

The Free State Project

“Liberty in Our Lifetime”



The Quill

First Annual Porcupine Freedom Festival: Trip Report

By Jason and Mary Sorens

Signed-Up Members
as of
July 25, 2004:
5,948

This report is a comprehensive account of our recent trip to New Hampshire and festivities at the first annual gathering of Porcupines in our future home of New Hampshire, along with some reflections on what this weekend meant for us. This was Mary’s first large FSP meeting, and the first time she’d been in New Hampshire since the FSP began.

On Thursday, we left New Haven for New Hampshire, arriving at our bed-and-breakfast in Bethlehem, N.H. in the early evening. We relaxed at the bed-and-breakfast and ate dinner at a local hangout. The next morning, we decided to see as much of the northern White Mountains as we could before the afternoon question-and-answer session at the Lancaster campground. We headed over to the base of Mt. Washington but didn’t take the train up to the top. It was fortunate that we didn’t, because Keith Murphy later told us that it was 42 degrees Fahrenheit with winds of 70 miles per hour at the summit—and we only had short sleeves on.



Glen Ellis Falls



View of Mount Washington

Then we checked out Silver Cascade and Glen Ellis Falls, and were thoroughly feasted on by black flies. Nasty little bugs! Fortunately, we got some insect repellent and it seemed to work great thereafter.

Then we took a drive up a gravel road into Jefferson Notch, the highest public road in the state.

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Something Extraordinary is Happening From The President

By Amanda Phillips

There's something extraordinary happening in New Hampshire these days. It's a quiet revolution, a calm celebration, an incredible yet simple undertaking; it's history being made by ordinary people. It's the Free State Project, and we have found our home. Last week, we got a sneak preview of what life will be like when we're all together in New Hampshire. The taste was exquisite, and left us hungry for more.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."—
Mohandas Gandhi

The most extraordinary aspect of the Porcupine Freedom Festival was the optimistic atmosphere and the sweet smell of success. For example, for the very first time, I found myself on the other side of the protest line, for as we walked to the New Hampshire Liberty Alliance's Liberty Dinner where Dr. Jason Sorens and Governor Craig Benson spoke, there was a handful of protesters holding signs and telling the media how awful we were. *They were protesting us!* The protest was significant because it means that the anti-freedom forces are taking us seriously.

One reason why the FSP has this optimistic atmosphere and success, unprecedented in libertarian circles, is that the FSP attracts a certain kind of individual. By and large, all of the Porcupines whom I've met have been intelligent, caring, motivated, and friendly go-getters. We're not your typical libertarians! We are libertarians who find ourselves more often in "do mode" than in "debate mode." More often than not, we are able to agree to disagree when a debate has lost its value. Back home, we used to pursue other activities when we saw the debate-mode libertarians dominating the discussion. But in the FSP we see our fellow do-mode libertarians, and we inspire each other to get active. Finally, here's a group of people who can work together instead of arguing against each other! The campfires were punctuated not by debates but by discussions about what each of us could *do* to promote liberty.

Aside from the friendly atmosphere of optimism and success, it was also a weekend to catch a glimpse of what life might be like for us in New Hampshire. At the Porcupine Freedom Festival, there was very little structure, and yet things got done. There was no prominent leader in charge, and the fabric of society didn't fall apart. There were some unfortunate souls who found themselves in difficult financial circumstances, and our fellow Porcupines came through to help. I didn't see any police in the area, but we all felt

safe and secure with Sam Cohen and the Gun Owners of New Hampshire present. We paid no sales tax when we went to the store. The Liberty Scholarship Fund raised money for the New Hampshire children who are educated out of the government schools. And while I don't know all the details, I got the impression that there were all kinds of personal freedoms occurring at the Porcupine Freedom Festival. It was a weekend to live what we believe, and I've never experienced anything quite like it.

"The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life. Rarely do members of one family grow up under the same roof."—*Illusions*, Richard Bach

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the weekend was the sense of community and fellowship we shared. Only at a Porcupine event can you see a young man attired in decorative marijuana leaves standing next to another young man carrying a .45 pistol, a lawyer standing next to a mom with her two homeschooled daughters, a Yale doctoral graduate standing next to a corporate accountant, and a hippie standing next to a lumberjack who's standing next to a New Hampshire representative. And yet we all belonged.

I never would have met any of our unique and diverse group had I stayed in my world of corporate accounting, aviation, private schools, PTAs and charity work. But that world is missing something very important to me. It is missing this devotion to liberty that I can only find among my fellow Porcupines. The thing I enjoy most about Porcupines is that we only care that you are dedicated to liberty and are willing to work toward it. What a pleasure to spend the weekend with people who admire you for what you value the most, instead of for the things you value the least!

These are people who understand what liberty means; what a joy it is to not have to explain and defend liberty! These are people who cherish liberty; what a joy it is to share that love! These are people who will work hard and fight for liberty; what a joy it is to not fight alone! These are people who love life; what a joy it is to share this passion! These are people who have a vision for a better future; what a joy it is to start making that vision a reality! These are people who are optimistic about the future; what a joy it is to look forward together!

New Hampshire is my home, and Porcupines are my true family.

Trip Report

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We made it to Lancaster just in time for the question-and-answer session at the Lancaster campground. Amanda and Jason were there to field ques-



View at top of Jefferson Notch Road

tions from other Porcupines and from the media. There was some discussion of the recent episode in Grafton, of course, and Tim gave his account of the meeting there. We talked a bit about how we could get our message out in the future so as to prevent such problems. One idea Jason had was to emphasize the “local control” aspect of our philosophy. Small towns get close to a consensual level of government, and “liberating” them by suddenly repealing nearly unanimously supported regulations may actually violate some of the property owners’ legitimate expectations. Instead, a more feasible approach toward a freer society would be to allow localities the right to opt out of state regulations if they choose to do so.

One older couple from Bethlehem, N.H. seemed somewhat hostile to the FSP. The man misunderstood something someone said and responded, “If you people come in here and tell us what to do, with that attitude of ‘piss on ‘em,’ there are more of us than you, and we’ll outvote you!” Following this outburst, a lengthy parade of Porcupines got up and gave their own stories of why they were moving to New Hampshire, what they hoped to accomplish, how they hoped to be good neighbors, and so on. The couple seemed to accept that we were decent folks, for they said nothing more in the face of such overwhelming evidence. It was an invigorating experience to see, face to face, the unity within diversity that characterizes the FSP.

After the meeting at the campground, we headed

to the New Hampshire Liberty Alliance’s Liberty Dinner in Plymouth. On the way down, we passed through Franconia Notch, which is frankly awe-inspiring, even if the Old Man is gone. At the dinner itself, there were about thirty left-wing protestors. They were pretty silent and just holding signs. Apparently Mike Fisher talked with them at length and found some common ground. It seems these protestors just don’t like Governor Benson, and they’re basing their opposition to the FSP on his welcoming us.

The dinner itself seemed to be a splendid success. More than 150 people showed up; it was packed to the gills. There were exhibitors, and two tables of silent auction items. We won a jewelry set for a steal. The food was excellent. There seemed to be no air conditioning, though, and the room got pretty hot. We met Governor Benson for the first time, and Mary was particularly impressed with his speech, which emphasized new programs he has organized that require no taxpayer funding, and how he hoped to get New Hampshire ranked first in economic freedom (it’s currently ranked seventh). He also wants a Colorado-style Taxpayer Bill of Rights, which is a very encouraging sign. A political scientist friend of Jason’s, Michael New, studies tax revolts and has found that Colorado’s spending limits have been the most effective tax limitation amendment in the country, even more effective than California’s Proposition 13. Jason talked a little bit about Richard Vedder’s idea of converting public schools into for-profit, teacher-owned schools, a proposal that could simultaneously result in massive tax and spending cuts, create real choice and competition in education, and win the support of public school teachers.



Jason Soren's Handshake with Governor Benson on the news

That night, the Liberty Dinner was covered on

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Our Staff:

Neil Alexander,
Project Manager

Devera Morgan,
Design & Layout

Ivan Santana,
Copyeditor

Contact Us:

On the Web-
freestateproject.org

E-mail-
info@
freestateproject.org

Phone (toll free)-
888-532-4604

Snail mail-
74 Shirley Hill Road
Goffstown, NH 03045



Something Extraordinary

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The Porcupine Freedom Festival was just electric with the spirit of freedom and friendship. There are plenty of Granite State freedom fighters who welcome us and are delighted that we are coming to help them.

The worst part of the Porcupine Freedom Festival? Leaving.

“Don’t be dismayed at goodbyes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends.”—*Illusions*, Richard Bach ✨

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ABC’s 11 p.m. news. While the report stressed that we favored legalization of marijuana and prostitution, and didn’t include much of Benson’s speech, it was overall fair. When Governor Benson was asked whether he was a “Free Stater,” he responded, “I favor smaller government; I don’t know whether that makes me a Free Stater, but I think others who favor smaller government will like what this administration is doing.”

Editor’s Note: Please continue the journey with us next month with the Saturday strategy meeting held at Roger’s Campground, a tour of Connecticut, and more fabulous pictures from the Free State!

...to be continued ✨

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Goffstown, NH 03045