
Metropolitan
New York
Library Council
LIBRARY
FIELD
2025 Field Report

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes our findings from The Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO)↗ member hikes at the Library Field↗ location in New Castle, NY.

METRO purchased the future site of the Library Field at 249 Croton Dam Road in July of 2025. The site is large: 26 acres, adjoining another 82-acre preserve managed by the Town of New Castle, NY. Once METRO gained access to the site, I rushed to bring our members to explore, reflect, and share their ideas through the medium of walking interviews or conversational hikes before winter arrived. These hikes were just one phase of METRO's prior and ongoing participatory design experiments. The hikes informing this report took place between July and November of 2025, and they were meant predominantly for METRO members↗, though we allowed some other interested parties to join us as well. We set out with two goals: first, to introduce the location and share our preliminary intentions; and second, to gather ideas, input, inspiration, and other feedback that will ultimately drive our project in the direction most useful and exciting for our member community.

The hiking methodology, like the Library Field project itself, is part art and part science, part theory and part practice. The theory is backed up by an extensive literature review↗ of walking as a methodology, assembled by METRO's Director of Creative Research, Dr. Shannon Mattern. Because these walks were led by the Executive Director, and because I am writing this, you'll hear me using "I" throughout this report. While I was the trail leader, so to speak, all of this work owes a great deal to the entire METRO staff, especially to Mary Bakija, Kyle Brown, Shannon Mattern, and Becca Quon. I've borrowed from social science methodologies like the walking method and narrative inquiry, but I left opportunities for the method itself to evolve, to meander and iterate, and to respond to the environment during the course of this work. A colder day, the presence of mosquitoes, or an unexpected encounter with a snapping turtle or a giant rat snake could (and did) greatly skew the input on any day. Additionally, and occasionally dependent on the aforementioned variables, some groups have good interpersonal chemistry, resulting in rich conversations, while others less so.

The walk itself includes 15 different stops, each of which is represented in a Field Guide booklet. The entire hike takes about two hours. At each stop, the group receives a conversational prompt that is meant to inspire them to participate in a discussion and generate some notes for the Field Guide. There are three different types of stops:

- → **Orientation Stops** — moments where I provide background information, orient the hikers to where they are on the map, and facilitate a more generalized conversation about the project. There are four orientation stops.
- → **Observation Stops** — moments where I prompt the group with some marker at the Library Field, and suggest a metaphor or relationship between that marker and the work that they engage in regularly as librarians or archivists. There are ten observation stops.
- → **Development stops** — places where METRO has proposed a parking area and a building site. These are similar to the orientation stops, but I assigned them their own category because we know they will require more in-depth community processes when the time comes for any significant development work.

IN THIS REPORT
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While the participants were encouraged to take notes in their Field Guide then photograph the pages and return them, many chose to provide input in other ways. I received thank you emails summarizing their thoughts, lists of book recommendations, photographs and photo collages, videos, drawings, and more. To summarize all of this input, I've written a complete narrative describing each of the fifteen stops as well as the specific inquiry the participants received at that moment on the trail. Toward the end of each of the summaries below, I include themes, quotes, and images that arose at that particular location over the course of five months. At the last of the fifteen stops, I ask the hikers for their final thoughts as a conclusion for our time together. In this report, I also use that final stop to identify and outline eight common overarching themes and METRO's likely courses of action to address those themes. All of the participants' contributions have been anonymized.

I've also included some appendices. One is the Field Guide itself. The other offers some background about the Metropolitan New York Library Council, as well as a bit about the origin of this project for readers who are not familiar with the Library Field.

This research builds on a great deal of prior work. In 2024, METRO commissioned Froghouse ↗, a design consultancy, to help us build a website and identity, and to support conceptual development for the Field. That same year we also worked with BKS Studio, another consulting team, to identify our community's hopes, needs, and hurdles before we selected a site for the Field; BKS hosted workshops and produced a report ↗. Additionally, the work here builds on Dr. Mattern's Library Field Syllabus ↗, which seeds the project's conceptual terrain, as well as environmental scans of related projects and other sources of inspiration. Finally, we are grateful to the Danish Ministry of Culture for their support of an international exchange between METRO staff and international library workers from Aarhus, Denmark ↗, the See-Art Foundation ↗ in Seoul, Korea, as well as US-based library workers from California, Arizona, Massachusetts, Stacie Ledden Consulting in Denver, Colorado ↗, and, again, Froghouse. Their visit to the Library Field and their participation in this process was invaluable.

Hike Narrative

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14 Edge of Pond / Dam
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HIKE NARRATIVE

From the moment a real estate agent first introduced METRO to this location to the time we closed on the property and received the deed, about 15 months had passed. During this time, METRO worked with a team of surveyors, scientists, engineers, lawyers, and town officials, and I spent extensive time all over the site. After careful exploration of the 26 acre property for over a year, I selected the 15 stops on this hike. The choices of hike stops represent a careful selection of natural and historical features of interest, all in the most accessible places we could choose based on trails and topography. As time progressed from July to November, some stops became more or less interesting based on seasons, weather, and comfort in general.

1

ENTRANCE GATE

Orientation Stop

At the entrance gate I provide an introduction to METRO, the nine library councils and their role in New York State's library ecosystem, and the Library Field project itself. The entry is marked by a padlocked, dilapidated, two-door chain-link fence gate with a sign announcing "The Library Field - coming soon." Here, we enter the gate and I share the project's origin story, both as it relates to a few other public library projects as well as METRO's programmatic shift during the COVID-19 pandemic.

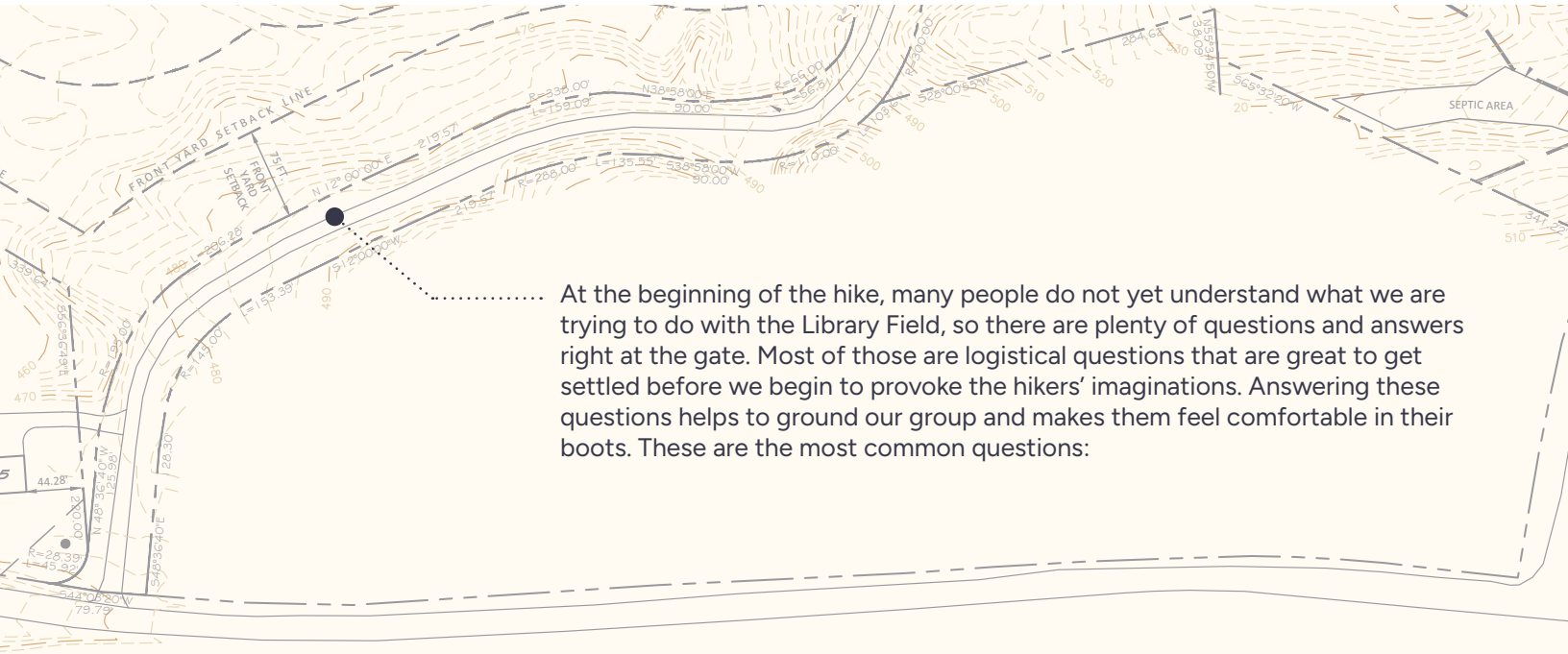
In some cases, because the driveway to the Library Field is currently unmarked and difficult to find, everyone parks at the neighboring Sunny Ridge Preserve and we take a 10-minute walk through the woods to the entry gate. When we approach the Field that way, I have an opportunity to explain more about METRO and our mission while we are walking.

After everyone is oriented to METRO's mission and the fundamental aims of the Library Field project, I provide an agenda for our time together: an overview of what we are seeking to accomplish on these hikes, and why everyone is here together. I tell them the hike is one means of gathering input, an important phase in our participatory design process. I explain the logistics: our hike has 15 stops, it is not terribly strenuous, but it will take two hours. I also take this moment to talk about tick protection, poison ivy identification and prevention, and all of the different ways the group should prepare and protect themselves. If they do not have water, I give them water. I tell them that I am carrying a first aid kit.

I give everyone a tote bag, stickers, and their Field Guide. I tell them that their contributions will influence the future of the project, and they will steer and direct our design process by writing notes in the Field Guide and sharing those notes after they complete their walk. I request that participants photograph their notes in the Guide and send them to me later, but I emphasize the fact that I'll accept input in any form they feel comfortable with: the Field Guide is present to help them organize and structure their input.

1 ENTRANCE GATE
Orientation Stop

As we pass through the gate and walk up the crumbling concrete road half-swallowed by vigorous poison ivy vines and dense wineberry brambles, I share some of the site's history and introduce its prior stewards, the Abercrombie family (yes, of Abercrombie & Fitch fame), who were outdoor outfitters and enthusiasts. This 26-acre property is less than one half of the original estate, which fell into ruin and has been subdivided and sold to various parties over the years. I tell them that there are historic ruined buildings that we will encounter as we explore, as well as natural ecosystems and landscapes. I make a point of explaining that this is not a historic tour, though: while we might probe some of the past uses of the site, the goal of our walk together is to prompt the imagination, to "read" the landscape around us, and to allow fiction and poetry to coexist with any historical accuracies we might be yearning for. From here, I lead the group up the road and into the forest.



At the beginning of the hike, many people do not yet understand what we are trying to do with the Library Field, so there are plenty of questions and answers right at the gate. Most of those are logistical questions that are great to get settled before we begin to provoke the hikers' imaginations. Answering these questions helps to ground our group and makes them feel comfortable in their boots. These are the most common questions:

"DOES METRO OWN THIS PROPERTY?"
↓ ↓ ↓

"Yes, we own the property, but the improvements we are considering will be based on the input you provide on this hike, and they are bound to be expensive and take time. This is one reason why sharing your thoughts and ideas is so important. METRO owns this property, and as our members it is *yours*."

"SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO HERE?"
↓ ↓ ↓

"We have many ideas about what we would like to do here as a support agency that trains, educates, and inspires library workers, archivists, and other arts and culture professionals, but the purpose of this hike is not to hear what METRO wants to do. It is to hear what you might like to do if we support your imagined activities in this unique environment.

"WILL THE PUBLIC BE ALLOWED TO ACCESS THESE TRAILS?"
↓ ↓ ↓

"Yes. Right now, we are still working on permitting and other procedural details, so we cannot yet officially invite the public to visit. Still, the community has been accessing much of the site via the Sunny Ridge Preserve for years, and social trails exist connecting the two properties. We intend to formalize the connections between trails and make the site publicly accessible between dawn and dusk."

From the moment we start down the trail, people began to offer ideas. One visitor piped up, "What about a 'walking stick' library by the parking lot (to help people traverse some of the trails)?"

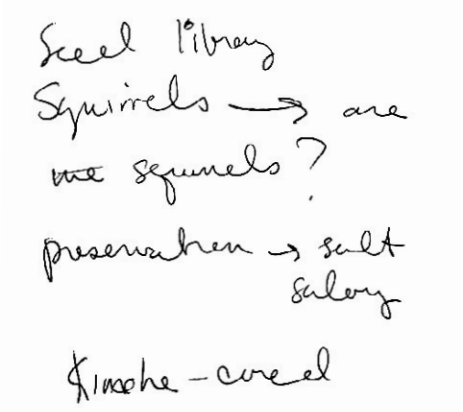
2 ROOT CELLAR
Observation Stop

The first structure that we come across is an old root cellar that sits in a gulley 20 yards below a thicket of brambles on the left. The root cellar is hard to see from the road and is inaccessible from this vantage point; it is further obscured because the structure itself is buried in a mound of earth, as is typical of root cellars. Burying the structure makes the earthen layer serve as insulation to regulate the temperature inside of the building. The mound itself has full grown trees rooted in it, as well as trees that have lived, perished, fallen, and begun to decay on top, a testament to how old the building itself is, forming another layer of debris on top.

I use the root cellar as a conversation prompt to get our hikers thinking about preservation, priorities, energy, and time itself. The Library Field is supposed to give knowledge workers a chance to reframe their work: how they do it, why they do it, who is meant to benefit from it. Prompts like this are meant to help them think more broadly and capaciously about their "field."

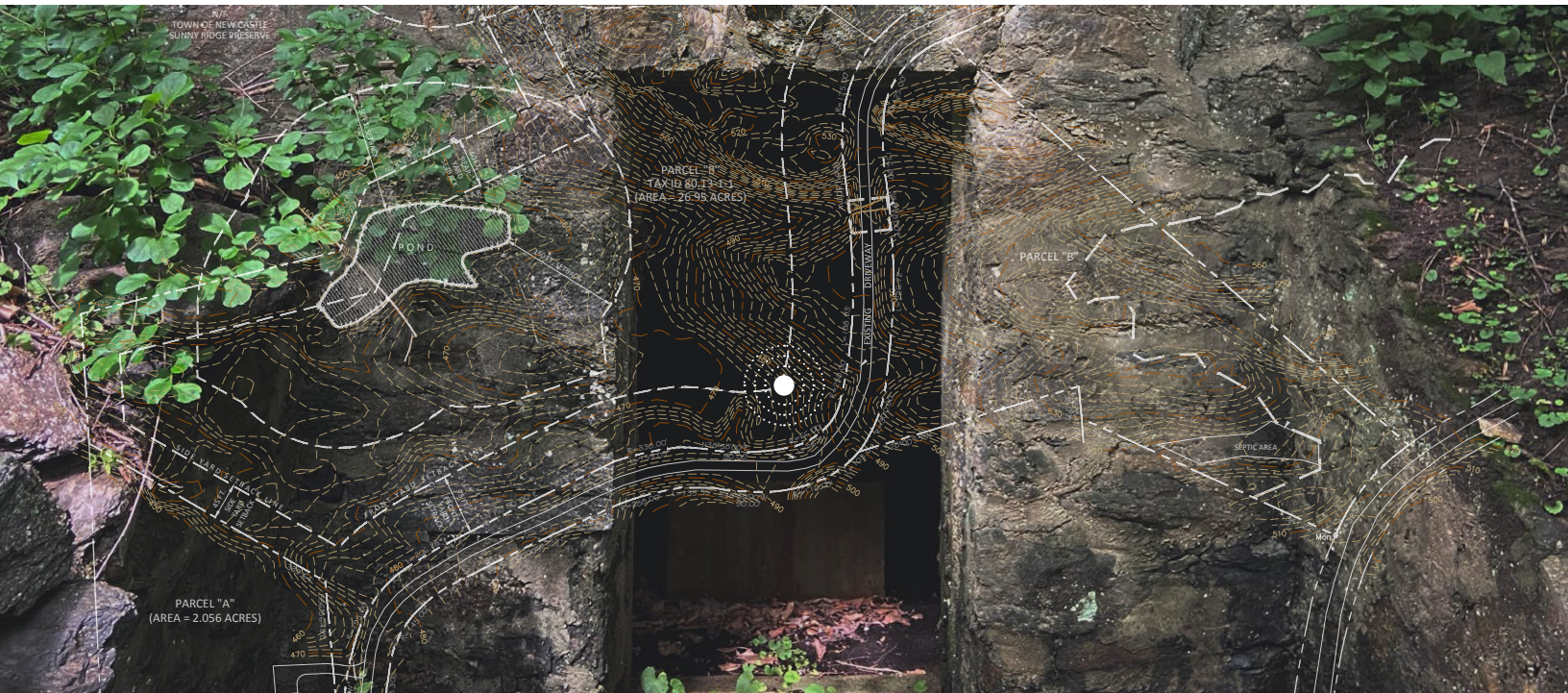
The stone building dates back at least to the 1920s. I say to the group that librarians and archivists are having a lot of conversations about the future of digital preservation, and I reference some recent publications exploring the next 100 years of digital preservation. Then I motion back to the root cellar and ask the hikers what people were thinking of preserving there 100 years ago. This building would have been storage for potatoes, turnips, onions, apples. This was an energy-efficient way to preserve what we needed for basic sustenance.

People reach for their pens and their Field Guides, and they start writing.



Moving into the woods and spotting the root cellar appears to grant the hikers license to transition from their practical posture to a playful and creative disposition. For example, after we spoke about the root cellar for a few minutes one hiker wrote, "This prompted me to think about memory—past memories, future memories, and how we make them." Memory becomes a recurring conversation point across our two-hour journey, and it shows up repeatedly in participants' notes. The historic ruins gradually overtaken by their natural environment set a scene many visitors respond to, suggesting this is a site-specific opportunity that METRO can explore further.

Another hiker wrote, "It would be interesting to have conversations about how far libraryland has come vis-à-vis storage and access, and where we will potentially go vis-à-vis retrieval. And is there ever the possibility of going back... and why?" The idea of looking at both the past and the future, and critiquing the unidirectional, western definition of "progress" first occurs here and becomes another consistent theme with our participants. This might be another special site-specific affordance. Repeatedly, because of where we are, we have opportunities to reflect on priorities 100 years ago while considering the nature of our profession 100 years from now.



3 ABERCROMBIE STONES

Observation Stop

A bit further along the old road we are following, the Abercrombies set up stone slabs on either side, each of which is perhaps four feet tall. All of the stone used in the buildings and infrastructure on the site was quarried on location and then moved into place. The Abercrombies were extremely wealthy, they loved the outdoors, and they treated this estate as their playground. They spared no expense, so decorations or embellishments like these roadside stones are found all over the property. These stones sparkle with the same mica schist that runs all the way down through Manhattan — the Manhattan Schist formation, a great nod to the natural regional forces that connect us, as opposed to the political boundaries people have imposed over time.

I use these stones to prompt a conversation with library workers about labor, a pressing topic in the profession. Often our hiking groups are made up of workers from a variety of positions within the organizational hierarchies at their places of employment. I point to the stones and ask the group how they think stones that big and heavy were quarried, transported, and set in place in the 1920s at the original time this road was cut. Then, after discussion of the past, I inform the group that METRO will need to widen the entire road to bring it up to code for emergency vehicles to pass through. This means that we will have to remove the stones, widen the road, and then reset them using contemporary technology and labor practices.

This stop is also where considerations of accessibility first arise, and this becomes an important topic we revisit throughout the entire hike.

The stones are heavy, as is the proposed discussion topic. Some participants really enjoyed talking about this, but others leapt toward poetic interpretation. After pointing to the flakes of mica in these monuments, someone referred to them in their field guide as “a labyrinth made from the land’s native ‘winking’ stone, thus lending itself to the contemplative and restorative space.”

I found that after speaking about storage and preservation at the root cellar and then touching on labor practices here, the group was generally ready to move on and think differently about their time at the Library Field.

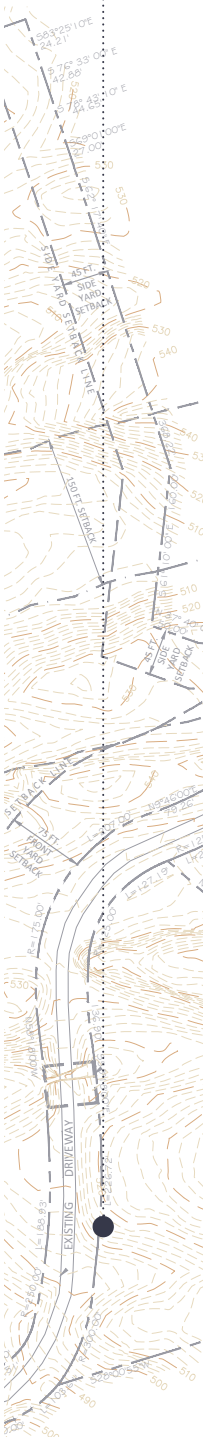
It was helpful to talk with the groups about METRO’s proposal to widen the road and reset these stones. Opening up to our membership about the permitting requirements, the regulatory environment, and the various bureaucratic processes that METRO is currently engaged in created a feeling of camaraderie; most of the participants were familiar with these kinds of constraints. A few participants local to the immediate area began to offer assistance, advice, and introductions, which I received as a great indicator that even at just the third stop on the hike they were beginning to see a future at the Library Field that included them.

WHITE OAK TREE
Observation Stop

4

The road bends to the left after we depart from the Abercrombie stones, and the group pauses by a massive, ancient white oak tree growing just off the right side of the road. This white oak tree is where we begin our discussions of the other living things present at the Library Field site, and how they participate in our project.

Most of the forest at the Library Field site is about 100 years old. The Abercrombies, or perhaps other farmers that preceded them, clear-cut the land. The presence of stone walls suggests the land was previously plowed and used for agricultural purposes, despite the rocky terrain and difficult topography. This white oak tree, based on its size and the shape of its crown, is much older than the rest of the forest. This means that the oak tree has witnessed, contributed to, and been impacted by a long series of events that have taken place here; it is a living archival element of this ecosystem. How can we access that archive? I sometimes tell the hikers a story of an exercise that BKS Studio led for us the summer prior; participants joined an active listening exercise prompting them to attempt to alternately speak to and listen to non-human entities. What does it mean to have an archive you cannot access, or a library book in a language you cannot interpret? From the perspective of this older organism, METRO and our Library Field project are just one small moment in a far longer history that has taken place here. Will this tree outlive our organization? This prompts further conversation about geological time scales, and I take the opportunity to promote humility and care as priorities in our work.



4

WHITE OAK TREE

Observation Stop

Many groups enjoyed talking about Richard Powers' book, *The Overstory*, here. I was met with very little skepticism about the idea that other entities present at the Library Field — plants, animals, geological formations, atmospheric conditions — could be thought of as participants in, contributors to, and users of our library project. This is one example of something I've experienced while speaking about the Library Field more generally: in situ, it is very easy to immerse oneself in it and understand, whereas it can be much more complicated to communicate effectively about the project when you aren't actually there. This reinforces the experiential nature of the ideas we are exploring as a community at the Library Field.

Time and memory were important themes for everyone here. Discussions of intergenerational thinking and interspecies connectedness inspired participants to ask questions about the original inhabitants of the land, prior to the Abercrombies, prior to colonization. Repeatedly through our process, in fact prior to even selecting this location for the Library Field, METRO members have expressed a desire to connect to indigenous ways of knowing to create new avenues by which they can understand or contextualize their own work.

In the time following the hikes, one of our participants invited METRO staff to a symposium at Bard College this spring: "An Invitation to Interconnectedness: Indigenous Approaches to Information, Knowledge, Justice, and Belonging," which will explore various themes broached across our fall Field conversations.

5

STONE BRIDGE

Observation Stop

Up the road from the ancient oak, we approach a beautiful old stone bridge that the Abercrombies erected to cross a gap between two stony ridges. One cannot see how marvelous this structure is from the top, so we go off-trail and climb down to see the tunnel underneath the bridge. The bridge features an arch with a keystone, and it is constructed using masonry techniques that are expensive and rare in current times. The bridge has a fairy tale-like nostalgic quality; stepping under it seems to transport you to another time and place and prompts imaginative and creative responses.

Despite the playful spirit that the antique bridge conjures, this stop has a practical side to it. I talk about METRO's responsibility to preserve and improve features like this, and ask for everyone's opinions on how we might approach such work. We know that this bridge is quite sturdy because it has borne the weight of trucks in the past, but we also know that we will need to do a lot of expensive work to assess its structural integrity and bring it to current standards while preserving and maintaining its aesthetic qualities. The most cost-effective way to address the structural integrity of this feature and bring the roadway above would be to bury the bridge and run a culvert under-neath it. The longer, slower, and preferable way is to carefully restore the existing structure so it will have the same magical qualities for another group of hikers in another 100 years.

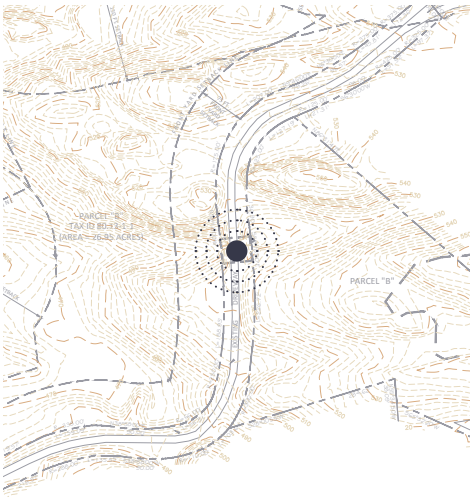
STONE BRIDGE
Observation Stop

5

At this time I talk more about how this is a long term project for METRO. We cannot and will not approach every need at once at the Library Field, so we will need to pace ourselves and set priorities for addressing different needs on a site that approaches the scale of a school campus. The stone bridge is where I take a group photo of all of the hikers, which I send to the group a day or two after the hike.

The most playful idea that a hiker offered here was “Transformation time — leave your bad habits on one side of the tunnel.” This is a really interesting idea, especially because the timing for such a suggestion is right after I introduced some big but concrete library-related topics like labor and storage, but I’ve also invited poetic and nonlinear thought via the ancient oak tree. This structure exemplifies the Library Field’s invitation to bridge, both literally and metaphorically, both ways of thinking.

Everyone loves to remark on the construction of the bridge, marveling at the arch and the masonry and the sheer amount of work required to build such a thing in 1920. Entering the space beneath it does feel like a gateway into a different time; watching participants I saw that nearly every one of them wanted to physically touch the stone walls. During the summer, when there was still moisture under the bridge, hikers marveled at a millipede crawling around in the dark. We thought about the different physical sites and climatic conditions in which various species and different kinds of activities thrive.

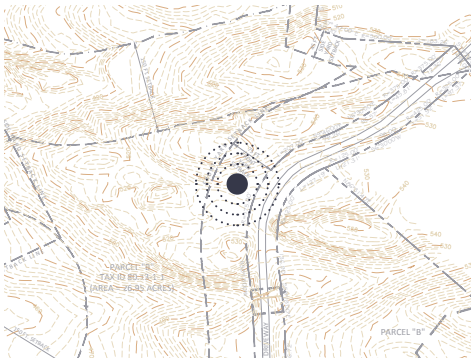


PROPOSED PARKING SPOT
Future Development Spot

6

No spot at the Library Field has seen more change during the July – November period than the proposed parking area, which is situated just up the road from the bridge on the left side. Knowing that the plans we submitted to the town denote this relatively flat area as a space for 12 parking places and a maintenance garage, we began to prepare this area during the course of the hikes as a gathering place. A large downed tree was removed, and the trunk was sliced up to make stools. We brought in a picnic table and a portable toilet. We repeatedly dumped and spread wood chips, leveling and refining the location more every week. During warmer weather, I brought in a screened-in tent to shelter us from ravenous gnats and mosquitoes.

This is an important stop on our hike, because it is the first opportunity that the group gets to sit down and pause. We all take a moment to drink water and eat a snack, and because everyone has become oriented to our process after a few prior stops, they look at the Field Guides a bit more. I ask people to use this time for some silence, because at this point we are far enough away from roads and deep enough in the woods that we can exercise more of our senses. The sounds and the smells come into focus, and a calm and peacefulness surround the group.



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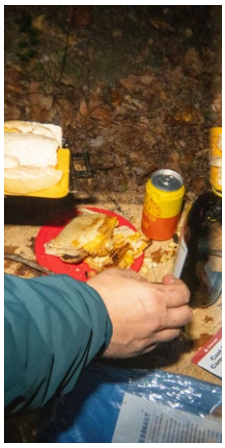


PROPOSED PARKING SPOT

Future Development Spot

While gathered here, we look at the site map and the entire hike again, and I explain that while it might feel wrong to turn this serene spot into a parking lot we are indeed at the only viable spot for such a thing on these undeveloped 26 acres, which connect to another 82 acres at the Sunny Ridge Preserve. I also use this as a moment to further explain the nature of our dual design processes, one half including the permitting and permissioning work with the town and county, and the other including the participatory process with our members — of which these hikes are just one component. Because this parking lot and the proposed library building site are significant interventions in this beautiful environment, we want to be sure to gather all of the input we can during this early stage of development. I explain that the parking lot and the building are just proposals, some elements of which strategically exceed our expected needs, and that all of this can be adjusted based on the input our members provide.

Because I offered almost all of the groups a snack and a moment to relax at the picnic table, food-related programming came up many times here. “Many Libraries are incorporating teaching kitchens to their buildings — what if you could create an outdoor version of this to promote culinary literacy and connection to food?” asked one visitor. Food came up in other ways, with participants making suggestions for foraging programs, some were interested in making tinctures and remedies, and people even asked if the root cellar was functional. Another hiker commented, “I like the idea of outdoor meeting spaces throughout the campus.” It is clear that preparing food and eating together at the Library Field will be an important part of our community building work here, and this really comes as no surprise.

The walk from the parking area to the proposed library building site takes the group around a stone knoll and along a path with rock faces on either side. As we walk, I explain to the group that we'd like to build a boardwalk along this path, which means that we could provide an ADA compliant walkway while also bringing our feet up off of the ground and preventing us from trampling all of the beautiful moss, ferns, and other attractive flora and fauna.

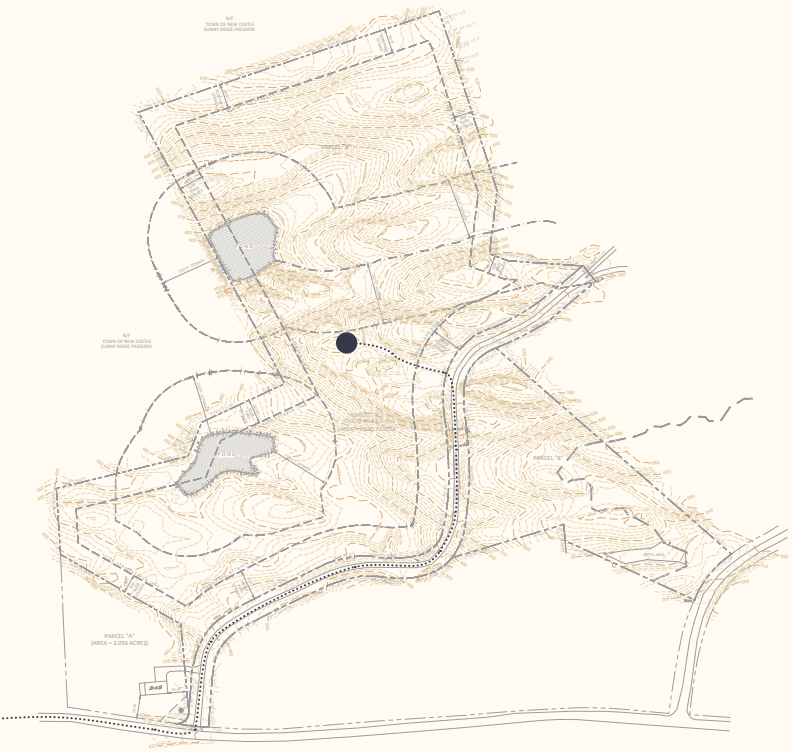
On this walk, there is a page in the Field Guide referencing a pink lady slipper orchid. During the first 4–5 hikes this plant was present, and I used it to prompt a discussion about respect for the site's current inhabitants, as well as the concept of ownership. These orchids are often poached by people who want to transplant them and own them. The result is almost always a failure, because the plant interacts with a soil-based fungus from the Rhizoctonia genus in order to survive and reproduce. This suggests that not only does this orchid have rights as a participant in the Library Field, just as the ancient white oak tree does, but that we should continually interrogate this notion of 'ownership' as a part of our project. Libraries are about sharing, and not owning things. The fact that a person's desire for ownership often results in death for the lady's slipper is a poignant reminder of unknown consequences in complex systems.

Unfortunately, after the first few hikes, the lady slipper orchid disappeared. This is most likely because a deer ate it, but documentation and then its absence provides as much opportunity for discussion as its presence did. I hope to see it return in the spring.

Participants who were fortunate enough to see this plant during the earlier hikes were delighted to know of it. Even then, the orchid wasn't in bloom - all we saw were the two emerald basal leaves — but the plant sat snug in a patch of fluffy moss looking like something precious set in a display box. The story about people's desire to own and poach orchids typically horrified the group, but didn't surprise anyone. Visiting this plant really drove home METRO's responsibility to care for this special place.

Those who visited the site of the orchid after it was gone reflected on different things, none of which were anticipated when I selected this as a discussion point. To the right, you see notes from a hiker's Field Guide where they were thinking about dormancy, subculture, and subtext—provocative concepts that emerged only because of the absence of our focal point, rather than its presence.

Ownership of land has been a point of concern from the very beginning of the Library Field endeavor, and the notion that a desire to own this orchid often results in its death resonated with our participants, further reinforcing our responsibility to make ownership, commoning, and stewardship an educational and programming topic.



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PROPOSED LIBRARY SITE

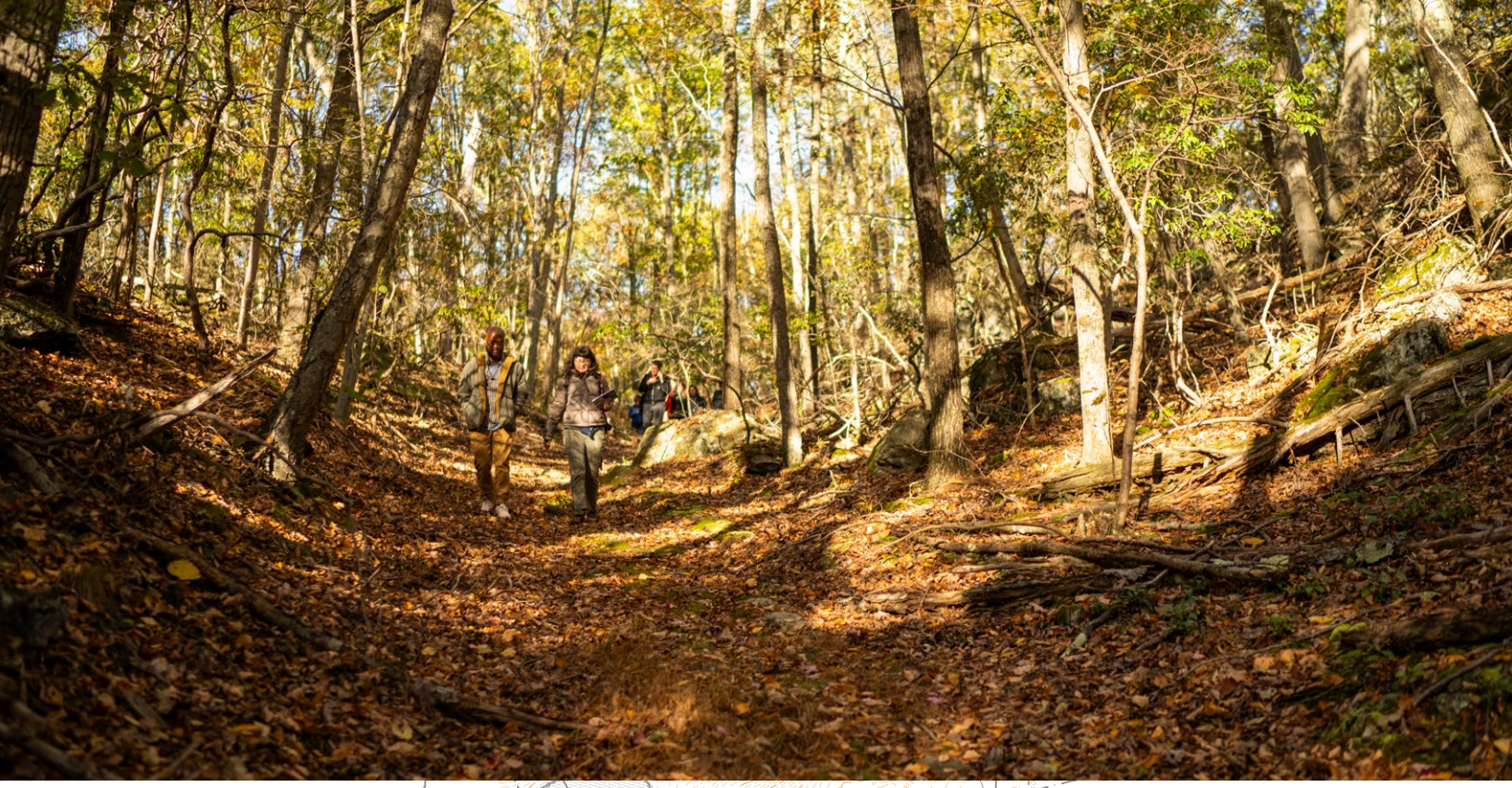
Future Development Spot

Moving past the former site of the lady slipper orchid, we meet on another rocky outcropping that is the site for a proposed 2500 sq ft experimental library building. Atop this ridgeline, the building site is among the highest points on the property, and it overlooks two ponds when the leaves are off the trees in winter. This spot also has some remains of an old Abercrombie structure, a single stonework pedestal about 4 feet high. This signals the prior presence of an architectural structure, and I point to other evidence that this entire area was disturbed and even quarried 100 years ago.

The proposed library site is not a stop for a sustained conversation, largely because we know that when the time comes to consider design and construction we will have another robust process specifically devoted to that building, its program, and its impacts. Instead, we pin this as a location that we will look back to from different perspectives along the trail, always orienting ourselves to this centrally located proposed facility. I explain to the hikers some of the constraints that METRO will face as we develop the site, ranging from a public drinking water supply to electrical access.

I never kept any of the hikers at the proposed building site for very long. In many ways, the walk to the building site from the proposed parking area is a more important space for contemplation during this phase of our project, and the pink lady slipper orchid provokes a more useful conversation about future disturbances than the actual building site. Still, hikers admired the perspective from this stony, elevated location, and they took note of the masonry work where the Abercrombies had built something here before. Not much remains of that structure, but one visitor who had experience as a blacksmith noted that the two small metal bolts protruding from the stonework pedestal were likely hand-wrought. People also noticed that the stones used in this small pedestal were not haphazardly chosen; beautiful quartz boulders had been selected to complement the rest of the schist in a tasteful and purposeful manner.

There was consensus that this artifact is something that should and could be incorporated into any future building. We also had a great deal of conversation here about using materials from the site for construction, much like the Abercrombies had. For example, we all spoke enthusiastically of milling any trees that might need to be removed for construction lumber. One hiker commented, “As I stood on top of the future home of this facility, I thought it would be nice to incorporate photos of the 15 Steps on our tour as well as any artifacts found.”



MAIN TRAILHEAD
Orientation Stop

9

After departing the proposed library site, we walk back past the (former) location of the pink lady slipper, back through the parking area, and continue up the road into new territory. When we reach the turnoff for the main trailhead, we pause and I gesture to the ruined Abercrombie castle on the neighboring property, and for some of the later hikes I walk people a bit closer to view it. I remind everyone that the reason METRO was able to purchase the 26 acre parcel we are currently exploring is because the former owner was unable to sell the entire property that included the castle, so they subdivided it. We now have a new neighbor; the castle property sold shortly after we closed on ours, and we are working with our friendly new neighbor in a variety of ways. We do not know if the property will become a residence, a bed and breakfast, or a restaurant — only time will tell.

Turning down the main trailhead, I explain that we are entering the main artery through the property. A great deal of our time until this moment has been spent walking on a road, feet touching worn concrete, observing things by the roadside. The trail will lead us into a wilder part of the Library Field, an area that will remain untamed. We believe that this main trail predates the Abercrombies, and that it was likely a carriage trail dating back into the 19th century or even earlier. I gesture to the invasive wisteria vines at the trailhead, all of which have migrated from plantings up by the castle, now spreading their persistent and resilient roots into the woods — and as a group we begin our course down the path.

During the journey down the main trail and moving toward our next stop at a cliff, participants often brought up wayfinding. At this point I had guided them through quite a few stops, and we had collectively tried to imagine clearings becoming parking lots, a stony pinnacle becoming a library, and weedy paths becoming boardwalks that hover above and protect the landscape below. The main trail is well defined and it will require maintenance, but it is not something that will be adjusted, expanded, or altered in the future. It offers us continuity, connecting the past and the future.

Many participants have ideas for self guided tours, and there are many creative possibilities for how this could happen. One hiker asked if we are in touch with other local trail committees. Another suggested a program: "**Field Guide Creation Workshop:** Let community members help build a community-authored field guide — Illustrations by kids or teens — Observations submitted by hikers — Local stories tied to ecological points."

Most of the trails at the Library Field are self-evident, but not all of them. I talk with the hikers about 'desire lines,' social trails, animal trails, and letting the topography show us where the trails should be.

10 CLIFF
Observation Stop

The hikers descend down the main path, and we take a short diversion to the right while passing a temporary marker showing the corner of the property. Here, I take the group right to the edge of a cliff — literally. There are many steep places at the Library Field. There are cliffs, boulders, and huge rock outcroppings that beg children or other adventurers to climb and explore, and to discover secrets in the crevices. Looking over the edge of this particular cliff you can also see a big standing dead hemlock tree, a victim of the wooly adelgid. The tree now has a spiky, dangerous, and foreboding look to it. Here, I start a conversation with everyone about safety.

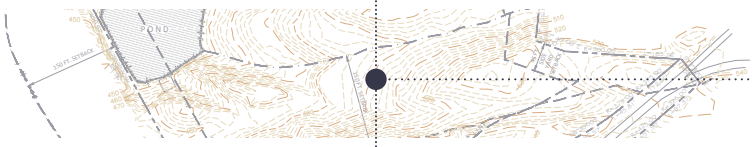
Safety is a topic that is often considered in libraries of all types, so it is an easy conversation point for most groups. I ask them what safety means for all of us, when we are all outdoors, in a wild place like this? What are their expectations for their personal safety in a national park, for example? What then should our safety-related obligations be as stewards of the land, both legally and philosophically? I also use this as another reminder of our non-human participants and our relationship to them. The Library Field, the Sunny Ridge Preserve, and every neighboring lawn is overgrazed by the unchecked deer population, making it even harder for indigenous plant species to compete with the introduced species. This cliff is something that we would typically flag as unsafe, since a person could fall off of it. But for a small native plant — Solomon's Seal for example — the only safe place to live is on the side of a cliff where a deer cannot eat it.

Almost every hiking group that included children was briefly interrupted as the kids crawled as close to the edge of the cliff as they possibly could, and their parents scolded them and brought them under their wing. I expected more genuine concern about people's safety here, knowing that the entire Library Field is full of precipices, toxic plants, biting insects, and other hazards. Overall, participants seemed less concerned about any physical hazards that they felt they could avoid, like cliffs and other steep areas. They were far more concerned about poison ivy and the potential for tick-borne disease: hazards present across our region and in any park or open space.

The cliff also brought up discussions about wayfinding, referring both to warning signage as well as other directional, informative, or interpretive possibilities.

More hikers reacted to the view from the cliff than to the presence of the cliff itself. From atop this cliff, you can see a really beautiful open expanse of woodlands below. Hikers repeatedly ask, "is that area part of the Library Field too?" Having moved from the road to the trail system, it seems to just be dawning on people how large 26 acres actually is.

MAIN INTERSECTION
Orientation Stop



11

The walk from the cliff down to the ‘main intersection’ is a steady, downhill slope on the old carriage road. Both sides slope steeply upward, and are covered with mountain laurel and mossy rock faces.

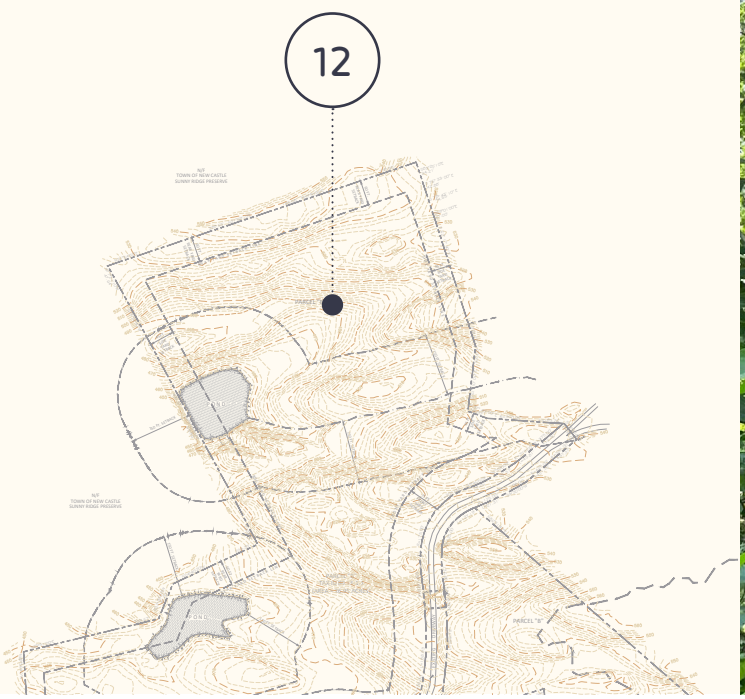
The main intersection feels like the heart of the Library Field property. The trail levels out and branches in two directions, the ground is covered entirely in moss, and the surrounding mountain laurels make the place feel like a secret garden. The main intersection is a natural place to pause and consider where one should go next, literally and figuratively. Here, I explain to the group that the rugged topography that prevented previous commercial development of the site is a special feature for our purposes at the Library Field; the different areas feel like rooms with walls, each with a unique character, each a different kind of programming space. The architecture is already present - we just have to look around us to discover it. We talk a bit about site-specific programming while we are here, using this ‘room’ as an example but also considering other types of sites and what they have to offer for different programs, events, or individual reflections.

I motion up to our left, where on top of the slope you can just make out where the future proposed library site would be.

After spending time at the main intersection, one hiker wrote, “Trailheads: I see these as critical learning paths — choose your path — think of story walks — descriptive outposts and opportunities for discussion, readings, playacting, etc.”

Speaking to the group about the rugged topography that seems to form different rooms within a building — with rock formations as walls and the tree canopy as a roof — led quite a few hikers to choose this stop as the moment to provide different programming ideas for the Library Field. One hiker offered fourteen different programming themes, each with three or four details regarding audience, potential partners, and how to implement.

TREE OF HEAVEN
Observation Stop



From the main intersection, we take a short detour down the trail to the right. This trail actually continues further than we go, and is oddly inviting while it is clearly overgrown and impassible. I walk our group to a tall, straight tree growing on a gentle slope that terminates at a wetland and pond. This tree is the Ailanthus, the Tree-of-Heaven, the aggressively invasive host tree of another local pest, the spotted lanternfly.

I explain to the group that the Ailanthus was introduced as a street tree in the 1870s, and based on the size of this one as well as its slender vertical growth habit it was likely planted here intentionally by the Abercombies in the early 1920s. It is so large that when I visited the site with a botanist in the very early spring we used binoculars to view the leaves and confirm its identity. Depending on when we visited this tree, it could be seen absolutely covered with lanternflies. We use this stop on the hike to discuss invasiveness, indigeneity, biodiversity, and encroachment — both politically and scientifically. If our entire Library Field site is a living library or archive, what do these perspectives mean for future collecting, maintenance, and weeding?

This is the first good view of one of our ponds, and frequently there are wildlife sightings here: deer, herons, turtles.

This is a particularly rich site for discussion, as the topic draws out strong perspectives and varying degrees of knowledge across a variety of domains. On almost half the hikes, someone would reference Robin Wall Kimmerer's writing here as we unpacked what our responsibilities are as stewards of this land, and more importantly all of its non-human inhabitants. I explain that the Ailanthus tree will have to be taken down, but that we hope to use its wood for construction and as material for artists, and then motion to the tangles of other invasive species choking the wetland, creating tick habitat, crowding out the indigenous inhabitants. This spot prompts more "have you read ___ " and "do you know ___" than any other point on the trail. All of this indicates that such sites summon excellent programming activities for METRO in the future.

Questions about hunting and fishing came up here multiple times. We often see deer from this hilltop; the pond down the slope supports a lot of wildlife. All of these deer sightings, as well as a product recommendation from one participant who hunts, led me to purchase two trailcams. One of those cameras is present here, and we regularly get pictures of deer, raccoons, and coyotes. Nearby preserves, like Teatown Lake, have to regularly cull the deer population because it gets out of control.

Managing an animal population is much less appealing to many of our hikers than managing plant populations. This serves as a reminder that our participants have a wide variety of familiarity and comfort levels with large, wild outdoor spaces. METRO's region covers urban, suburban, and nearly rural populations. Many of the city dwellers moved there from other rural parts of the country and world. Many of the suburban or rural participants 'escaped' New York, but grew up there or lived there a long time. Consensus on some of the topics will be difficult if not impossible to achieve.

13

EBONY SPLEENWORT ON RUIN

Observation Stop

Returning up the trail to the main intersection, we pass another Abercrombie ruin that is not directly referenced in our Field Guide, but which some hikers like to climb upon and explore. That ruin also sets a playful atmosphere, especially with younger participants who find the remains of a makeshift outhouse from long long ago. Past that ruin, we branch off down a dramatic stone corridor down toward the pond we had seen before. At the bottom of that corridor, is another small ruin: a pump house nestled into the rocks, overlooking the pond.

This stop prompts us to talk about human intervention and natural habitat, and their intertwined and complicated relationship. We bring the group's attention to a small fern growing in the mortar between the stones on the old structure. This fern is an ebony spleenwort, an indigenous plant, and it is present here because it is a lime-loving plant that found just the right substrate in the mortar that the Abercrombies used to bind this stone building together. Looking beyond the building, we see the same thing with our woodland pond. This pond is held back by an old dam that the former residents put in place. Over the course of 100 years, this pond has become habitat for numerous species. A preliminary environmental scan suggested the pond probably has an endangered turtle present, and a shagbark hickory near the pond likely provides habitat for an endangered bat.

After the hike was over, one participant wrote that "the opportunity to explore and reflect on the ways that non-human species have reclaimed human environments lit up my brain," and I have to imagine that they were referring to this stop. This may have been an overwhelming point on the hike; to access the stone structure by the pond requires a bit more of an adventurous spirit, and then once you arrive you are confronted by an abundance of stimuli: graffiti and cave crickets, ferns and frogs.

Returning up the stone corridor and onto the main trail, we continue a short distance and revisit the pond from the dam side. This gives hikers a better view of this small dam, the bramble beneath it and the inky water behind it. They can see the degree to which sediment has filled in the area over 100 years, creating a swampy wetland on the far side that supports an abundance of flora and fauna. Another of the Abercrombie stones, like those we saw along the road earlier, marks the edge of the dam, and the tattered remains of a rope swing hang from a black birch tree, evoking a time long ago when there was enough water in this pond that one might swing and jump into it.

This dam is a place where we talk about borders and boundaries. Our property line runs straight through the middle of the dam, with METRO stewarding land on the uphill side and the town of New Castle overseeing the downhill side. Libraries and archives typically have service boundaries, but there is tension between political boundaries and natural boundaries. How do watersheds or prevailing wind patterns influence work at the Library Field, and what kind of regional opportunities does this line of thought reveal?

This stop, or rather right after this stop as we climb back up the hill is the first moment that groups typically show some fatigue.

This view of the pond, having now seen it twice from other vantage points, consistently made participants ask about swimming, which is not something I anticipated. A surprising number of participants spoke up and said "I'd swim in that pond!", which eventually prompted me to start polling groups. Often as many as half of them would swim if given the opportunity. Citing reasons ranging from safety and liability to damage to the site and damage to the pond ecosystem, I explained that swimming will not be an option here 😕

Perhaps because of the larger view of a complex ecosystem including a pond, swampy wetland, and forest edges, this is the stop where most participants proposed citizen science projects, often referencing birds and ornithology clubs.

Another related programming proposal suggested we think about scale here, zooming in on the microbiome, referencing the famous "Powers of Ten" film by Charles and Ray Eames.

15

WOODLAND POND

Observation Stop

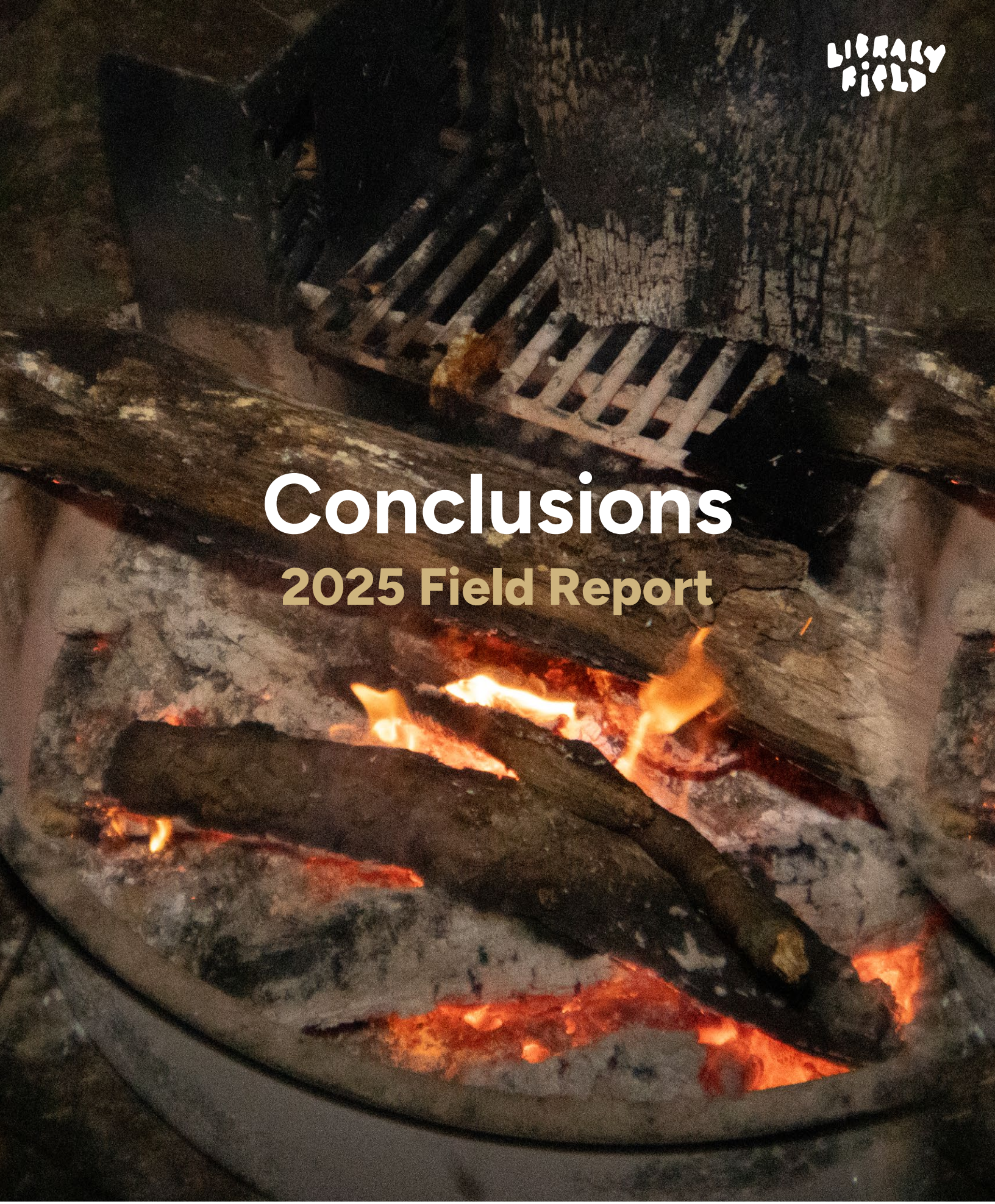
The walk between the two ponds is the least manicured of the trails; in fact it is not a trail made from people but a wildlife trail that has been lightly traveled by deer, raccoons, coyotes, and even turtles moving between the two wetland habitats. This journey requires hikers to go single file to minimize our disturbance of the landscape, and we ask them to try to stick to the path the best they can. Again I motion to the left to indicate that we have been circling the proposed library site.

The final woodland pond is a place where we talk about restoration, since this is one area we will target for rehabilitation as the Library Field project moves forward. This pond never dries up entirely, but during recent droughts the water level gets very low. As we stand on the edge of the pond and chat, I point upstream of the pond, where you can see the invasive Winged Euonymus (Burning Bush), Berberis Thunbergii (Japanese Barberry), and Rosa Multiflora (Multiflower Rose) that have dominated the entire landscape, choking out native species and making the terrain unpassable. We talk about bringing in goats to help, and about the replanting efforts we might take on to make this part of our forest healthy again.

After this walk, one hiker provided a variety of references and resources on how to "read" the forest landscape. They suggested this kind of "forest forensics" could be a good program, and pointed to a writer named Tom Wessels. When a tree falls over, it leaves a depression in the ground where the root ball has been pulled up from the earth. At the base of the fallen trunk, next to this hole, you find a corresponding mound where the roots and the earth bound to them decay. These are referred to as "cradles" and "pillows." Pillows and cradles can last for millenia, long after the tree itself has decayed. Stone walls and an absence of pillows and cradles can be one indicator that a forest had once been cleared and plowed for agricultural use. Ancient, untouched forests are filled with these reminders.

Hikers enthusiastically offer to help with reforestation and rehabilitation efforts by this lower pond.

"A clear visual of the impact of change - in this case the drought. But yet a thing of beauty with the sun and the reflection of the trees on the water surface. Sometimes 'low' moments can give us new perspectives and different ways to view our journey and the impact it has on our life and the lives of others. It's all related and intertwined."



Conclusions

2025 Field Report

CONCLUSION, FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of our two-hour hike we round the pond and choose a spot to reflect on our time together in the woods. This is our final stop, where I thank everyone and explain to them that this place is theirs, and that as METRO members they are welcome to join us as stewards of this special new place. I tell everyone that it is my job to figure out how to say "yes!" to their ideas, as wacky or ambitious as they might be. The following sections go into further detail about practical recommendations and a course of action, as well as some of the overall conceptual themes that emerged and resonated.

1. "We're already doing the work"
2. Access
3. Digital Technology
4. Planetary Design
5. Interconnectedness
6. Scaling
7. Reflections, Families, Reframing
8. Active Participation

THE HIKES WERE SUCCESSFUL

In the introduction I said that we set out with two goals for these hikes. Our first goal was to introduce the location and share our preliminary intentions, and our second was to gather ideas, input, inspiration, and other feedback that will ultimately drive our project in the direction most useful and exciting for our member community. We accomplished this, and exceeded expectations. The response to the hikes was overwhelmingly positive; people arrived curious and left inspired.

One person wrote "It was like having a walking brainstorming session only being out with nature instead of sitting around an office table." More than half of the participants followed up with input that is included in this report, and many of them offered to help and expressed excitement for future hikes, programs, or events. Over the course of five months, I saw more and more individuals signing up for these Friday and Saturday hikes as the story spread by word of mouth. People who went on hikes together wanted to exchange phone numbers, and were pleased to have been connected with their fellow hikers via email.

CONCLUSION 1

"WE'RE ALREADY DOING THE WORK"

One of the most common conclusions that our participants came to at the end of the hike was the idea that the two-hour hike itself embodied much of the spirit of what we hope to achieve at the Library Field in the long term. Quite a few stops on the hike focus on future plans, work that needs to be done, or concepts that need to be vetted for town approval. But as one participant said, "Especially in light of the slow nature of town permits, etc, I would absolutely encourage your continuing to use the space without the building, without the signposts, without the parking, as much as you can without running afoul of town regulations." Hikers urged METRO to be slow in our work at the Library Field, and not to rush our process. In fact, many of the hikers spoke about their own work as librarians and archivists and their desire to be slower and more thoughtful about it. We had conversations about speed, efficiency and the pressures to use AI in their workflows, and many saw the Library Field as a calming counterbalance to this seemingly inevitable and sometimes dark technofuture.

Not every theme that emerged can guide a programming response or an immediate course of action from METRO, but this one certainly can.

ACCESS

CONCLUSION 2

Most METRO members are employed at libraries, archives, nonprofits and other cultural institutions, meaning their ability to participate in programming and events during typical weekday business hours is limited. It is clear that we need to plan as much of our programming at the Library Field at the end of the traditional work week and on weekends. One participant suggested that it would be wonderful to be able to sign up to work remotely from the Library Field once we have a building, like some kind of coworking retreat space. When the weather was right, I often sat at a picnic table in the parking area and worked from there on my laptop, so I can understand this request.

Transportation to the Library Field is significantly easier for METRO members in the Westchester region than it is for those visiting from the city. Most of those in Westchester drive, so they have no problem getting to the location. For those riding the train, the Metro North is convenient but it still requires a seven- to ten-minute cab or Uber ride. Participants often asked for a ride from the train station, which suggests that it would be useful for METRO to acquire a Library Field vehicle one day. We had many participants come up from the city for these hikes, and in some ways the Library Field is of even greater importance to them.

Finally, accessibility was an important theme at large. METRO will need to pay close attention to this as we renovate, restore, and build at the site. Additionally, we can look to national parks and other parks agencies as we grade our trails, easy, moderate, difficult, etc. Participants overwhelmingly advocated for restoration of the stone bridge, from the perspective of both preservation and access.

CONCLUSION 3

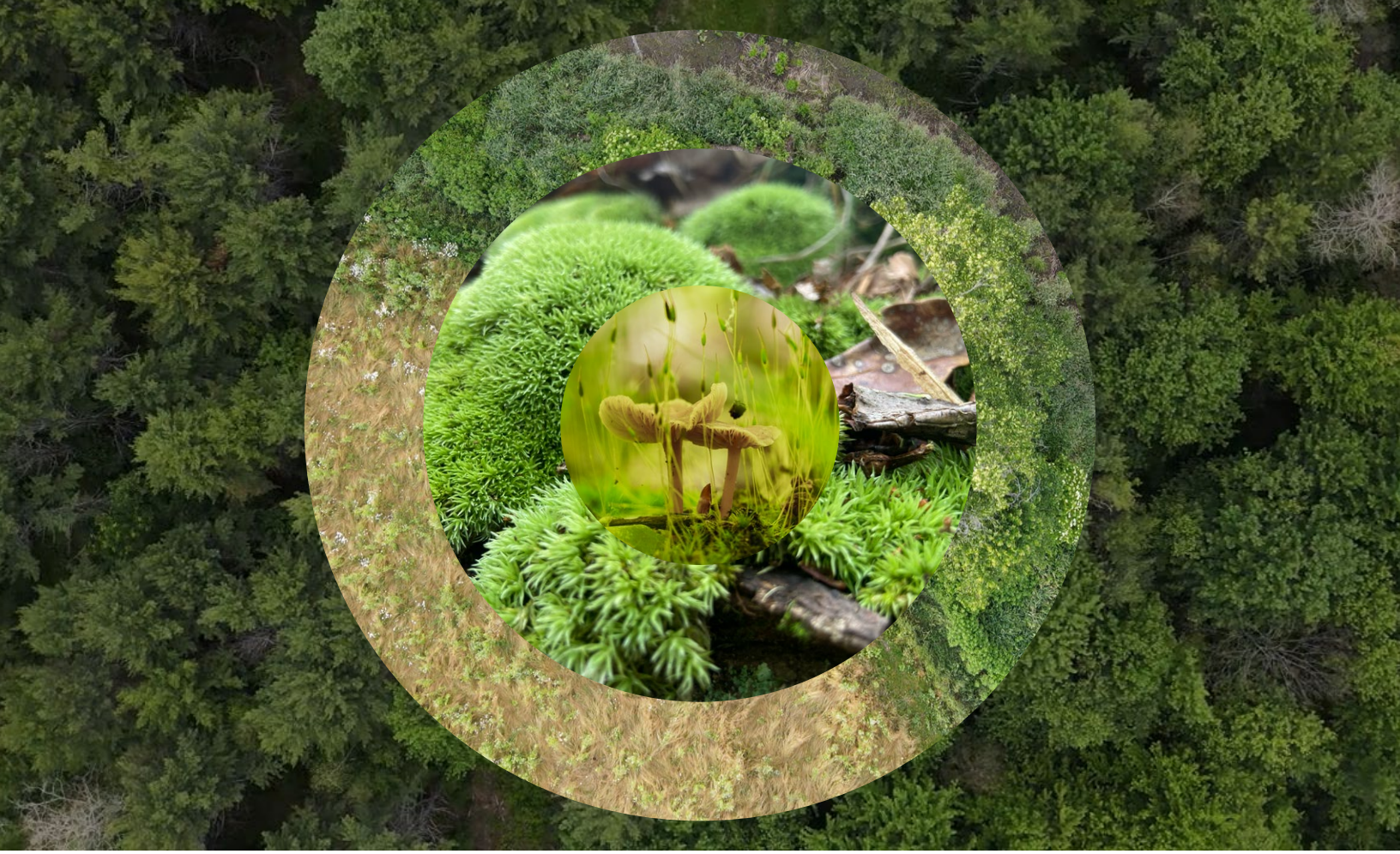
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

People brought varying perspectives on technology, and ultimately it became clear that the Library Field, much like a public library, park, or other community space, needs to be open to and accommodating of different users and different needs.

Some people see the Library Field as a place to leave the burdens of technology behind; they are tired of being surveilled by their phones, by cameras, by connectivity. They wanted to check their devices in at the gate, and only have them returned as they exited the Library Field.

Others saw potential for environmental sensors, a forest mesh wifi network, and citizen science projects like the Mothbox, an open source hardware and software package that allows scientists to attract moths to an illuminated sheet and then use machine learning algorithms to analyze and identify the species present in real time.

Unsurprisingly, hikers took a lot of pictures and shot a lot of video while they were on site, even as they questioned how much technology they wanted to engage with at the Library Field. The desire to document everything seems inescapable.



CONCLUSION 4

PLANETARY DESIGN

Seeding a transition from Human-Centered Design to Planetary Design Thinking has been at the very core of the Library Field project since its origin, so the hike was designed to spark these kinds of thoughts.

One of our participants clearly articulated the idea of ecomimicry in the conceptual design of a library:

> "Biomimicry is the practice of learning from and mimicking strategies found in nature to solve human design challenges - offers libraries a fundamentally different model than the ones we've been using. To me, libraries are more like ecosystems. Ecosystems solve problems libraries can learn from:
> - → How to serve diverse needs with finite resources
> - → How to remain resilient through constant disruption
> - → How to balance preservation with change
> - → How to create conditions for growth rather than control outcomes
> - → How to honor multiple species in shared space"

I don't believe that "systems thinking" was explicitly named by any of our participants, but certainly it was part of the way they described their desire to connect to and intertwine with the entire Library Field ecosystem.

Another participant said "You are the visitor in the forest – you have to listen to the forest, integrate with the forest, learn from it, utilize it wisely, and enjoy the forest: Recline and loosen your shoulders." There was a tension present between the desire to open up and relax and bathe in the forest versus protecting oneself, with both knowledge and gear like clothing or insect repellents. It is useful to consider this push and pull in our design thinking; complexity requires a fluidity and openness in our posture.

CONCLUSION 5

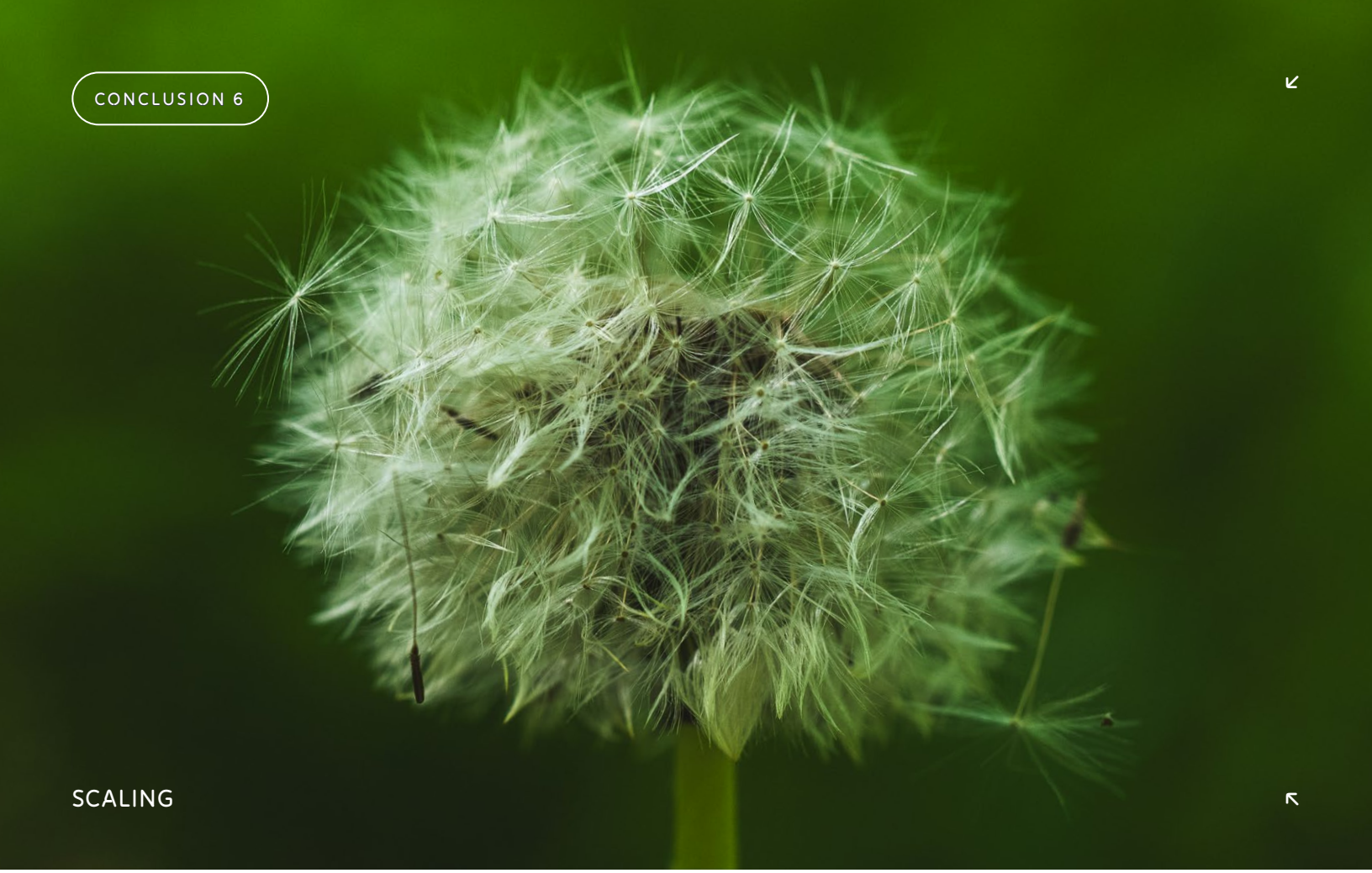
INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Different animals chose to appear for different groups. I found it hard not to assign meaning to this. One group, all of whom were visiting from the same institution, ran into a hawk on the trail. Rather than retreat and go about its hawk-business, it followed the group, perched in a tree and watched, assessing us and perhaps even judging us. I couldn't help but think that this hawk chose this group. I never saw the hawk again after that day, but perhaps they have seen me.

A stubborn snapping turtle stopped another group on the path between the dam's edge and the other woodland pond. Like the hawk, this old turtle wasn't going to be bothered by us.

To some hikers' delight and to other hikers' great distress, this rat snake confronted us one afternoon, splayed out across the trail. Why did the snake choose to reveal itself to us on this day? I've never seen them again, but I cannot help but think they've been watching me too.

Interspecies interactions and communications were important to all of the groups, for some from a scientific and taxonomic perspective and for others from a spiritual place. Hikers were incredibly open about their spiritual impulses, which is somewhat uncommon in the workplace.



CONCLUSION 6

SCALING

The Library Field is not a toolkit. The Library Field challenges the way that "innovation" is disseminated, distributed, and scaled across the library profession. Unfortunately, one of the most prized attributes a project can have in our field is replicability, the notion that it can be done once and then templated and copied with a minimal amount of investment, both financially and intellectually. These hikes and the words of the participants reaffirmed that the Library Field itself is not a replicable system or service model, and it is not a toolkit. Hikers did not join us to earn an official badge or a certification. This report should not be interpreted as a suggestion that folks go and get a plot of land and try this same thing wherever they are: that might cause more harm than good. Participants confirmed that scale and repetition are the opposite of what we might achieve with this quiet, special site for library workers, archivists and their communities. One person said "It occurred to me how nice it would be for library staff to get away from their everyday activities and periodically regenerate themselves through nature." Rather than just a location, the Library Field represents an attitude or a demeanor. The Library Field is germane to our region in the greater NYC area, and to METRO's unique, growing, and changing membership.

Instead of making a case for replication of the Library Field, our hikers repeatedly revealed ideas and pathways for collaboration and network building both locally and abroad.

Some of the most common prefaces to the proposal of a new idea along the trail were "this reminds me of this organization that does... do you know them?" or "I'm really interested in the work that... is doing. They would love to be a part of this." For METRO, this is an exciting way to frame growth in a library network — as a series of connections, a growing web of shared curiosity, interests, and concerns.

One colleague pointed out that plenty of organizations are out there doing good work trying to solve typical "library problems" ranging from book challenges to database and ebook pricing. The Library Field isn't trying to solve "Library Problems," it is trying to understand and make sense of wicked problems like climate change or our conscious participation in natural systems, and inspiring library workers to find new and innovative ways to adjust their focus and work differently. Maybe it's time to redefine our work and why we do it.

CONCLUSION 7

REFLECTIONS, FAMILIES, REFRAMING

After the walk, one participant wrote to me, "How do I respect and prepare for the unknown? The sudden storm, the censor, the new population entering the community on four feet and two feet or winged? How do I get comfortable with the unknown so I can prepare others and connect them with resources in the community?"

Another wrote. "By embedding the library within its natural setting, the library becomes more than a container for books and programs; it becomes a supportive habitat for the whole person. It invites people to think, feel, move, and restore, recognizing that learning is inseparable from the body, emotions, and environment."

There is no question that librarians, archivists, and other cultural workers are experiencing an unprecedented amount of trauma at the moment. All of us with experience working in this field know that our work is difficult even in the best of times. Now, more than ever, people need restorative moments to recharge and find a sense of joy and playfulness.

I had not anticipated that so many participants would ask if they could bring their families, pets, and friends out on these hikes with them. This contributed greatly to the spirit of the hikes, providing comic relief, a playful sense of exploration and observation, and a unique take on what the workplace means to those who signed up. When a diverse group came together — diverse in age, ethnicity, gender, role, and workplace type — the exchanges were exceptionally rich.

METRO must make Library Field programming welcoming and interesting for our members' entire families, as well as their personal networks. This inclusivity appears to be critical to the animation of this project. Additionally, we hosted two groups from institutions or organizations that were thinking of this as a way for them to have a retreat, to get out of the office and change their perspective on their work as a team. The hiking meth-odology wasn't designed with this use case in mind, but in many ways it still worked. Most of our participants brought up the idea that this place was a useful meeting place and retreat site, even if they were not part of a group that attended with that in mind. One of these groups referenced an interesting book: John Koenig's *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* is a compendium of new words for emotions. Its mission is to shine a light on the fundamental strangeness of being a human being — all the aches, demons, vibes, joys, and urges that are humming in the back-ground of everyday life." They shared a list of imaginary vocabulary from the book that reminded them of their experience at the Library Field.

CONCLUSION 8

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

At our final stop after circling the woodland pond and preparing to walk people back to their cars, after listening to the reflections and conclusions our group has come to, I give everyone a call to action. I had already told them that my job was to try to say "yes" to anything they wanted to prototype or experiment with at the Library Field, but at this point I reveal to the group that while hikes like these will continue in the spring, I also hope to get everyone's hands dirty, and give them a role in bringing the project to life. I talk about trail maintenance, weeding out overgrown thickets, replanting trees and shrubs, harvesting berries and rose hips, and other active group activities.

One participant wrapped up their experience at the Library Field with this positive statement:

"I had a great time getting a first look at Library Field and a sense of where the project is going. I think you are onto something with the way you are thinking about presenting things. Get people there and encourage them to observe and think. Semi-guided but open-ended. I believe you have an opportunity to both fit in among the other land-based institutions in the area and to set yourselves apart."

METRO's next steps will be acting on the things we learned during this phase of our research. In 2026, we'll focus our programming and events on the ideas that arose during these hikes, and we will continue to slowly and steadily move forward with restoration work and improvements to the Library Field site.

Keep up with our work at the Library Field:

Newsletter ↗

Website ↗

THANK YOU TO OUR MEMBERS, GUESTS, AND FRIENDS
—

Participating Member Institutions

New York University Libraries
Pace University Libraries
Westchester Library System
Ossining Public Library
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
New York Institute of Technology
Pratt Institute
Barnard College Library
Bard High School Early College Queens
Julia L. Butterfield Memorial Library
Brooklyn Public Library
Queens Public Library
New York Public Library
Yonkers Public Library
The New York Historical
Greenburgh Public Library
Bard College
Hastings Library
Dobbs Ferry Public Library
Lehman College, CUNY
NYC DORIS Municipal Library
Scarsdale Public Library
Briarcliff Manor Public Library
Chappaqua Public Library

Guests From Non-Member Institutions

Margaret Sullivan Studio
Betensky Law
CLIR
Valley Cottage Library
Lenape Center
Woodstock Public Library District
SUNY Dutchess Community College
City Bureau
WCC Native Plant Center
Library Futures
Rebecca T Miller
Maxine Bleiweiss
Henry Myerberg

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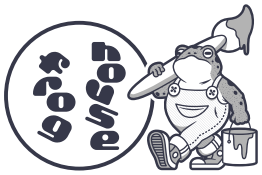


APPENDIX 1: BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) is one of New York State's nine regional library councils, chartered by the New York State Board of Regents and established in Education Law in 1966. We serve the boroughs of New York City as well as Westchester County, though many of our services have impact far beyond our local service area. Our mission is to create a sustainable culture of creativity, collaboration, and open exchange for libraries, archives, museums, and cultural institutions in the Metropolitan New York region and around the world. We achieve this through resource sharing and collaborations across our network that allow libraries to experiment, innovate, and develop new service models to better serve their patrons and users.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMLS hired METRO to assist them in convening cultural leaders from around the country for a project called Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museums (REALM). The primary focus of that project was working with the Battelle National Library to determine the attenuation rate of the SARS-CoV-2 virus on various surfaces found in public institutions: books, keyboards, and other common surfaces. While we were determining and communicating those risks to networks of cultural institutions all over the world, the convenings also revealed a proliferation of innovative service responses and creative programs and events. Cultural institutions all over the country refocused their efforts on safe outdoor programming through environmental education, storywalks, community gardening, nature connectedness work, citizen science projects, and more. The pandemic had forced everyone to take their work outdoors.

Based on what we learned during that difficult and traumatic time, in 2021 METRO began planning to open a permanent, outdoor open-air laboratory for librarians, archivists, and workers from other cultural institutions to reestablish their connection to nature, and to reflect on the work they do and why they do it. We named our project the Library Field, a pun that acknowledges both the interdisciplinary and seemingly boundless nature of library work, and the fact that our work would take place outdoors, in a field. As libraries stretch their mandate and fill other social service gaps, when they act as community newsrooms, manage research data collections, offer access to power tools and seed libraries and classes on everything from permaculture to video game design, what are the boundaries and parameters of this 'field', or discipline?

LIBRARY FIELD

Imagine

Welcome to the Library Field, an open-air laboratory where METRO's member libraries and archives will collaborate and develop new public programming concepts that center ecosystemic and sustainable design principles!

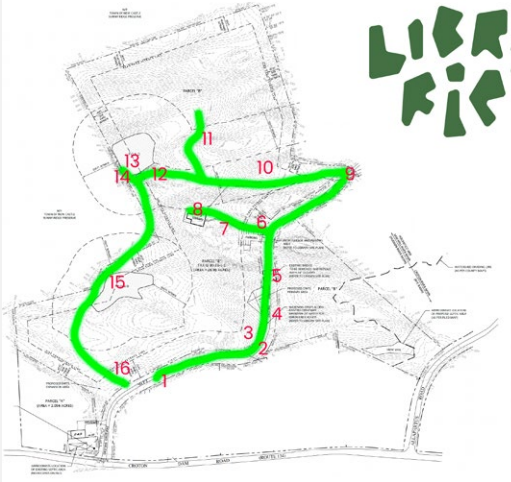
What if we were granted a field, a physical and intellectual terrain, where we could reimagine our institutions and social conventions and community values from the ground up — from the roots and soils to the treetops and clouds? What if that field were a library: a public space; a social infrastructure; an intellectual and ecological commons; a site for the convergence of myriad ways of knowing, multiple fields of knowledge? Could a Library Field prompt us to think differently about collection management, classification, access, preservation, pedagogy, community, and solidarity? Can it compel us to ask deeper questions about what constitutes a knowledge artifact or a media form, how we know things and why that matters?

During our conceptual design phase, we're welcoming friends to join us on hikes, to explore the field and imagine its potential in situ! Today's hike has 16 points of interest, featuring historic structures, natural features, anticipated building sites, and more — all mapped out in this field guide. As we walk together, we invite you to share your thoughts with us. We brought you here not only so we can share our plans with you, but also so you can contribute to our collective vision.

The following pages trace our route and highlight our 16 stops, each of which prompts a set of discussion questions or reflections. We invite you to jot down your thoughts or sketch out your visions. At the end of our route, we'll collect your guide in order to document your responses – and we'll then mail the guide back to you as a memento of our speculative fieldwork.

This field guide is a living document. As time goes on, we'll add historical context and archival materials, and identify some of the most prevalent resident species of flora and fauna.

metro.org



LIBRARY FIELD

1. Entrance Gate
2. Abercrombie Stones
3. Root Cellar
4. White Oak Tree
5. Stone Bridge
6. Proposed Parking
7. Pink Lady Slipper Orchid
8. Proposed Library
9. Trailhead
10. Cliff
11. Tree of Heaven
12. Main Intersection
13. Ebony Spleenwort on ruin
14. Edge of pond
15. Woodland pond
16. Exit

stop 1

entry gate

stop 2

Abercrombie stones

stop 3

root cellar

stop 4

white oak tree

12

stop 5

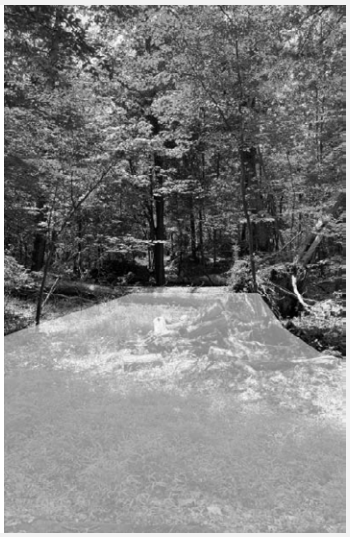
stone bridge

15

stop 6

parking lot and garage

16



stop 7

pink lady slipper orchid

19

stop 8

library site

20

stop 9

trailhead

23

stop 10

cliff

24

stop 11

tree of heaven

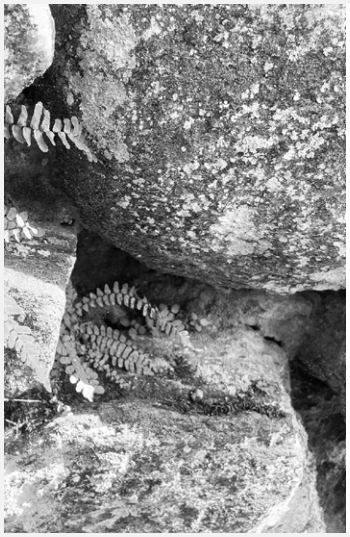
27

stop 12

trail intersection

30

31



stop 13

ebony spleenwort

33

stop 14

dam edge

34

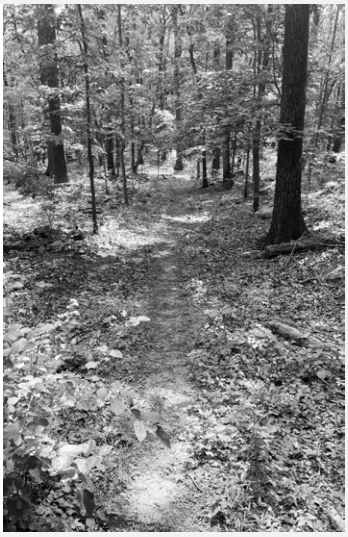
stop 15

woodland pond

37

stop 16

trail exit



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notes

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notes

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learn more and get involved at
libraryfield.org