High latitudes foster new attitudes about nature

Words are the usual interface between the person and the landscape, says Will Richard, a Maine nature photographer and leader of an environmental seminar at Bates.

But with the course “Perceptions of Place and Time — High-Latitude Bioregions,” Richard’s charge is to expand his students’ use of their senses, particularly vision, “so there’s not simply just the word as the surrogate for the landscape.”

One of those students is Erin Bertrand ’05 of Torrington, Conn. “I was excited about the opportunity to experiment with visual artwork, and use that to convey a message about what I see in the world around me,” she says. “While I have experience with nature writing and poetry, as well as scientific interpretation, I’ve never had the opportunity to look at and interpret nature in this particular way.”

“I have realized through this class that the bridging of all these perspectives,” she says, “will give the clearest picture of the world around us.”

By seminar’s end, in December, participants will have carried sketchbooks and cameras as far afield as the Gaspé Peninsula, in Québec, with its famed salmon rivers, forests and mountainous coastline. The three-day Gaspé visit in October culminated a weeklong, 1,566-mile exploration of the International Appalachian Trail, whose southern terminus is Maine’s legendary mountain, Katahdin. Additional field trips brought students to Bates’ own Coastal Center at Shortridge, in the coastal town of Phippsburg, and to other rural places in Maine.

Richard, who has been deeply involved in the creation of the IAT, is a resident of Georgetown. His resume covers not only his award-winning camera work but his experience as a writer, teacher of environmental studies, registered Maine Guide and expedition leader. His position as a fellow in environmental studies at Bates is made possible by a program, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, that taps the expertise of off-campus specialists from Maine and away.

What he teaches is partly photographic technique and partly an approach to thinking about the outdoors — “but I think a more important part is getting students out into the woods,” he explains, “getting them to places they’d probably never get to.”

He adds dryly, “Originally we were considering the Arctic, but that would have been a little too much.” Not that he hasn’t been there, done that himself. An exhibit of Richard’s photographs at the Bates College Museum of Art this fall includes stunning images he made in the Arctic and Antarctic.

In past years Richard devoted his exploring time to mountains. More recently he finds himself gravitating to the planet’s polar extremes — or, as he puts it, he has gone from high altitudes to high latitudes.

Aesthetically he values the polar regions’ stark natural forms, as well as qualities of light that feed the intense clarity of his images. But Richard also cherishes the pristine nature of these places.

“It’s so obvious when I come back to the States,” he says. “Here we just generate so much stuff. Sometimes I feel like I’m entering a junkyard.”

Some of the 16 students in the course followed Richard’s lead and turned their cameras to the landscape, while others painted, drew or worked in mixed media. Bertrand made collages of cut paper, pastels and birch bark to show how a landscape can be read as a document of natural change — and to point up the contrast between changes in nature and changes in human nature.

The field trips were key to this interpretive process. “One particular moment comes to mind when I felt like this goal was particularly accessible to me,” she says. “I was one of the first of our group to reach the very tip of Cap Gaspé,” which juts into the sea like the bow of some massive stone ship. “It was truly one of the most amazing places I have ever encountered.”
In some ways, says Stacy Smith, multiculturalism has gotten a bad rap. “It was an idea that grew in popularity through the 1980s and the ‘90s,” says Smith, assistant professor of education at Bates. “Then more recently it has been dismissed as being faddish and, in a negative sense, part of what gets lumped under ‘political correctness.’ ”

Let’s look again, Smith says: “It’s important to recognize that the issues suggested by ‘multiculturalism’ aren’t issues we should leave behind or neglect.”

That’s why she took part in the 2002 T.G.I.F. lectures, a series of Friday-afternoon talks by staff and faculty that this fall have explored the theme, “The Challenge (and Opportunity) of Multiculturalism.”(The T.G.I.F. spotlight moves to student speakers and a variety of themes during the winter semester.)

Sponsored by the Edmund S. Muskie Archives at Bates, the T.G.I.F. series offers provocative presentations on public policy issues. The point is to involve students, staff and faculty in lively and thoughtful discussion.

The time is ripe for a fresh look at multiculturalism on campus, says Smith — even at Bates, whose egalitarian tradition is rooted in the pre-Civil War anti-slavery movement. Nationally, civil rights proponents are confronting both legal challenges to affirmative action and the post-9/11 backlash against Arab Americans and American Muslims. Locally, Bates’ hometown of Lewiston has come under national scrutiny as the arrival of hundreds of Somali immigrants has been welcomed by many, but protested by some.

Smith’s T.G.I.F. talk was titled “The Challenges of Diversity and Equity at Bates.” In the series format, a brief presentation precedes a period of discussion, which can get pretty feisty, and Smith had two goals for hers.

One was to remind participants of why diversity is important at liberal arts institutions. She offered two broad reasons: First, the marketplace of ideas needs a wealth of different viewpoints to thrive. Second, given a national history of discrimination against women and members of minority groups, welcoming all manner of people to Bates is simply the right thing to do. “The question of access to higher education is one of the key civil rights issues of our time,” Smith says.

Smith’s other goal was to examine higher education’s role, and Bates’ own track record, in providing equal access to students of all walks of life. “One thing that Bates is doing right,” Smith says, “is that we’re asking these questions, and that we’re providing forums such as this to seriously take them up together as a community.”
Season’s Greetings
By Ed and Joan Tiffany P’03
Co-Chairs, Bates Parents & Family Association

To first-year parents: Welcome to the Bates community! To all other parents, welcome back to another fall semester. For those of you who attended Parents and Families Weekend, we hope you and your family enjoyed it as much as we did. This program provides a wonderful opportunity to spend time with your son or daughter and get to know the Bates community by meeting professors and coaches, as well as attending activities such as dance and music performances or sports. In addition, it is a time to meet other Bates parents who may share your experiences, hopes, and concerns, and who, like you, want a good weekend break! Check out the Parents and Families Weekend quotes and photos in this issue of the Family Connection.

From our perspective things are going very well at Bates. The Parents & Family Association is a recognized leader in fund-raising among peer schools and the involvement of parents as volunteers is outstanding. The commitment of the College to the highest academic standards is proven. Elaine Tuttle Hansen has brought a wide range of experience and energy to the presidency of Bates. With good reason, Bates is a very popular choice for students, and the admissions office reports 4,000 applications from outstanding students, a record number, for the Class of 2006. Of applicants accepted by Bates, 38 percent enrolled, a yield in keeping with those of recent years.

We had a very good turnout for the fall meeting of the Bates Parents & Family Association during Parents and Families Weekend. All the parents on campus for the weekend had several opportunities to meet the new president. A respected scholar and academic leader, President Hansen is impressed by and grateful for the participation of parents in support of the College. She is committed to Bates as a unique community of learners, and recognizes that one area requiring special attention is that of fund-raising and building the endowment.

Volunteer for Bates
We are pleased to continue chairing the Parents & Family Association for a second year. Our task remains twofold: to raise much-needed financial support for Bates, and to be a sounding board for the College while providing insight and inspiration for parent-volunteer activity. If you have not already, please consider investing some time as a volunteer for the Parents & Family Association — it’s an enjoyable and meaningful way to stay connected to your student’s life at Bates. Committees with volunteer opportunities include the Parents Fund (chaired by Dave and Eileen Laconi P’05, with Tom and Esther Hearn P’04), Welcome and Events (chaired by Linda Dodd P’04), Communications (chaired by Henry and Cathy Roberts P’00, P’04), Admissions, and Office of Career Services. The work provides a unique kind of involvement with Bates, and we hope to accomplish much while having fun! To learn more, please call 207-786-6336 or e-mail parents@bates.edu. We have excellent staff support from Sandra Anthoine, and we welcome your comments and ideas. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with us directly or with Sandra.

A Wise Investment: Parents Fund Update
Congratulations! Last year, almost 1,500 current and former Bates parents and grandparents contributed a record $639,981 in unrestricted annual gifts to the Bates Parents Fund! Thanks to your generosity, we surpassed the dollar goal by 7 percent and achieved a 15 percent increase over the previous fund year.

For the 2002-03 Parents Fund, the goal will be to exceed $600,000 again and to achieve 40 percent participation (1,578 donors). We hope you will make a gift to this year’s Parents Fund, and help us to educate others about the importance of supporting the liberal arts education that Bates College provides. Each gift makes a big difference toward achieving our fund-raising goals and helps to keep Bates on the leading edge of parent philanthropy.

Thank you!
To the parent volunteers and to all of our parent and grandparent donors, thank you for your continued generosity to Bates College. It is a great pleasure to work with you on behalf of the Bates Parents Fund and the Parents & Family Association.

SAVE THE NEW DATES!

Dates for Parents and Families Weekend 2003 have changed!

Please mark your calendars with these new dates for next year’s Parents and Families Weekend:

Friday, October 31-
Sunday, November 2, 2003

This was one of two weekends available next year that feature several Bates teams hosting competitions and that do not occur during Fall Break or the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year.

We apologize for any inconvenience this date change may cause for those of you who have already made hotel reservations or other arrangements. For more information on area accommodations, please visit the Bates Website at www.bates.edu/x11783.xml.

You may also want to note on your calendar the Commencement date for your student(s):

Class of 2003: Monday, May 26, 2003
Class of 2004: Monday, May 31, 2004
Class of 2005: Monday, May 30, 2005
Class of 2006: Monday, May 29, 2006

Note: The Commencement ceremony usually begins around 10 a.m.
“The most fun for us was to attend classes with our son. I’m sure it was the least fun part for him! Fortunately, there were other parents present, which made it not so embarrassing. It was fantastic to be part of the learning process, even if only for a few hours.”

— Terry Byrnes P’05

“The weekend program I enjoyed most was whitewater rafting. It turned out to be a fabulous day spent with my daughter and other Bates students and parents. I would suggest this activity every year!”

— anonymous

“Thanks for a great weekend.”

— Henry Ormsby P’03
Parents’ Reflections

Parents can offer each other advice as they watch their children grow and develop at Bates. This column is one way for parents to share their experience. Please send thoughts or a short story you’d like to share to the Parents & Family Association Office, Bates College, 2 Andrews Road, Lewiston, Maine 04240, or send an e-mail to parents@bates.edu.

I am in my fourth year as a Bates parent, with my daughter Amanda graduating in May and my son, Sam, beginning life at Bates. It has been extraordinary and exhilarating, and I am grateful that my children are in a school that nurtures them, yet provides a venue for intense independent study in completely different areas.

Amanda’s independent major combines sociology, education, and psychology with a focus on child and family studies. Sam is immersed in the sciences, and absorbed in a demanding internship.

Nothing makes me feel better than to know that they are in the library or laboratory, playing sports, or doing service-learning work. It hasn’t been easy to let go and trust that they will find their way and their passions — as well as the laundry room — but the more I let go of my own need to be involved in their paths, the more they are willing to share.

But letting go is a process, so each week I log on to the Bates Website and read The Bates Daily, copying selected events and e-mailing them back. Sam and Amanda know without my comment all about everything that is going on, but it is a way of connecting and confirming that they are indeed surrounded by enriching experiences. I am grateful for e-mail because it is a lifeline providing an immediate link with my children. When I receive a response it brightens the day.

— Pamela Adler Golden P’03, ’06

Our son Ben is a junior. I remember making the college circuit during his senior year in high school. We visited Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin, in that order. Because Ben plays squash, seeing the squash facilities was key. Of the three schools, only Bates lacked 21-foot-wide “international” courts.

You might think that would have been a deal-breaker, but such was not the case. Colleges have distinct personalities, and it was Bates’ “personality” that sold Ben. Two-plus years have not diminished his enthusiasm — or ours.

We have seen him mature into a person who doesn’t make assumptions, who asks questions. He is learning to see the world through the lens provided by a superior education. What more could anyone ask of a college?

— Vicky Schippers P’04
What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?

A good person to ask might be Bates football player and physics major Adam Shepard ’03.

Each Saturday in the fall, Shepard puts physics principles into action as he roams the defensive backfield for the Bobcats, bringing great force to his job as one of the team’s leading tacklers.

As the rover in the Bobcats’ 4-4 defense, Shepard faces the challenges of an outside linebacker, playing the run. He also has a role to play in a strong safety, getting involved in pass coverage.

It’s a demanding position well-suited to a superb athlete like Shepard, says head coach Mark Harriman. “We can always count on Adam to be in the right place. He’s a physical guy and he’s smart — just a great combination.”

Shepard has been named to two consecutive New England Small College Athletic Conference All-Academic teams. He also won last year’s Stephen Ritter Award, given annually to the 10 members of the football team with the highest grade-point averages at the end of the previous semester.

For Shepard, athletics and academics are a perfect recipe for success. “My grades have always been the best during the football season,” he says. “A lot of it comes from the football mindset and the coaching staff. They teach things that extend beyond the field.”

Shepard, who wants to attend graduate school in engineering or aerospace, worked in a Harvard research lab last summer. “It was tough, but it was fun learning and seeing how major research in physics is done.”

This resident of Canton, Mass., has always had a passion for physics. “My father works in the field, so I’ve been surrounded by it all my life. It’s just interesting — you know how the world works.”