

Volunteer Vibes - *Volunteers play many crucial roles at the Preserve. They maintain trails, welcome visitors, conduct research, educate youth groups, support special events, beautify our gardens, capture breathtaking photography, and much more, contributing their time, talents, and thousands of volunteer hours annually. We will be regularly featuring our volunteers in Talus Talk so that we can all learn who they are and why they do what they do for the Preserve. Let's meet our volunteers!*

James McCowan

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Massachusetts where I was fortunate to have some preserved forest and farmland nearby that I had free reign of as a child. My first exposure to Mohonk Preserve was as a Geology student and Cross-Country runner at Vassar in the late 90s. I explored the Preserve on field trips and weekend long runs with teammates and have felt deeply connected to it ever since.

What is your volunteer role(s) here at Mohonk Preserve?

I'm a Backcountry Patroller and Trail Keeper for the Millbrook Cross and the Coxing trails, which is convenient as I've run the loop of Millbrook Ridge and Coxing from my house at least once a month for the past 7 years. I also help on the Rock Rift trail with Heidi and keep an eye on the Stairmaster, too. I've also helped with some event planning for things like Rock the Ridge as well.

Why did you decide to volunteer your time and talents at Mohonk Preserve?

I've been enjoying the Preserve for over 20 years and it felt natural to help care for the space that has provided me with so much solace, enjoyment, and growth. As my wife and I raise our kids in the shadow of the ridge, I want them to not only grow to appreciate the place but also understand the sense of stewardship and care for it.

What is a volunteer accomplishment you are really proud of?

It's no singular big thing, just knowing that I can help look after the space. Sometimes that's a dedicated event or "work" hike with family to cut back some brush, but sometimes it's just stopping mid-run to clear some downed branches, offer some direction to visitors, or clean up some trash. Just having the Preserve as a regular part of life is special.

Where is your favorite place/trail on the Preserve and why is it your favorite?

So many highlights but I think my favorite trail must be Millbrook Ridge and my favorite carriage road is Laurel Ledge. They are both so high-reward and highlight how wonderful a place the Preserve is.



Photo by Bill Winter