can pay attention to



them for a long time without putting forth much effort. For instance, a mystery that presents a problem to be solved or an extreme experience can present what James called “hard” fascination: something that grabs our attention and doesn’t let us look away. Watching an exciting athletic event or an action-filled movie can be experiences of hard fascination. The problem with hard fascination is that it can also grab hold of thoughts, as

something that is extreme, exciting, or mysterious makes it difficult to think about anything else. However, James also described “soft” fascination: the extended attention that’s possible when something captures our attention involuntarily, but doesn’t interfere with other thoughts, offering us opportunities for reflection. Viewing a natural environment, closely observing a bird or animal in the wild, or walking mindfully in a green space can all be experiences of soft fascination.

Psychologist Stephen Kaplan expanded on James’ ideas with his theory of Attention Restoration. Exploring the popular assumption that spending time in nature is restorative, Kaplan suggested that that experiences of soft fascination in nature may be providing a kind of cognitive reset for people experiencing directed attention fatigue. In a 1995 article, “The Restorative Benefits of Nature,” Kaplan suggested “It is only in the modern world that the split between the important and the interesting has become extreme.” That is, most of us spend many hours completing tasks that we don’t necessarily find personally interesting, and while doing so, we are bombarded by an ever-expanding number of distractions. Thus, our overall levels of attention fatigue may be growing. Kaplan suggests that for attention restoration to occur, we need to spend time in restorative environments, which have four characteristics. They must be fascinating in the soft sense: they must capture our attention without voluntary effort

being expended, but allow reflective thought. They must be “away,” or removed from everyday activities and demands. Thus, a walk in a wooded area might be restorative, whereas a walk down a busy street may not. They must have presence in time and space, meaning that a restorative experience is not just momentary, but has what Kaplan calls “extent.” Finally, restorative experiences must be compatible with one’s current aims and goals. Thus, placing people in environments they don’t want to be in, even if they are beautiful and serene, may not result in attention restoration.

Research on attention restoration has resulted in some interesting findings. Children with ADHD long have been known to benefit from active physical play, which can help to improve concentration on school tasks. When they play in green outdoor environments rather than indoors, the effects on concentration are even greater. College students who become cognitively exhausted doing a rapid-response puzzle task, take a walk in a green area, and then return to the puzzles show improved performance as compared to students who simply rest indoors or who take a walk through a busy campus. Even findings on improved wound healing in hospital rooms with a view of trees (as opposed to a view of a parking lot) have been discussed in terms of attention restoration. Finally, limited levels of improvement in cognitive functioning have been reported for research participants who could look at a poster of a green landscape, as opposed to a poster of a cityscape or an abstract design; that is, the degree to which a restorative environment is “away” can vary, but an experience that is more deeply “away” may result in greater levels of attention restoration. In short, psychologists are finding empirical evidence that positive feelings of increased alertness and overall well-being related to time spent in natural environments may be associated in part with the renewal of depleted mental resources. It’s another great reason to get out from behind your desk, to turn off screens, and to get outside. You might just improve your concentration, increase your cognitive acuity, and renew your mind.

Frosty Apples

~Guy Graybill (Author of [Prohibition's Prince](#))

Herewith, a verse;
Concise and terse:

In Wintry time,
My pomes all rime.



Nights in the Colby Narrows

~Jeffrey R. Frazier (Local Author – see: www.pafiresidetales.com)

When the sun starts to sink behind Big Kettle and Little Kettle Mountains at the western edge of Colby Narrows, and as somber shadows start to settle along Fishing Creek, it signals the beginning of another peaceful night in this ruggedly scenic spot to the north of Sugar Valley, Clinton County. Only the numerous waterfalls of the ever-flowing stream cascading over the rocks in the creek bed disturb the darkened forest, and in the villages of Lamar, at the Centre County end of the Narrows, and Tylersville in Sugar Valley at the Clinton County end of the narrows, mountain folks can settle down for another night of peaceful rest. But in an earlier day a night of safe and uninterrupted sleep was not always assured for the area's pioneers; Colby Narrows, sometimes referred to as Sugar Valley Narrows today, was then a place that was as wild as its unspoiled landscape.

The dark defile is a picturesque place of natural beauty even today, but it has a history that sometimes is as dark and foreboding as the gloomy blanket of night that makes it an uninviting spot for lonely travelers, especially if they know about the murder of the Colby Family, Isaiah and Nora, from whom the Narrows takes its name. The murders of the Colbys on their forty-acre tract of land along Cherry Run on the eighth of August, 1887, caused a general panic throughout Clinton and neighboring counties until when, about a week later, the murderer was identified and captured at Smith's lumber camp in Wood Hollow along the west branch of Pine creek to the north. Lute Shaffer strongly proclaimed his innocence, but in December a jury found him guilty, and on April 4th, 1888, he was hanged from a gallows that had been erected in the jail yard at Lock Haven. His gravesite can still be seen in the Catholic cemetery on Susquehanna avenue, Lock Haven, where he presumably sleeps the sleep from which there is no awakening. The murders must have given many people chills and nightmares, but no doubt many



Big Kettle Mountain along the Colby Narrows

of them were descendants of sturdy pioneer stock who first settled here and endured many sleepless nights. Back in those days the usual nighttime music was the dismal and unnerving howls of the numerous wolf packs that once made this place their home, but those melancholy cries were also sometimes interrupted by the unsettling and frightening screams of mountain lions which frequented this mountainous region as well. Many of us today would not have the courage to

coexist with these wild denizens of the forest, but people in those times did, and tales of their harrowing encounters with and escapes from those animals would make interesting reading today. Unfortunately most of those stories have been lost as older generations have passed away, but a few can still be heard if the right person is found, and following are a few that elder folks in the region still remember hearing from the old folks of their younger days.

Probably the most ancient account can be traced all the way back to some of the first families who settled in the Narrows, including that of Michael Bressler, who came here as a single man in the earliest years of the nineteenth century. Eventually Michael met and married the daughter of Henry Spangler, another early settler, and by the time Anna Maria was twenty-two she was the mother of two boys and living in a log cabin that Michael had constructed near a copious spring on the uppermost heights of Big Kettle Mountain, which forms the westernmost boundary of the Narrows. The rustic place was not a mansion since it had a dirt floor and oil cloths for window panes, but it was home and a place of safety.

The family was prosperous enough to own a cow and other livestock, but they had to be continually on their guard to protect their animals from the wolves and mountain lions who still could be heard here every night. These noisy neighbors could, when driven by hunger, be more than just an annoyance at times, and even up until the time of her death in 1886 at age 86, Anna May, as she was sometime called, was fond of telling people just how dangerous they could be, recalling how one night in 1824 she had to deal with one such intruder on her own.

Although she must have been terrified at the time the incident occurred, the strong-willed lady did not lack the courage it took to defend herself and her family from an intimidating predator. On this particular occasion the young mother was alone in the cabin with her children, and the fact that her husband was away made the nearby screams of a mountain lion, often called panthers or painters by the mountain folks, seem that much more worrisome, especially since the family cow was tied up to a tree in back of the cabin that night. The familiar noise was no different than the screams of other panthers that made their presence known on the mountaintop every evening after darkness fell, but in this case the beast seemed to be closer than any had ever gotten before.

The accounts seem to vary as to what exactly happened next that night, with oral accounts handed down to Anna May's descendants differing from an account recorded in an 1884 newspaper article written by a reporter who interviewed her two years before she died. But the oral history recalled to me in 2014 by her great-great grandson recalls that in order to scare away the mountain lion the brave pioneer lady picked up a metal dishpan and pounded on its bottom with a wooden spoon to make as much noise as she could. Her ploy, says that oral history, succeeded in driving the big cat

away and keeping it away until the frightened lady's husband came home. But perhaps that account was a memory of how the young lady scared away the beasts on many different occasions since the newspaper account has many more details concerning the night of the endangered cow.

This account notes that Anna May had even more reason for concern on that night, not only because she was alone there with her children but because the cow had gotten loose. According to this version, she could hear the sound of the cow's bell growing fainter and fainter, and then she heard the panther scream. Since the cow was the source of the family's milk and butter she knew she had to do something, and so in an act of desperation she lit a torch to find her way through the pitch black woods and also picked up a chain with which to lead the cow back home if she could catch it.

The brave woman took off running, following the sound of the bell that was dangling from the cow's neck. She managed to catch up to it, and, wrapping her chain around its horns, led it back to the cabin where she re-tied it securely to the same tree. But her anxiety was then rekindled when she realized that the panther had followed her back and was screaming close by once again from the depths of the nearby woods.

Not one to be so easily mocked, the fearless mother grabbed her torch and walked up to the outside wood pile where she picked up an axe that was embedded there.

Brandishing her torch and shouting fiercely, the feisty woman took some ferocious swings with her axe to chop into some of the wood pile's logs. The exercise not only relieved her stress but also kept her and her children safe. The panther, apparently intimidated by the racket, slinked off into the woods, and Anna May and her children slept soundly and safely through the rest of the night. But the next morning the danger resurfaced once again.

Never dreaming a nocturnal beast like the panther would still be around the next morning, Anna May made a hearty breakfast for her children, and when they were finished eating she asked her oldest son Emanuel to lead the cow down to their nearby pasture to graze. The obedient son did as he was told, but he had not been gone long before his mother saw the dark shape of the panther dart past a cabin window, heading in the same direction as her son. Once again she grabbed her trusty ax and ran after the big cat, no doubt in a panic. But when she breathlessly arrived at the pasture she met a welcome sight. There she found her son being led back home by his father, who was holding the boy's hand in his. The cow was following along behind, calmly chewing its cud.

Anna May Bressler's truthfulness about the prevalence and boldness of mountain lions in the Colby Narrows in her time is confirmed by yet another oral historical account that was related to us in 2014 by a ninety-four year old native of that same area who heard the story from his father. The incident, which was said to have happened about 1820, supposedly occurred near the bridge that spans Cherry Run in the Narrows today.

It seems that during those days there was a large marketplace in Lock Haven where local farmers could take their meats to sell at butchering time in the fall of the year. Two men in particular were regular haulers, but they had had a frightening experience in the Narrows when a group of wild cats, smelling the freshly-butchered meat, tried to jump on the wagon to get it. The men successfully fended off the cats, but took to carrying stout clubs with them on their butcher wagon after that.

Then one fall day some years later, they had loaded their wagon with hams and other "butcher meat" and were driving through the Narrows again. They were no doubt enjoying the fall colors and crisp mountain air, which may have lulled them into a sense of euphoria and caused them to let down their guard, but when a group of six panthers of mixed size rushed at them from the mountainside they once again, using the heavy cudgels they were carrying, fought off the attackers. However, it's said that after this attack the men "beefed" up their defenses by carrying muskets on their butcher wagon trips.

The same old gentleman who was the source of the previous panther tale also tells of how bold wolves could be in this locale during that same era. He places the time of the episode as about 1840, and says it occurred one moonlit night near Michael Bressler's alpine cabin. Here, says the old man, lived a family whose names have been lost over time but who tended a flock of sheep that provided mutton as a source of food and of wool that could be woven into homespun clothing. These mountain folks also lived in a log cabin, but in addition to this humble abode they had constructed a log barn in which they housed their sheep when they weren't out to pasture in a mountainside meadow. They also kept two large hounds or sheep dogs in the barn with the sheep, turning them out with their flock to protect it from the nightly wolf attacks they knew were sure to occur.

The dogs proved their value night after night, intimidating the wolf marauders whenever their glowing eyes appeared in the murky shadows of the surrounding forest. But then one afternoon when the sheep were led from the barn to the pasture, one of the dogs was inadvertently left behind in the barn, leaving only one dog to guard the innocent lambs in the meadow. The wolves, sensing the lack of defenses that night, boldly attacked the lone sheep dog and the sheep, and the constant and abnormally loud clatter of the bells around the necks of the sheep awakened the family. The shepherds got to their flock when the wolves were still there, and in the moonlight they could discern a scene of carnage. Six large grey wolves had attacked the sheep, killing them all, but the wolf pack cowardly slinked away when the humans appeared. Their attack had been so vicious that one sheep was torn in two by the voracious pack, and, to add insult to injury, they also had torn apart the faithful sheep dog that had valiantly tried to guard the flock on its own.

It's said that the spring near where the Bressler cabin once stood, and which the Bressler's and their neighbors relied upon as a water source, can still be found on the Big Kettle Mountain above Colby Narrows today. But all traces of any of the original homesteads and barns there have disappeared over the years, much like those who remember the thrilling episodes of nightly panther and wolf encounters experienced by the early pioneers of Sugar Valley and the surrounding mountains. It can be argued that we're all poorer because of that lost connection to the past, and anyone who enjoys the tales of the long ago should be grateful for these few episodes that were saved from oblivion at the "eleventh hour".

Two Poems

~Susan Rimby (LHU Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Education)

Susquehanna Sunrise

Salmon, cotton clouds
Gold sun behind the island
Slate river looks cold

Susquehanna Sunset

The sky blushed pale rose.
The moon dripped its silvery
Glaze on the river.



Photo by John F. Katz

Local Hike: The Lock Haven Boulder Field

~Jon Roland (LHU History major)

The local hike to the Boulder field (sometimes called the skiing rabbit or Snoopy on Skis) is one of those hikes full of the unexpected because of the slopes and grades. One minute you're going straight up a slope and the next you are going downhill, trying to climb over unstable rocks and fallen trees. It is a hike that contains enough giant rocks and slippery moss that good balance is a necessity. Having a guide who knows the general direction is a good idea because of the various trails and ribbons that can make the hiking trail turn into a maze.



Getting to the trail is only a 9 mile drive. Start at Lock Haven University and drive east on Water Street. At the Courthouse, take a right on Jay Street and go about one mile, past the Route 220 ramps until you get to Castanea. In Castanea, Jay Street turns into Jarrett Ave. Turn Left onto Brown Street and follow it until it ends; then turn right and then left to go onto Keller Street. Continue to Youngdale Road until you see a pull off in the

road which is next to a steep trail. Park and get ready for a fun, but challenging hike.

The trail goes up for about a half mile or so and then splits. To get to the boulder field you must take a left. Sometimes the trail will become inconspicuous so you must trust your senses to detect the trail after climbing around fallen trees or walking on top of big rocks. Do not get distracted by the survey ribbons. There are lots of curves and elevations changes as well. Eventually you will reach the boulder field.

Understanding the wildlife on this trail is important. Be extremely careful of Rattlesnakes especially between June and September. If you find yourself on the boulder ridge hearing lots of hissing and rattling, just stomp on the big rocks as hard as you can to let them know you are around and they will slither away. If you do not startle them, you will not get bitten.

After a hike on this trail you will gain a new appreciation for the Allegheny Mountains.

Environmental Focus Group

Bob Myers (Chair), Md. Khalequzzaman, Lenny Long, Jeff Walsh, Lee Putt, Ralph Harnishfeger, Barrie Overton, Todd Nesbitt, Sharon Stringer, Jamie Walker, Steve Guthrie, John Reid, Lynn Bruner, Elisabeth Lynch, Kevin Hamilton, Keith Roush, Steve Seiler, Elizabeth Gruber, Joby Topper, Ray Steele, Michael McSkimming, Mark Jones, Adam Nothstein, Susan Rimby, Stephen Neun, and Scott Carnicom. The committee is charged with promoting and supporting activities, experiences, and structures that encourage students, faculty, and staff to develop a stronger sense of place for Lock Haven University and central Pennsylvania. Such a sense of place involves a stewardship of natural resources (environmentalism), meaningful outdoor experiences, and appreciation for the heritage of the region.