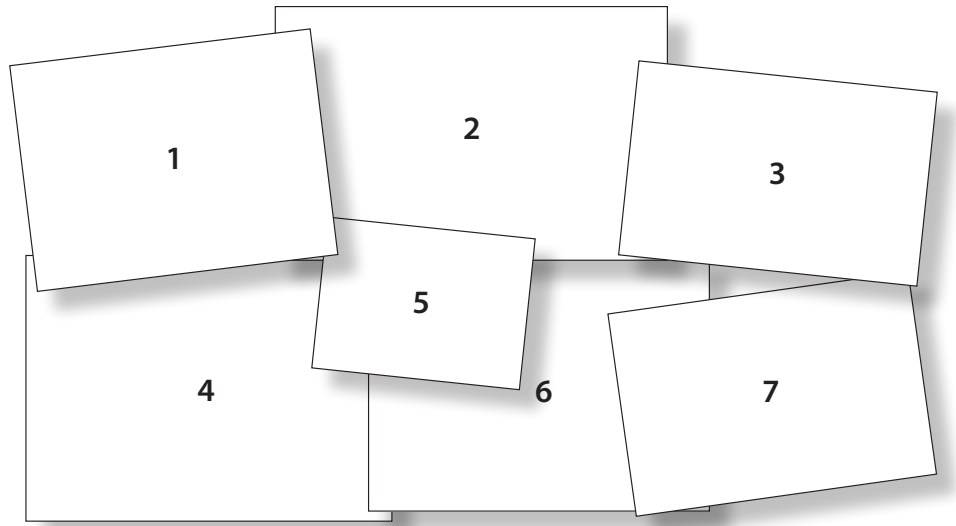




THE TARN: COMMUNITY RECOLLECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS



SPECIAL ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT
ACADIA NATIONAL PARK



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1. The Meadow in The Gorge, 1909 (The Strout Family Collection-Ahlblad's Frame Shop) (Figure 4)
2. The Tarn looking southeast--dam and stepping stones, about 1916 (Courtesy NPS Archives, Acadia National Park) (Figure 5)
3. The Tarn in 1934 (The Strout Family Collection-Ahlblad's Frame Shop) (Figure 10)

Bottom, left to right:

4. Ice boating at the Tarn, about 1987 (Courtesy of Bar Harbor Historical Society; Photo by Tammy Packie, *Bar Harbor Times*) (Figure 23)
5. Spring Fishing Derby at the Tarn, between 1984 and 1989 (Courtesy Bar Harbor Historical Society) (Figure 19)
6. The Tarn in The Gorge. 1939 photograph by M. Herbert Wheeler (The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop) (Figure 12)
7. The Tarn in 2010 (Figure 2)

**THE TARN:
COMMUNITY RECOLLECTIONS
AND REFLECTIONS**

by

Shirley J. Fiske, Ph.D.

Prepared under cooperative agreement with
University of Maryland College Park

**Northeast Region Ethnography Program
National Park Service
Boston, MA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tarn is a small, shallow pond and emergent wetland in Acadia National Park located between Bar Harbor and Otter Creek along State Highway 3 in an area known as The Gorge. Formerly known as Little Meadow, the stream flowing through the meadow was modified nearly 100 years ago by the construction of an impoundment at its outflow. As a result of the dam, the pond known as the Tarn was formed. Through the twentieth century, the Tarn's condition fluctuated from the original meadow to a more open pond with vegetation around the perimeter. In the last twenty-five years, since the 1990s, the Tarn became noticeably shallower and the area of open water diminished due to extensive growth of aquatic vegetation. At the current time the Tarn is considered an emergent wetland by the park (Calhoun, et al. 1994).

The Tarn is a place valued by local residents, having important qualities they appreciated and experienced for most of the twentieth century—that is, a pond with mostly open water. It has been a destination for recreational activities by Otter Creek and Bar Harbor families for three to four generations. In addition to recreation, the individuals interviewed value its aesthetic qualities for reflecting the surrounding mountain scenery and profile of Dorr Mountain in the water. A citizens group, Save the Tarn, has been organized to advocate for preservation of these qualities of a place that they fear will be lost as changing ecological conditions affect the water body.

The objectives of this study are to record historical interviews of interested and knowledgeable residents of Otter Creek and Bar Harbor who have recollections and memories of the uses and meanings of the Tarn. Members of these two communities were chosen because they are in closest geographic proximity to the Tarn and have strong associations with the Tarn as compared to other Island communities.

Primary data are from 27 interviews with community members, of which 18 are in-depth, formal interviews. Interviewees were asked to relate personal experiences, family history, and remembered and current associations with the Tarn, including the meanings the Tarn holds for them. The interviews were transcribed, analyzed for themes, and supplemented with documentary archival and photographic information from historical organizations and individual sources.

In order to develop in-depth understandings about the Tarn, the study sought out individuals who have historical and continuing associations and interests with the Tarn. Information was acquired through semi-structured interviews focused on documenting the experiences and views of those individuals for whom the Tarn was, and continues to be, significant in their lives. The study was not designed to solicit broad

views of the public about the Tarn, but to provide voices and views of individuals who are knowledgeable about the Tarn and who care deeply about it.

The report begins with an introduction and background chapter that provides a chronological overview of the Tarn and the human activities that have influenced it and contributed to its evolution. The scope of the study, its objectives and methodology are detailed in this chapter. Chapter 2 describes the historical and contemporary associations and uses of the Tarn that emerged from interviews. These include seasonal activities such as fishing, skating, and ice boating, and the attributes of the Tarn that made it a special place. The Tarn was a favorite place for winter recreation, easily accessible to both Otter Creek and Bar Harbor residents. During spring and summer, the Tarn was remembered as a popular fishing destination. The State of Maine stocked the Tarn, along with other inland lakes, from 1984-1999, and the MDI Rod and Gun Club co-sponsored fishing derbies and cook-outs at the Tarn with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

The third chapter describes the multiple components of significance and meaning of the Tarn to interviewees. The Tarn is valued for its visual appearance of open water with reflective capabilities against the boulders and talus of Dorr Mountain. Open water is an essential component of the Tarn landscape, according to most interviewees. Through the Tarn, most members of the interview group expressed a connection with the park's founders, reflecting in their minds the founders' intent to create the Tarn as part of a landscape of beauty. Interviewees also noted that the Tarn is an accessible and useable local resource – a place where you could fish or wade in the water, compared to other bodies of water on the east side of MDI.

Chapter 4 describes the observations and beliefs that interviewees hold about the ecology and the changes in the Tarn. Changes in water level, increased shallowness and rapid growth of reeds and other aquatic vegetation, and the inability to use the Tarn for familiar uses and traditional family activities are of particular concern. They can no longer count on the scenic vista and iconic views they once enjoyed and the aesthetic tranquility of the Tarn has disappeared. The interviewees are concerned that they have lost or will lose a place that has been integral to their lives for multiple generations. Observations on the changing ecology and the multiple causes of the changes, along with ideas about addressing them, are provided by the interviewees. The report concludes with a final chapter that summarizes the findings and makes recommendations for further research.

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All individuals who were interviewed—in formal interviews, telephone interviews, and conversations—are recognized in Appendix A. Each conversation enriched my knowledge of the Tarn and its social and historical context, from the briefest of phone calls to longer interactions that covered lifetimes and social spaces. These conversations were windows into peoples' personal lives and their histories on Mt. Desert Island, and are of great value.

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land-line telephone, when cell phone connections became problematic for my phone on MDI. Both she and Cathy James took extra time to help identify correct phone numbers so that I could contact potential interviewees. Pauline Blanchard was enormously helpful in locating and providing access to relevant Advisory Commission and staff meeting notes and provided invaluable logistic assistance on a number of other occasions. Gary Stellpflug, Acadia trails foreman, helped me enlarge and edit the chronology of events that affected the Tarn, and verify dates and activities—from his remarkable institutional memory and from ANP project files. I would like to acknowledge the helpful interchanges with others on the staff, including Judy Hazen Connery, John Kelly, Paul Crowley, and Bret Achorn, among others.

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Shirley J. Fiske
January 11, 2012



Figure 1: Map of eastern Mt. Desert Island, showing location of the Tarn and nearby communities Bar Harbor and Otter Creek. (Courtesy Karen B. Anderson, Acadia National Park)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background

A snapshot of the Tarn in 2010 shows a marshy pond¹ in a glaciated valley between two granite promontories, Dorr Mountain and Champlain Mountain, in Acadia National Park (Figure 2). The pond is filled with reeds and aquatic vegetation, providing only a small glimpse of open water. The water comes from Cromwell Harbor Brook, a stream entering from the south, augmented by springs along the base of Dorr Mountain.



Figure 2. The Tarn in 2010.

¹ The Maine Department of Environmental Protection defines a pond as a body of water with a small surface area and shallow depth; whereas lakes are large and deep. In a pond, sunlight penetrates to the bottom of all areas, in contrast to lakes where no sunlight penetrates to the bottom of the deepest areas. The website points out that no definitive line exists, technically, between lakes and ponds, because some ponds become lakes in mid-summer when algal populations limit light penetration to the bottom; and some lakes with very small surface area are also very deep. One legal distinction is that Great Ponds are defined by state statute to be greater than ten acres; if it is an impounded body of water it must be greater than thirty acres and more than ten acres before it was dammed. <http://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/lkepond.html>

The stream is impounded at the north by a small dam with stepping stones across its outlet, through which the stream continues to Cromwell Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean. State Highway 3 runs along the east side of the Tarn between Bar Harbor and Otter Creek, bordering the edge of the water closely, such that it is visible and easily accessible to local families and visitors. There is a parking area at the north end of the Tarn and a path leading down to the picturesque granite stepping stones. The stepping stones cross the outlet to a network of historic and scenic paths that ascend Dorr Mountain, lead north to the Sieur de Monts (SDM) area, and hug the shore of the pond among the boulders along its western edge, continuing south past the end of the basin.

Historical Context

An historic perspective on the Tarn is helpful to place the Tarn and surrounding landscape in the framework of cultural, social and economic changes that have affected and modified the area continuously since the beginning of the twentieth century. The purpose of this section in the chapter is to provide a framework for understanding the anthropogenic as well as natural events that shaped and provided meaning to the Tarn over the past 100 years.

For this chronological overview accompanied by photographs and maps, the researcher relied heavily on several reports of the National Park Service (NPS) Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation (OCLP) with regard to the development of the SDM area (OCLP 2009) and the historic hiking trail systems (Brown 2006). In addition, *Trails of History* provided insightful and detailed accounts of the planning and development of the area's trails and paths (St. Germain and Saunders 1993). The overview is augmented by recollections and memories from interviewees, interpretations of historic photographs and events by interviewees, and information and insights from park staff.

Probably as early as the 1500s, the area from Bar Harbor to Otter Creek through The Gorge, including Great Meadow to the north and Little Meadow to the south, was the location of Wabanaki carry trails for hunting, fishing, and trading (Prins and McBride 2007:574; also Brown 2006:12-13). In 1761 the first European settlers arrived on Mt. Desert Island—Abraham Somes of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and James Richardson, also of Gloucester, with their wives and children. Mt. Desert Township was incorporated twenty years later in 1789. By 1836-1866, walking paths and trails were documented through The Gorge along the east side of Little Meadow (which eventually became the Tarn), to Otter Creek and Otter Cliffs (Brown 2006:24). By the 1870s, fishing was the major occupation in Otter Creek, with 25 families catching cod, lobster and other species. Fish houses on both sides of Otter Cove have been documented since the 1860s in an ethnohistorical study of traditional fish houses in Otter Creek (Smythe 2008).

By the 1890s, with the ascendancy of Mt. Desert Island (MDI) and Bar Harbor as travel destinations, the southern wetland in The Gorge became known as Little Meadow and the path from Bar Harbor to Otter Creek became Otter Creek Road (Figure 3) (OCLP 2009:99). The “onset of the rusticators” affected the livelihoods of residents of Otter Creek, as they began supplying milk, butter, eggs, poultry and fish to the hotels and cottages of Bar Harbor, making daily trips to deliver these staples (Smythe 2008:37-38).

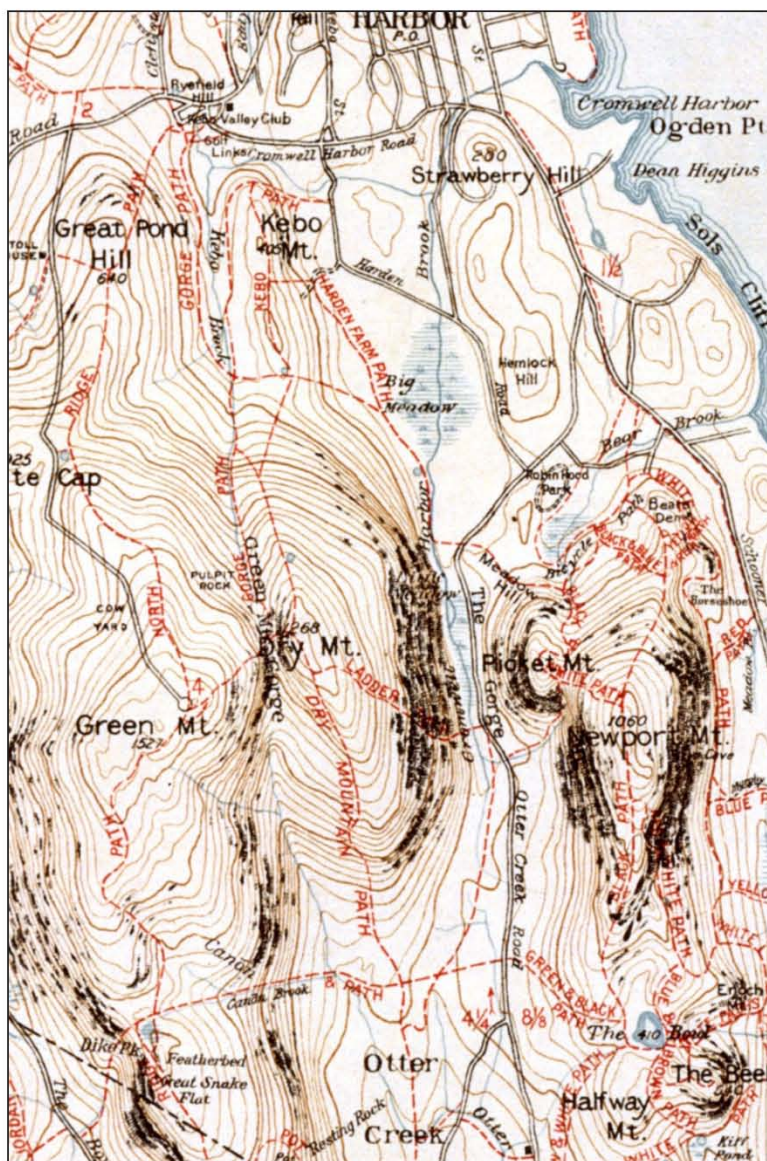


Figure 3. Enlargement from 1903 Path Map by Bates, Rand, and Jaques. Big Meadow (Great Meadow) to the north, The Gorge, and Little Meadow to the south, with Dry (Dorr) Mountain and Newport (Champlain) Mountain flanking Little Meadow. Otter Creek Road passes between the two mountains. (W.O. Sawtelle Collections and Research Center, Acadia NP)

1904 marked the dedication of the Congregational Meeting House in Otter Creek, organized by the pastor, members of the church, and the Aid Society of Otter Creek (Mt. Desert Island Register, 1909-1910: 25). At the time, Little Meadow was used for several commercial purposes—timber was cut on Dry (Dorr) Mountain and ox-carted across Little Meadow during the winter, and meadow grasses were cut for cattle and oxen (Walls interview). Otter Creek was growing as a village and livelihoods had diversified beyond fishing when the photograph below was taken in 1909.

The photograph appeared in a large-format portfolio titled “A Souvenir of Bar Harbor and Mount Desert Island,” and shows Little Meadow in a glacial valley with a stream meandering through it, and a small broadening of the stream on the western side of the meadow (Figure 4).

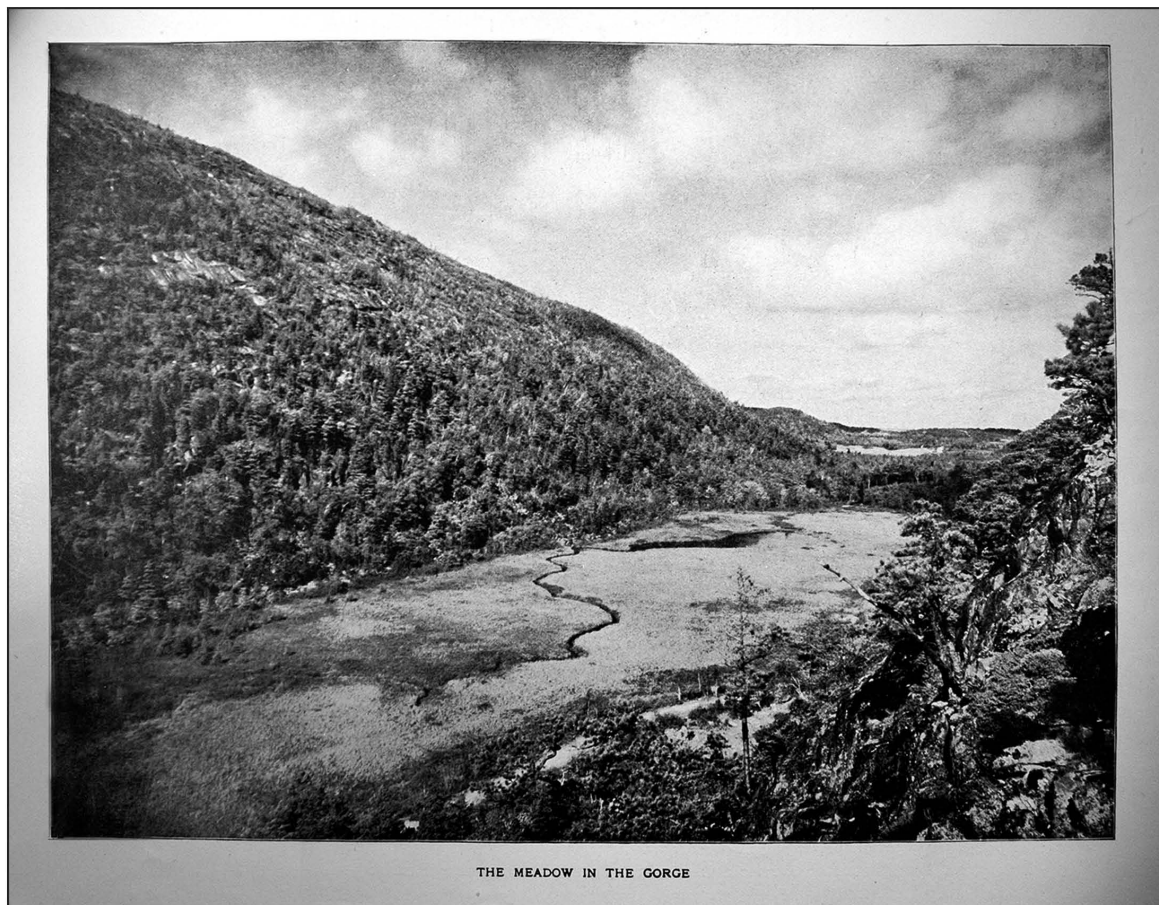


Figure 4. The Meadow in The Gorge. 1909.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

The stream running through Little Meadow was modified at some point, probably about 1913, by the construction of a small dam at its outlet. Stepping stones of cut granite

were placed across the top of the impoundment about that time, most likely by the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association (BHVIA), connecting hiking trails along the Great Meadow and the SDM area to Otter Creek Road and other trails (OCLP 2009:52). These stepping stones at the outflow of the stream were to become iconic of the Tarn, appearing in many photographs and representations of the Tarn over the twentieth century.

The date of the impoundment was not recorded, nor was there a record of who built the impoundment. The OCLP found “no historical reference” to a dam, a weir, or even a pedestrian crossing. However, Marjorie Coffin Brown’s research indicates that the stepping stones are consistent in style with the trail work of the BHVIA (OCLP 2009:52). The 1913 impoundment date remains the best estimate, deduced by the OCLP by comparing maps before 1910 with those after 1913, which show a slightly larger body of water (OCLP 2009:52). At the time Little Meadow was owned by the Rodick Realty Company of Bar Harbor (OCLP 2009:51).

Once impounded, water levels increased slowly and the character of the Tarn began to change, first becoming a larger pond with perimeter grasses and vegetation, and later transforming into substantially open water as seen in the 1930-1940 photographs. The photographs and postcards chronicle the appearance of the large open water pond that became known as the Tarn.

Soon after impoundment, from about 1913 to the 1920s, the Tarn is shown as an idyllic setting, looking from beneath the boughs of trees toward the stepping stones, with water flowing between them, and a reflective pond fringed with vegetation, hemmed by slopes of granite domes framing the view. Figures 5-8 particularly capture this aesthetic view.

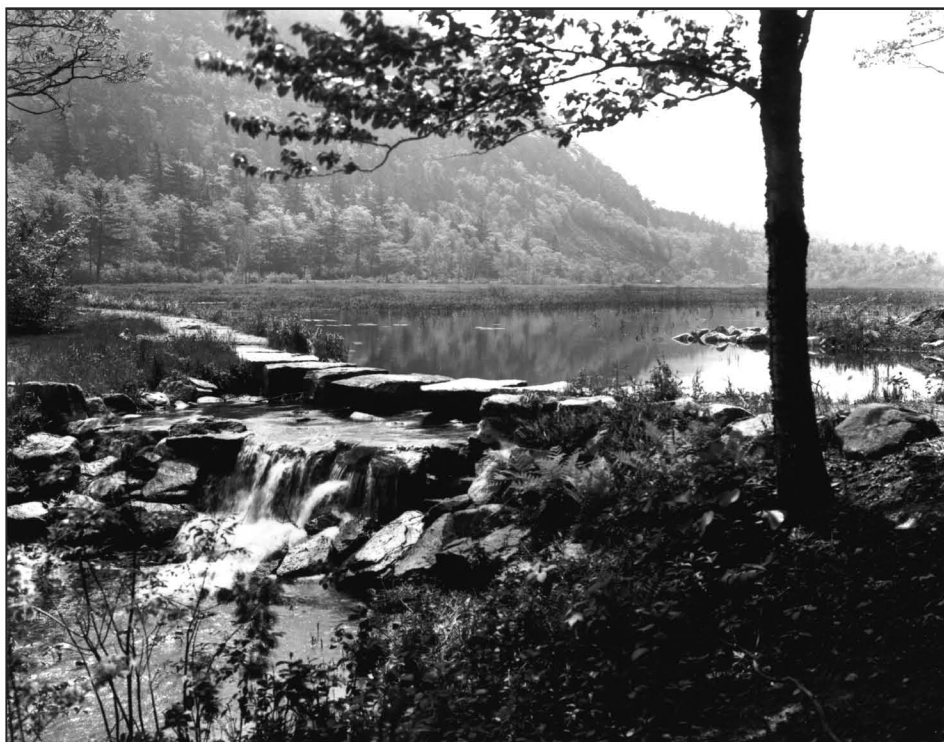


Figure 5. The Tarn looking southeast--dam and stepping stones, about 1916.
(Courtesy NPS Archives, Acadia)

The historic photographs and postcards with this view of the Tarn were popular and were reproduced or re-photographed over the course of thirty or more years. They appeared in photographs and on postcards, sometimes interpreted with hand-coloring on the photograph; and on historic dinner plates commemorating memorable Bar Harbor scenes, as in the collection at the Bar Harbor Historical Society. Although there is always vegetation in and around the pond during this period, some amount of open water is also present in the depictions.

In 1915, Little Meadow was transferred from Rodick Realty Co, to the Hancock County Trustees for Public Reservations (HCTPR), the organization led by George B. Dorr and Charles W. Eliot that was dedicated to acquiring scenic lands for preservation (OCLP 2009:39). The following year, 1916, is the first documented use of the term “the Tarn” by George B. Dorr to describe the Little Meadow area (OCLP 2009:52).

In addition to being a scenic walking destination and nexus of trails, the area around the Tarn was used for and affected by other activities, including gravel extraction (a gravel pit at the north end) and road improvements to Otter Creek Road in 1926, along the east side of the Tarn (OCLP 2009:53 and 41). The State Fish and Game Commissioner re-introduced beaver into ANP in 1921-1922 (Brown 2003:76). In his survey of the fishes of inland lakes of Maine, fishery scientist C.H. Batchelder, at the University of Maine, documented the presence of brook trout in the Tarn (Batchelder 1927).



Figure 6. Stepping stones across outlet to "Sieur de Monts Tarn." Hand-colored linen postcard. About 1916-1919. (The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

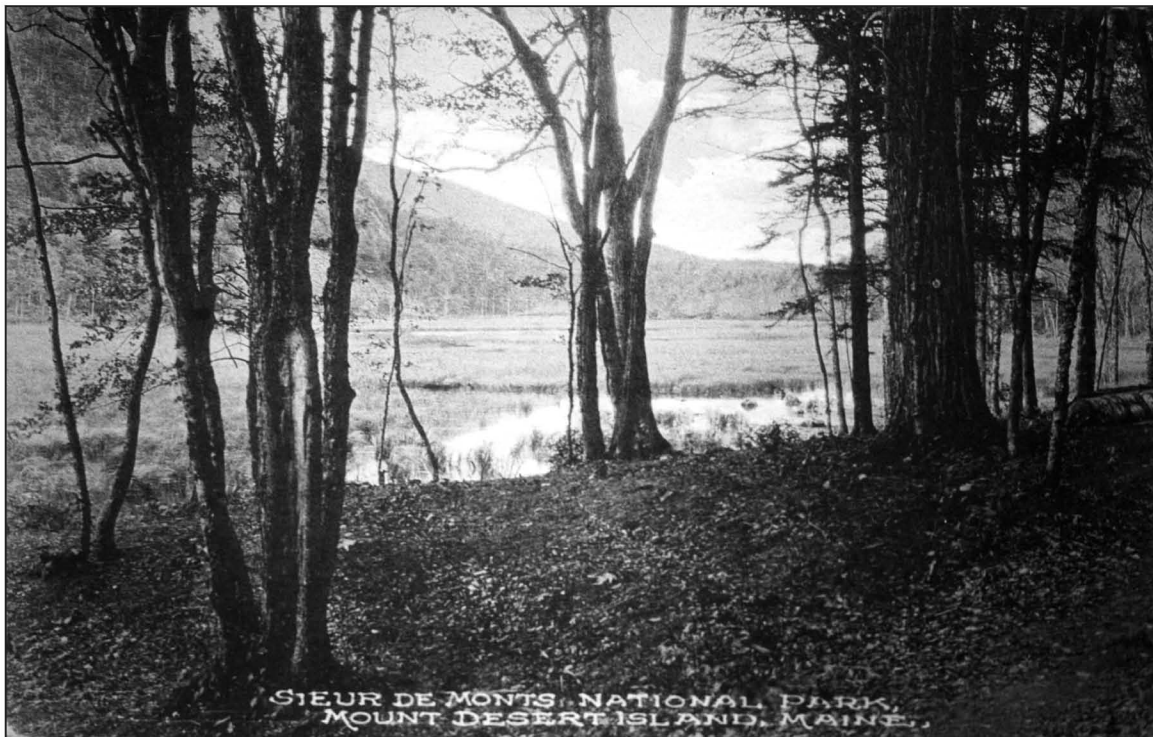


Figure 7. "Sieur de Monts National Park" postcard, about 1916-1919. (The Strout Family Collection -Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

When the Sieur de Monts National Monument was established in 1916, the Tarn parcel was not transferred to the national monument but continued under HCTPR ownership. Sieur de Monts National Monument was renamed Lafayette National Park in 1919; and became Acadia National Park in 1929. In 1931, 18 years after an impoundment created the pond in the photographs, the Tarn parcel was transferred to Acadia National Park by the HCTPR. By the time the Tarn ownership was transferred to the park, it had been a familiar and accessible landscape feature to residents from Otter Creek who passed it on a daily basis on their way to Bar Harbor.



Figure 8. Portland artist J.H. Bicknell's hand-colored photograph of the Tarn, about 1915-1920s. (The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

From the 1920s into the 1930s when the Tarn was transferred into Acadia National Park, the area of open water appears to have increased, as in Figure 8. There is generally vegetation around the perimeter and occasionally some vegetation appears in the center of the Tarn.

Figures 9-11 are photographs taken in 1934 by an unidentified photographer. The photo album was acquired at auction by Raymond Strout. There is no indication of who took the pictures, but there are dates on the pictures. From the images in the album, it was deduced that the photographer traveled with his car and trailer, camped at Blackwoods campground, and took photographs around Acadia National Park, including the Tarn (R. Strout, pers. comm., 2011). These photographs of the Tarn from a number of

different vantage points show more open water than previously.



Figure 9. The Tarn in 1934.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)



Figure 10. The Tarn in 1934.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

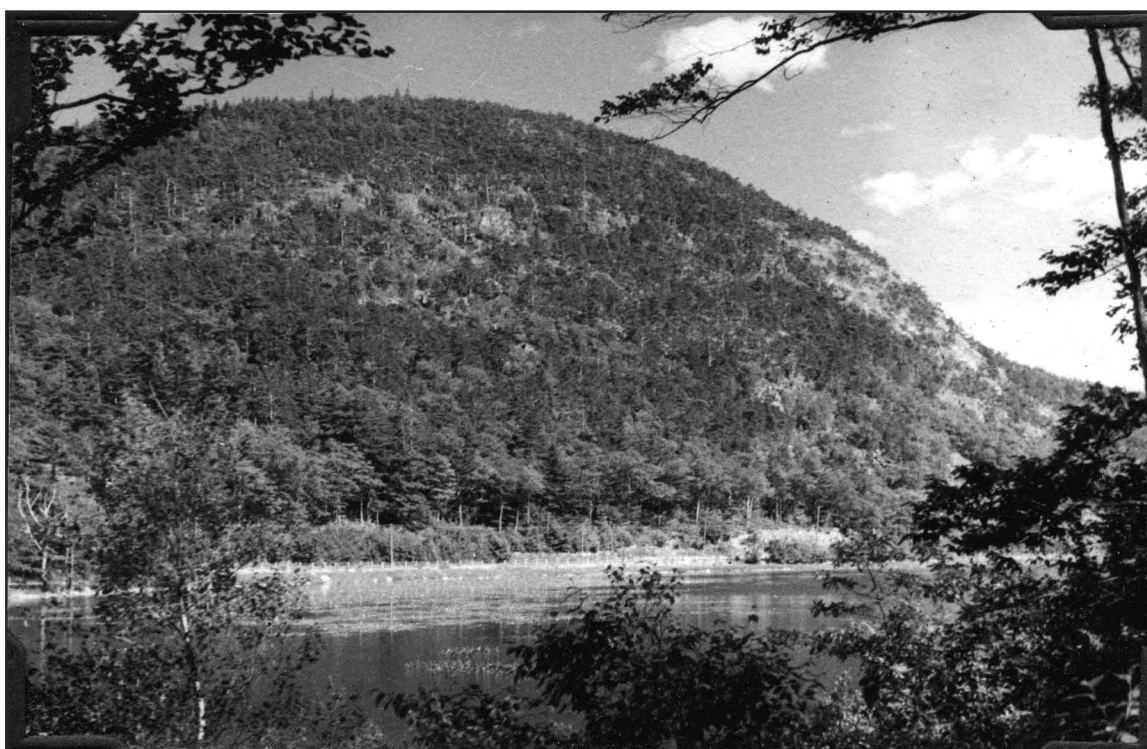


Figure 11. The Tarn in 1934.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

Moving forward in time to the latter part of the 1930s, the photographs show the Tarn becoming a more “classic” tarn² with open water, appearing to be quite deep, despite the fact that it had a shallow base with only a few deep areas. Acadia National Park (ANP) staff reported that being bottomless was a widely-held misconception about the Tarn. Both photographs from 1939, by H. M. Wheeler, show the Tarn with predominantly open water (Figures 12 and 13), looking apparently quite “bottomless.” Three interviewees mentioned the belief that the Tarn is bottomless, agreeing that it was a widely held belief passed along from one generation to the next. One individual noted that her grandmother, an Otter Creek native, warned her not to swim in the Tarn because it was a “bottomless” lake. Another said, “I always thought that it was a glacial pond, and that’s why it was bottomless.”

² A tarn is a geographical term referring to a “small, steep-banked mountain lake or pool,” especially one formed by glaciers melting. It is believed that the Tarn reminded George B. Dorr of those he had seen in his travels in Europe; hence name for the pond that was formed in The Gorge. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Tarn>). Oxford Dictionary of Geography and American Heritage Dictionary of Science.



Figure 12. The Tarn in The Gorge. 1939 photograph by M. Herbert Wheeler.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

From 1932-1944, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) worked intensely around the SDM and Tarn area. They repaired trails and built gravel access roads to trailheads. The Tarn Truck Trail on the east side of the Tarn and Great Meadow Truck Trail in the SDM spring area were among the roadways constructed. The Tarn Trail was a six-foot wide path between the Otter Creek Road and the water's edge (OCLP 2009:60). It was destroyed by the widening of State Highway 3 in the late 1960s. The CCC also replanted conifers in the gravel pit, replanted bare banks, and repaired other construction scars along the Tarn.

At the south end of Great Meadow the CCC constructed a trout pool. "Pools were stocked with trout, and walking paths were built around them so visitors could closely observe the fish." The CCC did the work in cooperation with the Mount Desert Island Fish and Game Commission (OCLP 2009:60), cited from the field camp reports.



Figure 13. Wheeler photograph, "The Tarn in Mt. Desert Island," 1939.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

As part of the Otter Creek Road realignment in 1939-1940, an overlook and parking area were developed at the north end of the Tarn, near the old gravel pit, in order to provide views south to the Tarn (OCLP 2009:101). Additional road improvements were undertaken in 1939-1940, as seen in the before and after photographs from the project report of the Kebo Road Extension (Figure 14). The photographs are reminders of the continual impacts of human activities on natural features in heavily traveled areas of MDI such as The Gorge.



Figure 14. “Before” and “after” photographs along the Tarn, Kebo road extension, 1939-1940.
(The Strout Family Collection - Ahlblad’s Frame Shop)

In 1939, Mt. Desert Nurseries, owned by George B. Dorr, planted 1,000 water lilies and arrowheads in the Tarn (OCLP 2009:42). Three of the interviewees fondly recalled the Tarn with pond lilies blooming in it—“a beautiful sight”; but the sentiment was not necessarily shared by everyone in the group. One person recalled his aunt being “furious that Mr. Dorr put in water lilies because they liked it with *nothing* in there” (emphasis in the original).

The Bar Harbor Fire, the “Great Fire of 1947,” burned the eastern part of Mt. Desert Island from Hulls Cove through the SDM area and over Dorr Mountain, consuming trees, vegetation, buildings and residences in its path. Three individuals interviewed had vivid memories of the fire and assisted in the cleanup in its aftermath. One individual remembered that Mr. Rockefeller insisted on removing the burned trees

on Dorr Mountain primarily for the purpose of making it look better, and although he no longer owned property in the park, he “had great sway over what happened.” Three interviewees, all in their seventies, described the Great Fire as one of the major factors causing the contemporary changes in the Tarn, a kind of “tipping point” in their view that interrelated with other forces—natural and anthropogenic—resulting in more rapid filling with sediment and organic matter.

By the late 1970s, the Tarn was becoming shallower and warmer. A report on the Tarn by Zabinski and Olday found that the Tarn was “a shallow, weedy pond,” and not suitable for trout habitat. As a side note, however, the authors stated that “there had been reports of occasional large trout taken from the Tarn by local anglers” (1977).

In 1984 the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) undertook a brook trout stocking program for inland lakes, including the Tarn, which continued until 1999. The MDI Rod and Gun Club co-sponsored annual spring fishing derbies at the Tarn with DIFW. Community cookouts were provided in conjunction with the fishing derbies. A guide book on lakes and ponds of Mt. Desert Island in 1989 described the Tarn as “an enigma” because it was a shallow and warm pond, yet large trout continued to be taken from the Tarn—as recently as 1987 (Newlin 1989:122). The main criticism of the author apropos both hiking and fishing around the Tarn was the “continual and distracting noise” from State Route 3 alongside the Tarn. Fishing activities in the Tarn are described in more detail in Chapter 2, Historical and Contemporary Associations with the Tarn.

In 2002 the DIFW found that a series of warm, unusually dry summers in the 1990s resulted in a substantially reduced amount of water in the Tarn, and recommended that the best use of the marsh for angling would be as a source of live baitfish. The report recommended that the park allow anglers continued use of the Tarn as a source of minnows (e.g. shiners and banded killifish) for bait (Brokaw 2002).

Increasing shallowness and buildup of vegetation continued in the 2000s, abetted by beaver activity around the Tarn dam which resulted in raised water levels in the Tarn on an episodic basis. Gary Stellpflug, ANP trails foreman, recalls that there was beaver activity on the Tarn dam in 2008-2009, which raised the height of the impoundment “12-18 inches higher than the dam itself.” After a series of severe storms in 2008-2009, a number of factors combined to make the stream crossing and dam structurally unstable, including the collapse of about two feet of the stone masonry face and the formation of channels around the sides of the impoundment and stepping stones. The dam was rebuilt in 2009 by the park to its original height, and the stepping stones were re-set to the original placement and configuration of 1913 using historic photographs (G. Stellpflug, pers. comm. 2011). More details on the 2009 dam re-building are in Chapter 4.

A 2010 report by NPS hydrologists Smillie and Ellsworth describes the reasons for the rapid changes in aquatic vegetation in the Tarn and what could be done to return it to open water, if so desired. They conclude among other things that “the pond has been filling with sediment since the construction of the dam,” and that much of the sediment was carried by the stream entering the Tarn (from the south, Cromwell Harbor Brook); but that recent conditions such as a reported increase in storm events may have accelerated the sedimentation. Interviewees identified many additional events, activities, and natural disasters, such as the Great Fire, that have had added to the increasing sediment in the Tarn and growth of aquatic vegetation (Chapter 4).

Contemporary Context

While the Tarn is undergoing ecological changes, park managers understand that the Tarn is important to residents in local communities; hence the initiation of this study in 2010 to document historic and contemporary associations with the Tarn (Figure 15).



Figure 15. The Tarn in 2007.
(Robert Pennington Photography)

The topic of the changing conditions at the Tarn (particularly the increasing vegetation) surfaced in a meeting of the Park Advisory Commission in September, 2000, when Paul Richardson commented that “Last year [the grass in the Tarn] was very visible, but this year, it is so thick, you can walk on it” (NPS Advisory Commission notes). In 2002, a citizens’ advocacy group, Save the Tarn, dedicated to restoring the Tarn to

previous open water conditions, organized and sent a petition to then-Superintendent Paul Haertel expressing dismay that the Tarn was disappearing. The petition stated that “We believe it would be a loss to the park and community to have George Dorr’s vision lost in pickerel weed.” Residents who signed the petition were concerned about the changes in the Tarn and the disappearance of an open-water resource they had experienced for three and sometimes four generations.

The receipt of the petition and its content were noted in the Advisory Commission’s meeting notes for February 2003. The notes indicated that the petition asked the park to look at “what needs to be done to restore the Tarn to the reflecting pool that it once was” (NPS 2003). About 50 people from a number of towns on MDI signed the petition requesting that the Tarn be classified as part of a cultural landscape so that it could be restored and maintained as open water.

Park managers responded that the management of the Tarn was tied to the question of whether the Tarn was a culturally significant resource. If the Tarn were to be identified as part of a historically significant cultural landscape, park managers would potentially be able to restore open water conditions and maintain it as a cultural resource.

The opportunity to consider the question of the Tarn as part of a cultural landscape came as part of the National Park Service’s national initiative to document cultural landscapes at national parks. Acadia National Park managers requested the NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (OCLP) to undertake a cultural landscape inventory (CLI) of the Sieur de Monts spring area and evaluate the Tarn during the assessment. The CLI is a comprehensive listing and evaluation of all culturally and historically significant landscapes within the National Park System. For those landscapes found to be potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the CLI provides an analysis of landscape characteristics and features, allowing for an evaluation of historic integrity and significance. This information is used to inform NPS planning efforts and budget decisions; and it provides detailed information about the landscape for management uses. The September 2008 ANP Advisory Commission Notes indicated that “research is in progress on a cultural landscape inventory of the Sieur de Monts area which will include the Tarn.”

The CLI assessment found that the Tarn was outside of the Sieur de Monts Spring developed area and did not meet the criteria for historic integrity. OCLP explained that they could find no historical documentation that George B. Dorr intended to include the Tarn in the SDM master plan, and that they could not include it in the boundaries of the SDM developed area and inventory (OCLP 2009:52). The Tarn was therefore determined not eligible to be listed to the National Register of Historic Places as a cultural landscape feature associated with SDM. The result is that the park continues to manage the Tarn as a natural resource, per NPS management policies (NPS 2006:51-51).

As part of the study process, the OCLP gave a public presentation on the CLI in September 2009. The finding surprised some community members and some park staff. The public meeting and the views of stakeholders were reported in an article on the future of the Tarn by Anne Kozak in the *Mt. Desert Islander*. Subsequent to the meeting, Karen Zimmerman, of Save the Tarn, wrote a letter to the Advisory Commission in January 2010 to clarify her points during the discussion at the meeting and raise additional questions about the Olmstead Center's conclusions regarding the Tarn.

In February, 2010, Deputy Superintendent Len Bobinchock gave an update on the Tarn after concerns were expressed by Advisory Commission members and members of the audience over the report of the CLI. As a consequence, the park proposed to undertake an "ethnographic study where oral interviews will be done with residents of Bar Harbor and Otter Creek to document their understanding of the Tarn over time" (Meeting Notes, Advisory Commission Feb. 19, 2010).

This sequence of events led to this project, "Community Recollections and Reflections of the Tarn," which has been undertaken to understand peoples' specific associations and history with the Tarn in more depth. The park management realizes its importance to residents in Otter Creek and Bar Harbor and wishes to document oral histories and ethnographic associations with the Tarn. The study is made possible through a cooperative agreement between the NPS and the University of Maryland, through the Chesapeake Watershed Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit.

Scope of Research and Methodology

Scope and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to document the associations, historical uses, knowledge, and meanings of the Tarn to selected members of the neighboring communities, Otter Creek and Bar Harbor, the communities situated most closely to the Tarn. A key aspect of the report is to let residents of Otter Creek and Bar Harbor speak in their own words about the importance of the Tarn and the dimensions of its significance for them.

The specific study objectives included an initial meeting with the management team and staff of Acadia National Park to discuss project objectives, and identify and compile documents from park files and archives that relate to the project. The objectives included collaborating with park staff and community members to identify potential individuals to interview for the study. The goal was to complete 15-20 ethnohistorical interviews with individuals from Bar Harbor and Otter Creek, and to produce a final

ethnographic report that synthesized the research findings in a scholarly, yet accessible, style for the benefit of the public, the interested communities, and park managers. An important sub-objective was to make extensive use of excerpts from interviews to present the views, values and perspectives about the Tarn in the words of the interviewees.

Research Methodology

Research data were derived from interviews with selected members of two park-associated communities supplemented with reports, articles and archival information and historic photographs and maps from Acadia National Park and from local historic organizations and individuals. The research objectives called for identifying and interviewing 15-20 individuals who had multi-generational associations with the Tarn, were knowledgeable about it, and continued to have involvement with it.

Preparation for fieldwork began in May 2010, with review of materials and preliminary phone calls to three interviewees identified as opinion leaders on this issue. Field visits were conducted on Mt. Desert Island for one week in July 25-30, 2010 and two weeks in October 17-29, 2010. The highest priority objective during these visits was to interview appropriate individuals and secondarily to conduct documentary and archival research on the Tarn.

Interview Process

Lists of potential interviewees were developed using three main sources and methods. First, at the commencement of fieldwork, the author met with Chuck Smythe, NPS Northeast Region Ethnography Program Manager, and Rebecca Cole-Will, cultural resource program manager in Acadia NP. This was followed by a meeting with a larger group of park staff and management to discuss the scope of work, the status of the Tarn, and generate lists of potential interviewees. The researcher developed an initial list of interviewees from these suggestions and from additional conversations with park staff.

The second method was to request personal referrals from individuals interviewed. Interviewees were asked whether there were additional people who were knowledgeable and would be important to interview. As a starting point, three key individuals in Otter Creek were interviewed—Paul Richardson, Karen Zimmerman, and Dennis Smith—who are native or long term residents, and knowledgeable about the Tarn. Each person had suggestions for additional people who were connected to the Tarn and could contribute their recollections and views. In general, interviewees mentioned relatives, friends or neighbors as potential interviewees; they also suggested knowledgeable business owners, former teachers, and native Islanders who had

knowledge of and had grown up with the Tarn. Through a “snowball” method from the original list, the process of referral and networking resulted in an expanded list of interviewees as the research progressed.

The third source of names was the list of signatories on the Save the Tarn petition. In consultation with Karen Zimmerman, Cathy James and Rebecca Cole-Will, the PI selected individuals, adding these suggestions to the master list of interviewees, along with contextualizing information such as where the individual grew up (or was “from”), where they lived now, and a sense of involvement with the Tarn. In addition, ethnographic fieldwork resulted in additional sources for names, such as librarians at Jesup Memorial Library, local business owners, newspaper editors, and others who had suggestions when the goals of the study were described to them.

From the lists of potential interviewees generated in these ways, a data grid was developed and selections were made based on the criteria of (a) length of association with the Tarn—preferably individuals whose families had lived in Bar Harbor or Otter Creek for multiple generations, such as members of founding families on MDI, arrivals in the 1800s, their relatives, or persons living in the area for over 30 years; (b) location of residence or former residence—one of the study objectives was to interview members who grew up in the communities of Bar Harbor or Otter Creek; (c) association with the Tarn, such as using it for fishing when they were young, skating on it, trapping or tracking wildlife around it, or working on the Tarn or around it in their professional job capacities; and (d) contemporary and continuing engagement in the issues regarding the Tarn.

Twenty seven individuals were interviewed—18 in-person, semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews following the protocol in Appendix C, usually conducted in peoples’ homes but in two cases in their workplace and one in a coffee shop. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes, and notes were taken. In addition, the PI conducted nine phone interviews or directed conversations, which were condensed versions of the semi-structured interviews and which covered the same basic questions but were briefer. Telephone interviews were conducted if the person’s schedule or the location of their residence precluded in-person conversation. Notes were taken and analyzed on the phone interviews and conversations. In general most semi-structured interviews lasted 35 minutes to an hour.

A maximum of four generations who have lived around the Tarn was represented in the individuals interviewed for this study. For example, an individual now in his 70s or 80s referred to his aunt or a friend of the preceding generation, now deceased (they would have been born in the early teens of the twentieth century). This previous generation appeared through remembered stories and recollections of the current 65- and 80-year-olds interviewed, and would have been the *first* generation to have known

the Tarn. Generally now deceased, they would have been teenagers and young adults in the early 1930s to 1945.

The current 65-and-older individuals interviewed in this study are the *second* generation to live around the Tarn and are referred to as the *senior generation* in this report. The children of the senior generation who grew up in Bar Harbor or Otter Creek are the *third* generation to skate and fish at the Tarn; and their children are the *fourth* generation who has experienced the Tarn.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for recurrent themes and patterns around the types of associations, recollections, meanings, and interactions with the Tarn held by the interviewees. When activities, memories, events, and meanings were mentioned by multiple interviewees, this repetition provided some indication that these themes and topics were shared among the group. For example, nearly every family that was interviewed had members who fished the Tarn during some period of their life and over multiple generations—for brook trout, bait fish and other types of fish (hornpout). The researcher concluded that fishing in the Tarn was a broadly shared theme with a cluster of memories, activities, and knowledge that revolved around it. The themes are reported in individual chapters on social activities, meaning and significance, and observations and beliefs about the Tarn.

Naturally there is variation among interviewees' memories, values and how they used and related to the Tarn. In order to reflect the diversity of themes and opinions within a community or interview group, ethnographers often report their results using conventional terms for portions of a group, such as "several" or "a few" or "a majority," rather than using percentages which imply greater numeration and numbers. In all cases, the PI is referring to the subset of the 27 individuals interviewed when describing "most" or "the majority," and not the communities of Otter Creek and Bar Harbor. The researcher uses exact numbers in many cases, but when using general terms for proportions, the terms follow general conventional use, such that "several" and "few" means a small number of individuals (e.g., more than one but less than a third of the interviewees); "some" means a moderate portion, more than a third but not a majority (over 50%); and "majority" or "most" refers to more than 50% and up to 100% of the interview group (14-27 individuals).

Limitations of the Study

The research was undertaken with a specific purpose, i.e. to hear from those residents most attached to and most passionate about the Tarn, and to document their historical associations with the Tarn. The limitations of the study are linked to its focused

nature; that is, the study does not attempt to provide the attitudes of a broad sample of people across MDI about their use and attachments to the Tarn or its future. It is not a public opinion survey. *Instead, it documents the values and perspectives of individuals specifically selected for their close associations, in-depth knowledge and experience.* The results amplify what is known on the surface by providing greater depth of insight into interviewees' uses, knowledge and feelings about the Tarn.

Ethnographic studies as a method of understanding human communities have other inherent limitations, in part due to the interrelated factors of time constraints and generalizability. Ethnography and ethnographic interviews are time-consuming and effort-intensive, and most traditional ethnographies take a year at the very least, to ensure that observations and conclusions are valid. Shorter-term rapid ethnographic assessments are time-consuming as well, and researchers customarily note that there is not enough time to interview all the individuals needed for complete generalizability.

The study met its objectives in terms of numbers of people interviewed. Additional people were identified as valuable resources who were not available during the time the PI was in the field. Time constraints affect generalizability of findings, to a certain extent, since the number of interviewees interviewed during this study is a small number of people in Bar Harbor (sixteen) and Otter Creek (seven). The PI's sense, from fieldwork and interviews, is that the findings are likely generalizable to families who are long-term residents of Otter Creek and perhaps to a lesser extent to Bar Harbor; but it is acknowledged that greater numbers of interviews would provide more confidence in the generalizability of the findings.

Historical Research

The NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation's CLI report (OCLP 2009) provides an excellent source of historical information on the Sieur de Monts area and the Tarn. The CLI report was useful in developing the historical descriptions of the Tarn and the chronology of events affecting it in Appendix B. In addition Margaret Coffin Brown's excellent *Pathmakers* volumes are invaluable sources of information about the history, organizations, and individuals behind the memorial trails, the improvements and changes in roads surrounding the Tarn, and the extensive work of the CCC in the 1930s that affected the Tarn area (2006).

A number of historic books, collections, and files at the Jesup Memorial Library were reviewed, including local history documents, collections of historic postcards, histories of Acadia National Park, and tourist guides. The annual reports of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, on microfilm in the basement of the library,

were an excellent source of detailed information on the civic organization's public works programs and the philosophy of the early patrician residents of Bar Harbor. Relevant years were reviewed for insight on land transfers, trail building, construction such as dams and other civic improvements, and use of the Tarn area.

Local historians and collectors provided access to and insightful interpretations on the Tarn and assistance in dating some of the historic photographs. Raymond Strout identified and interpreted photographs of the Tarn from a number of decades. The Bar Harbor Historical Society was also very helpful in locating resources and interpreting them, including their collection of past files and photographs from the *Bar Harbor Times*. Long-term institutional memories and park records were provided by Judy Hazen Connery, ANP natural resource specialist, and Gary Stellpflug, ANP trails foreman. ANP cultural resources program manager Rebecca Cole-Will and Bret Achorn, former ANP curator, provided access to the NPS archival photographic file and historical materials from their research. The pictures in this report are digital capture of original historic photographs and maps, or digitized scans of photographs, showing the appearance and use of the Tarn over the century. The source and credit for the images are indicated with each figure, unless taken by the author.

Data analysis and synthesis of information from interviews, observations, and historical records took place in stages. As new interviews were completed and transcripts produced, they were reviewed and integrated with existing data, checking facts with references already published, such as *Asticou's Island Domain* (Prins and McBride 2007), and identifying themes from interviewees' narratives. A draft of the report was produced in May 2010 and was reviewed internally by ANP staff and by the director of the Northeast regional ethnography program. The reviews resulted in detailed comments and corrections on chronologies, interpretations, and concepts. A final draft report was reviewed by Cole-Will and Smythe in October 2011. After all reviews the report was revised substantially to incorporate the corrections and to respond to reviewers' comments.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL AND COMTEMPORARY ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE TARN

This chapter describes interviewees' recollections about activities at the Tarn, things they did or experienced, family activities there, and stories that they recollected with respect to the Tarn. The chapter starts at the turn of the twentieth century as the uses of the Tarn diversified from commercial and functional uses to aesthetic ones—that is, as a scenic viewpoint and destination along hiking paths and trails built by the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association. The chapter continues with information from the interviewees as to how they and their families related to the Tarn over several generations, including their children and grandchildren, in a more contemporary context. The chapter generally describes the recreational activities by season, with fishing and hiking in the spring and summer, and ice skating and ice boating in the winter.

Early Uses of the Tarn—Paths and Hiking Trails

The early uses and activities around the Tarn area, as portrayed in the three volumes on the development of paths and trails and the Sieur de Monts area, *Pathmakers*, *Trails of History*, and the *Cultural Landscape Inventory*, describe the ambitious development of paths and trails around the SDM area for walking and hiking in scenic areas. “From 1913 to 1916, [George B.] Dorr and the Bar Harbor VIA constructed Kurt Diederich’s Climb, the Kane, Beachcroft, Homans, Emery, and Jesup paths, and in the 1920s the Schiff Path. The memorial trails, as well as the Wild Gardens Path, illustrated the qualities of the Picturesque Style through naturalistic features, such as stone staircases, rock paving, retaining walls, exposed summit rock, and their access to dramatic views” (OCLP 2009:33). Finished in 1915, Kane Path traversed the length of the Tarn along its western edge, between and among granite boulders adjacent to the water.

By 1916, the northern end of the Tarn, with its large granite stepping stones, was a trailhead or juncture for a number of scenic paths which radiated from the outlet of Cromwell Harbor Brook at the Tarn. The Wild Gardens Path emerged from the wooded area of Sieur de Monts at the outlet of the Tarn, providing an aesthetic view of flowing water, the stepping stones and impoundment, and a pool, as seen in the photographs and postcards in Chapter 1 of the report (OCLP 2009: 51-52; Brown 2006: 72). Directly across the Tarn outlet on the west side of the stream was the entrance to Kurt Diederich’s

Climb which ascended steeply up Dry [Dorr] Mountain. Kane Path followed the water's edge south to the Ladder Trail, which had been completed in 1896 and ascended the southern slopes of Dry (Dorr) Mountain. A short extension of the Wild Gardens Path across the stepping stones linked with Beachcroft Path, which continued across Otter Creak Road up Newport (Champlain) Mountain (OCLP 2009: 51-52). The CLI concludes that the granite stepping stones were placed there about 1913 to connect the Wild Gardens Path to the memorial trails (OCLP 2009: 52). The photograph of "Miss Cottonet at the Tarn" (Figure 16), probably taken around 1916-1918, shows Annie Cottenet Shermerhorn Kane, who endowed Kane Path as a memorial to her husband, John Innes Kane, on an outing on the north side of the Tarn, with stepping stones in view.



Figure 16. Miss Cottonet at the Tarn, about 1916.
(W.O. Sawtelle Collections and Research Center, Acadia NP)

Hiking and walking to scenic vistas were popular activities in the early decades of the twentieth century, as documented in the *Pathmakers* and *Trails of History* books, and by the density of paths and memorial trails in the area.

Three interviewees had recollections from the timeframe of the 1930s and 1940s. One interviewee from Otter Creek, probably in his early to mid-70s, recollected that he hiked “all through there around the Tarn, all over the island,” and especially during the period of World War II, because “there was nobody here and we even camped up in Canon Brook -- we pitched a tent alongside the trail.”

For two of the three individuals, hiking was associated with fishing activities. An individual in his 70s remembered: “It’s too bad Austin Walls is gone, because he could tell you. He hiked around the island more than anybody I know. He fished there a lot [the Tarn]. He fished all the brooks and everything.” Austin Walls was from Otter Creek (Smythe 2008).

A person in the same generation (late 60s-70s), stated that he never did that much hiking around the Tarn just for the pleasure of hiking. “We’d hike onto the back side [of the Tarn], but only if we were going fishing there or something. But not to go hiking in that area.”

The report will return to contemporary (post-1970) hiking uses of the Tarn in the section on Summer Recreation and Other Uses of the Tarn, at the end of this chapter.

Fishing at the Tarn

After the impoundment of Cromwell Harbor Brook in about 1913, the Tarn gradually filled with water and began to be used for additional activities beyond hiking the paths or viewing it from trails up Dorr Mountain. Fishing may have been an early activity at the Tarn as indicated by the 1923 photograph (Figure 17) showing a gentleman with his creel bag at the Tarn. Native populations of brook trout in the Tarn were documented by Batchelder (1927), so it is possible that fishing was an activity in the 1920s.

Almost all of the interviewees remember fishing at the Tarn or knew family members or friends who fished there, and recollections of stories go back to the generation preceding them. Among the senior generation of interviewees, who were teenagers and young adults in the 1940s and 1950s, there is substantial knowledge about fresh water fishing in lakes and ponds on the Island and specific memories of the Tarn as a fishing spot. Almost all the men interviewed recalled that as teenage boys and young adults they would go fishing there two to three times over a summer and more often if they lived in Otter Creek because of its proximity and ease of access.

One individual recollected the story that the construction of the Tarn dam in about 1913 was due to the desire by wealthy patricians of Bar Harbor for a local fishing hole, adding to the idea that fishing at the Tarn was a activity since the second decade of the century. “And a lot of the doctors here in the hospital and around [Bar Harbor] never had enough time to go out and go fishing anywhere. So, they got together and had somebody build the dam to flood the thing and then they put trout and fish in it. So, when they got a few minutes, they’d drive down here, cast a little bit, and see. And that’s how it [the Tarn] originally got filled with water” (Paine interview).



Figure 17. Fishing at the Tarn, 1923.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society)

Two other individuals recollected stories from earlier generations—from individuals who were teenagers and young adults in the 1930s and 1940s and have passed on—but who left their stories and memories of the Tarn and the fishing there. Dennis Smith related the story of his friend Austin Walls, who was the quintessential fisherman. “He walked almost everywhere he went. He’d have a pail and a fishing rod and wherever he was, he was ready to go fishing.” Austin Walls told Dennis that when he was a child, “he and his mother would walk to Bar Harbor—and there would be a patch of mayflies on the water. And he said you could see the fish, jumping, jumping and jumping after the mayflies. . .” Arthur McPike also recalled Austin Walls’s legendary fishing quests and hikes around the Island and the Tarn.

Dennis Smith recalled Harold Walls (“an older gentleman who would be pretty near 100 now” if he were alive) “talking about going up there with his father when he was a boy and they used to go up into the brook where the trout spawned in the fall and take them by the crooksack bag out of there. So, I mean, that’s how many he felt there were in that stream at one time in that pond. This would have been in the ‘20s and ‘30s and maybe even in the ‘40s. Whether they speared them or netted them or what, I don’t know.” According to Smith, these were 12-inch to 14-inch fish that Harold Walls caught in Cromwell Harbor Brook at the south end of the Tarn. These memories of trout fishing have been passed along from one generation to the next and to friends and community members.

Three individuals stated that there was a resident population of native brook trout in the Tarn that existed long before the Tarn was stocked by the State of Maine (McPike interview; Smith interview; Burr interview) (Figure 18). One person remembers that people “used to go out in boats and fish from the banks” before it got as shallow as it is now. Several other interviewees remember as teenagers riding their bicycles or hitchhiking to the Tarn for an afternoon or morning of fishing. “When I was younger, I used to pedal my bike down [to the Tarn], tie ‘em [trout] on the handle bars, take ‘em home.”

“Like most people—the Tarn being accessible, you might say—we went down as grammar school kids on our bicycles. And at one point in time, one or two of us that liked to fish took fishing poles and we used to—where the brook comes out—in that vicinity you could stand there and cast off line and possibly catch a small trout or perch or something of that nature.”

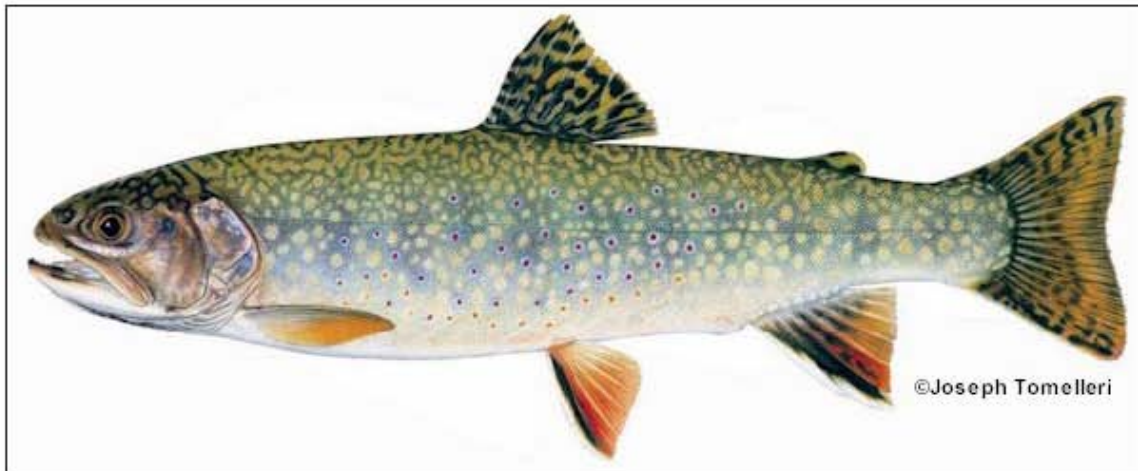


Figure 18. Brook Trout. (Permission for use provided by Joseph Tomelleri)

One interviewee, who grew up in Hulls Cove, recollected the following:

“Through high school and after high school I used to go fishing down there, four or five times in the summer, maybe more, depending how much time we had. It was a good fishing hole. We used to fish off the back side anyway, which is deeper. The main stream ran down through there. It ran closer to the ledges on that back side. The front side out towards the road was always very shallow.”

A Bar Harbor native, who told me that he is 81 years old, remembered the importance of the ledges as well: “You have to walk across to the ledges and cast out there in the deep area. Nice fishing [at the Tarn].” A third individual, in his 70s, talked about “A big ledge on the right side,” indicating that among this generation there was shared knowledge about the Tarn’s best fishing spots.

An Otter Creek resident stated, “We’ve always fished it, you know. It’s always been a good place—early place to go fishing, very early in the spring. Because you couldn’t go ice fishing on it or anything like that.” This individual also took his sons, the next generation, to the Tarn to fish.

A number of interviewees observed that the Tarn was a special place to fish because there was a window of opportunity for early spring fishing in the small ponds like the Tarn, where the ice melted sooner, as compared to the bigger, deeper lakes which “hadn’t opened up yet.”

“It was one of the first places in the springtime when the ice first went out that was a chance that you could catch a trout sometimes. And there were some nice trout in there. I don’t think a lot, but there were a few people that fished on the back side, under the mountain there.”

In the fourth quarter of the century the Tarn was becoming increasingly shallow and warm, and less suitable for trout habitat. One of the earliest reports on its suitability was done in the late 1970s. The authors concluded the Tarn made a “sub-marginal habitat” for trout. But the report also offered the hopeful statement that “for the persevering fisherman, any trout caught in the Tarn are likely to be sizeable transients!” (Zabinski and Olday 1977).

The State of Maine maintained a brook trout fishery at the Tarn from 1984 to 1999. According to Greg Burr, a fisheries biologist with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), the state stocked the Tarn and other inland lakes in Maine with brook trout primarily as a “put and take” fishery. Burr is a Northeast Harbor native who considers “the Tarn was my old stomping grounds.” Most of the men interviewed remembered that the Tarn was stocked with brook trout around that time, although they

could not identify the exact years. As one person recollected, “I remember that the Tarn used to have a fishery. It was stocked for—or reportedly stocked—for brook trout. I don’t know if it had natural brook trout or if all the brook trout in there were a byproduct of previous stocking. But, you know, as a kid, I certainly fished for brook trout in many locations on the Island, including the Tarn.”

Almost everyone interviewed remembered or knew about the spring fishing derbies at the Tarn, which were organized by the MDI Rod and Gun Club and the DIFW. “The MDI Rod & Gun Club did the derbies, starting in about 1980 through the early 1990s, and I would come down and officiate. Twenty-seven ponds, Island-wide were open to fishing. They had cookouts with hot dogs and hamburgers [at the Tarn]. The Tarn was the only derby that was ‘kids-only’” (Burr interview).

Another person recalled, “It was a good fishing hole. It was closed off for that [fishing derbies], and they used to take young children, teaching and fishing and everything. It was a good spot to take the children.” Another individual remembered: “They stocked some trout in there, they had some tagged fish. If you caught one of them, they would get a cash prize.” The image in Figure 19 was originally taken by a *Bar Harbor Times* reporter, and later included in *The Lakes & Ponds of Mt. Desert* by William V.P. Newlin (1989).

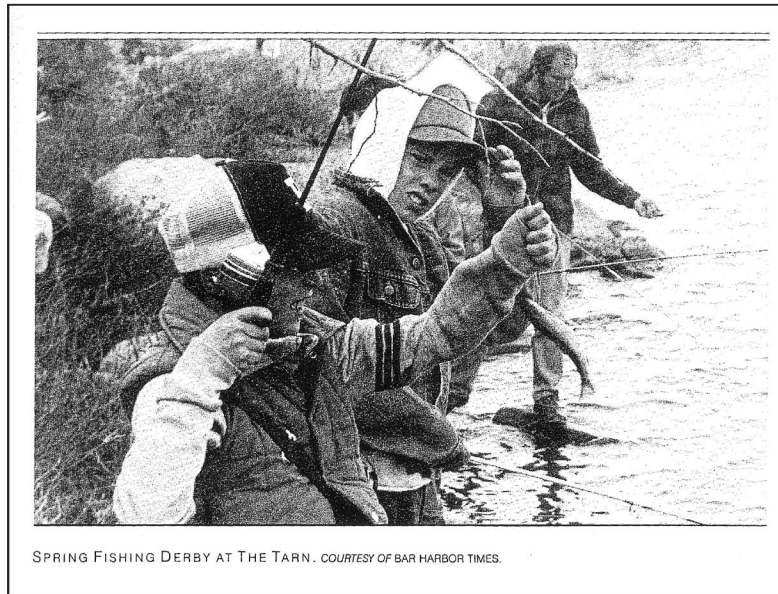


Figure 19. Spring Fishing Derby at the Tarn. Exact date unknown, between 1984 and 1989. (Newlin 1989)

Several people remembered that “Dennis [Smith] around 1987 or 1988 came up with a proposal to make it [the derby] a kids and over-65-only event.” The idea caught

some attention because it involved presumably grandparents, in an activity that was an intergenerational opportunity for fun and knowledge transfer on MDI.

An Otter Creek resident, Mr. Bill Strout, was president of the MDI Rod & Gun Club at the time and who was involved with the derbies for a number of years. Park staff point out that DIFW regulations allowed teens and seniors to fish without a license in the Tarn, in order to encourage fishing, since the Tarn would not support stocked fish year round. The MDI Rod and Gun Club is now called MDI Anglers. (J. Hazen Connery, pers. comm. 2011).

The Tarn was included in the 1989 tourist guide *The Lakes and Ponds of Mt. Desert* (Newlin 1989), and described as a fishing, hiking, boating and swimming destination. The guide called the Tarn “an enigma” with respect to fishing because of its shallowness and warmth, which are “not good characteristics of trout ponds;” nonetheless, the guide noted consistent reports of large fish (15”) being taken from there. All of the people interviewed who personally fished the Tarn knew where the deeper and cooler parts of the Tarn were and how to fish them, and almost all reported they had caught good sized fish at some point during their fishing years.

The Tarn also provided other fishing opportunities—several individuals noted it was a good place to catch baitfish. “We used to catch live bait there in the springtime. If we were going lake fishing and wanted a place to drop a bait trap in and catch some shiners—it was an easy chance. You’d get right in there and set your trap for a couple hours and then in the afternoon when you’re going fishing, just pick up your trap and get your live bait.”

Shiners and banded killifish were mentioned as the preferred baitfish from the Tarn by several individuals. One individual remembered taking his baitfish from the Tarn and fishing for land-locked salmon and togue at Eagle Lake and other ponds. Another individual indicated that baitfishing was prohibited by the park: “People used to set their bait traps in there. And of course that was -- as far as the park was concerned -- that was a no-no.”

Other recollections about fish and fishing in the Tarn indicate a familiarity with the pond, as though it were one’s own special fishing area. One individual recounted that a friend of his, an Otter Creek resident, put hornpout in the Tarn, because he liked eating them.

“He liked to catch catfish. He’d been down south in the military, I guess, and our local version of the catfish is a hornpout, and he put some of them in there. They look like a little catfish, and they have spines where there’s fins on their back. And they have whiskers. And he put some of them in there -- it was close to home. He lived in Otter Creek. And they went down into the

meadow by Sieur de Monts Spring, too. Just because he liked them. . . . They were good eating as far as he was concerned, and he poked them in there.”

Although the Maine DIFW has not stocked the Tarn since 1999 and the fishing derby is a thing of the past, the Tarn has more recently been the site of other fishing-related events. “Friends of Acadia organized an Earth Day celebration to do fly-fishing with Strout at the Tarn, even though it was all casting and no fish. They did one again this summer [2010], July 13, a third one” (Burr interview).

Although the current condition of the Tarn makes it unsuitable as a habitat for brook trout and other cold water fish, at least two individuals (father-son duo) reported they still fish in Cromwell Harbor Brook on either side of the Tarn. The father, the senior generation, a native of Bar Harbor, told me he fished the area all his life and still goes fishing today (2010), although with a caveat: “Nowadays, my *son takes me fishing* [emphasis in interview]. I just sit in the truck and wait for him. Caught an eel, a trout, ate ‘em.” He and his son “mostly fish the brooks” these days and usually catch two or three good trout. He described his favorite fishing holes and how to cook the catch: “Two or three good trout, native trout. Pink inside, all good. Put a little cornmeal on ‘em, 8-9 inches, fry pan, a little egg, salt and pepper. Fry it right up. Peel the bone right out. We have a good time, really. I take my son up there [Canon Brook and Cromwell Harbor Brook] all the time.”

The interviewees who fished the Tarn lament that recent changes have made it an unsuitable habitat for trout, in their view, and speculate that the only fish there nowadays are baitfish.

The Tarn was a social and recreational resource for three generations who enjoyed fishing there, according to multiple stories of individuals interviewed—the generation that would be in their 90s if they were alive, the senior 60-80-year-olds, and their children now in their fifties. The Tarn is remembered as a fine fishing destination among the smaller ponds, and the derbies were well-remembered across the interview group, particularly among the men. “There used to be fishing for kids – you don’t see that anymore.”

Winter Recreation at the Tarn

Ice Skating at the Tarn

All of the Otter Creek and most Bar Harbor residents interviewed recalled going to the Tarn to skate with their families and friends—both men and women of different ages. It was a desirable location for them because it was so close, easily accessible along

Highway 3, *and* it was usually the first water body to freeze over in the winter on eastern MDI. One Otter Creek resident explained that the Tarn was preferred for skating because it was more natural and less crowded than skating at Glen Mary frozen pool in Bar Harbor, which tended to be “noisy and boisterous.” Several interviewees described the Tarn as a beautiful setting for skating, nestled by steep granite slopes. Several others remembered that it could be very windy and cold to skate at the Tarn, which they saw as objectionable but also sometimes added to the fun (Figures 20-21).

All the individuals and their families interviewed from Otter Creek ice skated at the Tarn, across multiple generations. “It was a good place to ice skate, you know, because it was so easy, it was right there beside the highway, and you could drive.” Another individual from Otter Creek recollected, “especially in my younger days, like [when I was] 16, 17, 18 [years old], there would usually be a crowd of young people that would go up. Or we’d go up there as families, you know -- we’d all get together and go up there and go skating.”



Figure 20. Ice hockey outing at the Tarn. Cory Dyer and Toby at the Tarn, 1994.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society)

Interviewees who are part of the current generation—children of the senior interviewees who are in their 40s and 50s now—and skated on the Tarn in the 1960s and 1970s remembered skating with their families. One woman in this age cohort who grew

up in Bar Harbor remembered that “It was very cold—but you could skate the whole length of it.” She remembered that she used a sheet or blanket to go “sailing” down the length of the pond.

Ice skating is one of the things that I loved to do. I would skate either at Glen Mary in Bar Harbor or the Tarn, and far preferred the Tarn because of its sense of the wind and it was more wild and it is great. Sometimes there would be families there. A lot of times there weren’t [other people there]—moonlit nights. A lot of times, I or my friend could be the only one skating around, and it was pretty magical.

Most people who skated from Bar Harbor also went to the Tarn to go skating, usually with their family or a small group of friends. One interviewee described going with her brothers and her father took them. “We would drive from Bar Harbor and I think park on Route 3 where the fire pipe is, the fire hydrant pipe, and from there go ice skating. There was probably a convenient rock or log to sit on and put your skates on -- and just go sailing out there.” She particularly remembers the wind whipping through the Tarn: “You’d stand at one end, put your arms out and just go sailing down.”



Figure 21. Cory Dyer and Matt Grover of Bar Harbor with dog Toby. 1994.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society)

Skating with families and friends was a social event as well as a recreational outlet for families. Interviewees remembered seeing other families that they recognized from their community of Otter Creek. “You’d see other people ice skating there. I remember the Richardsons. I remember seeing like a pickup game, a couple guys -- down there with sticks and hockey pucks. And these were adults; they weren’t kids. You used to see pickup hockey games there.”

Another interviewee recalled “I guess one of my first recollections of the Tarn was ice skating on it in -- with both family and friends. It was accessible, you could get to it, you know, if you wanted to walk, or somebody’s parents would drop you off, and we would ice skate on the pond.” One Otter Creek resident recalled “There would always be families out skating on the Tarn on the weekends—four or five families, 10-15 people skating there. There was a lot of skating that was done on it.”

The Tarn was a preferred place to skate, even for individuals who lived farther away than Otter Creek, because it would ice over before the lakes on MDI and before snow started falling. One interviewee explained: “That’s what happens, you get it just like glass, and they’d have a few people out ice boating and skating and stuff. But generally by the time that our [bigger] lakes freeze, you don’t have much time before you get snow on the ice, and then that negates the skating and stuff.” As interviewees remembered it, the little shallow ponds like the Tarn and the Hulls Cove Dump (McPike interview) froze up before the large lakes, and before snow started falling in winter, providing an opportunity for smooth skating. “We’d get these little ponds and stuff that would freeze and we could go skating.”

Proximity to the Tarn was a factor that obviously played a role where one skated; but interviewees went elsewhere as well. If one lived much beyond Bar Harbor, it was possible to find places closer to home. A person who grew up in Hulls Cove, for example, said they went skating at the Tarn on occasion, but they had places nearer to the Cove. Some individuals went out to Salisbury Cove and skated on Hamilton’s Pond. They also took advantage of other venues including Glen Mary (“a little man-made swimming hole type thing, you know, that they made right there down off Ledge lawn”), the “pond in back of the [Jackson] Lab there,” and “this little pond down here, this little fire hole that I was telling you about.”

The Tarn was an important resource for recreation during the winter, because as one person said, “Well, winters are a little slow on the Island; and, so, if you don’t want to turn to some of the less desirable things in life and you’d rather focus on good outdoor family things to do -- you know, ice boating, ice fishing, skating -- you look for the opportunities that are available, so it sure beats hunkering down in, you know, next to the wood stove or whatever. Or in front of the TV.”

Ice Boating on the Tarn

Ice boating on the lakes and ponds of eastern MDI is a form of winter recreation that was enjoyed both historically and currently (Figure 22). Of the group interviewed, two people reported having done ice boating on a regular basis, and of these, only one (Dennis Smith, from Otter Creek) used the Tarn regularly. From informal conversations, photographs, and historic references to ice boating, it is likely that there were more individuals who ice boated at the Tarn, who could be identified with additional time for research and interviewing.



Figure 22. Ice boating on Eagle Lake. No date.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society)

Smith estimates that he enjoyed ice boating for fifteen to twenty years, starting when he was in his twenties and continuing into his forties. “One of the things that made it [the Tarn] so good because it was -- as far as the ice boating and skating, it would freeze over before anything else would. So you could go there before you could go anywhere else.” But he also noted that it was especially challenging because of its small size, “fierce winds,” and the necessity for tacking quickly and frequently. In the Tarn you’ve got to keep tacking -- back and forth. If you have to stop, you let out the sheet and try to turn into the wind.” He described ice boating as “very similar to a small sailboat like a *Sunfish* except it’s on skates. You got a sheet; and you steer with your feet. It’s like a tripod-

shaped frame with a runner up front, and a pole with a sail.” He noted that there was always the possibility of doing unintentional “360’s” while tacking quickly on smooth ice.

Dennis Smith’s descriptions of ice boating on the long, narrow pond, with the wind whipping up his speed, were vivid reminders of the strength of the wind through the Tarn. He remembered getting going fast, “I mean *really fast -- ripping*. Faster than you want to go at times. (Smith interview, emphasis in interview). In conversations with individuals who are knowledgeable about ice boating technology, the current boats called “skimmers,” have become lighter and more maneuverable on the ice, as seen in Figure 23.



Figure 23. Ice boating at the Tarn, about 1987.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society. Photo by Tammy Packie, *Bar Harbor Times*)

Summer Recreation and Other Uses of the Tarn

Hiking, Wading, and Swimming

The carefully laid paths and walks around the Tarn, developed from 1913 to 1916 and described in the first section of this chapter, invite hiking and exploring the Tarn. The Kane Path follows the western edge of the Tarn and provides the opportunity to walk among the granite boulders that flank the steep rise of Dorr Mountain.

Compared with the senior generation interviewed, the younger generation who are in their 40s and 50s, described more recreational hiking. For example, a fourth-generation Bar Harbor native remembered that hiking around the Tarn was a desirable activity for her husband and children, although her parents did not hike there. “My family -- not my parents, but my family -- we hiked a lot -- all the different trails and stuff like that.” Another of this generation offered, “Hiking and getting into the water, were primarily what we did.” Another person recollected:

“As I grew up, I certainly spent a lot of my time hiking throughout the Island and have spent a number of times hiking the trails in and around the Tarn and then up Dorr and Cadillac. There’s opportunity to sit and relax and reflect. And if you’re hiking -- it’s a nice place to rest and eat your lunch [at the Tarn]. I see people taking their shoes off.”

Several interviewees noted that they particularly liked the Tarn because they could get in it and wade out into it (Figure 24). They compared it to other water bodies, such as Bubble Pond, Jordan Pond, and other lakes that are reserved for scenic viewing only or for water supply (Eagle Lake). They made the point that there are not a lot of open water areas that are accessible to the public—“places where you can just go and wade, or swim your dog, or what have you.” Two individuals mentioned that people are encouraged to hike *around* lakes and ponds, perhaps “paddle a canoe on them,” but there are not many opportunities to use them on the east side of MDI. One person, a seventh and eighth-grade teacher in Bar Harbor for over thirty years, took his class to the Tarn for a “sort of a picnic or an outing or fishing excursion” each year.

Another interviewee noted that “The Hadlocks, for example, there’s just no swimming, no live bait, no motorized craft, no dogs, and there are -- you know, if you’re caught, there are penalties.” The interviewee concluded that “in terms of general public opportunities to utilize in a fairly unrestricted manner open water areas, there aren’t a lot of them on the Island.” Another individual recollected:

“We’d just go up the Ladder Trail or something like that, you know. There are lots of great trails that come down on the west side of the Tarn that go along that edge, so, we’d go down there and I’d bring the dog down there to swim. Because on this side of the Island there are not there are not many open bodies of water.”

“Legal or otherwise, there was swimming that occurred in the past. You know, if you’re coming down off a hike and, in particular if you’re coming down the stair trail off Dorr Mountain -- it was not uncommon to see people jump in. I don’t [personally] remember swimming in it, but certainly -- many a dog has been, you know, watered in that pond or swum in that pond.”



Figure 24. Hikers cooling their feet at the Tarn stepping stones, 2010.

These interviewees described an aspect of “usability” of the Tarn. The interviewees appreciated it as a public resource that they perceived was available for many activities in a somewhat unrestricted manner. The usability of the Tarn is linked with memories and meanings, and may be one of the keys to the significance of the Tarn to interviewees. It is described more fully in Chapter 3, Multiple Components of Significance: Memories, Meaning and Values.

Relative to the prevalence of skating and fishing activities, which were noted nearly universally by all of the interviewees, hiking and wading in the Tarn were mentioned less frequently and recollections and stories were fewer. Over the entire interview group of 27 individuals, hiking was mentioned by about a third to half of the individuals.

Several people interviewed paid attention to wildlife in and around the Tarn in a number of contexts. One of the senior gentlemen interviewed (in his 70s) recollected a number of stories about tracking wildlife around the Tarn and had personal stories from his adventures with behavior of bear and beaver. These ventures would have occurred in the 1930s-1940s. Trapping was mentioned by only one interviewee, the same individual, and any trapping was done by a friend, not the individual himself. Additional individuals with rich experience tracking and dealing with wildlife were suggested by interviewees, but it was not possible to interview them due to the time constraints of the study. A few individuals also mentioned that trapping has pretty much died out and that no one does it much anymore. One individual who worked for ANP mentioned live-trapping beavers, presumably as part of his job.

A number of people described their pleasure in spotting wildlife and stopping to view its activities at the Tarn. They noted that it is easy to pull off the Otter Creek Road to watch an osprey or otters lying on their backs eating fish or an eel. Two people mentioned they would go to the Tarn to check the vegetation occasionally, looking for native species.

The Tarn as a Source of Water—Fire Control and Practice

A few interviewees recalled that the Tarn was available for fire control and training, all of whom were or are employed by the park. “Several, *several* years ago, the Jackson Lab was on fire and they actually used the Tarn as a water source to help with the fire. We [NPS] took our pumper truck down there and pumped water for the fire. Because when you look around, there’s not another source of water” (James interview).

Another interviewee remembers the Tarn as a source of water for test runs for fire control for the NPS—where the team learned how to use the pump and hose, and how to “lay them right.” “A couple of years in a row, at the beginning of the summer season, the park personnel would go down there and learn how to handle the fire pumps, and connect the hoses up and test the hoses. Usually, at the end of the day, they’d have a water fight.” This was likely in the 1960s (Alley interview).

By way of context, ANP and the town of Bar Harbor installed a dry fire hydrant in the early 1990s; but it was functional for only a few years before it silted in (Figure 25). Rehabilitating the hydrant would have required a Maine Natural Resources Protection Act permit from the State because the area immediately adjacent would need to be dredged or and submerged vegetation removed. Consequently, the rehabilitation project was abandoned by the Town of Bar Harbor (J. Hazen Connery, pers. comm. March 31, 2011).



Figure 25. Dry hydrant at the Tarn, 2010.

CHAPTER THREE

MULTIPLE COMPONENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE: MEANINGS, MEMORIES AND VALUES

“...landscape is pragmatic, poetic, rhetorical, polemical; landscape is the scene of life, a cultivated construction, a carrier of meaning, a form of language.” Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*

How Meaning Accrues to Places

Landscapes, geographies, and places are crucibles of meaning that take shape as we pass from childhood into adults. They are visual and interpretational parts of our lives, constructed from one’s own experience and from the knowledge and stories of other generations. Humans historically and routinely imbue landscapes and places with meaning, from the Navajo (Diné) four sacred mountains to the iconic Statue of Liberty.

Meanings of places have personal derivations, but components of meaning are also routinely shared among a community, a cultural group, families, or a network of people with similar experiences. They can be lyrical, spiritual and highly situated; and they can be both imagined and real in the context of history and time (Basso 1996; Spirn 2000). One important objective of this study is to allow interviewees to describe the significance and meaning of the Tarn—what the place means to them—from their memories, experiences, recollections and thoughts.

This study focuses on individuals who have lived close to the Tarn and used it for multiple generations (two to four). It seeks to understand their connections to the landscape and the meanings they derive from this geographical feature: what it *was* and *is* about the Tarn that makes it significant to them. This chapter describes the themes that interviewees mentioned multiple times among their comments and observations, and interprets some of the underlying themes such as usability.

What the Tarn Means

This section describes the values and attitudes of the interviewees as evidenced in their statements about the significance and meaning of the Tarn. The intertwined memories and beliefs are a measure of their connections to the Tarn. Some of the meanings are symbolic, some aesthetic, and some are simply reflections of what they saw and remembered. Their comments express what makes the Tarn a special place to them and why the changes in the Tarn are important.

Open Water as an Essential Component of the Landscape

The majority of the interviewees remembered the Tarn as an open body of water during their lifetime, meaning from 1930 to about 1990. One person, about 70 years old, characterized it as open “forever.” People used words like “relaxing,” “tranquil,” “it sparkles -- looks like a gem,” and “it’s a thing of beauty” when they described the Tarn as they remembered it. The ability to see open water is an essential component of the Tarn to them; and without it, the Tarn loses meaning. Whether or not the memories of the interviewees reflect historical reality of fluctuating conditions in the Tarn is not the issue. Their memories and feelings about the significance of open water are deeply etched in their sense of meaning of the Tarn (Figure 26).

Several individuals clarified that the Tarn does not have to be *totally open* to be recognizable and meaningful. In fact, most interviewees recall seeing varying amounts of vegetative coverage at different times and realize that water levels and vegetation vary by decade and by season. Several remember that water lilies bloomed there at one point. But essentially, the idea of having *some* open water seemed to be integral to the meaning of the Tarn for the majority of people interviewed.

Reflective Capacity of Water

The *reflective capacity* of the Tarn to mirror the surrounding mountains and to reflect light was an important component of the meaning of the Tarn. Reflective capacity had a number of different, but related, aspects.

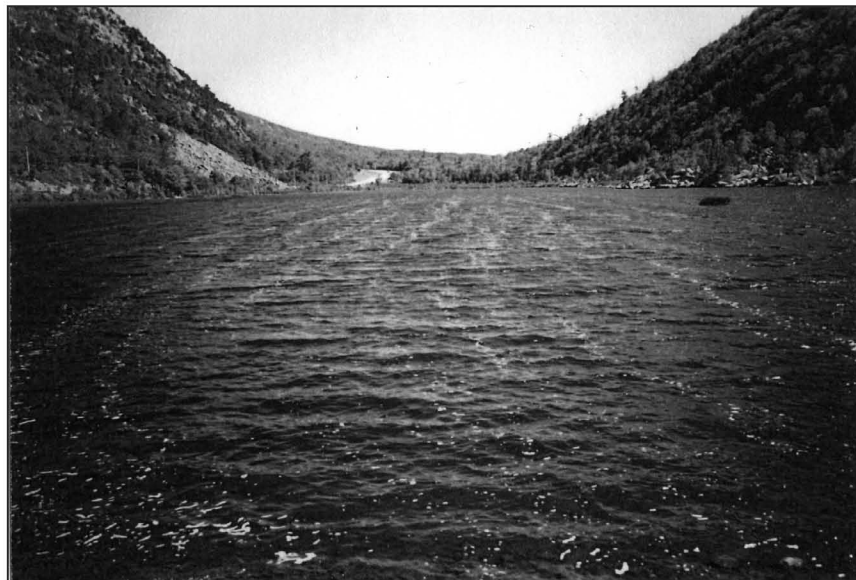


Figure 26. Wind trails on the Tarn, estimated to be about 1960.
(Bar Harbor Historical Society)

The Tarn provided a visual mirror, a reflection of the mountains surrounding it. One individual from Otter Creek stated her appreciation this way: “When it was clear, it was even more visible because that beautiful reflection is of one of the most classic glacial bowls ever. You’d see that as you’d come around the corner, and to me it was pretty awesome and awe-inspiring to see that.” Another person commented, “. . .there’s something incredibly remarkable about that place visually. . .how that [water in the Tarn] sets up the east face of Dorr, it’s spectacular.”

Reflection of the mountains, particularly Dorr Mountain, had symbolic significance to some interviewees. Two people mentioned the reflection of Dorr Mountain *in a pond that he created*. “The reflection of Dorr Mountain. . .was a nice fit, that his mountain was reflected in his Tarn.” Another individual stated that “. . .when you hike Dorr, the Ladder Trail or whatever, I liked the fact that you were seeing Dorr -- the mountain named after him -- reflected in a pool that he helped create. I mean, he helped dam it at one end.”

Reflectivity also has to do with the way that light bounces off a surface. Several people remembered the Tarn as “a gem” or mentioned a sparkling quality. One individual put it this way: “Well, the name Tarn—it’s a mountain pond. And basically, to me, it’s between the two mountains. And when the sun hits it, it just is like sparkles, you know.”

Most interviewees thought that the changes in the Tarn would reduce the Tarn to an un-recognizable meadow from which there would be no reflection of the surrounding granite domes. An interviewee from Bar Harbor offered the opinion that “something needs to be done” to maintain the essence of the Tarn as he remembered and experienced it. Another Bar Harbor interviewee of the senior generation put it this way: “The weeds, the growth in there is something else. I thought they would drain that down. It’s important to have the water in there.”

Landscape Aesthetics—“The Way it Looks”

The sentiment voiced most frequently (by a majority of interviewees) was that they did not like the way it looks. The present appearance of the Tarn does not fit their idea of what is attractive, compared with their memories of how the Tarn looked. The group interviewed did not care for the extensive coverage of reeds, grasses and vegetation. They expressed this concern as a variation of the statement that they do not like it “all grown in with the weeds, the grasses and reeds, so thick you could walk on it” or “mow it.” Another individual observed that the changes they noticed are “getting worse every year.”

The following quotes are from an Otter Creek native who traces his ancestry back to the original Massachusetts settlers on MDI. He makes the point that people who live

in Otter Creek and drive by the Tarn every day, have experienced it historically (compared with the occasional visitor or tourist), and are more likely to notice the encroaching grasses and reeds and to be dismayed by the changes.

“I guess I’ll say it this way -- living in Otter Creek and going to Bar Harbor, I see the Tarn all the time. Now, somebody may only see it twice a year, if they come from the other side of the island, they’re going to come around through Somesville and the Eagle Lake Road to Bar Harbor. So, all I’m saying is those of us that see that, and I don’t know if everybody’s like me, but they don’t like what it looks like, okay?”

“I have to be honest and say to you that I don’t know what the tourist person driving by thinks of it, okay? Because they haven’t seen it with the clear water, you know. But having seen what it has looked like in the past -- it looks like hell now, okay?”

Another person stated their preference would be to “look at a nice pond down there [rather] than weeds. I guess I shouldn’t call them weeds. But, to me, it’s a much more relaxing, soothing type of thing to look at [i.e. water in the Tarn].”

Not only did people object to the look of it, there were objections to the particular kind of growth currently in the Tarn that they *perceive* as different than previous aquatic growth such as water lilies, arrowheads and grasses.

The Tarn Symbolizes the Intent to Create Beauty

The scenic vistas of the Tarn were connected in several interviewees’ minds with the sense that the park founders intended to create the Tarn, and deliberately cultivated it, as part of a landscape in their pursuit of beauty and picturesque settings. This idea, whether historical fact or not, created meaning for them by connecting the Tarn as a landscape to the important goals of the park founders; and in doing so, connecting them (the interviewees) to the history of the park and the area (Figure 27).

The following statement is by a person whose family lived in Bar Harbor and MDI for multiple generations prior to and after the formation of the park. “George B Dorr invented -- *created* -- the park for people to have a place to go to be peaceful away from business and hardships and things like that. And I think the Tarn does that. (emphasis in original). Another individual put it this way:

“As far as goal and what he set his mind to, I think that basically he [Dorr] was into picturesque beauty. That’s the word that you’re looking for right now is *beauty*. And that is the word that actually describes what these three people [Dorr, Elliot, and Rockefeller] were accomplishing. And the Tarn was beauty because it was a beautiful area with the pond lilies, and it was tranquil.”



Figure 27. George B. Dorr at the Tarn, about 1935.
(The Strout Family Collection – Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

“I’d like to see it loaded with water lilies,” “or at least a few in there,” said one of the interviewees from Wild Gardens. She had memories of “a teenaged boy who used to ride his bike down there [from Bar Harbor], I think every day in the summertime and cut pond lilies and take them back to town to sell them.” Another individual, a Bar Harbor native for at least two generations, was familiar with the 1939 planting of water lilies from Mt. Desert Nurseries, owned by George B. Dorr (OCLP 2009:42). She recalled that George B. Dorr’s greenhouse and Mount Desert Nurseries were “just around the bend, if you’re leaving the Tarn and going back toward the Jackson Lab. His nursery was down the road a piece, about a quarter of a mile.” She remembers the Tarn with the lilies: “Oh, it was a beautiful -- it was just a spectacular place that you could enjoy by just viewing it;” and “you knew not to pick them because, you know, it was park property.” She also

remembered “people telling me the fragrance of a pond lily is something that you never will forget.” For about one-third of the 27 interviews, there were specific memories associated with water lilies in the Tarn, whether it was a rejection of them (as in the aunt who wanted the Tarn completely open), stories about cutting them to sell in town, or an appreciation of the beauty of the lilies—these memories are linked with feelings about the Tarn.

Loss of Opportunities for Historical Uses

The majority also talked about loss of the Tarn as a place for skating, ice boating, and fishing or swimming for the last two decades. “I think now it’s getting so with the growth there that you don’t get a good ice there anymore. Because if the ice forms around that growth, that growth doesn’t really go below the water. The water freezes around it, so there isn’t really any good skating there.” One Bar Harbor native, probably in his 70s, observed simply, “Used to be a lot of skating and fishing, but you don’t see it anymore.”

One woman who grew up in Otter Creek and now lives in Southwest Harbor remembers skating at the Tarn as a child. “There were no water plants growing up in the middle, even when I was a kid. It doesn’t look anything like when I grew up. My children could never skate there [when they were growing up], and they’re 28!” She expects there will be no water pretty soon. “The grass doesn’t belong here. I wish it were water again.”

Another person observed, “They [the reeds] don’t die down enough. You can’t skate on it at all anymore.” “. . .it makes a really rough, bumpy, ice, and that has damaged the ice for skating.”

Interviewees also mentioned the loss of fishing activities at the Tarn. The most recent biological assessment of fishing and fish habitat in the Tarn states that the pond is only good for producing baitfish (Smillie and Ellsworth 2010) and is not viable for brook trout. Interviewees who were or are fishermen concur and make similar evaluations. One interviewee stated: “Now that it’s become shallower and temperatures have warmed up and there’s not as much open water area there -- there’s really minimal fish, if any -- I’m sure there are fish there, you know, probably bait fish or what have you. But in terms of a cold water fishery, it’s probably pretty much nonexistent.”

The Tarn as a Useable Recreational Resource

This aspect of meaning is overt in several interviewees’ statements but implicit in the way many interviewees talked about the Tarn (Figure 28). The Tarn is perceived to be one of the few public ponds on the eastern side of MDI where people can use the water. It is a tacit assumption, at least by most of the interviewees, that one can (could)

fish there, wade in the water, let dogs swim in the Tarn, skate in the winter, ice boat, or walk around it and put your feet in the water. It is distinguished from “accessibility” of a resource which is easy to get to, for example, with nearby parking or a short walk. But it is *useable* if there are few restrictions on its use. One-fourth of the interviewees noted that the Tarn had aspects of usability for them.



Figure 28. Wading and exploring along Kane Path, 2010.

“What I meant to say earlier about other open water areas on the Island -- there are not a lot. Although the public is certainly encouraged to hike around or to walk around or in some cases paddle a canoe on or what have you, there’s not a lot of places where you can just go and get in the water, say wade or swim -- or swim your dog or what have you. There are restrictions because of the drinking supplies. And, you know, the Hadlocks, for example, there’s just no swimming, no live bait, no motorized craft, no dogs, and there are -- you know, if you’re caught, there’s -- there’s penalties. And, so, in terms of general public opportunities to utilize in a fairly unrestricted manner open water areas -- there aren’t a lot of them on the Island.”

The Tarn as a Local Resource for Otter Creek

A less tangible aspect of meaning that accrues to a resource or a geographic feature with historic association with a community is the feeling of familiarity, continuity, and a fictive sense of being part of one’s “neighborhood.” The town of Otter Creek is the

most proximate village to the Tarn and has a long-term association with the Tarn—since about 1913 when the impoundment appeared at the outlet of Little Meadow. Presumably it was familiar to them as a wetland or meadow landscape (Little Meadow) since the 1890s when residents provided provisions and services to Bar Harbor cottages and establishments and would necessarily pass through The Gorge on their way into town on a daily or weekly basis (Smythe 2008). It is a sense of connection that comes from a history of access, usability, and familiarity with geographic and landscape features. Basso (1996) provides compelling ethnographic description of how the landscape features of the Western Apache come to take on meaning, whether a spring seeping from the ground, a mountain top, or a bend in a stream. Landscapes take on meaning in complex and subtle ways that are not always stated explicitly; so at times it is helpful to look behind interviewees' descriptions to the assumptions that underlie their stories.

For Otter Creek interviewees, there was a sense that the Tarn was a part of their past for as long as they could remember (2-4 generations),³ and that the pond was a communal resource. There was a sense that the Tarn was in their “back yard.” Otter Creek interviewees relied on it as a place for skating parties, family recreation, and as a scenic source of inspiration. The feeling of the Tarn being part of one's backyard comes from the familiarity of using it, as in the recollection of person who put exotic catfish in the Tarn (his neighborhood fishing spot), so that he could fish for it. The interviewees related to it both as a recreational destination and as a place with vested memories from generations of use in ways that made it a part of their cultural landscape.

Let Mother Nature Take Her Course

For several individuals the evolving character of the Tarn was illustrative of normal changes in nature. Their opinion was that natural processes should proceed and that the Tarn should become (revert to) a meadow. One individual made the point that the situation offered a good opportunity for the NPS to offer environmental education programs at the Tarn, and felt that “we should not be held hostage by plans laid by original park founders.”

“George Dorr had a lot of plans, [some of] which never happened. And it's probably a blessing that it never happened, you know. So, I don't think that's

³ Most interviewees recognized that the Tarn was formed by an impoundment and was not a natural phenomenon. They recognized intellectually it would have been a different landscape before the impoundment, but the memories passed along to them by aunts, uncles and grandparents were about the Tarn as a pond, and not as Little Meadow, hence the statement and feeling that the Tarn had been there “forever.” Only one interviewee had recollections from the time of Little Meadow and how it was used, mentioned in Chapter 1.

a legitimate argument to say we have to make it always be the way it was when George Dorr was alive. They evolve. And we could make it an educational process, to educate the public to what happens.”

Four individuals expressed dual opinions with respect to “Mother Nature,” by which they meant changing ecology. “Mother Nature” should take its course; but by the same token these individuals would rather see the Tarn with more open water. For example, a former employee of the park offered the view that the Tarn is following natural progression filling in and should be let go. He stated, “We’re not in the business of creating reflecting pools to recapture what can’t be recaptured.” At the same time, he expressed the view that it would be a loss if the Tarn continued to fill in with vegetation.

Another interviewee also voiced the same polarity between his professional assessment and personal view. As natural resource professionals, both natives of MDI (Bar Harbor and Northeast Harbor), these two realized they were watching a case study in the laws of ecological succession. As long-time residents, on the other hand, they voiced the personal view that they would be losing something if the Tarn reverted to total wetland. One person was not opposed to dredging it or other mitigation, and suggested looking into ways to restore it; but at the same time, he realized he was viewing natural processes at work. The fourth person stated they “Always enjoyed its [the Tarn’s] appearance as a lake, rather than whatever..a pond.” But he concluded that “You have to let Mother Nature do its thing.”

To summarize, this chapter expands on the significance of the Tarn by exploring the multiple components of interviewees’ beliefs and experiences that give meaning and value to the Tarn in more intangible ways. To the majority of interviewees, the essence of the Tarn means having a certain amount of open water—enough to maintain its reflective nature and its ability to mirror the surrounding granite domes. The Tarn with reflectivity is a place that connects them with the vision that they believe George B. Dorr and other park founders had, i.e. to create a landscape with beauty and tranquility. It is valued as a place that is accessible and that is useable for many activities in the water and around the shore, and it is perceived by interviewees to be unlike other lakes on the east side of MDI. A tacit value that permeates peoples’ recollections and feelings about the Tarn, at least for Otter Creekers, is that it is a familiar and part of their cultural landscape and an appreciated community asset for them as individuals and their families.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGING CONDITIONS AT THE TARN: OBSERVATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

For almost a century, generations of Otter Creek residents have walked or driven by the Tarn on their way to Bar Harbor, and Bar Harbor residents had easy access to the Tarn. In listening to the interview group talk about their associations and connections to the Tarn, their narratives reveal a familiarity with it and a desire to understand and explain why the Tarn is changing—not just an opinion of what it looks like—but to offer their thoughts about *why* changes are occurring. The changes universally noted by interviewees are that the Tarn is becoming shallower and filling with vegetation. Ironically, the changes themselves have become a significant aspect of the Tarn’s character, perhaps because they have been so rapid, dramatic, and noticeable—especially to those who travel the Otter Creek Road on a regular basis. One person put it succinctly: “What is really notable is the rate at which that place has changed - essentially in a generation’s time period.”

This chapter presents interviewees’ observations and beliefs about causation, natural forces, critical events, and unexplained anomalies in order to present a holistic picture of historical, cultural, and ecological associations of interviewees from Bar Harbor and Otter Creek—one of the key goals in this ethnographic project. The chapter takes a generally chronological approach with interviewees’ recollections and observations, beginning with memories and stories from the early part of the twentieth century and the construction of the impoundment that eventually created the Tarn. From there, the chapter describes the events and activities in mid-century that interviewees’ perceived caused changes in the Tarn; and continues with observations from the late twentieth century to its current state. It concludes with interviewees’ observations about the range of actions that could or should be taken to manage the current changes in the Tarn.

Beliefs about Who Built the Dam and Why

One of the persistent historical questions about the Tarn is who built the dam and why (Figure 29). As described in Chapter 1, there is little documentary evidence that points to responsibility for construction or intent for the Tarn dam. The CLI states that a dam appeared, but with no attribution of responsibility or citation of source. “In c.1913, a dam is built to support stepping stones across the outlet of the Tarn” (OCLP

2009:39). The researcher reviewed the annual reports of the BHVIA from 1898 to 1920 and found detailed descriptions of paths built, specifications on how they should be constructed, numbers of stepping stones cut and laid, and sponsorship of paths—but the annual reports were silent on the construction of any impoundment or dam at the Tarn. According to Margaret Coffin Brown, many of the records of George B. Dorr and Anthony Liscomb, the designer credited for the layout and construction of trails in the SDM area, and who “did all the heavy work for Dorr,” were burned in the Great Fire of 1947 and much detail on Dorr’s intent is missing. “There are snippets of Dorr’s ideas but no clear picture.” (M.C. Brown pers. comm. 10/27/2010).



Figure 29. Tarn outlet and stepping stones Fall 2010.

The majority of interviewees believed that George B Dorr had something to do with building the dam and had some intent for doing it.⁴ But a number of people, all in the senior generation of interviewees, had specific ideas and offered explanations for the dam. Following are seven individuals’ comments:

“Let me go back and say when George B. Dorr, who, of course, was the original superintendent of Lafayette National Park and Acadia, his mother owned land down where Sieur de Monts Springs is, and he took that land -- excuse me, he *bought* that land and dedicated gardens down there in memory of his mother. And he then either dammed up or did something to make the Tarn a bigger body of water, okay?”

⁴ About a fourth of the interviewees said they had “no clue, no idea,” or “I don’t have the foggiest.”

“I’m not sure of the date when that dam was put in there, when the stepping stones. I thought George [Dorr] did it or had it done. He didn’t do it personally, but -- *authorized* as to.”

“The only thing I know is that George Dorr was responsible for making the pond.”

“The Tarn, the stepping stones, I understood he [Dorr] originally built that, or had that built, as a memorial to his mother.”

“The dam was put in by the people who have the YMCA.”

“...it [the dam] was [one of] George B. Dorr’s works. Well, didn’t he own Sieur de Monts Spring at one time? So, I believe that he just went ahead and had that built...” (in the context of developing water supplies—see Walls interview below).

One interviewee’s idea about the dam’s origin attributes the building of the dam to the desire by wealthy residents of Bar Harbor for a local fishing hole, as related in Chapter 2:⁵

“And a lot of the doctors here [Bar Harbor] in the hospital and around never had enough time to go out and go fishing anywhere. So, they got together and had somebody build the dam to flood the thing and then they put trout and fish in it. So, when they got a few minutes, they’d drive down here, cast a little bit, and see. And that’s how it [the Tarn] originally got filled with water.”

Finally, Norman Walls, an Otter Creek native, recollected a series of conversations between his NPS supervisor and himself at the time he was a new employee at the park. The conversations occurred just prior to his boss’s retirement in the early 1950s. His supervisor had worked with George B. Dorr when Dorr was superintendent at Acadia, and he described how water from the Tarn was piped down from the Tarn to the Sieur de Mont site for its amenities, namely the public restrooms.

“‘They used to lose their water down there at Sieur de Monts.’ And I couldn’t imagine what he was talking about, so I said, ‘well, what do you mean? The water’s right there, how did they lose it?’ Well, he said, ‘they didn’t use the spring water for bathrooms or any of this kind of stuff.’”

“So he said, ‘they run a siphon from the Tarn down through to Sieur de Monts Springs, and it run gravity-feed the whole time...but every once in a while it would lose the siphon.’ And he said, ‘the only way we could do it is shut

⁵ The story is repeated here because the belief includes intent to create a pond--a fishing hole that was easily accessible for recreational purposes for the busy professionals and wealthy cottage residents in town.

off a valve and go up there and [with] buckets of water and fill this end of it up,' and then when you open your valve up, the siphon of that water on the downhill side would pull the water from the pond."

Walls stated that he "walked that little trail between the pond, the Tarn, and Sieur de Monts Springs quite often—just walk or fish that brook." He saw the pipes reported by his supervisor there, corroborating the use of the Tarn for water for Sieur de Monts. He also stated that "they didn't use the sweet spring water at Sieur de Monts for any of the amenities like the bathrooms or toilets—it was for drinking only."

Walls surmises the dam was one of George B. Dorr's projects. "I believe that he just went ahead and had that built, because...the summer people that lived like the [Satterlees] and people down in that area -- their water came from The Bowl on the same principle." He stated it was typical of that era to impound water or have a water tank, and then siphon it down for use in town or in the Sieur de Monts area.

The existence of a pipeline used to supply water to Sieur de Monts during the 1930s is also described in a document written by Dorr shortly after the transfer of the Delano Wild Gardens of Acadia to the United States, which occurred in about 1935. The statement, signed by George B. Dorr, Superintendent of Acadia NP at the time, documents the rights and duties that were transferred to the Park along with the Wild Gardens, among which was the responsibility for maintaining (and replacing as needed), the "piped irrigation system from the Tarn" which waters the Garden, the Abbe Museum and the Sieur de Monts Spring lawn (Figure 30).

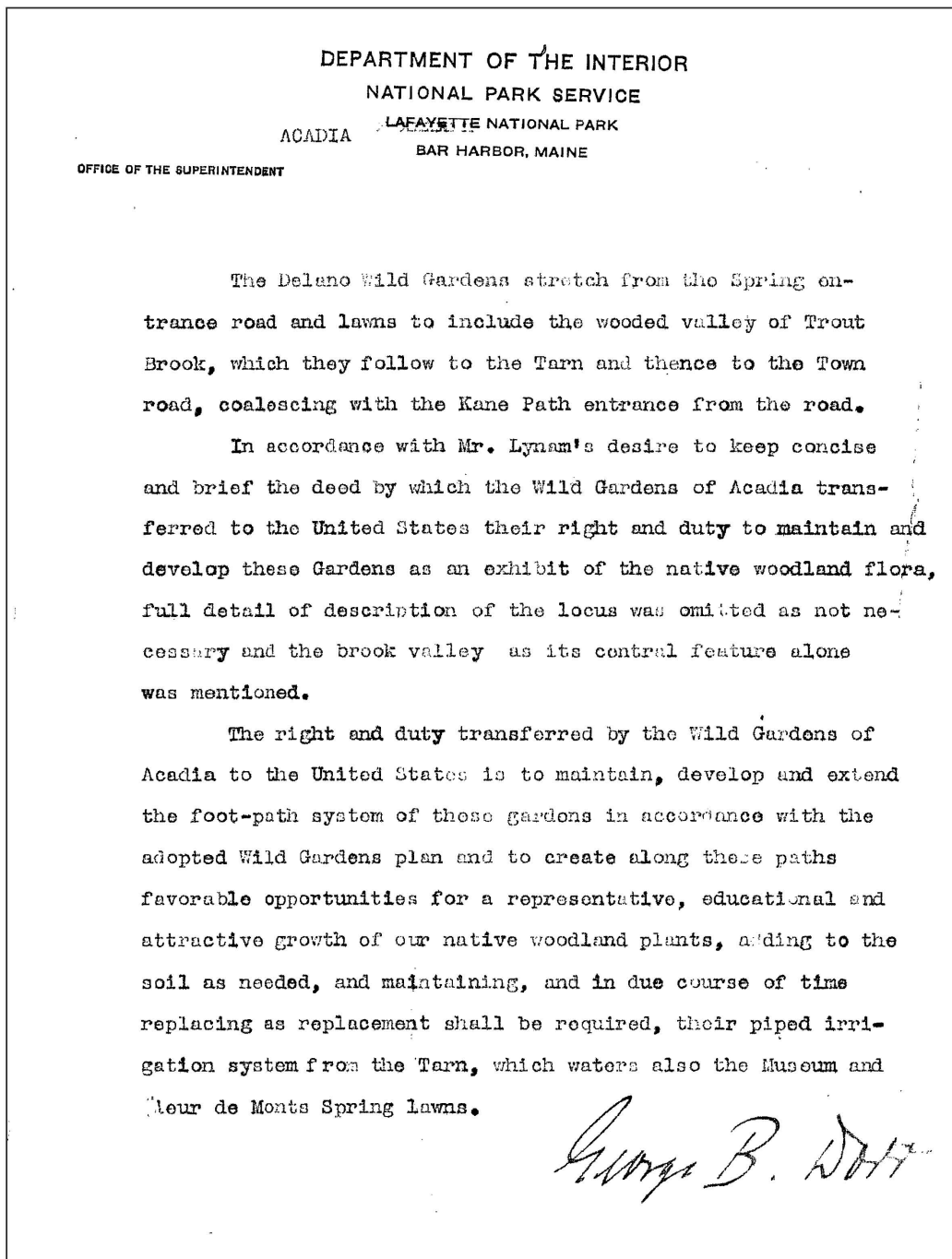


Figure 30. Statement from Superintendent George B. Dorr regarding the irrigation system from the Tarn to Sieur de Monts, Circa 1935. (W.O. Sawtelle Collections and Research Center, Acadia NP)

The information provided by Mr. Walls and the memo by George Dorr supports the idea that the Tarn was an integral part of the water supply system for the Wild Gardens and the restrooms in SDM at least during the early third of the century.

Effects of the Great Fire of '47

Several interviewees had personal recollections of the Bar Harbor fire of 1947 and had worked on the devastation left behind after the fire. These individuals, all in their 70s or 80s, believed that the fire had an important, if not *the most important*, influence on the increasing shallowness and vegetation in the Tarn over the long term. First and foremost, they believed that the fire changed the erodability of the soil since mud, dirt, gravel, and silt washed off the denuded slopes more easily. “So, you know, the whole soil erosion changed after the ‘47 fire.”

In addition, three interviewees recalled that the spires and stumps of the burned trees were cut down and believed that much of the wood and bark ended up in ponds.

“Well, Lake Wood was the same way [as the Tarn], and Lake Wood is a pond off in Hulls Cove, I mean, it was heavy pine trees, but after the fire, they cut all the logs and floated them in the pond, and the bark that came off the trees filled the pond up to a certain extent.”

“...and the Rockefeller crews had gone in and [cut down] the dead, burnt trees just to get them down. And, so, there was a lot of downed trees there that crisscrossed the trails and everything.”

“See, after the fire of ‘47, the hills were literally denuded. There was huge dead trees all over the mountains. And Rockefeller, even though it belonged to the park -- back in the ‘50s to ‘60s -- even though the park owned it, he held great sway over what happened. And he had his wood crews go in -- and just felled those trees [for the purpose of making it look better].”

One individual, probably in his eighties (he stated “I just lived a good long time”) remembers the Great Fire being the turning point for the amount of vegetation in the Tarn. His opinion was that “The 1947 fire changed a lot of things because it burned from Hulls Cove to Bar Harbor, through to Sand Beach. Before ‘47 it [the Tarn] was always a pond, with only vegetation on the edges. From the fire to the present, it was always vegetated to now an excessive situation.”

Another consequence of the Great Fire was an expansion of beaver activity in Acadia National Park in the decades after the fire. The burn killed many conifers and encouraged the growth of aspen and birches, which are favorite trees of beavers. The consequent increase in beaver activity and beaver damming around the Tarn (as well as other ponds and lakes) most likely contributed to the variability in the water levels over the next decades—even up until 2009 when the Tarn dam was replaced (park staff, pers. comm. 2010).

Filling in—Contributions from Roadways and Daily Use

Most interviewees noticed and commented that the Tarn is becoming shallower, and filling in, during the last three decades. All people interviewed had at least one explanation for the Tarn getting shallower, and a majority had two or more. Reasons included the cumulative effect of road building, putting sand on Route 3 in the winter, moving the earth around for parking areas, activities associated with the gravel pit, widening the trails like the Tarn Truck Trail in the 1930s and subsequent widening of Route 3—all of which likely increased the amount of sediment and nutrient load in the Tarn and made a contribution to the conditions that exist today. One individual specifically pointed to the lack of buffering and drainage capacity provided by the State of Maine transportation department along Route 3.

One Otter Creek resident remembers the water being clearer and deeper near the stepping stones:

“...you could stand on the [stepping] stones and look out into the water, and you could actually see the contour of the bottom. And it would slope away from here out into deeper water. So, when it went through the stones, it probably -- the water was about four or five inches deep. And you could step into the water from there. In probably two steps you would be up knee high or more...”

Most interviewees also understand either intuitively, from lifelong observation, or from professional training that the Tarn is a natural geographic sink for detritus, sediment, silt, and nutrients. In addition to the changes brought by the Great Fire of '47 they also identified other activities that they believe have increased the shallowness of the Tarn, including the road improvement activities from early days when park founders designed and built roadways, the Civilian Conservation Corps road-building and repair, county and state widenings, gradings, and drainage systems along roads that are extremely close to the water. Figures 14, 31 and 32, from the “Progress Views” album of the Kebo Mountain Extension project, for example, show grading, straightening curves, and laying asphalt around the Tarn. Otter Creek Road, a county road at the time, later was widened and became State Highway 3. The interviewees believe that sediment from the series of sequential road construction projects spanning decades, including the close-by Tarn Truck Trail, most likely contributed to its increasing shallowness.



Figure 31. Parking area construction at the Tarn, "before" shot. 1939.
(The Strout Family Collection – Ahlblad's Frame Shop)



Figure 32. Parking area construction at the Tarn, "after" shot. 1940.
(The Strout Family Collection – Ahlblad's Frame Shop)

Several people in the senior group of interviewees commented that they believed that the cumulative applications of sand to provide traction in the winter ended up being pushed or washed downhill into the Tarn.

“A lot of it is coming from the road. It’s surprising the amount of sediment we get each year from just sanding the roads. And people tend to forget about that. People tend to forget how much sand is put on every year, and none of it is ever picked up. It’s washing into the lowest point there. When you put a truckload of sand through there, three or four times in a week -- where does it go? I mean, and they plow the road and it all goes to the side and goes in there.”

Interviewees described the Tarn as surrounded by a road that is practically at the water’s edge—“right next door,” and that its proximity was believed to be a factor in increasing shallowness and boosting vegetative growth.

“Well, the road there is -- the road does come in pretty close proximity to the pond for -- I don’t know the distances, but probably a couple hundred yards or something like that. In other areas [of the park], the road’s set back from the pond, and there’s a natural buffer of vegetation and whatnot there.”

Another source of sediment came from the steep slopes of Dorr Mountain. Interviewees mentioned witnessing “torrential rains” and “water just gushing down over there.” A majority of interviewees had seen impressive waterfalls coming down Dorr Mountain and acknowledged heavy storms as a source of sediment—even rocks and boulders—entering the basin of the Tarn.

“There is a lot of runoff that comes off those mountains obviously. And they’re picking up nutrients and soil materials, and those soil materials contain phosphorous and other things. And that all contributes to the overall conversion of that pond” (Clement interview). ”

In addition to the contributions of the shoulders on State Route 3 and natural erosion down the steep slopes, several people pointed out the cumulative contribution of vegetative growth and die-back over the season—the effect of the annual cycle—on filling in the bottom and adding organic material to the pond.

“And as that root material, as the organic material associated with dead vegetation builds up, the water gets shallower, there’s more organics in the water, there’s a greater growth rate that’s available to the vegetation, so . . . eventually it will turn into a fen, probably, if you’re talking primarily reed vegetation, which is a peat bog derived from reeds and sedges and rushes and similar types of grass-like vegetation as opposed to, you know, bogs that are derived from, say, mosses, you know, the true peat bogs. And then, again, the

natural process is that it will continue to dry out and shrubs will move in and eventually forest.” (Clement interview)

Magnitude of Recent Changes

The rapidity and extent of the changes in vegetation distressed almost all interviewees, even those few who saw it as inevitable and interesting in an educational way. It was perceived that the changes have been “amazingly quick,” and “...in the last 10 years, 12 years. . .you can’t even hardly see the water now. It’s basically all of the grass.” “It’s gone from a pond to kind of a marshy area” within a generation; and “It’s the most covered I’ve seen in my lifetime.”

Interviewees observed that this year, 2010, was the most extensive coverage they had seen. Every person in the interview group noted the extensive coverage. Comments ranged from the observation that it doesn’t look anything like it used to look, with all the “growth in there,” and that it looks like “...it’s almost heavy enough to walk on, you know what I mean? Except on the far shore-- the water’s much deeper over there, see.”

The changes in the Tarn’s aquatic vegetation have been noted in park reports as well as by members of the interview group. A recent report to ANP staff on aquatic vegetation in the Tarn found the aquatic plant community has changed dramatically: two species which were not present in any of the freshwater habitats surveyed in 1996 are now the most abundant submerged aquatic plants in the Tarn—Canadian waterweed (*Elodea Canadensis*) and eastern purple bladderwort (*Utricularis purpurea*). (Staff Meeting Notes, August 21, 2008. Park files).

Several interviewees commented on changes in the types of vegetation in the Tarn.

“It’s very different from when I first started looking at it. I don’t really ever remember seeing *Equisetum* in the ‘70s. But it certainly was not there in the profusion that it is now. Nor were the reeds there in that profusion. I mean, it was really much more open water than in past years. And there were a lot more water lilies at the edges -- but now they pretty much have been crowded out.”

Another person specifically noted the problem of the reed mats that develop in the winter and create blockages and potential flooding in the SDM area below.

“And now once the ice comes in and freezes, it kills that grass, takes and pulls it out, you know, and then there’s a big raft of just these reeds floating around the top of the water. And that’s what plugs up the streams now, you know, when it drains out. It just has no place to go, and it just sits down there, you know, coming from here to Bar Harbor. You can look in there and see that brown mat right over the outlet.”

These individuals (four) recognized specific species changes in aquatic vegetation and noted some of the implications of the changes. But the majority of interviewees did not distinguish the new species, except to note the lack of lilies, and referred to them generally as “grasses” or “reeds.” They were primarily concerned with what they perceived as visual and functional negative effects of the vegetation—filling in the open water areas and making “bad ice” for skating and winter recreation.

Changing Water Levels

In general the interview group observed that water levels in the Tarn changed year-to-year and even during the year—particularly after heavy rains. The idea of natural variability in water levels was accepted at some conceptual level, even if most of their memories were of open-water conditions. Some interviewees believed that water levels in the Tarn had dropped dramatically over the last decade and that the Tarn dam was higher in the past. Their supposition was that the dam and/or the stepping stones must have been lowered or altered at some point, making the Tarn shallower.

As evidence for this drop in water levels three individuals pointed out high water marks on the rocks on the west side of the Tarn. “When you drive by there, if you notice, especially when you get to the north end, there’s some big rocks on the back shore. The old water line is obvious. As you approach the north end of the pond and look at the tip of one big rock -- I mean, it’s just a different color entirely.” They also acknowledge that “it defies logic,” and “we’ve been very perplexed as to what happened to the water level in that pond.”

The third person added: “If you go by, look at the color of the rock where the water is and where it used to be. You see what I mean? You know, it’s like the tide went out and it left the mark on the rock, okay? And, so, in the spring, the water was up there where it belonged. It’s not there now.”

These individuals were seeking answers to the perceived anomaly of water that was previously higher than the Tarn dam. This challenge to interpret the marks on the rocks was expressed in Karen Zimmerman’s January 2010 letter to the Acadia National park superintendent in the aftermath of the public meeting to discuss the CLI; and again in the statement by Dennis Smith:

“There have been serious floods in the past several years, what with seven inches of rain and all. But that still doesn’t explain the level that you see on the rocks. And that’s obviously a long-term -- it takes water to stay there quite a long time for it to leave a stain on the rocks” (Smith interview).

As noted earlier, water levels rose in response to beaver activity at various times over the past 40 years. NPS Trails Foreman Gary Stellpflug arrived at Acadia National Park in 1973 and has kept track of pond levels and beaver activity since that time, particularly as they affect trails, paths and public areas. He commented that beavers have been impounding water above the Tarn dam pretty continuously since he has been there, but there have been periods of more intense beaver activity that affected the Tarn (see *Pathmakers* 2006:222).

Recent fluctuations in the Tarn's water levels may be due to a combination of beaver activity and the compounding buildup of decaying reeds and grasses at the Tarn dam. By the 2000s, the reeds were causing quite a bit of damming in addition to beavers, according to Stellpflug. In late September 2009, with reed mat buildup, beaver dams, and heavy rainfall from a series of four large storms, the conditions at the Tarn outlet and dam faced a crisis.

“In addition, reeds were becoming a problem, clogging the stepstones. Two things were occurring: with too much water, a channel was gouging around the east end of the stones, getting quite deep and up to 6 feet wide—impassable at high water runoff. Also, the hydraulics were such that water flowing over the clogged stepstones was actually eating away at the front end of the dam. That, coupled with a few years of high rain incidents, really knocked away approximately two feet (height) from the dam. It had not yet churned its collapse upstream—in other words, the dam did not totally let go, but its front end was indeed deteriorating at a new and alarming rate. We had to do something to save the dam, protect the stepstones, and maintain the trail connection” (G. Stellpflug, pers. comm. 2/12/2011).

The trails crew sandbagged the Tarn at low water so they could work. Brush and silt were removed from upstream of the dam. They cleared the channel below the dam of any rock that appeared as if it had come from the dam itself, for reuse. They removed the granite stepping stones leading across the mouth of the Tarn, and dug out the channel.

“In so doing (and with the help of high water washing things away) we found another earlier wooden coffer dam underneath the stone dam. We did not do anything with this structure. It was not in the way of any rehabilitation, it had been buried by the present day dam, and we reburied it. We rebuilt the face of the dam, filled in behind it, “armored” the channel, and reset all the stepstones. As guide to help recreate this cultural landscape, we used three distinct photos from 1916 and the present dam looks almost exactly like those photos” (G. Stellpflug, pers. comm. 3/29/2011).

The dam was built to its original height in 1913 and the stepping stones and dam face rebuilt using historical photographs to recreate the same placement and spacing.⁶

Two interviewees also recollected beaver activity in the Tarn, the high water levels, and the resulting flood when the reeds and beaver dam let go. According to their accounts, the date would have been about 2007, a similar timeframe as Stellpflug's account.

"It was three years ago, I think, after a lot of heavy rain and a lot of heavy run-off that the beaver dam let go at the Tarn and there was six inches of water all over the place down at Sieur de Monts Springs when that thing blew out. Just a huge torrent of water came down through there. Plus heavy rains right on top of it" (Alley interview).

"Things That Aren't There Anymore"

Increasing shallowness and growth of aquatic vegetation in the Tarn have led to reduction in some of the wildlife observed at the Tarn. Three interviewees expressed disappointment at not seeing some of the wildlife that visited the Tarn in its earlier state, and which they felt would not return to the Tarn as a wetland. Wildfowl species mentioned included bufflehead, osprey and eagles.

"The buffleheads used to come back [every spring], and for me, that was like sign of spring, when the water opens just a little bit and they would come in and every spring they would be there. For me, this was one of the annual rites of passage or of seasons changing. They were pretty valiant. They stayed there until it was closing in a fair amount, and then this past year we've seen a pretty dramatic change in the amount of grass and the amount that is open. The buffleheads have not been back for two years now."

"I used to see osprey and eagle, and presumably they were feeding from the Tarn. And I haven't seen them. ... There are a couple of old trees near the Tarn that I would see them perched there, and you'd see them diving for food and -- I just sort of realized that, wow, I'm not sure when I last saw an eagle or an osprey."

"Also, when we first moved up here, this would have been in the late '80s, mid to late '80s, we used to see an osprey flying over there. So, obviously, there were lots of fish. And I haven't seen an osprey there for years."

Several residents also noticed that different species were moving in to the Tarn. About one-fourth of the interview group mentioned the appearance of muskrats on the

⁶ The uncovering of the wooden coffer dam inside the stone structure raises questions about whether there had been an earlier dam, for example, in the late 1800s.

Tarn during the winter (Figure 33).

“It was beautiful. With that ice -- and here’s these little houses all over the ice, yeah. And I think it’s because of the grass. They’re taking that grass and they’re making houses out of that grass that’s growing on the ice.”

“And these little guys know how to populate because we started out with one muskrat, and then we looked and there were three. And by the end of the season, there were 14 muskrat huts. So, I guess they’re like rabbits. And that was fun to watch.”



Figure 33. Muskrat houses on the Tarn, 2008.
(Photo by Alice MacDonald Long)

One Bar Harbor native stated that he’s seen muskrats at the Tarn over the years, but they’re not new to the Tarn. “I imagine there’s always been a bunch of them there. You just don’t see them a lot. And as they get a colony going and the area won’t support them, then they’ll move on to another brook...” According to Prins and McBride muskrats were hunted for food and fur by Wabanakis on a regular basis prior to the arrival of Europeans; are indigenous, and considered historically common in the area (2007:521).

Attitudes about Intervention

Nearly everyone had an opinion about what should be done, ranging from pragmatic solutions, to tongue-in-cheek suggestions. A large proportion of the interview group (about ninety percent) wanted the Tarn restored with open water—perhaps not quite like the 1939 Wheeler photograph in Figure 12, but with enough reed-free open water to make good ice in the winter and provide a reflective surface during the year “worthy of Dorr’s vision.”

At one end of the spectrum was the view that the park *shouldn’t* do anything at all (also described in the section “Let Mother Nature Take Her Course.”) Three people felt that the park should let ecological succession continue and that it was not necessary to keep the Tarn open water just because that is the way it was remembered. “Change is a part of life and let’s make the best of it” is how one interviewee stated this view.

“You can’t expect a place to always remain the same as you remember it. Mother Nature is constantly changing, and we need to accept that and use that as part of an educational process. And, you know, they have to understand that there’s succession that goes on in forests and ponds and they change. And we could make it an educational process, to educate the public to what happens.”

Another individual, formerly with ANP, stated that the park management should “let it go.”

“The Tarn is following natural progression, filling in. The bottom is higher, it’s gotten shallower—the reeds have taken over. Forty to fifty years ago, it was all open water, except at the south end. We’re not in the business of creating reflecting pools to recapture what can’t be recaptured.”

He added he could think of a lot better things to do. And then added, “Except, perhaps, re-do the dam to its former glory.” His view was that the park probably shouldn’t do anything, but if it did, it could be under the aegis of historical reconstruction:

“It would be fun to have the dam put back—restore it to its original state... we do trails, stonework, stone culverts, any of the trails, in that context. I suppose if they re-did it, it would probably raise the [water] level a little bit... get a few more years out of it.”

Another individual, with legislative experience at the State level, felt that “it would be nice to see it once again like it was,” but he also stated that “I’m a very practical person,” and went on to say that “it’s going to irritate a lot of people. I think if you were

starting to do something as big as dredging in there you'd have a civil war on your hands down here with people, because I think we're in a very, very environmental mold." He saw the requirement for broad public input and the political process as causing "turmoil" and questioned whether it would be worthwhile. This person was in the middle of the spectrum, wanting to recreate an "open" Tarn, but also realizing that it would be a controversial process.

The majority of interviewees, however, held the view that something should be done and that the park has to "make concessions" even if it does not result in a totally open body of water.

"We probably made comments to ourselves like they ought to clean this up some. I think the park -- there are some things they've got to do and some things they shouldn't do. But I think they've got to make concessions in certain areas, and I think that's one of the areas that they need to make a concession in."

His interpretation was that they "need to clean it up a little bit. Take some of the growth out."

Raising the level of the Tarn dam was brought up five times but people realized it wouldn't solve the problem long term. "So, if the dam was made higher, what would that mean? Would that impound more water so that there would be less vegetation? Probably for a time, and then it would simply fill in."

Quite a few people suggested mechanical removal of vegetation or dredging of some kind. "Take a Bush Hog in the winter and when it's frozen, and mow it down. I would like to see water in it. That was George Dorr's intent, wasn't it?"

"We got moose around here, let's get some of them moose in there. (laughing). That would take care of that."

"The easiest thing, I think, but also the costliest, would be to do some kind of a small dredging operation, and it wouldn't have to be from bank to bank, any of that kind of stuff, over the whole radius of, you know, circumference of that pond. It seems as though a piecemeal type thing is something to kind of keep it open a little bit. A little bit right in the middle of it, you know, something where you'd come down over the hill, you know, and look up there, you can see that pond, the sunlight glistening off of it."

The idea of cleaning out the vegetation came up numerous times. One person pointed out that there are companies that specialize in the removal of aquatic vegetation using "either hydraulic dredges or mechanical dredges -- and they dig up this material, place it in a container so it doesn't reenter the waterway -- and then take it off and dispose of it properly so that it's not a problem. You're using relatively low-tech, low

capacity equipment to remove vegetation, maybe remove some of the built-up organic material. Contain it, dispose of it in a proper fashion,” including composting it (Clement interview).

One suggestion was to look at comparable situations in other ponds on the Island. Little Long Pond was mentioned, where dredging out the pond and returning it to its original depth has been considered, although the interviewee pointed out that much of the land surrounding it is in private ownership.

Two individuals suggested that the next step ought to be making test bores to determine the composition of the sediments during different decades. The author took this to mean the same thing as a core sample, from which one can determine layers of sediments. One individual suggested checking with fire management and resource management in the park to see if they might have done cores at earlier points in time like after the Great Fire. Several people felt that looking at cores would provide clues to how to manage the problem of filling in and getting shallower. The theory is that strata of sediments and detritus have chemical and structural clues to their source and history, and so management actions can be targeted to the sources of sedimentation, e.g. the need to provide better buffer zones, drainage from roadways, or control the amount of plant growth. One individual jokingly surmised that maybe the park did not want to know the answers (to analyze the cores).

“You know, one thing they could do which would, I think, answer a lot of questions, if they would do some test bores -- all right, so we’ve got five feet of silt. Or, if they test bore down two feet and they find bold rocks -- I mean, because we’ve already disposed it. Siltation has played a big part.”

“If you do a test bore, what will happen? You’ll find wood down three feet below the surface of the sediment, then you know. Because wood will go in there and settle and sand will go on top of it. You can tell by the composition of the test bore, as I said, it would have wood pieces in it, whether it be small limbs. . . of course, the other part of it, which we haven’t talked about at all in terms of what caused this -- the fire of 1947. That may have deposited a lot [dead wood, charcoal]. An expert could tell you, ‘Look, here’s the fire of 1947.’ You’ve probably seen core samples, and they date them.”

At the other extreme of the spectrum of opinions was the idea of restoring the stream to its *original natural* state, which would mean removing the dam itself. One individual, a fisheries management professional and Northeast Harbor native suggested that the best course of action—in an ideal world for fisheries—would be to restore the Tarn to the “cold water refugia” for brook trout that it once was. This individual believed that the Tarn plays an important role in brook trout fishery, since there are wild brook

trout above the Tarn and below the Tarn in Cromwell Harbor Brook. The dam itself acts as a “hydraulic check” that backs up the water and creates a heat sink, and changes the habitat for the trout down below. He concluded that the dam has deteriorated over time, and the best use of the area is to return it to trout habitat (Burr interview).

In sum, interviewees’ recollections of how the Tarn has changed, from the genesis of the Tarn through impoundment to contemporary times, show an awareness of the extent of human and natural forces that affected the meadow—as it became a pond, a tarn-like pond, and now is an emergent wetland (Figure 34). Whether it was because of natural forces like beaver dam construction, or human influence such as sanding the roads in winter, it is perceived that the Tarn bears the cumulative brunt of such changes in its shallow, semi-enclosed basin. Interviewees maintain an image of the Tarn as a human-constructed place of natural beauty and recreational opportunity for all seasons, but they are also aware of its vulnerability to ecological and environmental forces. Collectively, these observations and beliefs add to an understanding of the interview groups’ cultural, social, historical, and ecological associations with the Tarn.



Figure 34. The Tarn. Fall 2007.
(Robert Pennington Photography)

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study describes the historical and cultural significance of the Tarn to selected members of two park-associated communities, Bar Harbor and Otter Creek. The report emphasizes the accounts of individual community members with extensive and ongoing ties to the Tarn based on ethnographic and historical interviews. The semi-structured interviews were designed to document interviewees' connections with Tarn and its significance in their lives. They were also designed to reveal interviewees' perspectives and concerns regarding present and future management of the Tarn. The highly focused nature of the study required the selection of specific individuals with proximate residency and long association to the Tarn, and as such it is not intended to provide a broad overview of public opinions about the changes and fate of the Tarn. The study findings were not unexpected, given the criteria for selecting interviewees who cared deeply about the Tarn and had been associated with it for as many as four generations.

Findings

The Tarn has been a significant social and cultural resource. Both social and recreational, for interviewees from the towns of Otter Creek and Bar Harbor. It became a social and recreational asset to these communities for as many as four generations, through annual rounds of seasonal activities that took place at the Tarn; and interviewees believed it would be there for the community in the foreseeable future. The interviewees attached important meaning to it based on their own life stories, recollections, experiences, memories, and beliefs. The Tarn connects them to the park's history and to park founders' vision of the area; and is a source of visual inspiration for most of the group. The large majority of interviewees expressed concern about the extent to which the Tarn is covered with vegetation today and a dismay in losing a recreational and resource that had been used by their families for generations.

- **Fishing.** Native brook trout and were documented in the mid-twenties, and there may have been fishing as early as 1923. Families from Otter Creek and Bar Harbor passed by it every day and several interviewees recounted stories from previous generations about abundant fish in the Tarn. Multiple generations remembered fishing at the Tarn, for brook trout and for baitfish. The state of Maine stocked the Tarn for fifteen years and held "put and take" fishing derbies

for children in the spring. The derbies and cookouts at the Tarn were co-sponsored by the MDI Rod and Gun Club and the DIFW. Most interviewees realize today that the Tarn is too shallow to support a cold water fishery, and are disappointed that there is no opportunity to fish there.

- **Ice Skating and Ice Boating.** The Tarn was an ice skating destination for families in the winter and was a favored pond on the eastern side of MDI because it was one of the first ponds to freeze over. Most individuals had pleasant memories skating on the Tarn, both with their family or friends. It was also an ice boating destination with the reputation for a challenging, narrow basin and fierce winds. Nearly all interviewees, and their children, had skated at the pond; most interviewees lament that the current type of vegetation in the pond makes skating and ice boating impossible since about 1990s.
- **Summer Recreation.** Wading, swimming, fishing, baitfishing, viewing wildlife, hiking the trails and letting one's dogs get in the water at the Tarn were recollected as activities that families or individuals enjoyed at the Tarn.

A Place of Scenic Beauty and Repose. The majority of interviewees remembered Tarn as a pond or lake with open water and they placed positive value on the aesthetics and experiences of the Tarn in that status. They appreciated the beauty of the reflections of surrounding mountains, the sky, and the boulders adjacent to the open water on the west side of the Tarn. Some remembered and appreciated the appearance of the Tarn with water lilies in it.

The Tarn will lose its distinguishing features. As an emergent wetland, the Tarn has lost or will lose its distinguishing features—open water—that connect the interviewees to the history of the park—the building of the dam and the intent to create beauty. Their feelings and recollections are based on an image of the Tarn that has been disappearing over the past twenty years; with these changes the Tarn will lose an essential part of its character and meaning. Interviewees all acknowledged that the water levels and coverage of vegetation vary over time and seasonally, but they remembered it as predominantly open water with reflective capacity, which was valued as an open body of water that was part of the community landscape. They barely recognize the Tarn today, compared with their experience, memories and recollections.

The Intent to Create Beauty. Some individuals felt that to let the Tarn revert to a wetland would be dismissive of George B. Dorr and other park founders' intent for the site, which they interpreted as creating a scenic place of beauty—with some open water, nestled in the mountains. It became known as “the Tarn.” About one third of the interviewees expressed this idea in their interviews.

The Future Condition of the Tarn. The majority of the interviewees saw ecological processes around the Tarn as largely human-influenced and perceived no inherent contradiction in a future that would be human-controlled or managed—at least to the extent of maintaining more open water in the Tarn. Their view was that the Tarn has undergone a number of transformations—becoming a pond, supporting water lilies for a nursery, supporting a fishery—and it can continue to be managed for human purposes, including a scenic landscape. A minority of interviewees expressed the view that “nature should take its course,” and that processes of ecological succession should not be altered.

Recommendations for Further Research

One of the observations that recurred to the researcher while undertaking interviews is the wealth of historical stories, anecdotes, and other undocumented connections with the park and its early development among the group of senior individuals on MDI from all walks of life and economic sectors. The senior generation of MDI residents who worked with the first park superintendents is now entering their 80s and 90s. Their memories about the development of the park, its challenges, their relationship to the park, and its relationship with communities and individuals associated with it will be lost forever if not captured soon.

There are historical books on the walking paths and trails that have been written by a number of individuals and groups, cited throughout the report. Paul Richardson has published a history of Acadia National Park, *The Creation and Development of Acadia National Park*, in 2009. Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns’s national parks book (2009) and Public Broadcasting Service special on “America’s Best Idea” have presented to the public the legacy of the ‘rusticators’ and the conservation and preservation efforts of the early park founders on MDI.

However the author is not aware of a book that captures the oral histories of individuals and organizations from the perspective of the ‘locals.’ This view would capture the stories, memories and experiences of people who were not necessarily eminent Bar Harbor residents from the cottages nor wealthy patrons of conservation, but those who lived on MDI and *worked for* George B. Dorr and subsequent Acadia superintendents, or families of the cottages and estates, or of Bar Harbor businessmen and women who had relationships with the park. It would be the perspective of the individuals who were providing goods and services to the Bar Harbor families, or business owners in Bar Harbor who had dealings with Acadia National Park, i.e. individuals and organizations outside the inner circle of the park founders and who

followed in the wake of the monument's and park's founding. Some of their experiences came to light while undertaking this study, and provide fascinating insights into the dynamics of local communities struggling to adjust to the changes in the economy around them as Acadia National Park was consolidated and developed.

A second recommendation for research is to address concerns raised about the generalizability of the findings to the Otter Creek community and to some extent to Bar Harbor because of the small numbers of interviews. While it is the researcher's view that the findings reflect shared attitudes and experiences among Otter Creek residents in general, and, with less confidence, those in Bar Harbor, it is recognized that time and resource constraints limited the number of interviews in the research plan. Expanding the number of interviewees throughout both communities could be productive to get a firmer sense of the generalizability and representativeness of the findings.

A third recommendation is to fill in what appears to be gaps in the historical knowledge base about Little Meadow during the period from 1850 to 1913 when Cromwell Harbor Brook was dammed. As one of the reviewers of the draft report put it, "There are only two sentences" on the use or ownership of Little Meadow, which was to become the Tarn. We know from interviewees that it was used for hay for oxen (cut hay, not a pasture) and as a transport corridor during the winter, for logs from Dry Mountain; and there may be historical photographs that show the use of Little Meadow. We know that in 1900 the Rodick Realty owned the parcel, but not who owned it prior to that. Additional research could shed light on this early historical period prior to the development and purchase of land by the HCTPR in the early 1900s.

Lastly, recent scholarly undertakings are about to become available to the public (if they are not already) and provide opportunities for comparative insight and collaboration. The author was advised that Mr. Ron Epp is writing a biography of George B. Dorr and provided a public lecture at the Jesup Memorial Library in Bar Harbor. The synergies among these and other research projects could be very useful for understanding the relationship with neighboring communities around the Tarn, The Gorge, Bar Harbor, and MDI.

AFTERWORD

As an ethnographic researcher, it is clear to the author that the Tarn carries cultural meaning and is a social resource for those interviewees from Otter Creek in particular. It is hoped that the information and perspectives in this report may be of use to Acadia National Park management and staff in understanding how a natural feature in the park is connected to people in near-by communities; and how their history with it has shaped their perceptions of this resource. I have used the term “recreation” to talk about ice skating and boating, fishing, and hiking; in general recreation is something that people do for fun and pleasure. The Tarn is connected in peoples’ lives with positive memories and feelings and naturally they do not want to lose them. It is also hoped that the individuals who were interviewed will find this report useful in capturing and documenting their views, experiences, and connections with the Tarn, and perhaps see it with additional appreciation, or see their neighbors with additional appreciation.

A report on the Tarn—basically, a place—should not be so long and complex. But as anthropologist Keith Basso eloquently describes in his book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, sense of place “reaches deeply into other cultural spheres,” including the moral order of things, ways of interpreting and imagining the past, and notions of how a landscape should look (1996: *xv*). Among people who live in places or landscapes, attachments to them are taken for granted, often difficult to tease out or articulate. That means an ethnographer has to listen closely to how people use words, in what context, and how they talk about places in order to derive what it means to them. Each of the chapters in this report offers a complementary take on the history of association, the use in daily life, significance and meaning of the Tarn, and the ecological knowledge that people use to interpret it. I have tried to describe these connections without over-interpreting, but by honoring the tacit knowledge in what people related to me.

To the individuals interviewed, the Tarn has historical, social and scenic value—as well as memories attached to experiences there, connections with imagined or real park history, and ideas about how the landscape should look. The majority of interviewees think of the Tarn as part of the larger managed landscape of the Bar Harbor - Sieur de Monts - The Gorge continuum, and experience and remember it as part of their social landscape.

The inherent polarity between this general view of the Tarn as human-created and valued, and the park’s management of the Tarn as a natural resource may help explain the concerns of interviewees and residents. It has become part of “the neighborhood,” and the author sensed a desire for a more active role in its future. It is hoped that this

information might be useful to initiate communication with interested community members and to find common ground on behalf of the future of the Tarn.

The following quote, in closing, is a succinct and illustrative vignette from an individual who is one of the “younger generation”—a woman in her forties or fifties—who grew up in Otter Creek and who is working and raising her family on MDI. She provides a glimpse into the multiple dimensions of significance of the Tarn to her and her family and reflections on the changes she has seen.

“I grew up in Otter Creek. I used to go down with my great grandmother or Dad, and went by it [the Tarn] every day. It amazes me how it’s changed since the Fire—no firs and only two pine trees survived the Fire; they’re the only ones. I’m amazed how much it’s grown up. Dorr Mountain was absolutely bare. The Tarn always had a lot of lily pads. I loved to go skating there. I remember doing ice skating, ice boating—it was really good for wind. We’d go a few times in winter and summer. It was the closest place to go. I remember hiking there, too.

As I got older there were more reeds, which blocked the reflection. They made the ice bumpy. It was too shallow for fishing then; but I recall that otters fished in the lake. When I think of the pond, I remember seeing a beaver dam. If it dries up, the wildlife will go away.

They [park founders] built the path to go along the lake, not through the field. Dorr had a purpose for it, so they should preserve it. Even driving by, it’s a loss; it would be sad if it was gone.”

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE TARN

During the research process it became apparent that a chronology of events would be a useful reference, as interviewees and archival research added to the author's knowledge of events and activities at the Tarn. This chronology augments the excellent work by the Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation in the *Cultural Landscapes Inventory* (2009) of the Sieur de Monts area, by providing an historical context for the many associations of the interviewees of Otter Creek and Bar Harbor.

1500 - 1920

Wabanaki use and settlement of MDI. Pre-European trails probably existed through The Gorge, linking the Bar Harbor and Otter Creek area. Native encampments on MDI existed through 1920, which marked the end of large Wabanaki encampments, i.e. in Bar Harbor and in Southwest Harbor at Clark's Point (Prins and McBride 2007:667).

1761

Arrival of first European settlers, the Somes and Richardson families, from Massachusetts. Mt. Desert township was incorporated in 1789.

by 1870

The 'rusticators' and tourism arrived in MDI, and Bar Harbor in particular. At the turn of the century Bar Harbor was second only to Newport, Rhode Island, as a summer destination for the wealthy. By 1896, the northern meadow in The Gorge became known as Big Meadow. The smaller meadow to the south was known as Little Meadow (OCLP 2009:38). Hay was cut in Little Meadow, and the meadow was used as a transport corridor for logs from Dry (Dorr) Mountain, using ox-wagons in winter when it was frozen. The Ladder Trail was constructed in 1896.

1880s

Otter Creek village develops as a village (the earliest settlers arrived in 1830). Censuses reveal slow but steady growth. By 1850 there were six households; by 1880, 22 households; and by 1910, 38 households (Richardson 1989:111-112). The earliest deeds for fish houses on both sides of Otter Cove were in 1860s. In 1870 the primary occupation in Otter Creek was fishing for cod, lobster and other fish (Smythe 2009). During this period, residents of Otter Creek began supplying farm products (dairy, eggs, and poultry) and fish to the cottages and hotels in Bar Harbor in response to increasing demand from tourism and economic growth.

1900

The Tarn parcel was owned by the Rodick family (as was Sieur de Monts Spring).

1904

The Congregational Meeting House in Otter Creek was dedicated. Organized by the pastor, members of the church, and the Aid Society of Otter Creek (Mt. Desert Island Register, 1909-1910: 25).

1909

Souvenir publication of “Bar Harbor and Mt. Desert Island”—perhaps the earliest photograph of “Meadow in The Gorge,” showing Little Meadow prior to impoundment and transformation into the Tarn (Figure 4).

about 1913

A dam or impoundment appears in photographs, built across the outlet of the Tarn. The *Cultural Landscape Inventory* CLI notes “In c.1913, a dam is built to support stepping stones across the outlet of the Tarn. Historic photographs and maps from this time indicate a combination of open water and vegetated conditions in the Tarn” (OCLP 2009:39).

about 1913

Granite stepping stones placed near outlet of the Tarn—probably part of the path system connecting the Wild Gardens Path to the memorial trails—which intersected at the outlet of the Tarn and connected to Otter Creek Road. Water flowed over the dam and between the stones, creating a “picturesque view” of Little Meadow. The stepping stones are “characteristic of trail work by the Bar Harbor VIA” (OCLP 2009:52).

1913-1915

Kane Path completed, dedicated in 1915 as a memorial to John I. Kane from his wife, Annie Cottenet Schermerhorn Kane. The path began at the northwest corner of the Little Meadow and went south along the west edge of the Tarn, ultimately connecting with Canon Brook Path. Construction involved arranging large flat stones, boulders, and creating some steps through the talus on the west side of the Tarn to create a smooth, accessible, visually interesting walking surface and view. Dorr saw the memorial paths, including Kane Path, as central to his intent to preserve the lands and make them more eligible for designation as a monument or park (Brown 2006:67-69).

1914-1916

The Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, with Rudolph E. Brunnnow as Chairman of the Roads and Paths Committee, undertook the construction of a series of trails and paths that led visitors to scenic features and vistas. The paths were put in to “connect the spring [Sieur de Monts spring] to scenic vistas and points of interest, including the Great Meadow, the Tarn, and summits of Dorr and Champlain mountains” (OCLP 2009:25; see also BHVIA annual reports).

1915

Tract 12-107, Little Meadow, was transferred from Rodick Realty Co. to HCTPR (OCLP 2009:40).

1916

Sieur de Monts National Monument established; monument boundary did not include the Tarn.

1916

First documented use of the term “The Tarn,” by George B. Dorr to describe Little Meadow (OCLP 2009:52).

1919

Sieur de Monts National Monument renamed Lafayette National Park.

1921-1922

Beaver reintroduced to the park by State Fish and Game Commissioner (Brown 2003:76).

1926

Development of a gravel pit near the outlet of the Tarn (OCLP 2009:41 and 59).

1929

Lafayette National Park renamed Acadia National Park.

1929-1930s

Planning for roadways and park circulation was undertaken by the Olmsted Brothers, George B. Dorr, now superintendent at Acadia, and John D. Rockefeller; they eventually reached agreement to locate roads along the east side of Great Meadow and the Tarn. Construction got underway with the New Deal in 1933 (OCLP 2009:5). From 1934 to 1935, the CCC worked extensively in and around the Sieur de Monts area.

1931

The Tarn parcel (32 acres) transferred from the HCTPR to the U.S. Government (Tract 12-107).

1932-1944

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built “truck trails, gravel roads used as fire access roads or access roads to trailheads. These were ‘administrative’ truck trails and not part of the hiking trail system” (Brown 2006:127-128). The Tarn Truck Trail was constructed in 1934 on east side of the Tarn, a six-foot wide path between the highway and the water’s edge; at the southern end of Tarn, it was one or two feet from the water’s edge. The path connected with the fire truck trail that ran through Beaver Brook Valley (St. Germain and Saunders 1993: 123). The Tarn Trail is “now overlaid with road fill,” due to the widening of State Route 3 (Brown 2006: 222). The CCC removed telephone poles on the Tarn side

of Otter Creek Road, to improve the view of the talus slopes on Dry [Dorr] Mountain (OCLP 2009:61).

1934

CCC repaired Kane Path; constructed two short trails to connect the newly built Tarn Trail on the east with the Kane Path. This allowed a full circuit walk around the Tarn (St. Germain and Saunders 1993:123; Brown 2006:146).

1935

John D. Rockefeller transferred the Great Meadow parcel—and in 1936, Sieur de Monts—to the U.S. government.

1939

Mt. Desert Nurseries, owned by George B. Dorr, planted 1,000 water lilies and arrowheads in the Tarn (OCLP 2009:42).

1939-1940

Kebo Mountain Road Extension, Project 6A3-8A1. As part of the Otter Creek (road) realignment, to allow the cutoff to Ocean Drive to pass under Otter Creek Road, an overlook and parking area were developed at the north end of the Tarn, “near an abandoned gravel pit that had earlier been partially replanted with trees.” (OCLP 2009:5)

Set of ten “Bar Harbor Plates”—souvenir dinner plates—manufactured 1939-1940. One of the ten plates includes the iconic view of the Tarn outflow and stepping stones (Bar Harbor Historical Society collection).

1944

George B. Dorr died.

1947

The Great Fire (Bar Harbor Fire). Burned trees on Dorr Mountain were cut and cleared, at Rockefeller’s urging, to improve the appearance of the mountains. Several interviewees remembered being part of the clearing and cleaning crews and recall increased sediment flow and downed trees in the Tarn. The burn encouraged growth of birch and aspen, leading to expansion of beaver activities and resultant occasional higher levels of water in the Tarn (park staff communication, 2010).

Late 1960s

State Highway 3 widening, date not certain.

Late 1970s

Most of the CCC bridges were gone or needed replacement. NPS trails crew rebuilt bridges and undertook repairs on the Kane Path and other trails throughout the park (Brown 2006:161).

1975

Section of Kane Path at the south end of the Tarn was submerged due to beaver activity in the area and was re-routed to higher ground (G.Stellpflug pers. comm. 2010).

1982

Maine Department of Environmental Protection report finds the Tarn dam in poor condition and recommends major repairs or rebuilding. (Berger and Associates, Inc. 1982, from park files).

1984-1999

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) stocked the Tarn (and other inland lakes) with brook trout. MDI Rod and Gun Club and DIFW conducted fishing derbies at the Tarn.

1987

NPS memo to Maine Dams Coordinator states that the “Tarn Lake impoundment” does not meet the criteria of a dam because of its height” (less than a two foot high impoundment area).

1993

100 yards of stepping stones and stone paving placed on Kane Path on southwest corner of the Tarn (G.Stellpflug 2010 pers. comm.).

1996

Maine Emergency Management Agency memo (pertaining to development and flooding downstream of the Tarn dam) notes “Brush need to cleared for Dam [unclear] stones should be replaced.” The one-page dam owner survey asks the purpose of the impoundment. “Fish and Wildlife” is circled and “Recreation” is handwritten in the box on the form.

2001 and 2002

Rockslides across Kane Path into ice. No trail damage (G. Stellpflug 2011, pers. comm).

ANP staff meeting notes indicate only half the amount of rain of the two prior years (1999 and 2000), resulting in low levels in eight ponds across the park.

about 2003–2005

2003 Flooding reported at the Tarn (August staff meeting notes). Tarn water levels at a high point in “early 2000s” due to a combination of beaver activity and the accumulation of reed mats on the Tarn dam. Beaver activity on the Tarn dam, and siltation above the dam related to that, created an impoundment that was twelve to eighteen inches higher than the dam itself, according to Trails Foreman Gary Stellpflug (pers. comm. March 3, 2011).

2002

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Lake Assessment Series, finds that a series of warm, unusually dry summers substantially reduced the volume of water in the Tarn. Finding: the best use of the “marsh” is as a source of live bait and ANP staff should allow continued angler use of this water as an important source of live bait.

2006

Earthquake dislodged rocks onto Tarn Trail, but did not damage it (G. Stellpflug pers. comm. 2011)

2009

Reed mats, beaver activity, and severe storm damage and erosion around Tarn dam, making hiking impossible. About two feet of stone masonry on face of dam lost. Dam rebuilt by ANP and stepping stones reset; silt and vegetation removed upstream, dam rocks downstream reset into dam. Dam rebuilt to original height and stepping stones and dam face replaced using historical photographs to recreate the same cultural landscape. (G. Stellpflug, pers. comm. March 2011).

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

CHILDHOOD OR LONG-TERM RESIDENCE AND CURRENT RESIDENCE

Formal Interviews

Mike Alley, Bar Harbor

Mike Blaney, Bar Harbor
(Interview not recorded by request.
Notes taken instead)

Jay Clement, Seal Harbor - Augusta

Barbara Cole, Bar Harbor

Sam Coplon, Bar Harbor

Deborah Dyer, Bar Harbor

Cathy James, Bar Harbor - Town Hill

Sue Leiter, Otter Creek - Bar Harbor

James MacLeod, Bar Harbor

Arthur McPike, Hulls Cove

Alice MacDonald Long, Bar Harbor

Ed Paine, Bar Harbor

Deborah Recholtz, Bar Harbor and Otter
Creek

Paul Richardson, Otter Creek

Dennis Smith, Otter Creek

Raymond Strout, Hulls Cove-Bar Harbor

Norman Walls, Otter Creek

Karen Zimmerman, Otter Creek

Telephone Interviews and Directed Conversations

Sherwood Carr, Northeast Harbor - Bar
Harbor

Robert Dolliver, Bar Harbor

Earl Brecklin, Bar Harbor

Les Brewer, Bar Harbor

Greg Burr, Northeast Harbor - Jonesboro

Jennifer Feltwell, Otter Creek – South
Carolina

Mary Helen Hadley, Bar Harbor

Paula Richardson Gannon, Otter Creek -
Southwest Harbor

Don Smith, Bar Harbor

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-structured interviews use a series of general questions about a topic to generate conversation around areas of interest. All the topics listed below were covered in all formal interviews, although the order varied from person to person depending on the experiences and interests of the person/s being interviewed.

Please tell me briefly about your background and how you ended up living here. For example, how long have you/your family lived in Otter Creek/Bar Harbor [or other, as appropriate]? Short personal or family history, including employment (sector or organization).

If “newcomers”-- When did you first start coming here [i.e. Bar Harbor, Otter Creek, MDI]? Summer resident or full time? When did you or your family settle here full time? Please tell me about your experiences/memories about the area known as the Tarn.

When did you first remember it? How old were you? What was it like?

Do you recall your relatives/neighbors/friends telling you stories about the Tarn?

What kinds of things did you do at the Tarn [specific activities]? What are your memories about the Tarn?

What kinds of things did your family do at the Tarn? (different things during the winter/summer?)

What kinds of things did your family do at the Tarn? (different things during the winter/summer?)

Were there usually other families or people using the Tarn? Were community events held at the Tarn?

Please tell me what the Tarn meant [or means to you]. Why is it a special place (or why not)? What do you like about it?

How do you think of/remember the Tarn? How would you describe it? Why is it special or important to you?

Have you noticed changes in the Tarn, the way it looks or feels, or in what you do there? When did you first start noticing them?

Have there been changes in the use of the Tarn?

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