

HILLTOPPER

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rlphprkns@yahoo.com or mailbox #1.
Thanks, Nina Rogers and whoever built the
snowman for contributing to this issue.

COMING EVENTS

Due to COVID 19 no Hilltop social events are scheduled. Check the bulletin board regularly for news of any last-minute outdoor activities. Meanwhile, you may enjoy those listed below.

Friday, Jan. 8 at 7 p.m.

The Center for the Arts' annual performance by scholarship recipients, "Stars of Tomorrow", is on Zoom this year. Find the Zoom link on their website: centerfortheartsnh.org.

Saturday, Jan. 2 at 1 p.m.

New London Conservation Commission will host a hike at Phillips Memorial Preserve in Otterville. Trip leaders are John Kiernan (kiernannlnh@yahoo.com) and Nick Martin (nicolasdmartin52@gmail.com).



A Toast to the New Year!

If you stayed indoors all day on Saturday, December 12, you may have missed seeing this snowman's brief but inspiring appearance. Standing in front of the flag - at half staff to mark the covid-caused death of NH House Speaker Dick Hinch - the snowman's brave smile is our perfect model as we leave 2020 behind and greet 2021.



Welcome and farewell Kevin and Linda Cooney, new owners of Unit 110, moved in on Dec. 16. Jerry and Leslie Carney have moved from another home in New London to Unit 145; Barbara and Lyman Smith have moved from that unit to their new home on Page Rd., just 3 miles away. Marge Mueller of Larchmont, NY, is expected to move into her new home at Unit 32 in mid-January.

Ralph's Field Notes: Stories in the Snow

One of my hobbies is identifying animal tracks. In winter, I especially like to read the stories left behind by animal activity in the snow. To “wipe the slate clean”, it’s best to go out when at least a little new snow has fallen the day or evening before. That way, you catch the dawn “rush hour” and you don’t get so confused by old tracks, melting snow, wind, etc.

Some stories: Several times I’ve seen mouse or squirrel tracks suddenly increase their spacing - meaning the animal started to run - then covered by spread wing tracks, with maybe a jumble of blurred tracks, then a few more wing prints but no more mouse tracks. It’s hard to say what bird had lunch, but there may be a few clues around. A long feather with a fluffy edge suggests an owl, as their wings are muffled. If the prey was a squirrel, it may have been a hawk in the daylight. If you’re lucky enough to see the bird’s footprints, that’s another clue, as hawks’ show 3 toes pointing forward and one back, while many owls’ are 2-2. These clues aren’t infallible; I once saw hawk wing prints (in daylight) overtake a white-footed mouse (night). The mouse escaped by falling into a culvert. I saw its tracks scampering inside.

Otters (and, to a lesser extent, mink) are fun to follow, as they alternate a few steps with a long belly slide, usually on a downhill. In one of the few displays that I’ve seen of a grown animal just having fun, it’ll slide down the hill, then scurry back up and slide down again. In the winter, otters often emerge onto the ice to eat their catch, so look around for fish scales, crayfish shells, etc.

In deep snow, deer often “yard up” - restrict their travels to a relatively small area, with wind cover, long lines of sight, and good browse. It’s important



Indoor Beauty Outdoors looks bleak, but some of the same neighbors whose gardens we admire all summer fill their homes with colorful houseplants. Left to right see plants nurtured by Ann Paulson, Suzanne Hammond, Nina Rogers.



“An unlitary man may be defined as one who reads books once only.” C. S. Lewis

A number of Hilltop readers have been finding pleasure this year rereading old books.

One such readers is Brian Stillson, who finds himself reading the first two volumes of Ken Follett’s Kingsbridge trilogy once again (**Pillars of the Earth** and **World Without End**) in order to better appreciate the third volume (**A Column of Fire**). Ann Paulson has begun rereading Patrick O’Brian’s 20-volume series of nautical history novels set mostly during the Napoleonic wars. (You may be familiar with the movie starring Russel Crowe based upon the first volume, **Master and Commander**.) If you decide to follow her example, she recommends also acquiring **A Sea of Words** by Dean King, a lexicon explaining the seafaring terms found throughout. Fay Bronstein likes to read her favorite classics again and again: “It’s just like a visit with an old friend.”

not to disturb them then, as they’re on a tight energy budget and most does are heavily pregnant. However, one winter I accidentally snowshoed into such a yard, and ten deer took off the other way. They hadn’t really seen me, so I stood stock still as they circled back to see what that noise in the bushes was. Eventually they spread around me to as close as 10 feet, but then I couldn’t stifle a sneeze, and the game ended.

Darker stories can be seen. Once I followed some coyote tracks around a marsh to a beaver lodge. Usually they don’t get far in the frozen mud and sticks, but this time they had successfully dug out the beavers, two of which had been dragged to a nearby dirt road.

Tracking in snow can be fun, but watch out for jokesters leaving dinosaur footprints, which once happened to me.

