My 11-year-old son and I ran the Middlebury College Section of the TAM seventeen years after I contributed to its design and construction. Griffin and I headed out for a 4.7 mile run from Battell Woods to the O'Neil Trail – What a treat! As planned, Griffin packed it in at Route 30 and I begin a trip down memory lane. As I continued on my planned circumnavigation of the TAM that morning, it wasn’t two minutes into my solo run that I ran into a group of students performing trail maintenance under the guidance of John Derick.

I was fortunate enough to have Professor Jim Northup for my senior seminar in my final fall term. Professor Northup would ask the class to identify six or seven projects on which the students would work throughout the semester. When a classmate suggested the design and construction of the much-needed Middlebury College section of the TAM I jumped at the opportunity. It wasn’t long before we were negotiating the trail’s route with the college, private landowners and the Middlebury Area Land Trust, designing interpretative trail signs and spending hours constructing the trail. This is when I met John Derick and had the pleasure to be under the tutelage of this experienced trail designer.

With shovels, wheelbarrows and wide smiles the students encouraged me to test out their newly rerouted section of trail. And if it weren’t enough to see the volunteers’ enjoyment that morning, crossing paths with John was icing on the cake.

Just as the interpretive signs and their black locust posts have withstood the test of time, so has John Derick. It might have well been 1997. What a gift John has given this community with his dedication to this trail and all those he has guided to maintain its condition. While I didn’t want our conversation to end, I had my 6-year old daughter, Ava, to pick-up back at Battell Woods as her wilderness camp ended at noon.

I headed off downhill through the woods and then wound my way through open meadows to Route 125.

At this point, a spring traveler can choose a wet or drier route. Those with dry feet will pass the Middlebury College Organic Garden and those with wet feet, me, will follow the fence line through open meadows. When the two trails converge about halfway between Route 125 and 23, you enter a short section of forest with winding trails.

As soon as you’ve entered the forest and adapt to your new surroundings and terrain, you spill back out into open pastures and sky that carry you to Route 23.

I never appreciated the TAM as much as I did that day. It’s a remarkable resource that has provided me with much enjoyment over two decades and will serve many more for decades to come.

I’m proud to have contributed to its development and look forward to seeing you on the trail.

Contributed by Peter Schneider
Middlebury College, Class of 1997

Help us reach our goal of raising $125K for the TAM Endowment Fund

$125K Goal

$53,000 –

start

For more info on the TAM or the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) call 802.388.1007 or visit maltvt.org