

## As We See It

As a learning tool, and an inspiration, the possibilities the Trail offers are endless. A.T. park office manager, Pam Underhill, ATC information services manager, Laurie Potteiger and A.T. outdoor recreation specialist, Rita Hennessy see the Trail as a way to keep people connected to the natural world, feel true accomplishment by lending a hard working hand, and get educators and students involved in projects that could shape their future. Their actions speak just as loudly as their words.

## T H E T A L K

### Our Children

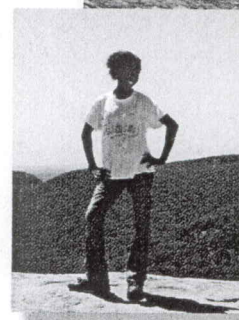
BY PAMELA UNDERHILL

Our kids are our future and all of the children of this country belong to all of us. We all have a vested interest in their well-being. We don't have to look any further than Blacksburg, Virginia to know that this is true.

We have reason to be concerned, as a nation. Rhetoric has been forming about children suffering from "nature-deficit disorder" and "leave no child indoors." We have a tendency to talk about "underprivileged" kids, "disadvantaged" kids, minority kids or "at risk" youth.

Our children are at risk — the advantaged and disadvantaged; black, white and Hispanic; urban and rural. They are at risk of being disconnected from the rhythms of the natural world and how they fit into it. They are at risk of not knowing where their food comes from or how necessary the preservation of the natural world is to their survival. And we are at risk of raising generations of kids who have no appreciation for the natural world or our public lands and who thus will not stand up for their preservation as decision-making adults.

It is appropriate and essential for ATC and the Park Service to have launched initiatives in education and outreach if they are going to remain relevant in a changing world. We have a responsibility to engage in these efforts and the A.T. is uniquely positioned to play a vital role. We will never forget the volunteer soul of the Appalachian Trail, but if we don't recognize and embrace the fact that the A.T. has become much more than just a simple footpath, we will have missed a golden opportunity to make a huge, positive difference in our world.



**Students with Groundwork USA conquer 1,284-foot Bear Mountain in New York.**

