

## Why We Love this Region

Throughout fall 2010, we asked you and our other friends, “What are *your* most special Monandock Region places?” The most popular response was Mount Monadnock itself. Dublin Lake, Willard Pond, and Pitcher Mountain were oft mentioned, and many said your cherished place is your own home or neighborhood. In addition to specific locations, places with views, wildlife (although, interestingly, no specific species were noted), and access to recreation ranked high. Agriculture and water quality were two other themes of import. But the most creative response was from Ike the Ox. Here is his response.

### **Ike the Ox’s Story of his Monadnock Special Place as Told to Victoria Reck Barlow**

Ike the ox, Swanzey’s ambassador of open space protection, says that his most special place in the Monadnock Region is his summer pasture, off Route 32 in Swanzey. When Mrs. Belding protected this land with a Monadnock Conservancy conservation easement, she made sure that Mike Johnson would be able to continue his agricultural uses. Mike fertilizes the land, and mows it, and keeps the fences in repair. Not that anyone would want to bust out, according to Ike. “We have limitless groceries, a pristine stream, shrubbery for escaping those pesky flies, the breezy knoll, the sheltered copse, and all kinds of interesting nooks and crannies to explore. We also have the memory of my brother, Buck, who is buried at the top of the knoll,” says Ike. Current landowners Liz and Ken Borchers (Liz is Mrs. Belding’s daughter), wouldn’t have it any other way.

Ask anyone, says Ike: The pasture is a great place. The two rescued mustangs use all that open space for galloping. Friendly Beauty is first at the gate when people show up with carrots or apples, and the miniature pony thinks that 20 acres are just enough for his big spirit. The pasture is a classroom for Star and Bright, Ike’s understudies. Every morning they have lessons in the yoke.

Ike has heard talk about a new winter pasture for the three boys, on nearby Honey Hill. Star and Bright spent last winter there, and tell of a magnificent three-sided shelter where dry hay appears twice a day. They describe hikes in the woods that will remind Ike of his logging days in Jaffrey. Ike suspects that Griffin and Lois Stabler, who protected the land through New Hampshire’s Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, would be delighted to know that cattle once again live on Honey Hill.

As is typical of all oxen, it means a lot to Ike when people walk their talk. Ike would like everyone to know that he is grateful to live in a region where people who value rural character—as well as really big rural characters—take action to protect the special places.

*Victoria Reck Barlow lives in Swanzey and is personal assistant to Ike, Star, and Bright. She also works as the assessing coordinator for the Town of Swanzey.*