

Webb Family: The Webb family has owned a farm on the Winthrop slopes of Mt. Pisgah for generations. Clyde Webb recalled some of his father’s experiences as a child bringing cattle to and from pastures on Pisgah. These memories are from the early 1900s, predating the generations of blue-berry pickers on the mountain, when Mt. Pisgah was open pasture land with very few blueberry bushes.

As Clyde recalled, each summer his father, Frank, took the young heifers, steers, and dry cattle to the pastures, leaving them there all summer and occasionally stopping by to check on them. When fall rolled around, he took the cattle back to the Webb farm. Clyde remembers his dad saying that the cattle “were like wild animals” after their summer pasturing. Once when his dad was bringing a steer home by rope, it began to pick up speed going down the mountain. Before long Frank found himself careening downhill. The race ended only when Frank found himself and the steer on opposite sides of one the mountain’s few trees. As Clyde described it, the ensuing crash was not the most favorable for Frank, but he was lucky enough to make it out in one piece.

Jane Robinson: A longtime resident of Maine, Jane spent time as a child on her family’s Monmouth farm, located where Route 132 is split by Route 202. The Robinson family farmed for three generations and brought their cattle to the summer pastures on Mt. Pisgah starting in the late 1940s. Jane, her father, and her brother continued this practice until the late 1950s. The summer pasture they used was owned by the Norburgs, who lived on the Mt. Pisgah Road.

Every summer the Robinsons would pasture about twenty-five of their steers, heifers, and dry cattle, transporting them to the pasture via pickup truck. Depending on the size of the animals, they could transport anywhere from one to three at a time. Jane’s father would return weekly to supply grain for the cattle on the mountain. Jane recalled that on one end of the pasture there was a fairly large natural spring that provided drinking water. She remembers being able to look up from her farm to see the cattle as dots grazing in large open pastures on the top of Mt. Pisgah. She still finds it surprising to see the top of the mountain covered with trees.

Looking Forward

The Kennebec Land Trust is currently clearing four acres on the south summit of Mt. Pisgah. Once the area has been cleared and exposed to the sunlight, highbush blueberries will once again have a place to thrive. Highbush blueberry plants can already be found in this area, but because of the forest’s regrowth, blueberry production has been greatly decreased from what it once was. The newly cleared spot can be found about halfway up the aptly named Blueberry Trail.

KLT’s goal is to bring blueberries back to the memorable mountain so that families will be able to pick once again. With proper management, this newly cleared site will become a popular destination for blueberrying, a place where the “kerplunk” of blueberries hitting pails will be heard as in days gone by.



The Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) works cooperatively with landowners and communities to conserve the forests, shorelands, fields, and wildlife that define central Maine. KLT protects land permanently, offers opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the natural world, and works with partners to support sustainable forestry and farming.

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Don Cameron, Jim Connors, Theresa Kerchner, Irene Vose Robertson, Jane Robinson, Eva Smith, Jean-Luc Theriault, Clyde Webb, and the Wayne Town Office.
Images courtesy of : Front Image: Irene Vose Robertson
All other images: Toby Smith*

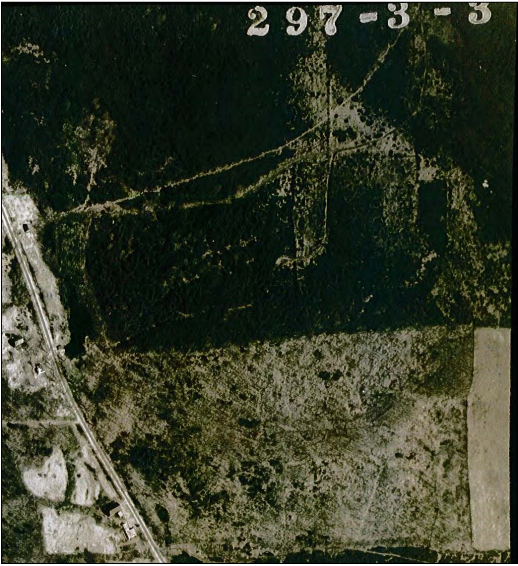


Robertson family picking blueberries atop Pisgah.
Photo by Irene Vose Robertson, circa 1950

Mt. Pisgah

A Fruity History

Toby Smith
Kennebec Land Trust Intern
August, 2016



Left Photo: Mt. Pisgah Tower Road - 1968



Right Photo: Mt. Pisgah Tower Road - Circa 2010

Human and Agricultural History

Mt. Pisgah has a long history of human use. Before the settlers arrived in the late 1760s, Maine was not exclusively home to deer, squirrels, and other wildlife. Native American tribes frequented the area, using the land in Wayne and Winthrop as a crossroad between the Androscoggin and Kennebec watersheds. During this time, the interior of Maine was dominated by forests and wetlands.

Families began to migrate into Maine from southern New England after the Revolutionary War, fleeing overpopulation, resource depletion, and postwar economic difficulties. The exodus of Native American tribes, a transition that presented the new settlers with a seemingly endless supply of land and wood. During the next few decades, roughly thirty percent of the state’s forests were cleared for croplands, hay fields, and pastures.

Ezekiel Holmes, who is considered the father of Maine agriculture, lived on Mt. Airy Farm on Mt. Pisgah. He once described the pastures in Maine as “home to innumerable flocks of sheep.” The evidence of past pastures can be seen near the remains of old stone walls and barbed wire on Mt. Pisgah. With the westward expansion of the United States and the collapse of the wool industry in Maine, many area farms were abandoned by the mid-1800s. The transition of farmland back to forestland in Southern Maine was a slow process.

**Summer Pastures and
The Mystery of the Highbush Blueberry**

As late as the 1940s and 50s, Winthrop-area farmers used the remaining open areas on Mt. Pisgah as summer pasture for young and dry cattle. The open, fading pastures, with little to no tree cover and ample sunlight, created an environment in which blueberries could potentially thrive.



*lowbush blueberry
Mt. Pisgah, Summer 2016*

All About the Blueberries:

Maine has more than a half dozen species of blueberries. The most common is lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*). It is a small shrub that grows roughly 4-15 inches tall, and produces small but sweet berries. These small plants of mostly dry sites are the primary commercial blueberry crop in Maine. Another species found in Maine is highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*).



*highbush blueberry
Mt. Pisgah, Summer 2016*

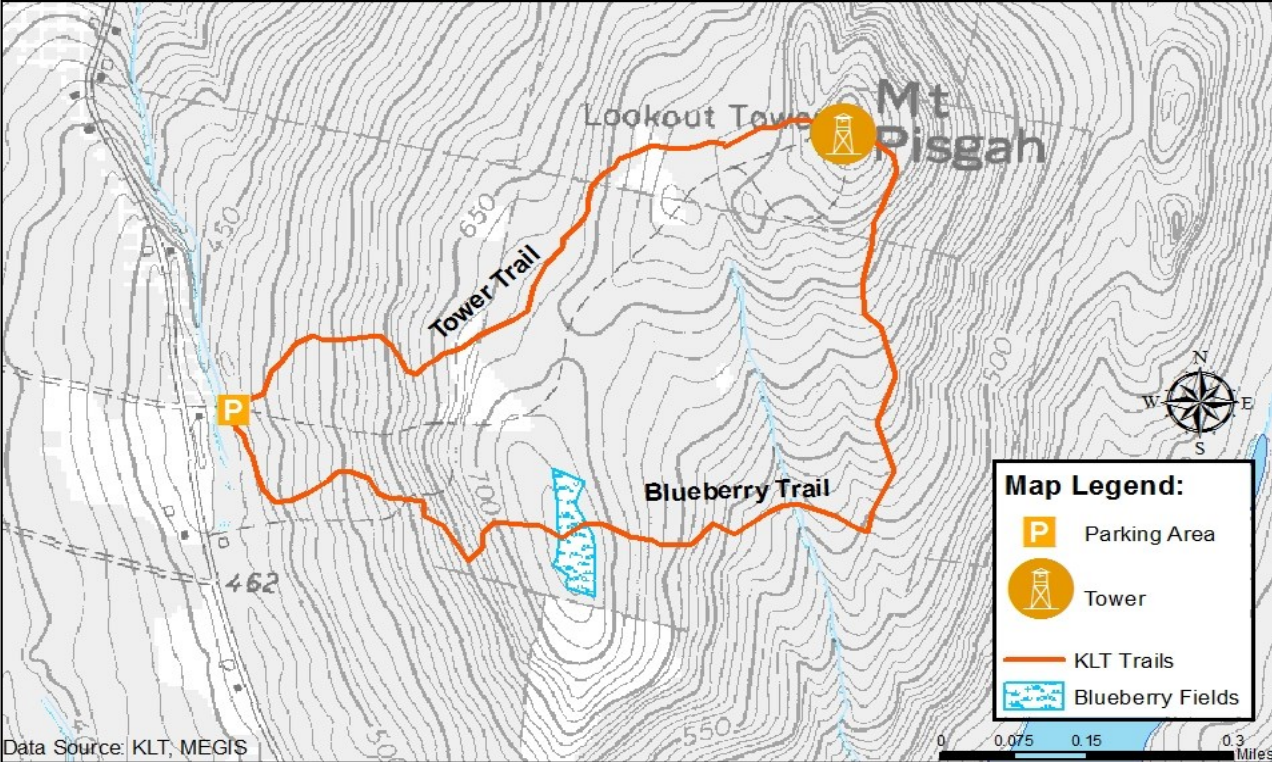
Highbush blueberries can grow over six feet high, and can have berries up to 2-3 times larger than the lowbush species. When highbush and lowbush berries grow in

close proximity, they sometimes hybridize and form a bush with intermediate traits.

During the 1950s through the 1990s, generations of families picked highbush blueberries on the relatively dry slopes of Mt. Pisgah. In natural settings highbush blueberries are typically found in areas with wet, acidic, organic soils. The plant is seldom a dominant species, except for in the following habitats: lakes, ponds, swamp areas, or high elevation clearings.

The habitats on Mt. Pisgah where highbush blueberries occur do not resemble these preferred habitats. At this site, the highbush blueberries are found in an upland forest with dry soil and no nearby water source. It is unclear how the highbush blueberries came to be in this less than ideal habitat, but it’s unlikely anyone who has picked the berries has ever complained.

Mt. Pisgah Conservation Area



Mt. Pisgah Memories

From Kennebec County Residents

Eva (Boynton) Smith: Eva and her family, which consisted of her mother and seven children, and their milkman and his family spent precious time together picking blueberries on the slopes of Mt. Pisgah. The peak years of their picking occurred during the mid-to-late 1950s. The ever-growing presence of second growth trees eventually limited their excursions, and by the 1960s the best of Mt. Pisgah’s blueberries had been picked. Eva remembers highbush blueberries being ubiquitous. During blueberry season her family would go picking roughly once a week, and each picker would have a pail full of berries within an hour. Her family would drive to the bottom parking lot and hike up to the top of the mountain, guided by a telephone wire that connected the fire tower to the old fire warden’s office. The wire served as their guide many times, and seemed to always lead the way to bountiful harvests.



Eva and her highbush blueberries

Unfortunately, their picking years were cut short by the continuous growth of the forest. To preserve the memory and taste, Eva has some of her own wild highbush blueberries in her back yard. Finding them growing near her home, she transplanted them so that she could continue to enjoy the wild berries. Her homemade blueberry muffins are a testament to just how delicious a wild blueberry can be.