

FOCUS ON THE ARTS

Preservation passion, through a lens

Photographer's show on display at Acton library

By Nick Cunkelman
Correspondent

When Acton resident Philip Keyes looks through his lens, he sees an opportunity to capture a glimpse of nature and to use this window to entice others to get outdoors.

Or at least that is the idea behind "Photo Explorations: Acton Conservation Lands," a photography show currently at the Acton Memorial Library featuring Keyes' work.

The show, which displays around 20 of Keyes' photographs in the Library's exhibit room, aims to motivate viewers to get out and explore Acton's conservation

lands and to support preserving open spaces in the town by drawing the viewer into each natural shot.

"We walk around with blinders on and especially in our suburban lifestyle we tend to take nature for granted," said Keyes, who spends many hours a week on Acton's conservation lands as a member of the town's Land Stewardship Committee, which constructs and maintains trails on the lands. "I'd like to have people look more closely."

Keyes, who grew up in Concord and spent several years in Bolivia as a Fulbright scholar using his cam-

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Philip Keyes photo

This photo by photographer Phillip Keyes is titled, "Triassic Birth."

Photos at the library

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era to investigate the conflicts experienced by Andean peoples in the region as they dealt with modern markets, is especially attuned to the power of photography in conveying a message.

"The beauty of photography is that even though we think it portrays reality, that's not exactly the case; it can be manipulated," he said. "Still, because of that reputation, photography has the power of social change — it works as an agent of social change."

Keyes' previous show, which was up last fall in Burlington, had a similar intent as it brought Burlington residents into the natural beauty of a large plot of town-owned land that the town had considered selling off to a developer.

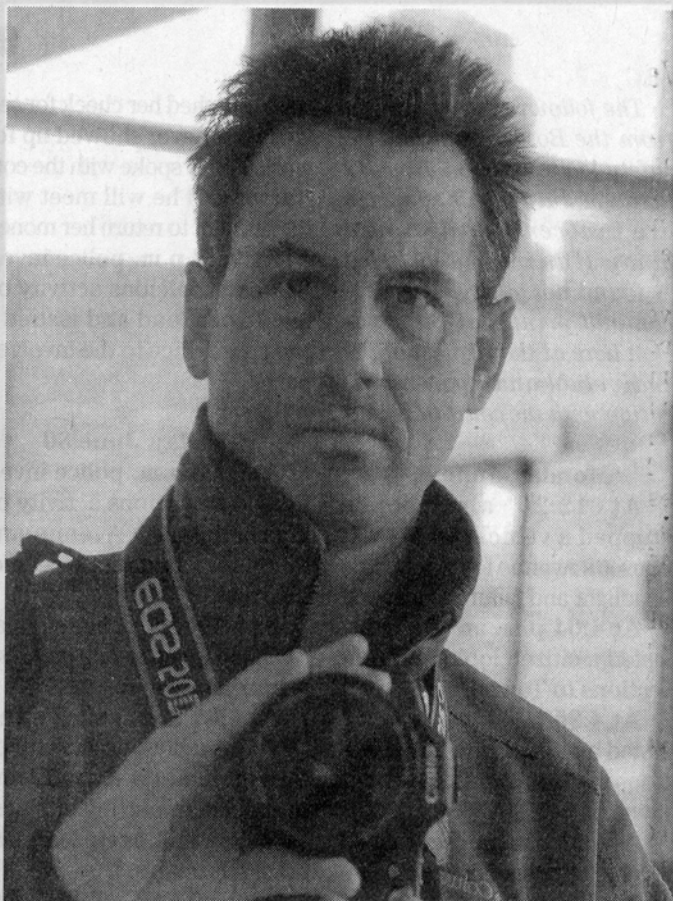
"And now there's some opportunities for Acton to step up to the plate and save some land," he said.

Keyes also acknowledged that since the "Photo Explorations" show is up in the library, one would hope that the usual patrons will realize — if they haven't already — the power of the natural world to educate and enlighten much like the books that surround them.

"All art has the ability to transform and convey meaning," he said. "This is another way to expand one's mind by doing your own natural reading in the natural world."

Yet Keyes does not aim to merely show awe-inspiring landscape scenes in his photos but rather the harshness of nature, a reality that he believes all people can connect to.

"I like the edginess of nature. It's not all cheery or happy or straightforward," he said. "We're losing a generation of people who don't have a connection with nature and open spaces, and I'm hoping that people will



Philip Keyes

be more inclined to find that after seeing it here."

As to that connection, Keyes highlighted the Trail Through Time, a heritage trail in North Acton which accesses old sites and stone structures to show walkers the concurrence of both the social and natural world.

"It gets people connected to nature and makes people aware of how nature and man have been connected for many years," he said.

Keyes also emphasized just how accessible nature is for Acton's citizens. Indeed, in addition to visiting actontrails.org, residents can buy map books of the lands that are GPS-rendered and artistically presented at Town Hall, Eastern Mountain Sports, and Butter Brook Farm for just \$10 a piece, and the money goes toward reprinting the books so more residents can get outside each year.

Jim Snyder-Grant, chairman of the Acton Land Stewardship Committee, noted the key role Keyes plays through both his work for the committee as well as his photography.

"One of the major reasons we're building trails is to give people experiences in the woods so they fall in love with nature and Phil brings that concern to his trail design," he said. "Also, his photos are incredibly stunning, and I've got to see our conservation lands in a whole new way through them."

After the "Photo Explorations: Acton Conservation Lands" show ends in August at the library, Keyes hopes to put it up in other locations in town such as the public schools in order to further promote environmental awareness.

Said Snyder-Grant, "Phil's been on the committee for many years, and he's invaluable in many ways."