Summer 2024 ***A close-up view of our Chapter's vibrancy and dedication***

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AMC Worcester Chapter
amcworcester.org
Appalachian Mountain Club

Summer 2024
Letter from the Editor

Summer is finally here and this is an exciting time for our Chapter. Save the date for our annual meeting on November 9th. It's a great way to get involved, learn about our Chapter, and make new friends.

This newsletter is full of interesting articles, including a book review and a recap on the Chapter's Leadership Training weekend. You'll also read an article that really resonated with me: *Responsible Fishing,* written by John Mangano. I'd like to share my story, a walk in the woods alongside a pond, that went from nice to terrifying when fishing paraphernalia was left carelessly behind.

A few weeks ago, on a walk in Harold Parker State Forest, my cock-a-poo Ollie walked through fishing line with a 6-barbed hook fishing lure attached. Fortunately, the hook didn't penetrate his skin, but it was tangled in his curly fur. He needed my help, and in trying to get him free, another of the barbed hooks went through my thumb. Ollie and I were physically attached! EMTs came to help and a trip to the ER was needed for me. All this because someone left fishing line and a lure carelessly behind.

My hope is that in reading this newsletter, you'll be inspired to join us. We need you to help us protect the great outdoors.

Nancy, Communications Co-Chair

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Under the Red Felt Crusher

Fishing on Lake Champlain

Happy Summer, fellow Chapter members!! It certainly has felt a bit like summer these past few weeks. Various shades of green are on full display in the woods, with splashes of color from wild flowers peeking up through the ground cover. I

don't know about you, but I love this time of year… It gives me a sense of renewal, and anticipation toward all of the fun activities and trips planned on the calendar. The season is short, or so it always seems.

Each year I say to myself that I am not going to fill every weekend so that I can have some wiggle room in case some unexpectedly exciting opportunity presents itself. But, as usual, they are just about all filled. Bad thing? No! It just means that I am an active seeker of fun, whether it be indoors or outdoors, on land or on water… and always with family and friends.

Many (if not most?) of our Worcester Chapter members likely are identifying with this as they read on. I have been, and continue to be impressed with their enthusiasm and dedication shown toward planning trips and gatherings, and well… just getting out there! Social media posts, inviting emails, and in-person camaraderie are just some of the ways that we support one another and make our Chapter great.

TrailsFest in early June was a huge success thanks to MANY planners and supporters of this important event. It was not without challenges in the early stages, but those challenges were quickly overcome because the members involved recognized the need to step forward and did so without hesitation. It would be difficult to name everyone who contributed… but to all of those individuals, I say "thank you."

I am looking forward to seeing and hearing about upcoming Chapter trips and events. As always, keep safety in mind as you plan your adventures and travel to your destinations. Be well, and have fun!

Chris Pignatiello-Chatson, Chapter Chair

Photo from last years meeting
submitted by Wendy Dziemian

ANNUAL MEETING
Save The Date
Saturday, November 9, 2024

Save the date for the annual meeting from 5pm - 10pm at The Manor in West Boylston. There will be a buffet dinner, guest speakers, live music, and dancing. Stay tuned for more details to be shared soon.

Be OutDoors with Appalachian Mountain Club - Worcester Chapter

Story and photos submitted by Carol Warren

Some of the coolest friends and folks I know is because of this organization. I have learned and done so many totally awesome things because of AMC, and now am part of the leadership team and helping others to become leaders. This weekend was the chapters annual AMC Leadership Training weekend. The learning, the role-playing, the expertise that was shared by some of the clubs most Expert leaders is nothing short of phenomenal. So proud to be part of this team organized by Donald Davies with master Leaders, Christine Fogarty, Walt Lazarz, Joe Massery, Pat Lambert and Erik.

I was with Christine Judycki-Crepeault in the kitchen supporting, and feeding these folks the entire weekend. Meeting them and listening to where they came from and what their plans are and thinking about all the people that they will in turn influence and impact along their own journeys is such a cool thing. I keep saying the training that our Leaders get is what puts AMC on a pedestal. It was truly an honor to have a part in all of our new leaders journeys.

Looking forward to spending more time with them all. I do think that hot fudge and butterscotch Sundaes will now have a forever spot on future training food menus (and of course the multitude of home made cookies kept everyone very happy)…. Maybe those tidbits of info should be added to the Trail Talk when recruiting new potential leaders! Be OutDoors with Appalachian Mountain Club - Worcester Chapter. We are doing amazing things.

Conservation Highlight: Responsible Fishing

Written by: John Mangano

The walk down to the river is short and familiar, the grass trodden down just well enough to form a sort of informal path to a favorite set of riffles, tailing out into a slow moving run and wrapping around a large boulder. It's mid June and in the pale light of the early dawn you can see blue winged olive mayflies swarm the surface of the stream. In the slack water behind the large slab of granite worn smooth by time, a round, green nose can be seen breaking the water's surface, mayflies disappearing into the depths of the brook trout's jaw. You produce a size 18 dry fly from your pack and take one final glance at the water to see now several more boils on the surface before securing the small fly to the end of your tippet and beginning to work out line to make your first cast.

As anglers, this story is nothing if not familiar. It's what prevents us from getting cabin fever waiting out the relentless New England winter and keeps us setting our alarm clocks for 4 a.m. throughout the rest of the seasons. However, when thinking of the joys that our favorite waters provide us, we don't always think of what we can do to return the favor. Anglers of all kinds know the waters they fish better than most other people, and as a result many of us see the results of poor stewardship of our resource in things as minor as the odd 3-inch piece of discarded monofilament to things as egregious as discarded beer cans, bait containers and food wrappers thrown into the water with zero regard for their impacts on the watershed. While the intention is different, the outcome we see is often the same; streams, ponds, canals and every body of water in between becoming "not as nice as I remember it being a number of years ago," right before our eyes. With the popularity of fishing and the number of anglers increasing every year, it becomes our responsibility to conserve the resource we come back to again and again so that it may remain a place of solace, happiness and good memories for years and generations to come.

One of the best ways to keep the banks of our local fishing holes clean is also one of the simplest: managing scrap pieces of line. Whether you're casting large plugs to striped bass on 60 lb. braided line or presenting bushy dry flies to wild brown trout on 7x tippet, the process to affix your chosen lure produces waste scraps of fishing line. These scraps can be easy to misplace or even just snip off into the river and allow to flow out of sight and out of mind, but they present a real problem in the form of a choking hazard to small animals as well as adding to the countless tons of microplastics frequently discarded into various bodies of water. Thankfully, many land management organizations, as well as non-profits like Trout Unlimited, have seen this problem and presented a solution in the form of scrap fishing line recycling containers located at access points to many streams and ponds. Simply hold on to the tag end of your line when cutting, place the scrap line in a pocket, an empty coffee cup or one of the many personal microtrash containers available at your local tackle shop, then discard the scrap line into the recycling container on your way back out to your vehicle at the end of your day. The scrap pieces of line are often recycled, melted down and used to make things like tackle boxes, bobbers and other new pieces of fishing gear!

Some rivers and ponds have special regulations for what type of fishing is allowed and which species you're permitted to target, following these rules and regulations

when applicable is another great way to help ensure that the resource remains healthy. Often, special regulations are applied to specific bodies of water in an effort to help protect certain species of fish if the population is fragile or heavily pressured. Some of the signs you may see at access points may say “catch-and-release only”, “fly-fishing only” or “artificial lure only.” Following these rules doesn’t just protect the ecosystem, it also protects you, as the fines that can be incurred if you’re caught breaking those rules can easily ruin a nice day on the water.

Most people who start fishing as children remember going to the bait-and-tackle shop early on a Saturday morning, getting a bucket of shiners or a cup of nightcrawlers and heading to their local pond, watching for the bobber on the end of their line to move and at the end of the day, dumping the remaining bait back into the water because “the fish will just eat them.” Some people continue to dump leftover baitfish and worms into their later years without much of a worry and often there may be no harm done. However, lakes, ponds, rivers and other bodies of water can be incredibly fragile, and more often than not, baitfish and worms sold at tackle stores are not the same as the organisms found to be naturally occurring in the body of water you’re fishing. Being that a body of water has an established ecosystem hierarchy, introducing a new species in excess can be enough to throw that hierarchy out of alignment, resulting in issues as minor as fish only growing to smaller proportions to entire species of fish being lost. Nobody wants to wonder if their behavior has anything to do with the lack of largemouth bass over a pound in the pond near their house.

When it comes right down to it, practicing good leave no trace principles while on the water, just as you would on a hiking trail, can help stop a lot of undo harm to our local fisheries and beyond. A good rule to follow to keep ourselves in check while standing in a river waving a rod is to stop and think about how we would feel if we saw someone else doing what we’re doing. If you looked downstream to see an angler disposing a piece of discarded monofilament into a small waste container clipped to his pack rather than just clipping it off into the current would you think “what a responsible steward of the land”? Or if you saw an angler throw an empty PBR can from their kayak into a cluster of cattails on their way back to the boat ramp instead of disposing of it into a trash can when back at shore would you think… Well, I think we all know what we would think. Being the type of angler

we hope to see on the water is a great place to start, and knowing you're doing the right thing for the place you enjoy recreating is a great reward in and of itself. I can't tell you that the fish care whether you practice good conservation ethics or not, but I like to think that every time I set the hook and feel the head shake of a big fish it's because people before me cared enough to take care of the water that I'm standing in, and I for one would love to be the reason someone else gets to catch fish there long after I'm gone. ~

Examples of fishing line recycling stations

AMC Worcester Celebrates National Trails Day with TrailsFest

Photos and story submitted by Carol Warren

TrailsFest 2024 is a wrap! TrailsFest, which has been held annually since 2018, coincides with National Trails Day and is co-hosted by a group of organizations including the Appalachian Mountain Club, Greater Worcester Land Trust, Wachusett Mountain Ski Area, North County Land Trust, MA Department of Conservation & Recreation, and the Mid State Trail Committee. The goals of all organizations involved are to celebrate trails in all forms; educate, protect and just simply BE OUTDOORS.

This years event was held on June 1, National Trails Day, at Wachusett Mountain. Morning events included guided and educational activities: biking, hiking, paddling, map and compass, forest bathing, families, trail work and more. Afternoon

activities continued the celebration of trails including a partners tent (with over 40 local outdoor groups) musical acts, family activities, food trucks and a sky ride! Huge thanks to all involved for making this our biggest TrailsFest ever! National Trails day is held the first Saturday in June. Be sure to make your calendars for 2025!

We are still gathering all pictures and videos from this event. Check the website for a compilation of the amazing event very soon. ~

Solar Eclipse Party of the Century

By Zenya Molnar, Worcester Chapter 20s & 30s Chair

One of our groups admiring the eclipse from the trailhead of Table Rock. Photo courtesy of Kristen Biatowas.

Over 30 people in their 20s and 30s gathered for an interchapter solar eclipse party in Crawford Notch in New Hampshire from April 7-9 at the AMC Highland Center. While the group stayed at the Highland Center and Shapleigh Bunkhouse, we offered excursions to places in the path of totality with one group spending the day in Lancaster and another going to Table Rock near Colebrook, New Hampshire. Young members from NH, Western MA, Maine, Narragansett, and Worcester Chapters attended this long weekend, which provided an opportunity for leaders and participants alike to meet other young folks passionate about the outdoors and conservation, make new friends, and share future trip ideas.

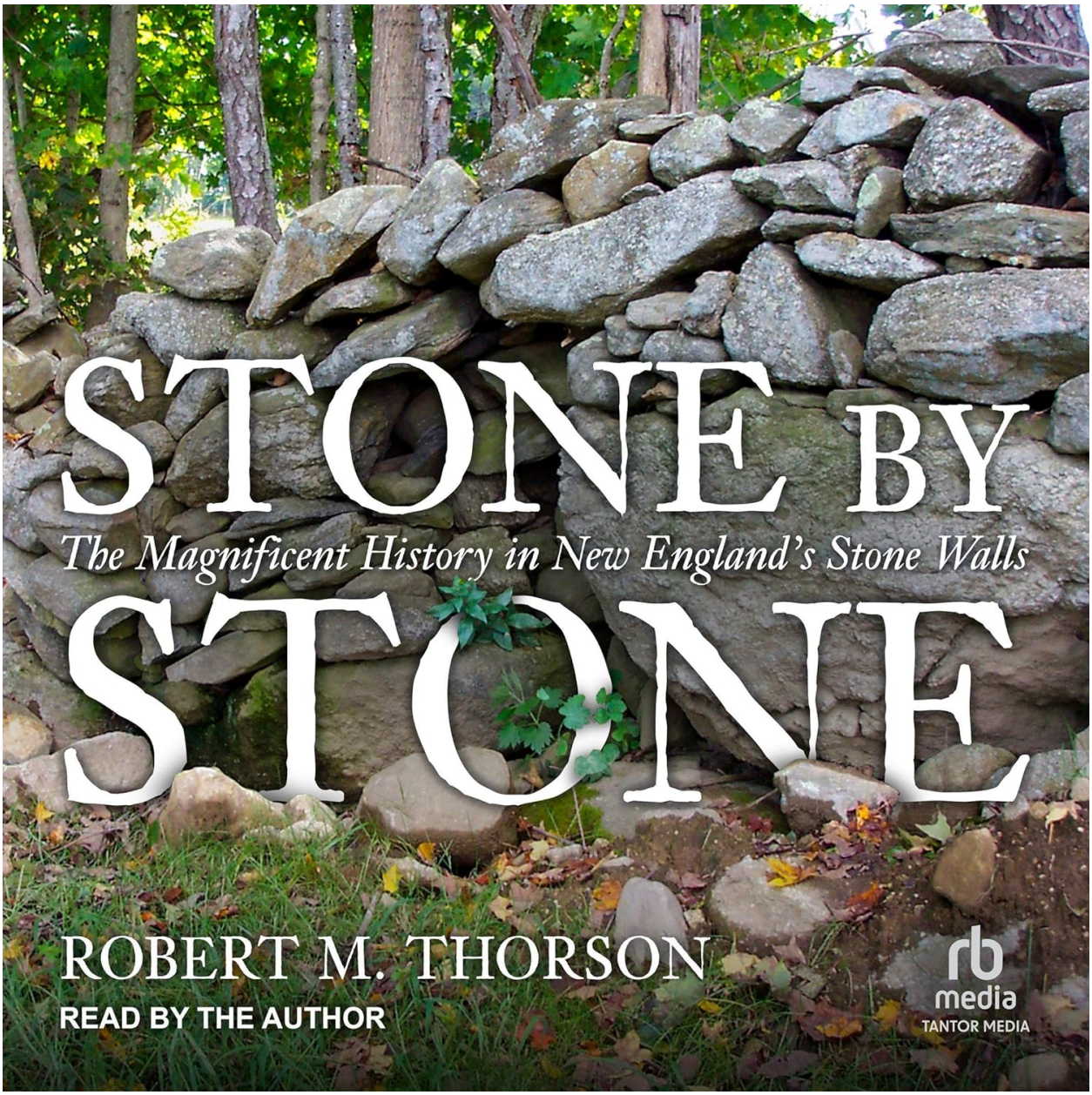
Lancaster was buzzing with people who wanted to experience the total solar eclipse, and our group found a prime spot in a field next to the fast-running Israel river with wide views of the sky. As we witnessed the slow but constant process of the moon eclipsing the sun, people exclaimed their excitement at the darkening at-

mosphere, wavy shadows, and cooling temperatures. Although the total eclipse in Lancaster lasted less than one minute, the experience was extraordinary, and it was enhanced by the fact that we could share it with like-minded outdoorsy folks that convened thanks to AMC.

The group in Lancaster, NH as the moon was eclipsing the sun. Photo courtesy of Jake Scoggin.

The Highland Center offered solar eclipse themed dinners and programs, including an inflatable planetarium where you could learn about the constellations and planets visible at certain times of year.

Although it was officially spring, winter was holding strong in Crawford Notch and in the northern part of the state with a few feet of snow still on the ground in the Notch and deep in the mountains. We hiked in snow to the red bench via the Ammonoosuc Lake trail where we got stunning views of a clear Mount Washington and the Presidential Range. Similarly, on the last day of the trip, we summitted Mount Willard and were rewarded with beautiful views into the Crawford Notch amidst a snow-capped summit. ~



Book Review by David Elliott

History in Stone

Colonial New England farmers contended with little stone, woodland walls date from the nineteenth century, and besides, they're trash heaps. But cherish them. And by the way they could as well have ended up in Wales, Norway or Morocco had the Connecticut River Valley been shifted. Which is to say Robert Thorson, local history buff, PhD geologist, UConn Professor and author of "Stone by Stone: The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls" isn't afraid to knock away a popular misconception - or three - spinning wilder tales in the process.

But he's considerate about it, with explanations that hold together like fine masonry. New England's farmers remain heroes, opportunists and heroines too. My life long fascination with walls, cellar holes & stone faced dams remain, simultaneously more ordinary and vivid. Which I partly credit to reading the introduction and last chapter several times to bind the big picture tighter.

It seems Thorson is a popular local figure, rather the Old Man of New England physical history. I recently listened to an Audubon Society scientist's lecture on walls and despite having a stack of books he kept referring to this one. It reads like a deceptively informative walking tour packed with relevant geologic & historical facts, an entire course worth. Bring a tape recorder. Oh wait, you don't have to. Right now it's a free listen for Audible.com subscribers.

(No, I'm not peddling Audible, with its pros and cons, but I personally love cranking through a book or two a week listening on my phone during mindless chores. Check out the Libby service at your nearest or major library to give listening a try).

But back to our trans-oceanic geology. What's now the eastern United States collided with the African and European tectonic plates to form the supercontinent Pangaea half a billion years ago. By way of analogy, think of the Pacific and North American plates raising California's mountains and triggering the explosion of

Mount Saint Helens. Home was a hopping place, in which planetary crust plunged as deep as 20 miles and mountains rose into what geologists dubbed the Caledonian Range which rivaled the Himalayas in height.

The Caledonian Range consisted of what later became the Appalachians, Norway, the British Isles and Atlas Mountains of Morocco after it split up again. That split was accomplished by rift valleys, long cracks in the earth's crust that spread and fill volcanically, generating new crust, in this case slowly growing the floor of the Atlantic ocean.

All that churning of crustal material created the bedrock beneath us. Those wavy bands of color shot through with veins of quartz we find on bald White Mountain peaks formed when they were heated to putty 10 miles inside the earth's furnace. A stone's degree of metamorphosis, say from sedimentary deposits to hard Appalachian mountaintop is essentially a function of how deep it was buried for processing. Less deep, bands of sedimentary rock tilted at crazy angles were squeezed under mere miles of surface with layers of mud, sand and primitive plants and animals turning to stone (lithification). Logically enough, for Roxbury Pudding Stone the raw material included assorted sizes of stream bank rubble. While the Connecticut River's Brownstone cliffs started with sand deposits, and the reason they appear only on the west bank, is that the rift valley that created the drainage in the first place gradually expanded to push the east bank an ocean away.

Another curiosity is how this stirring resulted in distinctively shaped stones right in our backyards. As a hot, subterranean stone mass called a "batholith" rose toward the surface the drop in pressure and temperature it experienced caused it to develop cracks that intersected into distinctly rectangular, trapezoidal or elongated shapes depending on material and conditions. Reaching the surface the mass broke apart into loose stones of these shapes. Which is why at home, to my astonishment, I have found remarkably rectangular and parallelogram shaped stones, as if made to

order for wall building! A pleasant accident to a person fond of the truism, “The best kind of stone for building walls is the free kind.”

The final mechanism shaping the landscape on a geological time scale was the most recent ice age. It created Cape Code, Long Island, and glacial potholes such as Walden Pond and Long Island Sound. Seriously, the Sound was a freshwater lake 10,000 years ago. But of particular interest is the “glacial till” that covers a landscape at the retreat of a glacier, a densely packed bed of sand, clay and embedded stones colloquially referred to as “hardpan.” It would have been on this hardpan that biological processes reestablished themselves, over 10 millenia producing a thick layer of fertile topsoil.

This richly organic, relatively stone free top layer is what colonial farmers found on arrival, as Thorson cites from contemporary accounts. Additionally he interprets the underlying hardpan as advantageous to farming because it blocks the percolation of rainwater, keeping it relatively near the surface and accessible to plant roots. (As an aside I’ll note as a gardener what “hardpan” has always meant to me was days spent breaking it up with a pick so that plants had loose soil to grow in, but Thorson presents a different scenario). Third, Thorson asserts that settlers preferred upland, sloping fields for their good drainage. To summarize, New England farmland was initially rich, without many rocks to interfere with plowing, had a consistent moisture content even in dry weather, and on uplands were not subject to becoming waterlogged.

With the above scene set, the next and all subsequent developments relating to stone walls that Thorson cites occur on a human time scale. With the end of the French and Indian Wars in the mid 18th century, i.e. the military subjugation of the native peoples, large-scale migration commenced from fortified but crowded coastal settlements to the wilderness interior. Far vaster areas of wilderness would now come under European style cultivation.

The first step for these pioneers was marking homestead boundaries with blazes chopped in trees with an ax. A house was built and trees were removed as best as could be managed. Crops were planted. Yields in virgin soil were bountiful, but declined in subsequent years. But with so much land available, established European practices for maintaining soil fertility were ignored. Instead of systematic crop rotation and letting fields "rest" every third year, new fields were cleared and the old left for pasture, with ruined pasture left to growing firewood.

But generations of such extractive practices had consequences beyond exhausting the soil's fertility, they yielded a harvest of stones. No wonder farmers blamed the Devil! Though Thorson sees a dual mechanisms, erosion and compaction lowered the soil surface while the deeper frostline inherent to cleared versus forested land heaved the underlying stone gradually upward. And when they met, the age of significant wall building had begun.

Even so, Thorson portrays removing stones as only an adjustment to an always strenuous routine. While hardly a trivial chore, it ranked far below that of cutting and splitting 30-40 cord of firewood with hand tools.

We have reached the heart of Thorson's conjoined arguments. First, stone was late to appear in New England fields, being a byproduct of lost soil fertility, so walls likewise. Second, walls served as "linear landfills." Building them commanded about as much of a farmer's thought process as taking out the garbage, really heavy agricultural garbage. The rocks were in the way.

Granted, they make fairly permanent boundary markers. I've got a property line marked by one. Nobody, including Thorson, is going to dispute that. But for instance 99% would never pass muster with the fence police. Seriously, poor fences got you fined. They had to be maintained "Sheep high, bull strong, and pig tight" or your livestock could end up in somebody else's crop. And too high for a sheep to climb means at least up to your chest, not your knees or hips like virtually every

farmer's wall. The ergonomics of building a chest high "fence" out of stone re-quires staging, and besides your starving in the course of construction, that would get you laughed out of the grange.

Though clearly farmers built some nice walls or at least wall sections in prominent places. We've all seen beautiful stone work associated with a house. It's not like farmers were immune to aesthetics, just practical. They let their muscles do the calculation. For instance for field shape and size i.e. distance rocks had to be hauled and wall height i.e. lifting required. Two acre rectangle, hip high, done.

Meantime, the larger political, economic and technological environment around these farmers was evolving. They had changed from colonists to Americans, citi-zens of an optimistic new nation and experiment in Democracy. Roads went from practically non-existent paths among farms to at least planned, even if still awful. Farmers switched from subsistence to commercial crops, at least to the extent they could bring them to market. British blockades during the war of 1812 spurred do-mestic manufacturing which led to horse drawn farming tools evolving and pur-chased cloth replacing homespun. In 1811 there began the merino sheep boom that would last for 40 years, before the market utterly collapsed. Mind you though, that was 40 years grazing an animal that pulled up pasture by the roots.

Meanwhile, coming over the horizon was the Civil War which called up 12% of the population for military service, a few percent more than WWII. The war plucked boys from remote farms and gave them a job and a world tour. They rode trains, saw cities, lived a different life. It was the second half of the nineteenth century, a time of rapid modernization and industrialization. Upon demobilization, via rail-road and steamboat, they could reach cheap, level, wide open agricultural land to the west more easily than return to their parent's tired hill farms too far from new urban markets via still bad roads. Resulting in widespread farm abandonment.

It took modern transportation to bring people back to those areas. People had to forget the drudgery and isolation. AsThorson says, nostalgia is about remove, what makes an antique notable: the haziness of its purpose. That was another lifetime, literally. Which is to say a primary requirement for enjoying walls - from my office chair, tapping away at a keyboard - is because we don't have to build them.

That they're old landfills doesn't doesn't mean we can't enjoy them, though it's interesting to ask why we do. It's like, a farmer was just lining up his trash but what we see is, a lichen garden? Well, who doesn't like lichen, no matter what it's growing ons?

Yeah, there's part of me that's offended by this characterization of stone walls as extruded trash heaps because of all the beautiful stone work I've seen. In a state of nostalgia my idea of mortar is gravity plus geometry. The bridge that makes my knees weak is a poison ivy covered stone arch to the side of route 85 in Hopkinton. In Clinton Connecticut there are the most beautiful animal pens, their stones fitted such as would make an Inca proud. Restoring a hand dug well I climbed up and down its indestructibly interlocked dry stone walls a hundred times, marveling at its builders skill. What masterpieces.

But then studying the stone wall pictured on the cover of this book (not the audio), I note it is built one rounded barely balanced stone thick and three high, and I have to concede it is far more representative than any of my cherished mental images. Chances are like me you've seen enough woodland walls illustrating this deeper truth, that these indifferent heaps were piled to get rid of the stuff. Not that that forbids us from admiring, or rebuilding them into something more - as the farmers sometimes did themselves. Hmm, I do collect broken things generally….

As you've surely gathered this book is far from a howto on wall building but a study of its context. Still, the author briefly discusses some mechanics of wall building. For instance he describes beautifully how to thread stones to tie a wall

together: stretching and overlapping them lengthwise, stretching front to back, and by providing a gradual taper in the vertical.

I've personally spent entire years building several large walls and many smaller. It's a spatial exercise, an adventure in simple machines - ramps and pry bars; a body mechanics test - amazing how much weight you can rest on your thighs; Even neurology, as below.

Thorson notes the observation by William Least Heat Moon in "Blue Highways" how when you're deep into building a wall the process becomes unconscious, the stones telling you which ought to go where. Moon describes this in terms of the native view that rocks are alive, and while I don't put it that way myself, it's as good a description as any of what I've experienced.

I describe it in terms of muscle memory, what lets dancer partners move automatically with the music, or a baseball player hit a fastball. Likewise, building a fine stone wall becomes unconscious after you've been fitting stones long enough. Measuring openings and candidate stones by eye trains the unconscious mind such that it will take over if you let it. The right stone can just kind of twinkle, "Yeah me, I'm a good fit." Without pausing I find it fits remarkably well. It gets comical. This is definitely going to sound crazy but I try to make it fail by picking up the first rock my eye falls on and bingo, it's good enough. I swear fading light can actually move things quicker. I've fitted stones well into the night. See why I don't dismiss the animist interpretation? ~