



## Alumni Profile: Jon Kohl '92 Writing Down to the Roots

Jon Kohl '92

I was never content to stay on the surface. Ever since high school where I edited the newspaper and literary magazine, my writing delved into the depths of big ideas. At Dartmouth College, I founded *Sense of Place* environmental magazine and co-founded this newsletter in search for a better understanding of our environment.

Professor Dana Meadows helped to show me that big ideas lay at the root of our way of looking at the world. I understood that, but did not descend too far into the well. I threw rocks down, just to hear how deep they would go, but I never heard a splash.

Instead of a writing job after Dartmouth, I joined the Peace Corps in Costa Rica in 1993. I was still writing, but soon the hands-on work of teaching children at the National Zoo pushed it aside.

After graduate school, Arlington, VA-based RARE Center for Tropical Conservation hired me to manage a nature guide training program in Honduras. My writing got left behind. In 1999, I expanded my activities beyond guide training. I worked on our trails program and founded the Public Use Planning Program, designed to help parks implement strategic visitor management plans.

But as my experience grew, I realized I had been working mostly on the surface, and descended only a little into the well. I saw that many problems we fight with technical solutions have deeper roots, often leading back North. In promoting ecotourism, our operating assumption is that visitors from developed countries will come and visit the

most sensitive places, and that can't be stopped. So let's prepare for that destiny. International market and political forces drive our work.

The roots of our battle go much deeper into the well than just the technical solutions most development organizations provide to developing countries. As I started to think about these roots, I began to write again, covering topics such as how international donors fund visitor centers – as monuments – rather than as true development tools. But it was not until September 11th, 2001 that my life turned deeper into the well.

Professor Meadows died in February 2001 but her message rang strong. To solve problems of development, environment, terrorism, public health, you have to look at the problems as a system of interconnected factors. You can treat factors individually, such as deforestation with ecotourism; or you can go deeper and change the system's rules (laws), or still deeper and change the objectives which establish laws (economic growth), or you can go very deep into the well, and change paradigms driving the objectives (development means converting nature into individual wealth).



This photo by Matt Humke appears on the cover of this year's RARE Center annual report. It shows Kohl teaching a local Guatemalan how to use binoculars to find the quetzal, the boy's national bird.

The only way to fight ideas, then, is with ideas. To do that you need a critical mind, communication skills, and an attraction to abstraction. Not everyone has the weaponry to battle paradigms. Often the combatants use the sword instead of the pen. The President battles terrorists, but not the ideas behind them. Until their paradigm changes, or his, more terrorists will come.

I'm now preparing an expedition into the well of dimensions I have not yet defined, requiring my return to the US where many big ideas originate. I am going deeper and deeper this time, illuminated only by the light of a few good ideas. And the only thing dark enough to snuff out that light, are closed minds unable to set old ideas free.

Please visit [www.jonkohl.com](http://www.jonkohl.com) to contact Jon or see his writing.



# Beyond the Green

Vol. 7, No. 4  
Spring 2002

Newsletter of the Dartmouth Environmental Network

## DEN Symposium: September 27-29, Moosilauke Ravine Lodge Growing Green Together: Hanover and Dartmouth

**Growth** can be a dirty word. Often we don't trust that growth can be an enrichment of our community. But as we all know - growth, in some form, is necessary. How then do we manage it in a way that builds on a community's strengths while enriching it ecologically? At this year's Fall Symposium, on September 27-29 at Moosilauke, DEN will host a discussion of these issues and how they relate to Dartmouth.

### **Effects on Dartmouth**

As the College continues its ten-year run of construction projects, concerns are beginning to surface. Among townspeople, Dartmouth's southward expansion has caused alarm that downtown is becoming more urban. On returning to campus alumni notice the changing scale that the Baker library renovation has brought to the North side of campus. And students can spend their entire College career without a semester free from dodging the orange fences of construction sites.

The undergraduate student body at Dartmouth is not growing yet the size and number of Dartmouth's buildings is. Improving or replacing outdated facilities and providing for newly recognized academic needs are often the engine for such growth, and a fattened endowment from the 90's is the fuel. Much of this growth is necessary to remain competitive as a top-rate institution. However the question on everyone's mind is: at what cost?

Have there been attempts to ask this question? Of course, at every meeting of the Administration of the College and at every Hanover town meeting this question is addressed. Yet, a shadow lurks near the doorstep. That shadow is the unknown future that development will have on the community. Will this future be the result of an integrated vision shared by the town and the College or one of each trying to fight for its own?

### **Hanover and Dartmouth - Tough Times?**

Historically, the Town of Hanover and the College have had a good relationship when it comes to development. Lately however some in Hanover feel that the College has been using its weight to push policy. For example, the College has offered \$18 million plus a 61 acre site in exchange for the Hanover High School building and site, thereby "encouraging" the movement of the high school to the outskirts of town. In addition, by buying 19 houses in the downtown area several years ago, the College's influence has extended deeper into downtown.

These and other tensions haven't brought the College and Hanover to brinkmanship, yet. However, at this May's town meeting four zoning amendments needed to implement Dartmouth projects were defeated by the voters for the first time in recent memory, and tensions remain high.

### **Symposium 2002 - Exploring Growth**

Everyone wants to see Hanover and Dartmouth grow into a place that builds on its rich character, instead of eroding it. But getting there brings with it many questions. Is a tense Town/College relationship an impediment to a sound development strategy? Where does the community stand currently and is there a clear vision to move forward? What means exist to track progress? Economically? Culturally? Environmentally? What initiatives might enable the community to grow with an awareness of these impacts?

At this fall's symposium DEN will host a series of panels to explore these questions. College staff and town officials will be invited to share their views on the subject with the DEN membership and to enjoy the colors of Moosilauke for a beautiful fall weekend.

## Campus Briefs

At **ENVS**, the newly renovated Hornig Library in Fairchild opened this spring complete with recycled carpet and energy efficient light fixtures.

The **RWG** is continuing research into the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) on sustainability reporting and is seeking support for the College to participate. Its new website is nearly complete and will contain an outline of environmental initiatives at the College, and upcoming projects. Check it out at [www.dartmouth.edu/~rwg](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~rwg). The group has also explored, with a start-up bio-fuels company, the possibility of using processed wood chips from the Grant to make diesel fuel for the campus power plant.

**ECO** has led an effort to establish a new campus printing initiative-Greenprint-that will eventually save 33 percent of the 5.5 million pages printed on campus and save more than \$40,000 annually. With the help of Materials Manager Bill Hockstin, ECO and ESD have initiated environmental tours for local sixth graders to show-case College resource efficiency efforts in composting, dining hall recycling and in the heating plant. In addition, a student proposal for a full time Sustainability Coordinator has been presented to the College.

At the **Organic Farm** this summer, trials will be conducted on several solar irrigation system prototypes. A full-scale system is planned, with partial funding from DEN, for sometime in the next 2-3 years. The Farm is providing food to Collis successfully, and maintains a weekly on campus farmers market.

Because of zoning constraints at the Farm site, a new proposal for creating a **Sustainable Living Center** closer to campus is gaining support. Although dramatically different from the initial proposal, this new proposal is making progress with both students and the administration, which wants more on campus options for students.

**DOGA** has made progress working with the Administration on Socially Responsible Investing of the College's endowment fund, helping them to set up an advisory committee of students and faculty. With the help of this committee, it is hoped that the College will release quarterly reports on its investments upon request from members of the Dartmouth Community.

For symposium information or to register: [www.dartmouth.edu/~den](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~den)