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Mountains in a Pandemic


Accidents · Alpina · Poetry
News and Notes · Books and Media
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Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club promotes the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, forests, waters, and trails of America's Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

We believe these resources have intrinsic worth and also provide recreational opportunities, spiritual renewal, and ecological and economic health for the region. Because successful conservation depends on active engagement with the outdoors, we encourage people to experience, learn about, and appreciate the natural world.

WELCOME
At the Appalachian Mountain Club, we believe the outdoors belongs to you, no matter who you are, where you live, or how you choose to enjoy it. And we want to help you spend more time outdoors, fall in love with those special places, and share that love with family and friends. Because with your help, and the help of good people of all ages and communities, we can protect the outdoors and ensure that everyone, now and in the future, can experience that same sense of wonder, spiritual renewal, and love. Wherever your path leads you—to a challenging summit, a quiet river, a sandy beach, or your neighborhood park—we want to be your connection to the outdoors.

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In late March 2020, when normally adventurers would have flocked to Pinkham Notch below Mount Washington in New Hampshire, the long, narrow parking lots near the road were nearly empty. JOE KLEMENTOVICH
Title page photo: *Normally teeming with hikers and skiers, Pinkham Notch Visitor Center on Route 16 south of Gorham, New Hampshire, remained inaccessible for more than three months in spring and early summer 2020.* JOE KLEMENTOVICH
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The Long Way Home

Is it help or is it “help”?

One hot July afternoon earlier this summer, my husband Nat and I were huffing up the Marlborough Trail on Mount Monadnock in southwestern New Hampshire. I spotted four men above me, heading down. I pulled myself over a boulder and tugged a bandana up from my neck and over my face (pandemic hiking). I caught up to Nat, who said, “One of them asked me if we had a headlamp.”

I was disgusted. “How patronizing. We’re almost to the top.”

Nat said he took it as well-intentioned, even though he was not used to the idea of being an old man. This brought up an ethical question I struggle with. Is it condescending to make a visual judgment and offer free advice?

For decades I used to run into men on mountains who would ask if I knew how steep or cold this mountain was. They’d ask if I had a raincoat. I was loaded with energy and wearing a full backpack. I would just smile.

Today I feel defensive. Strangers can’t tell by looking that what I lack in brute strength I reap in wisdom (I hope). They don’t know I’ve logged thousands of miles. I edit a mountaineering journal, for goodness’ sake, with an accidents report that describes scenarios of injured people who forgot lights. Still, truth is, the man who asked about the headlamp hit a nerve.

We’d actually left it in the car and only had the light on my iPhone. Ha, the joke’s on us. And I do go more slowly now. I can’t spontaneously run up Monadnock in an hour the way I used to. If I were to fall, even four hours before sunset, I might need a headlamp while waiting for help.

All this brought up a memory of strangers helping me in a most respectful way.

On a bright April day many years ago, the second day of an overnight backpacking trip in southwestern Virginia, my daughters Elizabeth and Annie and I rested after lunch in an old corral near Mount Rogers. A ranger drove up in a pickup, crunching gravel. I jogged over to his window. I asked, pointing, “Does that trail connect back to the Appalachian Trail?” I opened my Appalachian Trail Conservancy map.
“There’s a shorter way,” he said. He pointed to a dashed line on his Grayson Highlands State Park map and handed me the map. “That will save you time. A horse trail.”

He is not the helpful stranger of this story.

We strapped on packs and started trudging up the shortcut, picking our way over loose sand and stones between rhododendrons. I chatted, encouraging the girls, who were just 9 and 7.

“See these rhododendrons? I love the way they reach out.” A stream flowed straight through blotches of sun, down the trail. I smelled something bad. Next I saw a mass of blond hair flattened in the shallow water. I saw teeth and an eye socket. A dead horse.

I remembered that wild horses roam the Grayson Highlands. I must tell my daughters. I turned, woodenly. “Uh—stay to the right, girls. Don’t be scared, but—there’s a dead horse.”

Silently they picked their way over it. I chirped, “It’s natural to die! It’s even normal for a horse like this to stay where it died.” But I felt terrible.

The stream turned away from the path, and we came to a fork the ranger had not explained. I turned us left. We hiked a long way into a sunny meadow with a view of Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia. The girls’ hair blew in the wind as they snacked on M&Ms. I took their picture and worried we were behind schedule.

At the clearing’s edge, I sank to my knees with both maps. Oh no. Our route had added three miles to our eight-mile day. I said, “OK, the good news is that I know where we are!”

We slogged on, hardly speaking. We crossed a stream. I needed to pump water, but I wanted us to get out before sunset. Another ridge rose ahead. I wailed inwardly. Where is the parking lot?

I heard rustling. Coming around a wooded bend, here came two strong-looking men with full packs. We all stopped. I asked, “Do you know how far it is to Massie Gap?” My voice wavered.

They paused as if to gauge whether I knew what I was doing. They frowned. One man nodded.

“Go up over that ridge,” he said, businesslike, handing me his water bottle, which I took and poured into my empty one. He pointed to the bush-covered ridge just behind him. “Massie Gap is that way, but you have to go over that mountain first.” I realized that they had decided to help me save face in front of my kids.
Turning with my best late-day field voice, I said, “OK, girls, it’s just a mile over the ridge, and then it’s all downhill!”

Later that night, tucked into beds at our friend’s house, Annie said, “Mama? I’m afraid of the horse.”

“Oh, Annie.” I said, and hesitated.

Through the dark came Elizabeth’s quiet voice. “Think about cupcakes.”

I thought this was excellent advice: hopeful, respectful, gentle. Something that’s hard to get right—especially, perhaps, right now.

—Christine Woodside
Editor-in-Chief
Mountains in a Pandemic

Winter 2020 brought the new coronavirus, SARS-Co-V-2, to the world. Few alive had ever lived through a worldwide threat of a highly contagious virus whose origins were murky and treatment yet to be found. Suddenly, the best public-health advice was to return to the days of the 1918 flu pandemic: wear masks and stay away from people to avoid catching coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). That meant that traveling out and up into distant mountain ranges could not happen, and exploring home trails and forests became a stressful affair. In mid-March, in this journal’s home range of New Hampshire’s White Mountains, the U.S. Forest Service snow rangers decided that to keep everyone safe they would cease predicting avalanches or doing rescues in Tuckerman Ravine. Soon after, the White Mountain National Forest closed many of the popular trailheads. The Appalachian Mountain Club closed its mountain lodges in Crawford Notch and Pinkham Notch and had to block off entry to its parking lots.

So we asked writers and adventurers from New York City, Boston, New Hampshire, the Alps, Maine, and Pennsylvania to write about what a quarantine feels like when it means you cannot feel free to wander in the wilds. We hope their explorations and resilience will offer some inspiration to get through the next year.

The mountains are not going anywhere.
The Closed Outdoors

*A hiker quarantines in New York City*

Derick Lugo

The Quarantine

My first impulse was to flee to the mountains. “The Appalachian Trail, here I come!” That compulsion was quickly dashed to pieces. The AT was not an option for me or other hikers seeking solace in its outdoor embrace. I was trapped in New York City.

In mid-March 2020, life took an unexpected turn into the unknown. New York was on lockdown; restaurants, bars, gyms, and unessential businesses were told to close their doors. New Yorkers were ordered to stay at home. The state of emergency had us quarantined in our small apartments for an uncertain period. The rest of the country soon followed suit, yet the Empire State, with a population of 19 million, was reporting the most COVID-19 cases. And with almost half of the state population living in New York City, it was no wonder the unknown virus severely affected us.

“Step back, step away from me . . . haven’t you heard of somethin’ called the coronavirus? It’s been killin’ people!” An elderly man shot the remark to an unexpected patron at my local post office. The early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic made many people scared to be around others, especially when initial reports of the virus had it being fatal to seniors. As far as he knew, he could have been infected. I was unsure what to think of all of this.

I tend to lean toward optimism in difficult situations. It’s what got this inexperienced hiker to complete a long-distance hike of the AT. My Instagram stories were full of corona jokes, and with the discovery of TikTok, I was doing all the quarantine dances. Yet, as the weeks went on and the numbers of cases grew, the tone of this pandemic was far from funny.

Before the wide spread of the virus, I rarely watched TV news. Except for the last few seconds before the news hour concluded, it seemed like all I kept seeing were reports of bad events. For once I wanted to hear, “Breaking News: The United States and China formulate a plan to end world hunger. Other
countries are eager to join the cause. And after the break, how the government is planning to supply thru-hikers with hundreds of hiker feeds all along the Appalachian Trail. Stay tuned.”

Now, the local and international news had nothing I truly wanted to start or end my day with. But once word got out that New York had become the epicenter for the pandemic, I needed to be in the know. I had hiking plans for the upcoming months, and I did not want to be caught off guard so I kept CNN on all day long, mostly on mute until I thought there was something I needed to know or if the Cuomo brothers were on.

They call it a man crush, maybe, but I was not the only one; the rest of the country was drawn to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. His confidence,
tough voice, and clear explanation of the situation was what New Yorkers needed. He didn’t just give us casualty numbers; he took control and made us feel a bit at ease about the state we were all in. Now add his younger brother, a CNN news anchor with the same demeanor, and you have an interview that at times ended with some funny brotherly banter.

But I digress, distracted by the Cuomos. For the first few weeks, new developments of the virus, how it was being contained, and the daily restrictions were announced. Every day was a new extreme. The subways were left empty except for the essential and healthcare workers . . . and the homeless. Bank lines wrapped around the corner, when in the past there weren’t even lines. Making a quick stop at the supermarket was nonexistent. Resources were running low and the rush for toilet paper left me confused. (How could I have missed that this virus caused uncontrollable bowel movements?)

During the first week of the city lockdown, I began feeling pressure on my chest, followed by chest pains. It felt like I was wearing a 60-pound backpack across my chest while climbing a steep mountain. Fatigue that made breathing a challenge took over my evenings. When the fever and chills started, I knew I was dealing with something I had never experienced before.

I did not rush to the hospital. With an inadequate amount of testing available, we were asked to stay home if we had flu-like or even COVID-19 symptoms. For almost two weeks, I had the worst case of the flu. Did I have “the Rona”? I don’t know, but what I do know is that my tush did not need the extra toilet paper. Like the pyramids, the mystery of the toilet paper hoarding was unsolved. Best guess: aliens!

Daily developments continued to be broadcast; first, only the elderly and persons with underlying conditions were in danger, and children were not especially affected. Before we could finish our sigh of relief for the young, that report was not 100 percent accurate. Children were getting sick.

“Masks are not necessary. . . . Oh, wait. Yeah, wear them.”

I couldn’t keep up. Suddenly the news was becoming stressful to watch, and although after two weeks, I recovered from whatever it was, and I was as healthy and as strong as ever, the news was making me ill. I wondered how many people watching the news were getting phantom symptoms.

At its highest point, 45 percent of the United States coronavirus cases were in New York. Will the Cuomos ever report good news? My bromance with them was fading fast.

How can this get worse?

“People of color are at greater risk of COVID-19.”
More than ever, I wanted to grab my pack and spend another six months (how long it took me to thru-hike) in the wilderness. Like Snake Plissken, I wanted to escape from New York, yet I couldn’t do that either.

**A Closed Appalachian Trail**

Days after the city lockdown, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy announced the cancellation of several hiking events. This included Trail Days (the AT’s biggest hiking festival) in Damascus, Virginia, and the closing of several shelters along the AT. A week later, the ATC advised hikers to stay off the trail. Their decisions coincided with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommendation to stay home in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus.

This was a gorilla-size monkey wrench thrown into my 2020 plan to hike and tour my AT memoir in the hiking towns I had visited during my 2012 AT thru-hike.

*Derick Lugo navigating a rocky slope during his 2012 Appalachian Trail thru-hike.*

COURTESY OF DERICK LUGO
No hiking and no contact with others?
I’m done, put me away. This was a hard one to swallow.
For me, the AT is not only about the mountains, the scenery, and the terrain. It’s also about the interaction with others on the trail. I could not have finished my thru-hike without resupplying in small towns, hostels, trail magic, and hiker feeds. I agreed with the ATC decision to urge hikers to stay home and attempt a thru-hike when the pandemic finally passed. Not necessarily because I thought hikers could infect each other and locals or vice versa, which was a possibility, but for me, my thru-hike was more than just a trail that led me up and down mountains. It was, to my surprise, about the community. The people not only helped make my thru-hike a success, but they also made it truly enjoyable. If that had been taken away, then I would have missed out on a vital part of my journey. I felt for the class of 2020 thru-hikers who had to cancel or postpone their adventures but in my experience, like my gear, I would not have completed my thru-hike—well, not easily or not as enjoyably—without human interaction.

Not Only Surviving, but Thriving
When we were advised to stay indoors, I, like many outdoor enthusiasts, understood the reasoning, but my hiking plans were disrupted. My initial reaction was diva-like.
“What the further?!?”
I felt like a grounded ’tween being told that I couldn’t use all electronics, including my cell phone. The kid in me was screaming, “When you’re done stomping on my ambitions, why don’t you sweep them away so I’m not bearing witness to its lifeless form? AAUGH!”

After my exaggerated moment was over, I eventually understood the reasoning behind the restrictions, and although I was not thrilled with them, I accepted them. The next step was to adapt and move forward. We were all going to pull through these life-altering times. The other side of these challenging times was going to be bright. But I didn’t just want us to survive; I wanted us all to thrive.

I took to social media. I needed to see how hikers of all sorts were coping. It seemed that the quarantine had extended the hiking off-season. Many were using this extra time to continue planning a thru-, section- or weekend hike. Staying busy in this way kept the anxious hiker busy and sane. Research material, such as hiking books, either guides or memoirs, were read. Podcasts
and YouTube videos were also used in preparation. Spring hikes may have been disrupted, but in our hearts, summer and fall hikes were bound to still happen, and we were going to be more than ready.

A socially distant walk near the George Washington Bridge had to suffice. COURTESY OF DERICK LUGO
Respecting the government guidelines to avoid groups, stay six feet apart, and wear face covers—hikers did just that. Yet there were still tons of open trails where a safe social distance hike was possible.

As a fellow hiker put it, “I don’t think most hikers are staying off the trail entirely. They are just changing perspective, choosing easier less populated hikes near home and being cautious to avoid gatherings.”

That may be so. I had to adjust my way of staying active. I was living with my partner on the top floor of a five-story brownstone walk-up. Three long flights of stairs replaced my mountain climbs. Thirty minutes up and down those steps left me feelin’ like I was on the approach trail to Springer Mountain.

Yeah, hikers were discouraged, yet we adapted and kept an open mind.

While our public lands, trails, and greenways were closed, were they healing, like India’s cities, where a clear blue sky could now be seen because of a lack of air pollution? I saw photos of luscious green grass growing on trails that no one had trotted on for weeks. Was this a blessing in disguise? Will a rejuvenated wilderness make our outdoor experience that much better when we can finally trek? One thing is for sure, the hardworking trail maintainers, who are as eager as anyone to get out onto the trail again, will have much work to do.

Until that grand day arrives, adapting and coping with the current situation has become a worldwide mission, especially for those who thrive on treading along a trail and breathing in the crisp, clean mountain air. Video communications such as Zoom and social media live streaming are used to share stories and photos of past hikes, as well as plans for future outdoor activities. All spring it was becoming clear that our feelings and motives for being out in nature were as sacred as the trail and mountains that evoked them.

For me and many others, the year drastically changed because of COVID-19. My book tour for *The Unlikely Thru-Hiker* and hiking plans screeched to a halt. Writing outdoor stories and attending Zoom book clubs became my new virtual book tour. Like the reflection on the sunglasses of my book cover, I had my sights on climbing mountains. I was aching to be out there again. Being in the presence of beautiful scenery can leave us in a heavenly trance, yet as Robert Macfarlane expressed in *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (Penguin Books, 2013), “But there are also the landscapes we bear with us in absentia, those places that live on in memory long after they have withdrawn in actuality, and such places—retreated to most often when we are most remote from them—are among the most important landscapes we possess.”
The pandemic has indeed left many of us with a ravenous appetite for the outdoors. We are ready to rage up a mountain as soon as our feet touch the trail. The absence of the outdoors has truly made our hearts grow fonder. How much more appreciative are we all going to be when we finally get to freely explore any trail our heart desires? Greater respect and wonder will run through us with a thrill we have never felt before.

Derick Lugo—trail name Mr. Fabulous—is the author of *The Unlikely Thru-Hiker* (AMC Books, 2019). He lived in New York City for most of his life and in July moved to Asheville, North Carolina.

**The Vertical Mile**

*An obsession of repeated climbs*

Stephen Kurczy

At a secluded crag near my house, there’s a climbing route called Malevolent Eye. It’s 32 feet high, with a 3-foot overhang and a difficulty rating of 5.10−. It’s tricky enough to challenge a good climber, with several blade-thin holds and a slippery, insecure lunge in the middle.

A couple of decades ago, the prolific Connecticut climber and guidebook author Ken Nichols ascended Malevolent Eye 50 times in one day. His record stood unchallenged until early 2020, when a mutual friend of ours—Brian Ludovici, then an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut and president of its climbing club—climbed it 70 times in a day. When I heard, I told Nichols—who is in his early 70s and still climbs religiously—that I wanted to try to set a new record and possibly break 100.

Connecticut doesn’t boast the soaring cliffs of New Hampshire and Maine, so climbers here have to get creative to do long routes—especially when outdoors areas are closed because of a new coronavirus. The American Alpine Club in March discouraged climbers from visiting cliffs so as to not spread
the virus, while New Hampshire’s sport climbing area of Rumney and New York’s Shawangunk Ridge altogether closed. But under controlled conditions at local crags where social distancing is the norm, climbing in small groups appeared to be in keeping with the Connecticut’s governor’s executive order that “individuals should limit outdoor recreational activities to non-contact and avoid activities where they come in close contact with other people.”

Nichols was skeptical of my goal for Malevolent Eye. I’d fallen repeatedly when first trying the route two years ago and since then had only managed ten ascents in a day. My wife, Jenna, and I had recently had a baby, a fact that earned me endless ribbing from Nichols that my climbing days were numbered. Still, he loved the idea of a competition developing around who could do the most ascents of Malevolent Eye. Since he was recovering from a shoulder injury and couldn’t climb himself, he volunteered to belay me for the effort—while of course maintaining a six-foot social distance.

Stephen Kurczy’s objective, Malevolent Eye, is a route on the Fifty-Foot Cliff near the University of Connecticut, in the Storrs section of Mansfield, Connecticut. He lives nearby in Woodstock Valley. LARRY GARLAND/APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB
On a cool morning in early April, we hiked the half-mile into Husky Rock (so named because nearby University of Connecticut’s mascot is a husky), tied an anchor around a tree at the top of the cliff, and hung a static rope. I had a coffee canteen. Nichols had his peanut M&Ms. We were prepared to be there all day.

I started climbing at 8 a.m., feeling infinitely far from 100. My plan was to do reps of five, with a five-minute rest between sets. The climbing sequence went like this: Side pull with left hand, high crimp with right hand, step feet onto blade-thin edges, bump right hand to higher crimp, cross left hand over right hand to medium pocket, match hands, shuffle feet, bump hands up to deep pocket, shuffle feet, move left hand up to a rounded and downward sloping hold, high step right foot, bump right hand to the “malevolent eye” sloping hold and then to a deep pocket for a hand jam. Shake out. Reach high, reach high, reach high again, and mantel to a stance on the cliff top.

I kept a tally with rows of stones so I wouldn’t lose count of my total. The first three hours I averaged 20 ascents per hour, falling for the first time as I was about to surpass Nichols's record. He promptly lowered me to the ground, as per his rules of climbing: The ascent only counted if I didn’t fall. There would be no hangdogging. By 11 a.m. I had finished 60 reps. I gave myself a half-hour rest.

The temperature was in the 60s with full sun. My fingers were pink and burning. My head felt foggy, partly from the climbing but also from sleep deprivation, having been kept awake the previous night by a crying baby. I lay on the ground and closed my eyes.

What was propelling me onward? It seems absurd to suggest I was climbing for the “glory,” as who cares how many times an obscure, short cliff in the boondocks of Connecticut has been top-roped? There’s an arbitrariness to all athletic “achievements,” be it sprinting in a circle or running 26.2 miles, hitting a ball over a net or throwing one into a 10-foot-high hoop. And what I was doing was nothing compared with the monotonous pointlessness of the Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence 3,100 Mile Race, which consists of 5,649 laps around a city block in Queens, New York. What motivates humans to such endeavors? They drive “people to persevere through unpleasantness in the hope of grander rewards in the distant future,” social psychologist Adam Alter wrote in a 2015 essay on long-distance runners in *The New Yorker*. People who run around a city block 5,649 times (or who endlessly climb Malevolent Eye) “are driven by something more secular than spirituality—they could be hungry for meaning, in general.”
At 11:30 a.m., UConn student Pratham Shah, who happened to be president-elect of the climbing club, appeared at the top of the cliff, saying he’d be joining us. I hopped up to reclaim my position on Malevolent Eye.

I wrapped cloth tape around each of my fingers to forestall further skin burn as well as staunch several openly bleeding sores, but the tape pulled off quickly. My pace slowed to 10 ascents per hour—half the speed I’d been climbing the first few hours. After each climb, I’d return to the ground, take a swig of water, close my eyes for a minute, then do another ascent.

I fell for the second time on number 70, my body subconsciously stumbling over the idea of surpassing Ludovici’s record. When I reached 71, Nichols rewarded me with a Cadbury chocolate bar. I ate it with two ibuprofen. Nichols had a devilish grin on his face, betraying his enthusiasm that another climber, aside from himself, was becoming obsessive-compulsive, to a potentially alarming degree, about racking big numbers climbing. During a half-century of climbing he has meticulously tracked all his climbs, recording exactly 120,000 clean ascents by the end of 2019.¹

One route he established is called the Great Wall of China, traversing 9,000 feet across the Trapps cliff of the Shawangunks and considered the longest climb in the world. This made my endeavor on Malevolent Eye seem tame.

Spurred on by chocolate and pain relievers, I hit number 100 at 3 p.m. and triumphantly added a 100th stone to my rows. I figured I might as well try to do a few more reps, because my goal was never to stop at 100—it was to climb as long as possible. It was a self-created “escalation trap,” as psychologists call it. According to a famous 1999 paper by George Loewenstein of Carnegie Mellon University about why mountaineers choose to climb mountains, “Fame, self-esteem, and the desire for mastery may bring people to the mountains, but other forces keep them at it when conditions get miserable. One such force is the almost obsessive human need to fulfill self-set goals.”² In my case, the mere act of setting a goal to endlessly climb was compelling me onward.

At this point, Nichols had to leave to pick his wife up from work. I was out of water, having consumed three liters plus another half-liter of coffee. It made sense to stop. But Nichols promised to return in 90 minutes with more water and to continue belaying me. I recruited Shah, the UConn student, as my substitute belayer.

¹ On the occasion of his 100,000th lifetime ascent in 2016, Nichols was profiled by Michael Levy for the Summer/Fall 2017 issue of Appalachia.
² George Loewenstein, “Because It Is There,” Kyklos 52 no. 3 (Summer 1999): 315–343.

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My new goal was to do 110 reps, which sounded like a nice round number. Once I got there, my goal became to hit 122, which was the personal single-day record for Nichols—and in all likelihood the all-time single-day ascent record for any cliff in the Northeast, he said. Because who else in their right mind does stuff like this?
Just as I topped the cliff for number 122, Nichols reappeared. It was as if the momentousness of my surpassing his record had conjured him back. He retook the belay from Shah, who headed home for dinner. I popped two more ibuprofen with fresh water.

My fingertips had gone numb. My hands were bleeding. An oozing rash appeared near my wrist from repeatedly doing a hand jam. I had also memorized the route so completely that I felt totally confident in ascending, save for one move toward the start. Before each ascent, I would tell myself two things: “It’s just one move,” and, “My fingers are pillows,” as a way of convincing myself to ignore the pain in my fingers. The recitations became my mantras.

Now my goal was 130. Then 140, which would double the previous record. Once I got to 140, I figured I might as well round up to 150.

Nichols was periodically breaking into chuckles. As I approached 150, he suggested a few more. “If you climb it 157 times, you’ll have done more than 5,000 feet of climbing!” he said.

It was now 6 p.m. All I’d eaten that day were two pieces of toast, a chocolate bar, a Clif bar, an apple, and some Goldfish crackers. I was exhausted. I wanted to be done. I stared at the ground.

“You’re so close to 5,000 feet,” Nichols said. “Why not just do seven more?”

When I hit 157, I figured I might as well do another three to reach an even number. As I neared number 160, Nichols moved the bar again. He was scribbling numbers on a piece of paper.

“Steve, I am not kidding,” he said, “but I did the math and if you climb 165 times it would be exactly 5,280 feet—a vertical mile!”

As much as I was ready to be done, I was charmed by Nichols’s enthusiasm. He’d been belaying me all day, fueling me with chocolate, refilling my water, and giving constant encouragement—despite the fact that I was trying to break his old records.

“You just have to do 165!” Nichols said. “It’s too perfect. And then, I promise, I won’t egg you on anymore.”

When I completed the 165th ascent, Nichols dubbed me a new inductee of the Mile-High Club—I don’t think he realized “mile-high club” is slang for people who have sex on airplanes. I’d climbed the equivalent of both The Nose of El Capitan and Half Dome in Yosemite in a day. We turned back-to-back and elbow-bumped. I arranged my 165th stone on the ground.

Climbing Malevolent Eye 165 times was absurd, a trivial repetition of human movement. But isn’t this how life in general can feel, perhaps especially amid self-quarantining and a pandemic? Hit the alarm clock, drink
coffee, log online for work, walk to the table for dinner, climb back into bed, repeat. Life is a series of repetitions that can feel like an endless loop.

But in the words of the philosopher Albert Camus, meaning comes from embracing the absurd. This theme is at the heart of his philosophical essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus.” In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill. Camus argues each human lives a kind of Sisyphean life. But by embracing life and putting a shoulder to the boulder, I can create meaning. “Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world,” Camus wrote. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

It was dusk as Nichols and I coiled the ropes and walked back to our cars. I got home at 8 p.m. Jenna shook her head when I recounted my day. “It sounds like a hot dog eating contest,” she said of my endeavor on Malevolent Eye.

My hands were so red and raw they felt like they were burning when I ran them under water. That night I was on baby duty, and I winced in pain when my 5-month-old grabbed my fingers. In the morning, I could hardly pick up a cup or type on a keyboard. My finger pads were sensitive to the touch. My hands hurt to clench. My right pinky finger had a subungual hematoma (bleeding under the nail). For days, I woke with burning fingers and needed to run my hands under cold water, apply lotion, and pop ibuprofen to ease the throbbing. And I was happy.

“Bravo!” Nichols emailed. “What a feat! Very impressive! If you were not sore today, I would have written you off as an extraterrestrial.”

Stephen Kurczy is a Connecticut-based journalist. His book The Quiet Zone, about an Appalachian town where cell phones and Wi-Fi are banned, will be published in 2021 by Dey Street Books.
Eight Weeks on Scudder

Writing from the pandemic at the fringes of the White Mountain National Forest

Sally Manikian

“Wait a minute: It’s right there!”

The weedy, wide logging road at my back, I faced a dark green tunnel of mossy ground and spruce-fir walls. The narrow route fell cleanly into the category of “hiking trail.” It was late April 2020. After three or four frustrating and unsettled weeks trying to find the best evening close-to-home hike for my dogs and me, I had finally arrived: the Scudder Trail.

A few weeks earlier, when the sled dog mushing and racing season had ended but before the usual hiking season fully began, I looked for trails where I could take my dogs, routes with a south-facing aspect and low elevation, less ice, and easier traveling. My biggest emotions have always needed big spaces, and this pandemic spring brought a lot of big emotions. In a wash of anxiety and fear, March moved to April, the transitional month that has always been hard for me emotionally, and especially so this year. Rooted to my desk for work, the daily question of where to hike with my dogs connected me to bigger things: the positive attitudes and love of my dog team and of my mountains.

“My mountains.” The possessive here is not of the actual landscape, but representative of the life I’ve lived in these mountains. My memories that live in and among the ravines, ponds, and ridgelines: hiking trails I’ve built, National Park Service boundary lines I’ve painted, places where I got a little lost off-trail amid the disorientation of the hillsides. Throughout the pandemic spring of April and May, and into June, I walked over and over again on the same trail, as ground turned to grass and brown turned to green leaves and snow turned to moss, every trip an incremental step forward, while the world I experienced at my desk stalled in uncertainty.

When I have the time to look up and wonder at the world, I usually find myself sitting on the floor by my bookcase, flipping through the twenty years of my hand-penned journals. There, I locate my former self and track
the small decisions and significant events that have directed my life’s path to where I am now. In a similar fashion, during the eight weeks on the Scudder Trail, I met my old memories in the mountains.

Those trail and mountain memories were a tool to decoding and understanding where I stood, both geographically and emotionally, in the current pandemic reality. Looking back isn’t just an act of nostalgia. It can be a force of strength in a world of fear.

For almost ten years, I’ve lived in the town of Shelburne, New Hampshire, on the northernmost edge of the White Mountain National Forest. One of the first colonized towns in the valley, Shelburne follows a braided
Androscoggin River woven between steep ridgelines. Topography and geology confine houses to the clusters along two roads that parallel the river. Shelburne is a town of about 350 people adjacent to larger towns of Gorham (2,600), Berlin (7,000), and Bethel, Maine (2,600). We are quiet and a refuge for others. Rising on the north edge is the rugged Mahoosuc Range, to the south the softer spine of the Carter-Moriah Range, and the treadway of the Appalachian Trail ties the two together. I chose Shelburne because the mountains are larger than the people, and the people have listened and respected that—no houses crawl up ridgelines, and there are no tourist-driven guesthouses or hip brewpubs. The mountains are in charge.

I chose to live here also because I love the Mahoosucs, a range that has always escaped the population and recreational sprawl of easily accessed areas like Franconia Notch. Surrounded by privately owned timberland, containing absolutely no 4,000-footers, and where most hiking trails are accessible by the rutted, potholed, and dusty Success Pond Road, the Mahoosucs have always felt raw. A sparse set of campsites and shelters remain unstaffed except by a roving caretaker. I was that roving caretaker for two years, when I formed the basis of this love and understanding.

The Mahoosucs harken to the land and heritage of the 1800s, the early days of White Mountain hiking and trailblazing, a place referred to by nineteenth-century explorer Marian Pychowska as the “Success Wilderness,” not because a federal agency and act of Congress declared it so, but because of the wilds it held. When I step onto a trail on these hills, I breathe easier. I know how wide this system is, partly because I know the history and have stared at the maps that show the 30,000 acres of the pure land of Success just on the other side of the ridgeline.

A few popular trails ripple up the flanks of the Mahoosucs: the Centennial Trail that tracks the Appalachian Trail before it reaches the Mahoosuc Trail and the side access paths of the Peabody Brook, Austin Brook, and Dryad Falls Trails. Popular is a relative term, here, as the trailheads barely hold spaces for two or three cars. “Popular” in Shelburne usually means one car parked there. The pandemic redefined popular on a microscale in Shelburne. The trail to Mount Crag—a less-than-one-mile hike on a well-marked trail through conservation land, leading to a stunning vista—became truly popular. Pre-pandemic, I had hiked that trail many times in the evening with a dog or two and rarely seen anyone or any car. Suddenly, that changed. I saw neighbors, I saw folks from upriver, and I met someone who brought her family on the hike she had last done as a teenager. Every day multiple cars crowded the tiny
lot. I also saw cars with “from-away” plates that brought up a surprising xenophobia in me. In the woods, I gave people a wide berth to pass me. I wanted something else—space—less because I feared contagion but more because I sought a place with fewer people where my mind could be at rest. Knowing of other trails, I resolved to drive past the Mount Crag parking lot every time I saw a car there, pushing on to the logging roads and quieter trails around Mill Brook Road.

Mill Brook Road has been my entry point to the Mahoosucs for almost fifteen years. The first time I set foot on it was in May 2008 as an employee of the Appalachian Mountain Club. It was also my first time in the Mahoosucs. Here I found myself on private timberland and the trail management system at the same time. My job that day was team member of the AMC Trails Department rite of spring, the annual helicopter airlift. It delivers materials for summertime construction, trail work, and maintenance and takes used supplies out.

A lot happened quickly that day. I went from downtown Gorham to Mill Brook Road, where the helicopter roared while my coworkers rushed to load lumber and supplies onto the hooked cable hanging down. I rode in the helicopter to the summit of Mount Carlo, ran down to the campsite, and then stood off to the side while the rotor blades pushed air wildly into the bending tiny spruce trees and the tiny cable hook lowered down. I helped load a bundle of a dismantled outhouse onto the cable. Barely an hour had passed since I had left my car in Gorham.

My supervisor and I rushed back to the summit of Carlo, where the helicopter would pick us up after finishing its other jobs in the range. We paused for a moment and a breath. The two-way radio at our feet buzzed with conversations between the helicopter pilot and the crews on the ground. The radio crackled, the helicopter blades hummed in my ears, and the wide green expanse of privately owned forestland of Success Township spread out at my feet. I saw what the Mahoosucs are: a place where people and forest live close together in trust.

On that same road, in 2011, my dog Quid and I roared uphill in a tiny red Chevy pickup. Suddenly an 18-wheeler barreled down the steep hill on its way to the mill, weighed down with a load of trees. It almost ran us over. The trails were cut over, exposed on all sides to thinned out overstory and new piles of discarded treetops. I learned to keep an eye and ear out for the articulated movement of the skidder with the cleated chains on its giant tires, holding aloft piles of newly cut trees officially now turned to timber. In the ten-year
cycle of management, loggers returned here again in 2019 or so. This is a constantly shifting landscape, with the benefit of an improved road, so I could access the trails and the swimming holes in my no-clearance Toyota Prius.

Mill Brook Road meets the paved North Road at a subtle green street sign. It gives no indication of anything up there other than inconsequential private timberland, land often missed or unseen by hikers. I once read an article in the Boston Globe by a travel writer who hiked up the road, musing about the death and decay and spookiness of periodically logged forestland, a place barely offering value for him as a hiker and adventurer. The tone that writer took was problematic for me. It was the tone of a conqueror. He placed himself in a position of authority as someone from a civilized location. That view often underlies the tension in rural towns in tourist destinations. Yet I myself have not been immune to it. During the pandemic spring, I needed to let go of my own assumptions of beauty, trails, and mountains to find a place of safety. I needed a place to hike.

With a mathematical calculation on available time, the time available between my workday ending and my need for dinnertime, I needed a hike that was less than an hour and a half round trip door to door. Unanchored from newly popular Mount Crag, I considered the Scudder Trail, which starts on Mill Brook Road. From the other times I’ve been on that trail on my way to a Shelburne peak, either Mount Ingalls or Mount Cabot, I remembered that trail as a wide, grassy logging road, where ticks clung to my socks and muck flowed into my shoes, sun at my back as I followed a path that had the logic of a logging road. The first time I’d gone there was in 2010, with Quid. I chose Scudder for a weekend hike of curiosity. I had never repeated it, for there were other, longer, and better trails I hiked for work as an AMC employee. I am not immune to the same blindness and acts of unseeing as the Boston Globe writer.

The Scudder Trail meets the privately owned Mill Brook Road about a mile up, where trailhead means an intersection of two roads with a handmade sign pointing the way. The entire length of the trail itself is unprotected, passing through 5,000 acres of forestland that is part of a sort of archipelago of tracts from Ontario to Maine managed by one company. In early spring 2020 I started using the Scudder Trail, only traveling up it for ten to fifteen minutes. Before turning around, I sat on a decent stump at the edge of a snowfield, where the bare trees enabled a view across the valley and where the dogs sniffed and explored swampy areas. I rested my mind and ended my day after a steep climb uphill. I stopped at that stump because I had made up
my mind that continuing toward Mount Cabot was a longer commitment, a longer walk.

Then, on April 25, I walked past the snowfield and stump. That day I had enough time and spiritual and physical energy to keep going. I learned the shocking truth that I had been stopping at the threshold of where the trail left the wide logging road and skirted conservation land. I stepped through a narrow tunnel, a series of orange blazes, and a one-foot-wide treadway. The trail was right there, the summit less than 15 minutes farther. My dog companions that day were redhead Squan, whom I’d raised from birth, and blue-eyed Gem, one of my lead dogs. I turned to them and said, “We found it!” Squan happily launched herself at my face (a trait she unfortunately had inherited from her father).

Powered by a new fully achievable goal, a summit that we could reach, hiking up Scudder to Mount Cabot provided a purposeful anchor to the uncertainty the pandemic world created.

Not long after we’d found Mount Cabot and settled into a new routine, the White Mountain National Forest shut down—sort of. Not actually shut down like government shutdowns, since staff members were still employed, but shut down by declaring trailheads closed. Reserves and preserves in some towns and land trusts did the same. These public lands may be forever green, but their protection requires a balance between use and conservation. It is not easy to close public lands, but in mud season of the pandemic year, car and foot traffic to many trails skyrocketed. The WMNF felt it had to close its trailheads.

My friends who still work in land management and recreation management, for AMC and the WMNF, were caught in a tough place of upholding public safety and resource protection while the public demanded access. One had the job of turning people away from the blocked-off parking lots. Another spent a day hiking past gates to put up signs, which someone tore down a day later. For a brief time, some unseen standard of public and mental health seemed to be demanding a higher need than resource protection: the right of longtime seasonal second-home residents to shelter in their properties looming over fragile rural communities. So many seasonal communities deal with tension between those who live normal lives all year and those who prefer to see it as a vacation destination. In my own valley and elsewhere around the national forest, the pandemic only exacerbated these tensions. Those who didn’t have a second home also looked to public lands as a place they had a right to visit. This added fuel to a raging fire.
Meanwhile, over in the Mahoosucs, the Scudder Trail remained open. These trails are usually painted as vulnerable: cut over, lacking investment, difficult to find, unattractive to hikers. They cross land as an afterthought, the primary ownership reason preserved for the timber resource to be cut and paid back to investors. I've seen the management maps for these properties. They show protected green of public land in negative space, while the timber lots are darkened and labeled. There are few trails, there are no houses; there are only the lot numbers, logging roads, and landings. Sure, public access is allowed because the Northern Forest allows passage through private land. These are not the cultivated trailheads that govern decision-making on the WMNF to the south or the AT that runs along the spine. When these trails are shut down, it's not because of public health or overuse, it's because of harvesting timber. These plans are never announced to trail managers, so more than a few times in my trail work, I've walked into the woods to find things changed.

It has also not been lost on me that when lodging and restaurants tied to the outdoor tourism industry have been closed and will be challenged to reopen, the timber industry is still at work. For as long as I've lived here, I've sat at tables and conferences and been interviewed by New Hampshire Public Radio where the discussions use the tool of a false either/or. They say that New Hampshire’s North Country is either timber or tourism, when both have existed alongside for a long time and will for some time more. The Mahoosucs are not much different from when Marian and Lucia Pychowska explored them in the 1870s. Even that Boston Globe writer mused on the irrelevance of timber. Yet in this pandemic timber cutting kept on, the paper mill upriver produced toilet paper, and it changed its supply practices and made that paper available to residents during the early weeks of supply shortages. Tracing the fiber-supply chain, trees cut from this forest could have become that toilet paper.

I left the logging road and kept walking uphill. The Scudder Trail joined the Red Trail and then the Yellow Trail, arriving rapidly at the Mount Cabot loop for the sweeping view into the valley and west toward the Presidentials. While I could have formed a loop using the color-blazed trails of Philbrook Farm Inn, for weeks I kept going up and down Scudder as an out-and-back. The names of these trails, the simple naming by color, appear on the map as almost out of place. In urban parks such as the Blue Hills Reservation outside Boston or a mountain bike park I found once in New Jersey, trails are often color-coded for ease, recognizing hikers who don’t need a fancy
name; they just need a blaze to follow. These color-coded trails of Shelburne, tied to the Philbrook Farm Inn and built for the inn’s guests, are in many ways the same: These are the “urban” trails of my own town. These trails are so invisible to some that at times they have been left off the AMC White Mountain Guide and maps. The Scudder Trail is different, an effort of recent reclamation by my local hiking club, the Shelburne Trails Club, only ten years old.

Walking the same trail almost every day, I rotated through my dog team’s nine young puppies, each 10 to 11 months old. I gave them one-on-one coaching time, paired them with a suitable adult dog, and watched how they approached the world of the trail. I tested them on the trail junctions, seeing how they acted without direction from me and seeing which choice they made and why. Hoss blew through intersections determined to be in the lead no matter what. Page looked at the correct trail direction and then chose the other precisely to be contrary and adventurous. Speck padded along quietly and calmly, accurately following weeks of dog scent. The entire family of Squan, Bruce, Skee Ball, Riptide, and Jameson made whip-smart turns because they believe in making good decisions. During our hikes, we met exactly one porcupine, flushed numerous grouse, and spooked a bear into the trees. There were a lot of flowers, biting insects, and eventually brilliant green leaves. In eight weeks, I saw two cars, and two hikers, one a neighbor, and one a hiker I never placed.

As April turned to May and neared June, I started noticing something. It had been a long time since I’d hiked on the same exact trail almost every day, watching the snow melt out and the new ground appear and dry out. I’d grown accustomed to tracking the change of spring in my front yard, snow melting quickly with an extended bare brown limbo, before grass growing, crocuses popping, and leaves greening out. In the lingering spring at higher elevations, where the gap between snow and summer is short, there’s an immediacy of transition. Witnessing that visible change across the mountain ecosystem on a daily basis helped my heart and mind anchor, as there wasn’t a lot to trust in the pandemic reality but one can always trust snow to melt. “This was snow, only a week ago,” I said to the dogs, much as I announced receding snow to Quid the winter we lived at the edge of timberline as caretakers for the Randolph Mountain Club’s Gray Knob cabin.

I have always been one to try to level mountains and wilderness to the backyards, always afraid of the risk of holding mountains as a separate dreamy place. We restrict ourselves too much, placing mountains on lists
to be conquered in some residual colonial way or feeling that we are only truly ourselves in a place far away from our homes where we’ve made full lives. The flip side of this is that it is as well to ask myself the same questions, as the mountains are my backyard. As the snow finally releases its hold on the higher elevations, and higher and longer hikes beckon, even as a resident of this valley, I waver a little bit. Am I complicit then in the new problems?

A friend’s comment during the trailhead closures in April has stuck in my head: “I feel like I’m on the edge of articulating something.” She wrestled with the tension of supporting access to public lands but was so disappointed by the negative reactions of hikers to trailhead closures. Living in a rural trail town, which is quiet half of the year, she also recognized that there is a firmly established culture and economy that involves second-home owners and tourists, some of whom are her friends; yet she saw them as the vector they posed. Those flashpoints form an ecosystem of human relationships on top of the over-loved White Mountains, and our communities are under stress. Our relationships with the mountains we love are tenuous, even on our best days. Maybe that’s why I’ve felt more comfortable lately in the raw, less formed land of industrial timber. It is an area unclaimed by these formal relationships, almost a returning to the beginning of our trail-based history in the White Mountains. A connection to the mixed and often difficult history of community.

At the end of May, I decided it was time to try Mount Crag again, but only if the parking lot was empty. My companion would be Gemma, one of my main lead dogs who is a loner and prefers going without another dog partner. On a muggy Friday after a brief downpour, chances were good we’d find no one there, and that proved to be right.

But as I took the first few steps, I had mixed feelings. I felt guilty for walking on a trail that I know was being hammered with more use than it could take, and shocked at so much change and difference in the flowers and leaves after eight weeks of absence. More than anything, I felt homesick for Scudder. I wondered what was happening on that logging road just to the east. The next day, I turned back to Scudder with the puppy Skee Ball and an adult, Flora, two dogs who had been communicating that it was their turn for adventures.

We walked over dense green grass on the logging road and through the densest fog of mosquitoes I’d seen. Pushed forward at higher speed, without a reflective moment to stop. The trip to the summit and down took less than
an hour. I wasn’t able to fully soak in the stunning clear vista, the valley dried out of moisture and sharpened with green. I had to stay in motion constantly, both hiking and waving my hands. Closing the car door at the end in relief, I realized that the car had become the safe place. Scudder had gotten me back on my feet, and it was time to go somewhere else.

SALLY MANIKIAN has been writing for Appalachia since 2008 and is the journal’s News and Notes editor. She previously worked for the AMC’s Trails Department. She now works for The Conservation Fund in New Hampshire and Vermont and is grateful for the chance to turn from technical grant writing to heart-driven essays here. She lives in Shelburne, New Hampshire, with her disabled brother and sister, her partner Chuck, and the 25 athletes of Shady Pines Sled Dogs.

Going Small

A father and daughter do backyard field research

Dan Szczesny

In a small patch of crumbly dirt and mulch, near the weather-worn trellis where the hydrangea had begun to bloom, my 5-year-old daughter, Uma, plucked a beetle off the wood and held it up to the sun.

“Daddy, look Daddy. Isn’t she cute?”

“She” was a tiny winter firefly (Ellychnia corrusca), that peculiar but common “dark firefly” with the bright red bands. Uma dropped the beetle into her palm and it scuttled up her arm. After a moment, the insect spread its thick, black wings and lifted off. It disappeared over the top of the shed.


Her eyes widened. Spread out up and down the trellis and side of our shed were a dozen fireflies crawling this way and that. The adults hide out under tree bark and can survive subfreezing temperatures. They begin to reemerge
in the spring when the maples begin flowering, sometimes clustering around sap flows.
  “Do they live here in our backyard?” Uma asked.
  “These do,” I said. “It means springtime.” I told her the fireflies came out with the flowers.

_Uma Szczesny with a winter firefly in her yard in Manchester, New Hampshire._

DAN SZCZESNY
Watching for spring for us normally means taking peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in our backpacks on what my daughter calls “adventure days” to the White Mountain National Forest or state parks. Last year, Uma had earned her first hiking patch through the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands’ Fire Lookout Tower Quest Program. Near the end of fall, she climbed to five of the state’s fire towers. She got stronger with each hike. She seemed to draw energy and confidence from the wind and granite.

We had had big plans for 2020. We’d taped a map of New Hampshire to my office wall and pinned the eleven fire towers we hadn’t seen yet for later hikes. We were going to splash in Echo Lake in Franconia Notch State Park and maybe even spend a night in an Appalachian Mountain Club hut. But by mid-March, it was clear that the world was changing and we needed to adapt. Our little family gathered around the kitchen table to talk about our new life, our plans becoming local and smaller. We’d explore our neighborhood, use field guides for city critters, plant a garden, and let the wild come to us.

My daughter was disappointed at first, of course, but we explained that nature is unlimited and, like the virus that kept us home, the outdoors has no boundaries if you look hard enough. I thought of the thirteenth-century poet Rumi, who wrote, “Beauty surrounds us, but usually we need to be walking in a garden to know it.”

So, we decided to enforce simplicity: We stayed home and turned to our backyard to feed our souls. Even in a dense neighborhood in Manchester, New Hampshire, our hometown, our little family is blessed with an enclosed, expansive backyard. My wife, Meena, plotted out the vegetable garden. We adorned the birch and pines with birdhouses and hummingbird feeders. We collected rainwater in enormous barrels, let the rhubarb run wild, and scattered as many seeds we could find to the wind.

Uma and Meena would scold me for tossing away apple or watermelon seeds instead of planting them. Our compost bins became an obsession, creating fuel for our backyard soil. Last Halloween’s pumpkin, still bearing mold-fuzzy seeds, sprouted a pumpkin plant in the compost nursed by nothing more than what appeared to be Uma’s strength of will.

We waited, we grew impatient, frustrated at our inability to go to nature. But the days got longer and warmer, and week after week, day after day, the wildness began to emerge.

One warm morning in May, my daughter and I pulled some old plastic Adirondack chairs out of the garage and set them up in the sun, overlooking the backyard. We brought out some snacks, a couple of New England flower
and wildlife guides, and wore hats. We were trying to practice field research in a small, pocket blank book I had bought. Asking a 5-year-old to sit quietly and watch for wildlife is expecting a lot, but she focused her attention like a tiny scientist. That is, until a downy woodpecker (Dryobates pubescens)

The junior naturalist takes a break by the back of the house. DAN SZCZESNY
swooped into our yard and perched on the metal suet holder we had hung from a thin branch of our hobblebush.

This became too difficult for her to sit back and watch, and she developed another strategy for absorbing our backyard friends.

“Daddy, can I go closer?”

I nodded. “See how close you can get, but try to stay as quiet as possible.”

She crouched low to the ground, a small Jane Goodall in pink shorts and a T-shirt that said, “Puddle Jumper,” and began to take tiny steps across the yard to the bush. I expected the bird to take off immediately, but it didn’t. The junior naturalist got to within five feet. Four. Then three. Only when she raised her hand to the jittery bird did it alight and float just over her head to a pine tree across the yard.

She tore after it, all pretense of sneaking gone. Amazingly, the bird once again let her get within a few feet before lifting off again, shooting straight back to the feeder. Uma followed, and the game repeated.

Uma was screeching with joy, waving her arms, her legs pumping hard to keep up. After a few minutes of this, the woodpecker jolted straight up into the sky and drifted away, a black and white winged balloon. Uma stretched out in the grass, spent.

The American naturalist John Burroughs liked to point out that humans never really commune with nature: Rather, wildness provided the conditions and the solitude and “the soul furnishes the entertainment.”

I walked over and looked down at my daughter, breathing hard, arms outstretched, the dandelions entwining with her hair, cheeks red from laughing.

“That bird liked me,” she said.

“It really did.”

“I can’t move, Daddy.”

I lay down in the grass with her, the tops of our heads touching, and we watched the clouds drift by for a couple minutes, until the squirrels and fireflies and woodpeckers began to return. Not a mountain in sight.

Seasonal Affective Reorder

Which reality is capable of a pause?

Sarah Ruth Bates
It’s the second-least attractive New England season, and my mom and I are on a walk. The least attractive New England season is the gray sludgy stage of late winter, when the leftover snow has cohered into gritty piles that refuse to melt. We’re just past that. Last fall’s leaves carpet the ground, still whole. The snow preserved them, the sun has melted them out, and they look like they might’ve just fallen. The world’s simple, here: creamy sky, pen-sketch trees, leaf carpet.

We’re climbing the hill behind the park. It’s the closest wild space to our suburban house. Not so wild: You can see the football field where the high schoolers play. Fenced yards delineate the edge of these woods. It’s less “idyllic sanctuary,” more “where the high schoolers escape adults.” But it’s still the woods: maples, pines, leaf-covered ground. I know these are last fall’s leaves, and this now is the inhale before spring. If I’d been dropped here without knowing the date, though, I wouldn’t be able to tell if it was a late fall or an early spring day, snow coming or going, days shuttering or opening.

I’d flown home from graduate school in Arizona a week prior, planning to stay ten days for spring break. I had not yet flown back. Instead, I taught and took classes from my childhood bedroom. My parents and I walked most afternoons, often near water: the Charles River or a reservoir—lush excesses to me after months in the desert. Fog hovered above the water, and droplets condensed on pine needles. It felt like decadence. I’d been living where spots that show up blue on the map run dry more often than wet.

Time passed, and felt like it didn’t. My life, resuming, would have happened in Tucson. The world had, impossibly, paused. The usual time markers meant nothing. Events got postponed. They’d still happen—same place, same people—but in an indefinable later. No classes or teaching or talks or parties or groceries or appointments—for you, too, I know.

At first, our daily neighborhood walks required armor: masks but also hats, gloves, and boots for the cold. I borrowed my dad’s long underwear. The snow didn’t melt, but stuck. I threw snowballs at my parents (gently). They laughed but wouldn’t fight back. Lame.

On various Zoom calls I watched the natural light in Arizona windows not fade, as my face darkened. I refreshed my email for word on when I’d be

*By the Charles River, “the staticky hum of news and anxiety quiets.”* TROY ALMEIDA

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expected back in classrooms. *We are assessing the situation.* Crocuses up. *We are not sure at this time.* Magnolia bloomed. *We will not resume in-person classes this spring.* The maples pressed out celery-green buds.

These days, we often walk in the meadow near our house. The grass is patchy yellow. The landscape’s not ugly, but it’s scrubby. In a usual year, around this time, the colleges roll carpets of sod over their own scraggly grass. This year, they are skipping commencement and leaving the grass to grow on its own time. Here in the meadow, it will be a while. The robins look shabby, too, their red breasts not yet vibrant. But there is no shame in looking like you’ve had a hard winter.

*SOMETHING, EVEN BEFORE THE VIRUS, “REAL LIFE”—LIFE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY—SEEMED TO ME IMAGINED, AND ABSURD (“BUSINESS CASUAL,” FISTFIGHTS OVER SPORTS TEAMS). THAT’S MAGNIFIED, NOW. THE PANDEMIC HAS PUNCHED THROUGH THE WALLS OF OUR SETS.*

In the Julio Cortázar story, “La Noche Boca Arriba,” the protagonist slips between sleep and wakefulness. He’s lying on his back in the doctor’s office—then on his back, about to be killed in a ritualized sacrifice. The story begins at the doctor’s, but it ends with the sacrifice, revealing that world as the binding plane of reality. Cortázar’s trick relies on the reader’s assumption that the first known world must be the real one.

I talk to my grad school cohort from my parents’ backyard. They say I look green screened into my background. The scene I’m in appears faked.

Walks are interludes, breaks, from “real work” at the computer. But which reality is capable of a pause? I walk, and remember again that the natural world is happening, as it always continues to, and I am just running in place inside a small and walled-off part of it. In the woods, the staticky hum of news and anxiety quiets. The pines have put out their new growth, bright and tender as a pear. The red-winged blackbirds scream, *conk-ka-REE!,* stopping for nothing and no one. Why would they?

That line, *If a tree falls and no one hears it, does it make a sound?* The arrogance of it! We thought our human-made world had inevitability. Then, we stopped it. So much less of it was essential than our egos wanted to believe.

I call the outside “the woods,” even when I’m in the desert, because this is my nature. I know how to trust a foot planted on granite, wet or dry, lichenened or clean. I know the give-spring of a wooden bridge through a muddy path. This particular wild is what I am a beast of.
A rare genetic disorder makes people unable to sleep. It comes on in adulthood. When it comes, it kills. The mind and body cannot stay on all the time. Rest has to balance activity. You have to go into the putting-back-together place sometimes. It’s not an exact analogy, of course. I don’t need the woods to survive. But I need the woods to do well. I forget that, sometimes. That forgetting, and the attendant wondering how much it really matters that I do well if I’m getting a lot done, that is a symptom of the spell that the woods breaks.

In the meadow, the grass has grown as high as my knee. I watch the wind whiffle it. The sky is as bright a promise as you can believe. I admire it, and I love it, and I loved it gritty and snowy and scraggly and brown, too.

My dad says the cure to jetlag is to walk outside during the sunset. You speak to the animal of your body in a language she understands. These months unfold that exposure on a grander scale. I’m showing my body the seasons. Today the maples have unfurled their leaves, like a thousand thousand tiny bright still-drooped umbrellas, a thousand thousand brave forays back into this world. I watch them, smell them, walk under them. I am readjusting my body to the cycle of change.

Sarah Ruth Bates is a writer and second-year candidate for an MFA at the University of Arizona. Her essays and interviews on adventure, medical ethics, and life have appeared in this journal, the Boston Globe Magazine, WBUR’s Cognoscenti, and elsewhere. Read more at sarahruthbates.com.
Androscoggin Constant

The town belongs to geese and bears

Judi Calhoun

When the world went quiet, I took my sketchbook out to the Androscoggin River to capture the Branta canadensis, Canada geese. I used woodless pencils . . . steel gray, sleek, and cold as winter to touch. I lined them up in a silver tin like branchless trees. H2 graphite issues a lighter line, one step up from HB, at the center scale of pencil grading standards. Creating doesn’t always require excellent tools, although they help.
Making the first mark is always connection, soul to spirit, almost sacred. The beginning is vital to the paper and pencil relationship. I felt it somewhere in my soul. I was careful not to invade too deeply into the paper's texture. Long sweeping arch shapes create silky feathers isolating beautiful features defining each stunning quill. The air was alive with scattered snow flurries. I drew my turtleneck up to my ears. But for the splendor of these winged creatures, I braved the bitter cold. What artist would not?

I have always tried hard to understand the mechanism of our changing seasons here in the Great North Woods of New Hampshire, where I've lived with my husband for more than fifteen years. Here, winter is long. Snow feels like such a final postponement of spring. But birds make winter in this woodland community bearable. They come soaring, honking, and squawking across the sky in winter darkness—a wondrous symphony outside my window. These creatures that share our world haunt my dreams with visions of flying.

I cannot see them but hearing their song brings a certain comfort. They've made it home safely. This simple migratory routine that succors my belief that life can be normal again even amid a global pandemic.

The birds never worry about snow falling on spring flowers, nor do they care how our human world is getting along during the COVID-19 pandemic. Birds have only love on their minds. The majestic Androscoggin represents new life, the birth of yellow, fuzzy baby geese.

When the wind tried to steal my drawing-paper, I turned away. The birds with their long necks and kind eyes followed me as I strode quickly across Route 16 back to the house. Spring snowflakes melting against my skin, I hid my sketchbook beneath my jacket and rushed inside my studio, now cluttered with books, sketchpads, paintbrushes, silly things only I understand.

I held my breath like the rest of the world, hearing news of this pandemic, my heart breaking for families of lost loved ones. I wasn't sure if I should worry. Was it the end of the world? I pondered things I hoped to do but had never accomplished. No. It was not over. That chubby dame in the Viking hat had not begun her aria. Besides, it's not in my nature to panic, as it does no good to worry. I found the best way to cope was to lose myself in creativity. A Chinese proverb: "The birds of worry . . . fly over your head, this you cannot change, but that they build nests in your hair, this you can prevent." It is always a choice. So, I became lost in my creative world of words.

A tremendous part of my peace comes from my faith in an intelligent designer. With so many bright youth declaring their advocacy of a nihilistic
philosophy, my belief system could be considered archaic and not very popular. I shrug it off. I see myself holding, in one hand, a shield of faith, in the other a powerful sword, the sharpest—my pen.

I expected to wake up one morning and feel the world changing. I did not. Life here on the Androscoggin stayed steadfast, immutable. There were subtle changes. Neighbors called to see if we were all right. Did we need anything? Hardworking young people bought food and picked up prescriptions for shut-ins. What we have here everyone in the world wants: people caring about people, an old-fashioned America. I sometimes feel a little guilty to be a part of this uncommon life in our thriving woodland paradise. I am so grateful.

I read an article on a unique phenomenon in animal behavior happening across the globe since the COVID-19 outbreak. Wildlife began appearing in unusual places because of the silence on earth from government-imposed lockdowns.

My own unusual animal encounter happened one glorious day in March when a couple of geese came strolling across the road away from the river. Perhaps they wanted to get a gander at my empty garden beds. I liked to think they came to visit me. After all, they had seen me with my sketchpads by the water, always watching.

My husband is a wooly man, slowly turning into Santa Claus, badly in need of a haircut since the barbershops deemed nonessential businesses had closed. He excitedly started yelling, with true Paul Revere flair, “The geese are here! The geese are here!”

From my window, I watched two of them exploring my yard. A couple, one a little delicate, the other rotund. They pecked at my lawn, honked at the house—calling me out to play. I could hardly breathe. It felt almost magical. Should I assume or entertain the idea that they came to discover me, as I have explored them?

They ambled like my husband; the stress and fears of the pandemic world do not exist to them. Perhaps both the birds and my husband sway on the fringe of existence where the peaceful flow of the river dictates their rhythm of life.

I thought maybe the geese were lovers. No . . . an old married couple. He honked at her, It's time to go. He turned to leave, but she stayed. He honked again, louder. She didn't want to leave; however, eventually she followed. They waddled leisurely into the middle of Route 16 holding up traffic.
By now, they must have been aware of their own star power. They reminded me of elderly couples I’d seen at the beach the previous summer, mindlessly strolling into traffic, having every confidence the cars will stop.

**Afternoons around 3 o’clock I go for a walk.** There is a gaggle of birds down toward the walking bridge along the river, near the decaying remains of rusty logging-train rails, spikes still embedded in the splintering wood. I stand still, eyes on the sun sparkling off the water. It doesn’t feel like we are living through a pandemic. Being here seems almost prosaic, as if I should don a lab coat and catalog the birds rather than simply enjoy their beauty.

I opened my sketchbook and started to draw. Suddenly I felt uncomfortably aware of how oddly quiet it was. Across the street, the schoolyard was empty. I used to hear the happy sounds of children’s voices rising in the chaos of joy. I hardly saw children anymore, as if they had all left the planet.

This shelter-in-place order must have been harder on children in well-populated areas. Here, families practiced social distancing by hiking, fishing, or canoeing. A few still jogged, yet most of our sidewalks were empty.

The large gossiping parties of my feathered friends moved away, and not too far, a comfortable distance as if they too practice social distancing. When
I followed, they shifted away again. Now I spoke softly, letting them know it was OK. I meant no harm.

I’m no expert on geese; I’ve learned their behavior, figured out the dynamic. The loudest honker gives a sharp warning, is in charge. I read that bird conversation depends on the age of the goose. The oldest of the rank honks out orders and the others follow.

I never thought I would be living where, on any given day, I might glance out my window to see a family of black bears strolling down the street, heading for the river. Yet this spring, during the pandemic lockdown, the black bears were bolder, coming out more often than ever before. Folks living here are intimately familiar with our family of bears residing in the woods just up the road. When you run into a bear, it’s as uncomfortable for you as it is for the animal.

My neighbor Gregory Norris, a writer, lives at the very edge of the woods. He has had many misadventures with bears. One warm day, as he sat on the sunporch, the largest bear tried to get inside, destroying the porch door. If this had been the city, the bear would have been hunted down. I shudder to think what could have become of the creature. Gregory had to fix his door, and while not happy about that part, he did not begrudge that bears sometimes act like bears.

Down the street, the local pastor walking her dog encountered Mama bear. When they startled each other, the dog barked; Mrs. Bear ran off. Most of the joggers and walkers carried cell phones, with an app whistle or horn.

It was spring—bears were ravenous. The local newspaper warned people to take down feeders, as the bears would destroy them to get at the seeds inside. The last thing you want to see outside your picture window is a hungry bear devouring birdfeeder seeds while watching you.

Some days the geese called me from my studio. I rushed outside. The cold wind was biting. I tucked my hands inside my sweater. Now, once again, I was suspended in sensory splendor watching their dramatic acrobatic ballet soaring gracefully into the white sky, diving, and spiraling before a backdrop of dark snowy trees. I don’t believe there is a more beautiful sight.

I yearn to share this moment with all who suffer. So I offer up a prayer for the dying and wish I could change the world.

Judi Calhoun is an artist and writer who lives in Berlin, New Hampshire.
Annotating Darwin

The more we learn about living things
how the crimson on a sumac
begins near the ground, rising
night by chill October night;

the clearer it becomes that life’s processes
the springing forth, the gathering
of light and storing of sap,
the letting go in a shower of gold

are based on the same
chemical and physical laws
claiming each leaf and every
life back to the song

we see at work in a stone or a glass of water
—poured with a bow to the cloud,
pond, North Atlantic—bow
not much different from a prayer

Polly Brown

Polly Brown’s new book, *Pebble Leaf Feather Knife*, from Cherry Grove Collections (2019), includes a number of poems first published by *Appalachia*. She’s written about war and peace at the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Joiner Institute and helped organized plein air poetry events on a Massachusetts hillside. She and her husband have been doing more of their hiking on the trails managed by the Seven Lakes Alliance in Maine.
Lockdown in the Alps

All quiet in Chamonix

Doug Mayer

Anyone who has touched a climbing rope utters with reverence the name of the French town at the base of Mont Blanc: Chamonix. Its glaciated peaks and its 15-mile-long V-shaped valley just below the 4,809-meter peak, have been at the forefront of alpinism since Jacques Balmat and Michel Paccard first gained the summit of “Le Mont Blanc” on August 8, 1786. This journal first mentioned “Chamouny” in its December 1884 issue.
Even some of the mayors of Chamonix (current population 8,906) have alpine stories to tell. Maurice Herzog, whose team made the first ascent of 8,091-meter-high Annapurna, held the office from 1968 to 1977. Current Mayor Eric Fournier runs high-elevation ultramarathons. “I trained for 45 minutes,” he quipped when asked how he prepared for a 100-kilometer race around half of the Mont Blanc massif.

Nick Yardley, a guide and mountain rescuer from the White Mountains of New Hampshire, has climbed for three decades in Chamonix and calls it “the place to come to test oneself against the milestone climbing routes of such heroes as Walter Bonatti and Riccardo Cassin,” two of the Alps’s famous climbers.*

In Chamonix, through World War I, the 2018 flu pandemic, and World War II, ice axes were always swinging.

Until, at noon on March 17, 2020, in the world’s birthplace of alpinism, everything stopped.

**Le Confinement**

The coronavirus caused a seven-week lockdown. Facing surging infection rates and the prospects of overflowing hospital emergency rooms, the French government took a series of decisive actions, starting on March 12, when it announced that all schools and universities would close, indefinitely. Next, large gatherings were prohibited, and cafés and restaurants closed.

Finally, on March 16, French President Emmanuel Macron went on national TV to announce the start of a mandatory home lockdown, which became known as **Le Confinement**. In Chamonix, locals took to the mountains for a final fix, uncertain what the future held. Emily Geldard, a hiking guide and longtime resident, grabbed her skis and climbing skins and headed for Le Tour, a small valley village not far from the Swiss border. “Although the ski lifts had closed the day before, we turned up to a packed parking lot,” she

* The Italian climber Bonatti pioneered technically demanding routes on the world’s highest peaks, including the first winter ascent of the North Face of the Matterhorn. He died in Rome in 2011. His Italian contemporary, Cassin, made over 2,500 ascents, including more than 100 first ascents, such as a technical ridge named in his honor on Alaska’s Denali. He was a decorated World War II resistance fighter, who died at age 100 in 2009.

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*A seven-week lockdown left the normally bustling streets of Chamonix, France, completely empty.* KATIE MOORE
said. “Looking down the run, you could have mistaken it for a busy ski day, but with most people moving up rather than down!” Geldard was glad she went. “It felt like our freedom was about to end.”

For my part, I had planned to attend the popular Pierra Menta ski mountaineering race in Arêches, 90 minutes from Chamonix. Considered one of the world’s great mountain races, the event draws competitors from around the world and thousands of spectators, who ski deep into the Beaufortain mountain range to cheer the skiing athletes as they climb and descend challenging alpine terrain on lightweight skis. Pierra Menta, of course, was off for this year. Suspecting a lockdown was coming, a friend and I nonetheless kept our hotel reservations, taking what we thought were reasonable sanitary precautions. We enjoyed two days of quiet ski mountaineering—and on the
third and last day, I fell and broke my arm. At the hospital the next morning, I chose to wait outside, the small, poorly ventilated salle d’attente already filled with sick-looking, coughing patients. An MRI revealed that surgery would not be necessary, and a friend gave me a ride home. It was, I decided, an act of genius. If I had to break a bone and miss a season of spring skiing, at least this time around there would be no FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out.

The vibe of town had already started to shift. Normally, Chamonix has a lively nightlife, with many bars, pubs, and restaurants open into the early hours of the morning. Geldard’s husband owns the popular Big Mountain Brewery. “It was already different, with people avoiding hugs or kisses when meeting. There was lots of chat about COVID and speculation about the upcoming confinement.”

When it came, the confinement was strict. Anyone venturing out, Macron announced, would need to complete a form called an Attestation de Déplacement Dérrogatoire. Fines were levied for improperly completed paperwork, with repeat offenders facing a penalty of up to 3,750 euros, or about $4,300, and six months in prison. Time outside was capped at one hour, and approved reasons for leaving home were few. The government allowed just one hour of exercise and only within one kilometer of your residence. Within a few days, leaders added a cap of 100 meters of climbing above home. The goal was clear: reduce hospital admissions and free up medical staff for the impending tsunami of COVID-19 cases.

During the confinement, I was living in an apartment just at the one-kilometer radius from downtown Chamonix. On the second full day of lockdown, I filled out my attestation, signed and dated it, adding the time, and struck out for a walk. Chamonix, famous for its busy pedestrian-only downtown and bustling outdoor cafés and restaurants, was a dystopic ghost town. Gendarmes, the local police, were very nearly the only people out, checking papers and IDs. Of the half-dozen residents I saw, one was half-slumped on a bench outside the mayor’s office in Place de l’Église. She caught my attention and today lives in my memory for one notable quality. She was coughing violently.

Confined, Les Sportifs Cope

In short order, a wave of illness swept across the country. On March 31 alone, 7,578 new cases were reported across the country. On April 4, the country recorded 2,004 new deaths that day; on April 15, 1,438 were dead from the...
virus. The daily new cases and death rates dropped dramatically by mid-May, but cumulative deaths would reach more than 30,000 by mid-July.

In Chamonix, several of my friends were sick with a range of symptoms. One of the valley’s strongest ski mountaineering guides, Fred Bernard, battled a severe COVID-19 infection at his home in Le Tour. At one point, he drained an oxygen bottle saved for clients. Geldard, with whom I had recently shared a long car ride, fell ill. At home a few days into confinement, I began to experience light flu-like symptoms that lasted ten days. I wondered if I had been lucky enough to gain immunity without much personal sacrifice.

Down valley, in the village of Servoz, an American high mountain guide from Saint George, Vermont, had started his confinement a few days before the rest of the country. Brad Carlson, age 31, had been climbing with a friend who contracted the virus from a client. Carlson, only the third American to go through Chamonix’s École Nationale de Ski et d’Alpinisme’s high mountain guide program, also holds a PhD in alpine plant ecology and works part-time as a researcher at Chamonix’s alpine environmental research nonprofit, CREA Mont-Blanc. Carlson’s wife, Hillary Gerardi, is a sponsored mountain runner for Black Diamond and worked at six of the Appalachian Mountain Club’s White Mountain huts between 2005 and 2009. Carlson and Gerardi have lived in France for nine years, the last three in Chamonix.

In many ways, Carlson and Gerardi are representative of the Chamonix community—overachievements included. High-level sportifs, their living depends on time in the mountains, sometimes with tourists tagging along, other times pushing their limits, hard. “If it’s a beautiful Saturday and you’re not working, you sure as hell better be out sending hard or doing something rad,” says Carlson, who likens the vibe to a treadmill—cease your relentless forward motion, and in the blink of an eye you’ll be jettisoned off the back.

Carlson, who has a low-key presence and a gentle demeanor, is both wise and thoughtful. He found a silver lining in confinement. “It was a really positive experience for me. I needed to slow down.” The couple took time to enjoy their backyard, having lunch outside and exploring local trails in their village, even as the pandemic raged at their doorstep—an irony not lost on either of them.

The more typical Chamoniard reaction, however, was a bit more angst-ridden. Climbers, trail runners, and backcountry skiers slowly began to chafe against the lockdown. After a full moon, residents spotted ski tracks high on the Mont Blanc massif. A few trail runners admitted privately to completing duplicate forms, noting the time on the second form an hour later, so
they could double their time outside. Other residents gently tested boundaries. Colorado native Rob Coppolillo, who lives in Chamonix with his wife, Rebecca, and two children Dominic and Luca, delicately explored the fringes of the 100-meter cap and was promptly admonished by a local gendarme. “He was very polite, with a big smile,” said Coppolillo, who thanked the officer. “I was going a bit stir crazy and sure enough, it bit me in the ass,” he confessed.

**PGHM Responds**

The local mountain police, *Le Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne*, or PGHM, were at the ready for the cat-and-mouse game. With their helicopter, Dragon 74, they patrolled the peaks, occasionally landing to fine the few climbers and skiers brazenly violating confinement. They watched the GPS app Strava, looking for *les sportifs* who neglected to keep their phones off. They flew drones, hid in the trees near bouldering areas, and stopped trail runners, asking to see their sports watches—some of which were ticking well past the one-hour mark.

Chamonix’s airborne athletes weren’t immune to the itch, either. In a moment of poor judgment that is already becoming legendary in the valley, one paraglider couldn’t quite restrain himself. The problem? He lived in a building with a number of PGHM employees. His climbing rope provided the solution, however, and in the middle of the night he rappelled out his window, climbed above Chamonix, and happily sailed over the sleeping town. When he returned, PGHM members were lying in wait with a few questions about the dangling rappel cord.

Midnight rappelling aside, most Chamonix residents took the confinement in stride. Danny Uhlmann, a mountain guide from the United States, started an online training program for his fellow guides. Guide and paraglider Dylan Taylor organized his peers via the messaging service WhatsApp. When American guides Mark Houston and Kathy Cosley fell ill, the group brought the longtime Chamonix guides their groceries. (Cosley later got tested and was negative for coronavirus antibodies. Houston decided not to get tested after Cosley’s negative result.) Chamonix’s trail runners went virtual, supporting each other on a popular local Facebook group, Wild Trail Chamonix. For their part, Gerardi and Carlson set up a cycling trainer, pull-up bars, and rings in their yard that Gerardi had scored right before the looming lockdown. “We made ourselves a *Deep Confinement* Spotify playlist and generally embraced training hard in a 500-square-foot space,” said Carlson.
Le Déconfinement Arrives

For Chamonix and the rest of France, the first phase of le déconfinement came on May 11. France’s Minister of Sports issued painfully conflicted guidance: climbing was allowed, but climbers needed to maintain 1.5 meters of spacing—impossible on a narrow belay ledge. One could set foot atop the summits . . . but please don’t stay long. Mountain sports were approved for training, but clients were not yet allowed. In the Haute-Savoie, the mountainous region of France that is home to Chamonix and more than a dozen other mountain towns, the regional government chimed in, noting that hospitals would be near capacity, and the usual rates of mountaineering accidents would not be acceptable. “The chance of overstoke was very high,” Carlson said.

In general, though, alpinists took the intent of the decree to heart. In Chamonix, there were a few accidents. One skier fell 600 meters in the Cosmiques Gully, off the Aiguille du Midi, and was seriously injured. Two weeks after the deconfinement, Hugo Hoff, a past winner of the Freeride Junior World Tour, fell 700 meters and died while skiing the Gervasutti Couloir, on the east face of Mont-Blanc du Tacul. A professional, sponsored athlete, he was just 20 years old.

In town, Chamonix remained eerily empty, the result of a new 100-kilometer travel limit. A few cafés and restaurants opened for take-out only, and small groups of friends awkwardly rejoiced in seeing each other, tapping elbows in lieu of the famous French bise on the cheek. They did their best to remember the new 1.5-meter distantiation sociale. Nearly all wore masks, and posters went up reinforcing the new norms.

Three weeks later, on June 2, France entered phase two of deconfinement. A much smaller than usual clutch of climbers and skiers gathered outside Boulangerie Le Fournil on Avenue de l’Aiguille du Midi, downing a café au lait while they waited for the early morning tram up to glaciers below the Aiguille du Midi, where they would have instant access to the alpine world they so missed.

An Uncertain Future

In recent years, Chamonix has metamorphosed. The largest events are now trail races like the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc and the Marathon du Mont-Blanc, each of which bring tens of thousands of mountain runners and onlookers to the region. Climate change, meanwhile, has been melting the permafrost that acts as glue, holding together classic alpine climbs. In
September of last year, an estimated 100,000 cubic meters of rock collapsed on a portion of the Mont Blanc massif, falling on to the Glacier des Pèlerins, below. The dusty plume was visible for miles. And now, guides, shopkeepers and others who bank on alpinists and trail runners showing up, are wondering what the summer holds. “The forecast is for close to zero international clientele,” Carlson said. He and his colleagues at the Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix expect business to be about 15 to 30 percent of normal, their few clients being regional tourists looking for adventures close to home.

Cosley, who has been guiding in Chamonix for two decades, wonders if it’s the end of an era. “I go back and forth between thinking we’ll have a weird year or two,” she said, “and wondering if maybe the business model of American guides getting American clients in the Alps is gone for my generation.”

Coppolillo, for his part, is trying to reposition and find more regional clients. He’s part of a social media group of American guides, and few expect much business from the US for some time. With European Union borders less likely to close than more distant international ones, looking for clients a little closer to home is clearly a safer bet.

If stress and uncertainty was the order of the day during the seven-week confinement in the world’s home of alpinism, there was another population that, one imagines, was decidedly OK with the change. Chamonix’s alpine fauna experienced a newfound peace. Mathieu Dechavanne, CEO of the Compagnie du Mont-Blanc, which owns the valley’s 69 mountain lifts, captured unusual footage during one of the handful of times the town’s Aiguille du Midi cable car—the world’s second longest—was in operation during the confinement. In the video he posted online, one of the Alps’ few wolves is casually roaming over the spring snowpack, mere meters from the shuttered Refuge Plan de l’Aiguille mountain hut—and, no doubt, blissfully unaware of the human drama unfolding a thousand meters below.

Doug Mayer lived for years at the base of Mount Madison, in Randolph, New Hampshire, where he was trails chair for the Randolph Mountain Club. He now lives in Chamonix, France, and runs the trail-running tour company Run the Alps.
Katahdin

Standing above unsettling thoughts and emotions

Anthony Emerson

It’s May now in Maine, which usually means spring, petrichor, songbirds, and snowmelt coursing beneath rock and earth. It means frigid hikes on trails blocked by fallen trees stripped naked by the wicked months

On top of Pockwockamus Rock, early April 2020. The author hiked here from the Golden Road, a logging route, because the main road was covered in snow. JUDITH ARCHIBALD
of January and February. It means the restlessness that brings me on drives up familiar roads flanked by birch trees bent like parentheses, each drive bringing me farther into the woods as the snow recedes out of sight. And, it seems, out of memory. It’s May now in Maine, and those things are still true, though barely noticeable behind the pall of a global pandemic.

As John Muir said, “Nature in her green, tranquil woods heals and soothes all afflictions.” My particular afflictions—anxiety, boredom—have been amplified inestimably by the pandemic. The momentum of the changing seasons cannot be slowed by the spread of the virus, and neither can my enthusiasm to get into the backcountry. I wanted to be near the mountain, to feel the escapism of drifting into the timelessness of the wild. Instead came the recent news that Baxter State Park would be closed until July and with it the crushing realization that I’d be forced to cancel my season-opening camping trip and take day trips below treeline.

There are many uncanny differences between this spring and springs of the past—differences you cannot escape no matter how far into the woods you go. In the park the evidence is everywhere. Yes, volatile weather conditions often delay the opening of certain trails or even the entire park this time of year, but there is a palpable stillness now, like a vacant movie set or a ghost town from the old West. I half expected to see a tumbleweed galumphing down the tote road. The park’s visitor center is shuttered, facilities locked up. The website displays a ticker with font and colors that imply foreboding. There’s the empty ranger truck being used now as a receptacle for winter signage. The closed gate at the entrance and downed tree left unattended in the parking area are less than inviting. Then there’s me and my new behaviors: sanitizing my hands after using the pencil at the registration box. Casual trail etiquette has been replaced by the dread of meeting a fellow hiker on the trail and exchanging hurried pleasantries behind a bandana pressed against my face. And the new thoughts: Do the animals know? The trees? Can the forest sense my fear the same way I can feel the leaves surge with the wind?

Typically, my time in nature forces me to consider things both small and large at the same time: the immediacy of honking geese and the complexity of their migration patterns, their inscrutable instincts. My hikes fix my awareness on the concrete and the abstract of the wilderness. This has not been my experience since the spread of the virus. On my recent trips into the woods, I have struggled to grasp the dichotomy of an intimidating, robust landscape, which is also part of a sensitive ecological system. A system that when standing beneath a 100-year-old, 100-foot-tall white pine feels infallible.
but is in grave danger because of our human influence. I found this easier to understand recently when I returned home to several inches of May snow blanketing the boughs of evergreens. I watched as the waterfowl that had made a home in the boggy pasture behind my house were forced out by the fickle whims of Maine climate, and something called the polar vortex.

A man walks alone in the woods; what is he looking for? I’ve had this refrain stuck in my head, as a kind of prompt, on my post-virus outings. I have no good answer. Is it solace or solitude? An escape from the horrors of a diseased society? Maybe. And maybe the forest is medicine. I have felt a kind of existential sickness over a dislocation from the natural world. And if the forest is medicine, then Katahdin is a monument to good health—a beacon of aliveness, and light. The mountain has been a spiritual stalwart for thousands of years, from the native people who deified it, to the adventurers who conquered it, to the writers and artists who immortalized it, and the conservationists who helped preserve it. For me, mostly, it was the aesthetic backdrop to my early childhood. It didn’t become a source of curiosity, pride, or importance until very recently, when my interests in self-reliance and self-discovery pushed me into the woods to experience for myself what I had only read about.

I have over my lifetime engaged with the mountain, but only as art or idea, never in a physical sense. My family for generations has lived in sight of Katahdin. I feel something bizarrely akin to birthright when I see it, though I know better. When my mother was growing up, her mother would make her wear a snowsuit until the snow

Anthony Emerson posed for this photo, taken by his grandmother, on Logan Pond Trail in late April 2020. The trail begins at the south gate of Baxter State Park. Katahdin rises in the background. JUDITH ARCHIBALD
was totally off of the mountain. Now, I have a yearly bet with that grandmother—born out of that unsettling tale of my mother’s childhood—about the date the snow will disappear fully from Katahdin’s peak. Every year we put the kayaks in the alpine ponds at the mountain’s foot long before the snow is gone. As I write this, I am sitting beneath a black-and-white photo of the mountain’s Great Basin. It was taken by my great-great uncle for the Great Northern Paper Company, and if my house were suddenly ablaze, it would be the first thing I’d grab.

I am 29 years old, the same age Henry David Thoreau was when he first climbed Katahdin. I don’t know why exactly, but that fact seemed important to me when I first discovered it. I still was planning (and as of this writing still am planning) to climb the mountain several times in summer 2020 with Thoreau in mind. I’m hoping he can help me glean from the mountain the kind of wisdom I might need entering my 30s in times such as these. I know well the feeling of triumph over unsettling thoughts and emotions. I have not experienced the kind of victory that comes from exceeding the perceived limitations of my own body. I want to explore the boundaries both within and without myself, and I know the mountain exists somewhere on those boundaries. I don’t know if I’m handling this crisis well now, or if I’ll get any better or worse as the summer rolls inexorably on. I know that I find myself clinging to books by people with such names as Leopold, Emerson, and Muir.*

The ones who opened my eyes to what Thoreau called “the tonic of wildness.” I know that I wake every morning with the urge to be outside and to see Katahdin flourishing in the sky. I need it.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, I used to think of the mountain as a metaphor for various principles of my mindfulness practice. I’d think of a time-lapse video of clouds passing by the peak while the mountain sat in quiet observation, grounded, unperturbed. Now I think of the clouds not as ephemeral thoughts but as the collective societal turmoil of our present and near future. It comforts me knowing that Katahdin—that greatest mountain—will be standing serene, unfazed through it all.

Anthony Emerson is a student and writer living in northern Maine.

* Aldo Leopold, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Muir.
The Shaking Trees

In the forest, catching up with Mom by phone

Andrew Jones
“You should be wearing your mask,” my mom scolded from 400 miles away.

“I’m in a forest,” I replied. “I think I can rule out the maples coughing up virus particles.”

There’s a young forest that starts at the edges of my backyard. It doesn’t go very far: Wolf Creek and the Grove City suburbs that look like every other western Pennsylvanian small town keep it from developing into a dense and thriving forest. Most of the trees stand fairly tall, but their trunks aren’t thick. Flexible and limber, the strong winds that blow from eastern Ohio cause maples to smash into black gums, while pines rustle down needles like green dandruff. Nature had become a quick yet effective panacea to isolation life, and these brief excursions into this pocket of nameless nature nestled between my house and the creek provided some relief that sidewalks and passing cars couldn’t. “Either way,” I told my mother, “I rarely see people wearing them.”

“Well, I read that in Pennsylvania it’s mandatory when you leave the house to wear a mask or something covering your mouth.” She sighed and paused. “I just want you to be safe.”

“I know,” I respond. “I’m sorry. But there’s rarely anyone back here. I think I’ll be OK. I am thinking ahead. It’s just a bit different out here than by you.” There’s such a disconnect between our experiences with this stay-at-home order. It feels impossible to speak about something without having to clarify something or frustrate her.

“Is Sky with you, at least? I bet she’s enjoying the day. It’s nice and sunny here.” I look up, and dark clouds are pushing through the blue sky.

“Yeah, she’s up ahead a bit.” I scanned around and watched Sky, my black and white pit bull, sniffing a patch of grass. She began to open her mouth when I yelled out. “Sky, you’re not a cow. Do not eat that!”

“What’s she doing?” Mom became worried on the other side.

“She was just about to eat some grass,” I responded. “Nothing to get worked up over.”

“Oh. Well, work’s having me do some extra shifts,” she said while my other ear listened to a not-so-distant woodpecker. “The nurses’ union set up a daycare for all Long Island hospital workers who have kids,” she said. “The daycare centers shut down, so we’re all they have that’s open. I’ll take their temperatures a few times during the shift to make sure no one’s exhibiting a
fever. We don’t have enough tests to go around, so taking their temperature is the only way to reliably guess whether they have it or not.”

“Catch anyone yet?” I asked. I leaned over to a musclewood and felt its smooth bark. It’s not often anymore that you can touch another living thing, with social distancing and face mask enforcement around every corner. Even though it’s been relatively quiet, we’ve been given pretty strict guidelines to follow. The quiet stresses me.

“So far, we’ve been lucky, although I’m sure one of them will get it eventually.” Mom was silent for a few seconds. Sky found a patch of grass to roll in for a spell. “Had to bring Aunt Barbara some eggs. She was almost out; I still have half a dozen left, so I should be good until whenever I find them next.”

“Why was she running out? Couldn’t she just go to the store and grab some herself?”

“Andrew,” my mom said. “The stores are all out. Long Island is out of everything essential.”

“Oh,” I muttered. I thought back to my last trip to the store. Eggs were there by the dozens of dozens, along with milk, bread, chicken. Hell, you could still have the deli slice up a pound of American cheese and hand it to you. The only odd thing not in stock was toilet paper, which so far had been the only commonality we’d shared throughout all of this. Even if they did run out of eggs, I knew enough people that had chickens. I think I knew more chickens than people in Grove City.

“Which reminds me,” my mom began in that tone that told me I would be quiet for a minute or two. I let her ramble on about eggs, freezing milk, buying yeast, doing some deep cleaning, and going for a jog around the block with Sky to keep my mind off things. The wind was picking up again, and I could hear it in the trees. A branch here or there would plummet to the ground, and Sky would jump if they landed near her. The trees bowed together and whipped around, crashing into their neighbors like packed subway passengers. What I wouldn’t do to be a subway passenger stuffed in a full subway car, tapping into others as it shifted and stuttered toward something to do filled with people to see. Concerts have been canceled, classes have been postponed, and work has been upended. The restaurant where I work has converted to take-out only.

I heard a loud crack across Wolf Creek: Another tree must have given in to that eastern terror piercing through. I walked over to the steep hill that dipped into the creek and peered through the trees to try to find its fallen trunk.
“Grandma’s not doing well,” Mom’s words broke through the woods and brought me back into the conversation.

“Didn’t she just get out of the hospital last week from pneumonia?”

“She wasn’t in the hospital. She stayed in the nursing home that time, but yes, they think she’s got pneumonia again,” Mom said. “Or maybe not. You’ve seen the case numbers out here.” The number of confirmed cases in New York had just crept over 20,000. Meanwhile, Western Pennsylvania has barely seen cases in the 100s. Grove City only had one case, and that was reported two days ago. “So she’s in the hospital now.”

“Have you gone to see her yet?”

“They won’t let you in,” her voice became heightened. She took a deep breath. “They don’t let you into the hospitals with so many COVID patients going in, and she said she’s getting tired of talking to everyone on the phone. It’s hard for her to talk. So I haven’t heard from her. I call the nurses station every few hours and send them bagels every once in a while. It helps them remember her. She said at one point it took her four hours to get some Tylenol.”

“Do you think she’s got it?”

“All I know is that they’re doing the best they can.”

“She’s gotten over worse. I’m sure she’ll get through this. She’s practically an expert at kicking pneumonia’s ass,” I tried joking. Conversation was all I could do, and this realization made me feel worthless.

“Just pray for her,” my mom trailed off, holding something back. I could hear the trees groan louder. The wind blew harder, and black clouds covered the sky.

Andrew Jones is a creative writing student at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. He has been published in the Showbear Family Circus and In Parentheses.
There Was No Mountain

But there were memories—of shoes

Elissa Ely
For the moment there is no mountain, no vista, no traveling, and barely even breathing room behind the masks. Living in fear of the new coronavirus feels like living on a planet where the inhabitants cannot survive the surface. Everyone proceeds dutifully, anonymously, and mostly silently through the untrustworthy air. Passing strangers, you can’t tell whether they are smiling at you or not, and because of this, it’s much easier to look down. For many weeks in 2020, I saw more shoes than sky.

Instead of hiking in mountains, I hiked in my memories. It was a way to review the past—and, I suppose, not a bad rehearsal for the future. At first, the memories rose high: to the top of Mount Lafayette, to the Lakes of the Clouds, to wildflowers in Crested Butte, Colorado. The views were broad, without blisters and without pain (though without real satisfaction, either).

Eventually, like a falling kite, the memories sank closer to the ground. I recalled a sign on the Old Bridle Path in New Hampshire’s White Mountains and a coiled snake near the bottom of the Wasson Peak Trail outside Tucson. When these memories hit ground, I started to remember shoes.

Footwear! If everyone who has ever walked a trail offered an opinion, it still wouldn’t tie the laces on this topic. In one way, the discussion is simple: just wear the right kind—preferably one for each foot. Henry David Thoreau and John Muir did, and their results were spectacular. In another way, it’s a discussion without end, one of those political arguments neither side enters thinking they will change their minds.

I’ve used the same hiking boots in various incarnations for decades. They’re dense and clunky, high on the ankle and built for the rocky, rooty New England conditions that wear you down or trip you up. Life is too full of uncertainty to venture from success, and they get the job done. But everyone makes their own choices. There are many ways to walk.

Once I was setting off toward Artists Bluff and Bald Mountain above Franconia Notch and passed some families congregating at the trailhead. The women wore long skirts and open-toed sandals or loafers. The men wore black leather shoes. The children wore sneakers.

Shoes like this have no business on a trail, I thought to myself. Thoreau would not have approved.

A minute after I passed them in my reliable boots, I stumbled and fell. It was the imbalance of age—that growing unsteadiness that googling tells us...
can be prevented by standing on one foot while watching the news at night—but I landed hard. It took another minute to sit up and review the relevant body parts. There were scrapes that would be tender in a few hours, a bleeding knee, and torn pride.

When my boots and I finally limped onto Artists Bluff, the families were already there: they had taken the loop from a different direction. No one was scraped, scratched, or bleeding. The women sat serenely, shoulder to shoulder, on rocks overlooking Echo Lake. Some of the children had kicked off their shoes. In the end, their footwear had been just as steady as mine. Their balance had been significantly better. In these strange times, memory takes me back to other shoes: the old friend I hiked with, who constantly stopped to tie her boot laces because she didn’t believe in double knotting. In the middle of an important thought, she would suddenly drop to her knees, and mumbled sentences would drift up from below. We argued about this for decades, but never stopped hiking together because companionship is far more precious than speaking clearly.

On a White Mountain trail, a stranger once paused to kick off his boot and sock and, while he rummaged in a pack for moleskin, he told me about his very ill wife. I could see the blister on his heel and understood that he might prevent it but could not cure the person he loved.

I remembered shoelessness. In Red Rock Canyon outside Las Vegas, I met a man climbing barefoot, wearing nothing but dreadlocks and a loincloth, deep in reflection. It was wrong to turn and gape as he receded, but I couldn’t help myself; the rear of him was so dignified, and his pace was so sedate. Nakedness speeds some of us up, but it did nothing to hurry him. Maybe he was feeling gratitude for having feet.

These days, when driving from one New England state to another in order to hike is discouraged, the mind is left to climb in memories. Odd images emerge, from where they usually live in some folded inner place. Under normal circumstances, they remain there. But looking down, as we do now, has brought them into view.

_Elissa Ely_ is a Boston-based community psychiatrist and nonfiction writer.
Komorebi

The green light filters through dipterocarp trees. Komorebi: light through leaves.

I open, open to the light, that passes through me as if I were transparent, as if I were never there.

I am a part of the light, part of the rattan tree leaves, part of the babbler’s song, of the angle-headed lizard, the giant forest ant, part of the dog-faced fruit bats, part of the black spotted frogs.

Komorebi: the longing. It can never be like this again.

7 April 2019
Ulu Ulu Temburong Forest, Brunei

Marcyn Del Clements

Marcyn Del Clements has contributed to Appalachia for many years. In 2013 she traveled to Cuba as a citizen scientist to study its plants and animals, including the smallest hummingbird in the world, the bee hummingbird.
Waterman Fund Essay Winner

The Wild Self

What is wild to one is home to another

Lorraine Monteagut
For Bey, the wildest of them all

The doors to the world of the wild Self are few but precious. If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door.

—Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype

When we saw the radio towers, we hurried the rest of the way to the summit of Bear Den Mountain. We dropped our packs and took to the tractor seats jammed into the earth facing the Shenandoah Valley, partially visible through power line clearings. It was late June 2019. We were losing light on the first day of our 161-mile section hike of the Appalachian Trail north from Rockfish Gap. It was our first trip as a family: Ben, me, and his three kids. The previous summer, they’d hiked the section between Hot Springs and Springer Mountain. I’d never hiked more than 30 miles in one trip, and I was relieved to see signs of civilization.

We descended to Beagle Gap as the sun set and the clouds gathered. We passed through a grassy field littered with lightning bugs to the base of another mountain. We turned our headlamps on and climbed silently until we arrived at a meadow near the top. The next morning we would notice the marker for Little Calf Mountain and take in panoramic views of the Shenandoah National Park’s southern end and see for ourselves why the surrounding mountains are called Blue Ridge.

We barely made camp before the rain started. At the first thunderclap, the kids scrambled into their tent, and Ben and I dove into ours a few yards away. We yelled to each other as we unceremoniously downed our Clif bars. The lightning struck directly overhead. The tents flapped violently. Hours went by and we couldn’t sleep. Ben watched the Doppler on his phone, bands and bands of red moving over us. I could tell he was grappling with himself, trying to decide if there was anything we could do. I took the opportunity to let my worry show, too. But I wasn’t worried about the storm. I was suddenly nervous that I wouldn’t keep up on this hike, that I would never settle into this family, that maybe they preferred last summer when I wasn’t there.

Lorraine Monteagut pauses on Stony Man Overlook near Luray, Virginia, on June 30, 2019. BEN MONTGOMERY
That’s when I knew we’d arrived at the wilderness we’d been seeking. Or that it had somehow found us, some invisible frontier shifting over us in the storm, replacing our semblance of control with a primal vulnerability.

The frontier is defined as the border between settled land and wilderness, and it continues to be part of the American imagination even after
we’ve staked everything out. In the mid-1700s the Shenandoah Valley was an important frontier of population migration. Migrants traveled from southeast Pennsylvania through the valleys south and west, through Maryland, to Virginia, and into the southern backcountry, many moving through Rockfish Gap, which featured one of two east–west roads. They were in search of cheap lands and fertile soil, of sustainable and safe homes. I imagine they thought themselves pioneers, never mind that the area had already been used as a war and trading route by the Cherokee and Iroquois for centuries.

Before our trip, I’d only read about the area or seen it in movies. It was an old America my family wasn’t a part of. I was raised in the extreme southeast corner of the country by newer immigrants, but our aim was the same. Settlement. Safety. Stability. Our frontier was the eastern edge of the Everglades, which we kept pushing against with our suburban homes. For a week in the mid-1990s, our house was the westernmost one among vast fields of strawberries, and I’d climb onto our roof to look out past the migrant workers picking, into the marshy wilderness even farther west, forbidden to me.

In most Latinx families, hiking is not a thing you do for fun. Walking just because? We’d walked when we were forced to leave our homes. We’d run from war, from military occupations. It was a wildness to which we did not want to return. Our assimilation called for domestication, especially for the female. My mami called me *callejera* and poured alcohol on my wounds when I came home scraped up, to teach me to stay inside. The next morning I was crawling out at first light, my hurt knees tender against the windowsill, on my way to adventure the borders of our growing civilization.

I didn’t realize then what a great privilege this was, to be outdoors willingly. I didn’t realize that my white skin afforded me opportunities that my darker cousins would never experience, that I could mimic the pastimes of the longer established Americans and nobody would think me uneducated as I made my way home covered in dirt.

We didn’t go on road trips to national parks, like in the movies. I dreamed of forests and mountains, but what I had was flat land. I walked out of my neighborhood and followed the road until it ended and I pushed west with my imagination, believing I was the first one to ever do so.

A wild little thing, my parents called me.

On the second day of our hike, as we entered the Shenandoah National Park, I stumbled over my feet on a descent, and my left knee landed on a sharp rock. I was in massive pain but tried not to show it, pushing back
the thought that I might have to sit this trip out after all. I wouldn't know until weeks later, but I'd torn the tendon just below the kneecap.

The section of the AT that runs through the park is a far cry from the frontier of the 1700s. The many areas that converge with Skyline Drive feature nice convenience stores and day-hikers who smell like dryer sheets, who park and walk to the nearby summits. A controlled wilderness, the valley glinting with human life.

As I limped around camp, Ben suggested I drive along Skyline and meet them each night at the campgrounds. The previous night's fears about being left out were materializing, magnified by the fact that I couldn't just go home. I had to stick it out, one way or another, find a way to be there while not completely being there. I watched Ben’s kids making camp and felt a nostalgia for a childhood I’d never experienced, this life of road trips and the outdoors that they so easily took to, which seemed to constantly reject me. They were a family unit with a long-established history. I felt like another species altogether.

I’d imagined that sometime along the hike I’d get to talk to each of the kids in turn, have a heart-to-heart. A little over two years earlier, I’d come into their lives like a storm, unsettled their family, pushed the boundaries of what they’d thought possible. They’d thought their parents would be together forever. Now they packed into a one-bedroom apartment half the week, sharing Ben’s bed as he took the couch.

I remember how jarring it was when my own parents were divorcing, like there was no sure footing at home. I stayed outside most days, where I could steady myself with the horizon line. The sunset on the Everglades was a kind of magic, milky pink and yellow clouds over a great expanse I imagined was infinite, a blank slate. Since my home had lost all semblance of order, I thought I might as well take to the wilderness. I dreamed of heading west, the direction of freedom.

Like all the white people before me who thought themselves pioneers, I’d neglected to consider the indigenous people who’d lived for hundreds of years in what I called the wild, who had a wholly different experience of frontiers and westward expansion: the Miccosukee. To them, freedom wasn’t some void beyond their reality, but something they fought for. Following the Indian Wars in the 1800s, most of the Creek tribes in Florida were moved to reservations out west. Except for about 100 Mikasuki-speaking Creeks, who hid in the Everglades in temporary camps. They lived like this for a century, resisting assimilation, until the early 1920s when they took part in the commerce along the Tamiami Trail. In the 1950s, one of the leaders of the tribe,
Buffalo Tiger, visited Fidel Castro in Cuba, who accelerated the tribe’s international recognition as an independent country within the United States. If you drive around the Everglades, you’ll see the Miccosukee now live in modern homes, though most of them still have chickee huts in their backyards.

Lorraine Monteagut, left, with Ben, Morissey, Asher, and Bey Montgomery in Rockfish Gap, experiencing the privilege of being outdoors willingly near an old settlers’ migration route. LUKE MONTGOMERY
What is wild to one is home to another.

As I limped through Shenandoah National Park, I grappled with the concept of home. I’d decided to tough it out, walk through the pain. I used a walking stick I named Wandering Wanda, a thick one with a notch at the top I could put a lot of weight on. I had expected the trip to be physically hard, and though I hadn’t expected to be injured, once I got going, the pain wasn’t unbearable. It was the psychological challenge I hadn’t bargained for. I was raw. I fell behind the group, and the symbolism of that tore me open. Childhood feelings of loneliness rushed through me. Since I was alone on the trail so often, I took the opportunity to cry openly, sometimes loudly. If Ben or the kids heard me, they’d think I was crying because of my knee pain.

Out on the trail, I came to understand that I longed for a home I had yet to make. I’d spent so much time in my younger years constantly running from a home I’d deemed unstable. I was the first in my family to apply to college, and getting the acceptance letter from the University of Florida had been the happiest moment of my life. Since then, I had never settled, never stayed for longer than a couple years in one place.

I wonder if it’s in my blood, to keep moving, to never settle. We are a family of exiles and immigrants, after all, of people always on the edge of some frontier. Maybe it’s why the wilderness renders me so vulnerable. To my grandparents, the woods had human eyes and human dramas. The woods is where the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) lived, armed insurgents ready to kidnap their children. The woods are where Fidel Castro strengthened his army before striking their town and starting a revolution that pushed them from their homes forever. The woods aren’t a safe place. The woods aren’t for recreation. The woods are the difficult past.

There is a part of me that loves danger and seeks it out, that wants to delve into the dark recesses of the past and live there. When I was a teenager, I’d drive west on Tamiami Trail with my friends to this place we called the insane asylum, which has since been demolished. We’d take a left from Tamiami onto Krome Avenue, a spot that seemed so remote to us, back when it was just a two-lane road. One night, we pulled over at a broken section of the chain-link fence and cut the engine. The thick sound of outside took hold, the groan of reptiles alien to me and the constant shrill of the cicadas that forgot they were only supposed to explode upon humanity every seventeen years.

We stooped through the opening of the fence, fighting coarse grass and mangled bushes. The ground was surprisingly dry, and it cracked under us as we moved through. I tried to slow the sound under my feet, afraid to awaken
something old and sleeping. When we got through, we came to a frontier of asphalt and marsh, what looked like a tarmac leading to squat buildings with long hallways, nothing but the river of grass beyond. We called it the insane asylum because we were teenagers and hungry for drama. We smoked pot and tagged our names on the walls and dared each other to walk the broken halls.

I later found out that it was a missile base constructed around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a remnant of the Cold War. In the 1980s, it was converted into a detention center to process the immigrants from the Mariel boatlift, the huge sanctioned emigration of Cubans from Mariel Harbor to the United States. Today, the original buildings are gone and all that’s left are concrete pads in a far corner of the Krome Detention Center, which now processes immigrants from all over the world and which has a long history of detainee abuse.

When I think of wilderness, I think of places like this, of unexpected human objects suspended in nature, of humans in hiding or imprisoned. I think of the migrants who worked the strawberry fields of my childhood, who lived in temporary camps in a place I thought was all wild, who still live there, who live all over this country, invisible, working for our food system in a sort of indentured servitude. I think of the migrants we don’t let in, those people who walked because they had no choice, who carried their children and somehow moved hundreds and thousands of miles through Central America, through Mexico, and who are now separated from their children at the U.S.–Mexico border, put in cages, called animals by our president.

When I think of wilderness, I remember the look of fear in the eyes of the hundreds of Haitian refugees who ran onto the Rickenbacker Causeway in 2002 as I was driving home from high school, who tried to get into my car. How many times I have returned to that moment in my memory and hit the unlock button, driven them to Little Haiti to save them from being taken to Krome, to prevent their inevitable deportation back to places they can no longer call home.

I’d like to think that I was crying for all of these people during my hike in the Shenandoah. But these are associations I can make now, from the safety of my house, fully back in civilization. No, long hard hikes in remote places have a way of exposing what’s most tender and personal. I was crying selfishly. I was crying for home—my home, or the ideal of home that I had not yet achieved.

By the last night, my knee pain was minimal and I’d gotten all my crying out. Over the couple of weeks of hiking together, Ben and the kids and
I felt like a unit, like we’d gone through something important together. I hadn’t had the private conversations I’d imagined, but we’d bonded quietly over shared tasks in close quarters. As we made our last camp at Sam Moore Shelter, we played our made-up games and challenged each other to a push-up contest. I maxed out at fifteen before my arms buckled and I fell to the ground, tired, laughing.

That night, there was a torrential downpour. Ben couldn’t just sit in the tent this time. He spent a couple hours digging trenches around our tents to keep the water from getting in. It was a miracle we stayed dry. The next day, when we got to Harpers Ferry and the end of our journey, we picked up a copy of the *Washington Post*, which reported that the area had received about a month of rain in one hour, causing flash flooding. Major roads became rivers, sinkholes opened up, people had to abandon their cars and walk. *And we slept outside!* we bragged. We’d made it through our epic trip, intense storms and all.

As the effects of climate change worsen and economic and political pressures increase worldwide, some scientists project that we will see a forced mass migration of millions of people by the end of the century. What we consider wilderness and what we consider civilization will become moving targets in this country, as wildfires rage in the west, hurricanes emerge in the Gulf, snowstorms descend from the north. Change will be the only constant, and new frontiers we can’t yet imagine will emerge.

I sit and write this on the back deck of the home I’ve been slowly making for myself. From here, I watch the colony of bees I’ve set up toward the back of the yard. The bees dart out into their version of the wild—the patch of flowers next to someone’s mailbox, the median on a busy highway—and they return to their version of civilization laden with pollen. I don’t mow or use pesticides, and I’ve noticed the wild returning to my little plot of land: bugs I’ve never seen, medicinal flowers, vines of tomatoes in the drainage ditch. Wilderness is all around and deeply personal, not something to be discovered “out there.”

If we are to successfully protect the wild spaces of this world that bring us so close to the marrow of life, we have to start with ourselves. We must each nurture the wild self, the vulnerable self who is always seeking home in this world, who faces hardships but does not quit, who adapts in hopes of a better life. And even as we make room for ourselves in this exploration, we must make room for others. We have always been a beacon of safety, a country of immigrants. We must continue to have empathy for those who seek asylum and invite them into our family.
Just as surely as there will be storms, there will be human migration, and it’s time we acknowledged that human movement is also natural. It might seem to us now that there was more room back in the 1700s, but the concepts of the American frontier and wilderness were even then largely imaginary, a matter of perception. Now, we have the opportunity to consciously redefine our next frontier to nurture all life forms. It is a door between the wild and the civilized that is forever shifting so that we may protect what’s important to us and make room for more, be it flora, fauna, or human. There is space yet for us all.

LORRAINE MONTEAGUT is a writer, designer, and communication PhD who lives in Tampa, Florida. This is her first major feature article.

Editor’s note: After the Waterman Fund’s essay contest committee and I chose this piece as the winner for 2020, we then learned the author’s name and realized that her companion in this story is Ben Montgomery, a writer whose essay about the same two daughters and son on an earlier hike appeared in Appalachia’s Summer/Fall 2019 issue. We loved Monteagut’s perspective on her life, on American attitudes about the outdoors, and on her experiences with a family we felt we’d gotten to know a little bit.

Just days after Monteagut completed this essay, in March 2020, Montgomery’s son, Bey, died. He was 11 and had completed 405 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Monteagut dedicates this piece to him. We at the journal continue to grieve this loss, honor Bey’s memory, and wish the family well.
A Teenager Goes Guideless in the Tetons

Part 2 of a climber’s memoir

Steven Jervis
Editor’s note: In our last issue, Steven Jervis wrote of going to the Tetons alone at age 15. He followed guide Glenn Exum up Grand Teton and scaled other major peaks. Now, he tells of going back over the next few years and exploring some new climbs on his own.

I accepted George Evans’s unexpected invitation to join him in the Tetons in early July 1954. George was one of the younger Appalachian Mountain Club climbers in the Shawangunk Mountains in southeastern New York State, but he was still three years my senior and an undergraduate at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I had not had much contact with the Evans family other than being reprimanded for reckless climbing by George’s father.

In earlier days, AMC climbers had made a mighty impact in the Tetons. In 1929, Robert Underhill (Appalachia editor from 1928 to 1934) and Ken Henderson (who was in charge of the journal’s Alpina section for 33 years) pioneered the East Ridge of Grand Teton. Amazingly, this intricate route was only the second to be done on the mountain, two years before Glenn Exum’s solo. Two years later Underhill returned to the Grand for the first ascent of the forbidding North Ridge.

I was guideless now. The AMC presence that summer was modest. Our Gunks training had not prepared us for Wyoming’s big mountains, where speed is essential, as we discovered on the East Ridge of Nez Percé, a Robert Underhill classic from 1931. George and I were accompanied by Bill Cropper, another AMC Gunky. Bill was a strong partner, but this third person impeded our already slow progress. The East Ridge is a complicated affair, with rappels from two subsummits. To make these easier, George had brought a light rappel line. It was very thin indeed, and it left a nasty rope burn when it slid onto my bare neck. The climb is not technically difficult if you know where you are going. Because we often didn’t know, it was almost sunset when we reached the top. The descent is easy, but one does not wish to fall off. Thus my first mountain bivouac.

I had never been so high without sunshine or a sleeping bag; it can get pretty cold at 12,000 feet, even in summer. We paced about for warmth and

Steven Jervis, in the white helmet, belays Pete Carman as he leads their climb of the North Face of Grand Teton, in the early 1960s. HENRY ABRONS
managed intermittent sleep. At first light we hurried down to the valley to assure the rangers at the checkout station that we were fine, really we were, and they need not send a rescue party.

George and I next climbed the Exum Ridge without being benighted. Now, for something harder. From Jenny Lake, the Grand looks like a stroll: just head west and keep going. But we knew that then we would encounter a gap of several thousand feet; we would find ourselves not on the Grand at all but atop the aptly named Disappointment Peak. This would not be the summit we had hoped for. To make the ascent from this side, we must undertake the challenging East Ridge. Because of its altitude and tricky route-finding, it remains a serious proposition.

George and I hiked up to the base camp at Amphitheater Lake, a gorgeous spot favored by climbers and bears. Bill Cropper was not with us; on an earlier attempt, he had been injured when the edge of a snow gully gave way as he was bridging to adjacent rock. We started early from the lake, but as we approached the first technical section, ominous clouds swept in. We retreated to our camp, packed it up, and headed down to Jenny Lake. There we met Ellis Blade. “I think you should have kept going,” he said. “You would have had a good time.” Maybe so: No bad weather ensued. But I remembered these words eight years later, when Ellis led a much too big AMC group on a dangerous route on the Grand. They encountered a storm—a really bad one—and spent two nights out in miserable conditions. One young climber died.

A few days later George and I returned to Amphitheater Lake, determined. The next morning was blue and sunny, and we soon passed our previous high point. The East Ridge is complicated by two great towers, dramatically visible from north and south. How to get around them? We had picked up a lot of what today’s climbers call “beta” (information about the climb). Beta said pass the first tower on the left (the first ascent party had gone right), the second on the right. This meant following a snow couloir (cautiously—this is where Bill Cropper fell) and striking the ridge above the first tower, known as the Molar Tooth after its two prongs. The snow was kind to us, and soon we had gained the ridge proper. The second tower was intimidating. We had to pass it to the north, in the cooling afternoon shadows. I started up a wide, obvious crack. It was damp and unwelcoming. Once up this pitch, however, we were past the difficulties and only about 1,000 feet from the top. But we had again been slow; it was late, we were tired, and the exposure was considerable. We tried to hurry along. The last thing we wanted was another chilly bivouac. My ice
axe, one of the ash-shafted ones we used in those days, clattered as it dangled heavily from my wrist. The route, if you picked it right, was little more than scrambling, but we reached the summit only toward evening.

There is a relatively quick way down to Amphitheater Lake, but it follows a steep snow couloir. We chose the long, easy descent into Garnet Canyon, then branched to the trail to the lake. The only drawback is that the last few miles are uphill, disagreeable after 20 hours of climbing. I recall the last hour and a half as my most tedious, ever. When we reached the lake at midnight, we found that a bear had visited our tent, without benign intent.

It was now August, and several more AMC members showed up. First came a strong climber and his surly, non-climbing wife. Several more appeared, and we moved into the couple’s campsite. We thought this was club camaraderie, but the couple saw it as an intrusion and became very angry indeed. As soon as we could, we moved into another campsite.

By now I was the more eager for the arrival of my (slightly older) high school climbing partners, Mike Wortis and Steve Mann. They were driving Mike’s 1941 wood-sided Ford station wagon from Spokane, where they had spent a remunerative eight weeks canning peas at a Green Giant factory. Days passed, snow melted, and lupine grew in the meadows. At last, one day they showed up in a burst of campground dust. In Washington, Mike had taken the first leader fall any of us had incurred. Not serious, but a reminder of our vulnerability.

With only a few weeks remaining of our summer, we hurried up to the peaks. It was Steve and Mike’s first time in the range, so I repeated the Exum Ridge with them. On the trail down from Garnet Canyon, we skipped the long switchbacks and roared straight down the grassy slopes. This was a speedy but destructive method; it caused significant erosion and would be soon prohibited. Then we had a go at the enormous and poorly defined—that is, confusing—south face of Storm Point. Halfway up I led what was for me a hard pitch and embarked on another. I was stopped by an intimidating overhang. Mike took over and solved the problem in fine style. That’s one reason I liked to climb with him. I was sure that we had made a new route and reported it accordingly. But the description never went into the guidebook. It was mentioned only as a “subsequent early climb.”

The three of us joined Bill Buckingham for Rock of Ages, a sharp crag above a beautiful lake. I have only two memories: The approach couloir was loose and frightening, and the key pitch led up and right across a steep face.
I tried to lead it but backed off in favor of Bill, who said, “It looks goable,” and went right up. This was not the last time that Bill would take over for me.

All too soon, it was time to begin our drive back East. We stopped at Devils Tower, on the far side of Wyoming. I had been entranced and frightened by this strange formation rising a thousand feet above the plain ever since, at age 8, I had seen it on the cover of *Natural History* magazine. We knew we had no chance of climbing it because the Park Service was known to discourage severely such efforts. Nevertheless, we decided to inquire, just in case.

“You want to go up there today?” the ranger asked. It was 10 a.m.

We concealed our amazement and said the next day would be just fine. To our knowledge there were only two routes on the Tower: Fritz Wiessner’s from 1937 and Jack Durrance’s leaning column route first climbed the following year. Wiessner, a specialist on such terrain, had climbed a difficult crack, placing a single piton a long way up. We headed for Durrance’s column instead.

There are two serious pitches on the Durrance: the broken column and a wide crack above. We drew straws for leading. Mike got the column, I the crack. The leaning column looks as though it had been tipped over for climbers. It was unexpectedly balancey, and I was glad of Mike’s top rope. My pitch was much longer but presented no route-finding problems. My right foot went into the (very convenient) off-width gap between the column and the wall, while a serendipitous crack a few feet left accommodates the other foot. The only problem on the route is that the crack gives out near the end. I must commit myself to the gap. Today, this pitch is graded 5.6+, pretty challenging for kids like us. After that it’s hardly a scramble to the huge, nearly flat summit.

When we got down that early afternoon, clanking with hardware, a family of tourists took our picture. We felt like heroes—for about ten minutes.

Two years later, in 1956, Mike and I returned to Devils Tower with our Harvard Mountaineering Club partner, Dave Toland. We climbed an aid route several columns right of the Durrance, using flimsy pitons left by army troops who had been practicing there. A bunch of these lay unused at the base of the climb. All Mike remembers is getting his foot stuck in a crack and wondering whether he could ever free it without breaking his ankle.

Afterwards we ran into Jim McCarthy, whose presence was a sign of change. He created a number of routes on the Tower’s longer and harder

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1 The Yosemite Decimal System rates technical climbs from 5.1 to 5.15, with 5.1 the easiest.
north side. One recent year, 5,000 people reached the top of the Tower. Our 1954 ascent had been only the 41st. (I later learned that George Evans had been there before us.)

**Going back one year to continue the chronology:** In 1955, I graduated from high school and expanded my mountaineering destinations: Wyoming’s Wind Rivers and Alberta’s Selkirks. But, in between, Mike Wortis and I had a few weeks in the Tetons. We undertook the south face of Symmetry Spire—we thought by a new route until we found the first piton halfway up. Once more we wandered up the south side of Storm Point with no idea where we were going. We’ll never know whether this was a new route, even in part. The guidebook forgoes description of the face; it just quotes Willi Unsoeld: “a real wilderness of broken walls, ridges which disappear, and gullies which lead nowhere.”

We needed to conclude with something adventurous. I had been 15 years old when Bob Merriam told me about the Red Sentinel: “this remarkable chisel-like pinnacle,” as the guidebook says. Hans Kraus, the leading Shawangunks climber of his day, had made several attempts from the northwest side but was stymied 30 feet from the top. In 1950, it was one of the few remaining unclimbed points in the range. On a rare collective day off from guiding duties, Dick Pownall, Leigh Ortenburger, Mike Brewer, and Bob Merriam had reached the summit, starting on the east face, then turning onto the very exposed north. More than 60 years later, when he was in his 90s, Bob sent me a narrative he had written for a publication in North Carolina, where he had been living in retirement. He led the second pitch: “relentlessly vertical. . . . There is nothing climbable near our corner position. It looks possible, however, to traverse about ten feet onto the face on tiny ledges. . . . Now irreversibly committed. . . . Can’t release a hold for selecting and driving a piton. . . . Breathing hard, hug the face and look around. . . . More than 40 feet above Dick now.” Finally, to his vast relief, Bob does manage to place a piton. The way to the top remains difficult, but at least he has some protection.

In 1955, when Mike and I attempted it, the Red Sentinel had seen almost no subsequent ascents. I led the first pitch so that Mike could have the second, harder one. The first, originally led by Dick Pownall, starts up a jam crack, then goes right to an airy belay. I climbed the crack and clipped the

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On a summer day in 1955, Jervis rappels down the Red Sentinel, a pinnacle almost no one had climbed in five years. MICHAEL WORTIS
piton at its top, took one look at the traverse, and went back down. I slowly worked up my determination and climbed back up to the piton. Rather than embarrass myself with a second retreat, I made my way across the traverse ("delicate," says the guidebook) and clipped the belay. Then it was Mike’s turn. Many decades later he still recalls the first intimidating moves onto the north face, as well as manteling on a jutting crystal farther along. Whatever he encountered did not long impede him. When we reached the top, we could not find a register to sign. But we were there. Really. I have a photo to prove it.

I had already said farewell to high school. And to the Tetons—though not for very long.

Afterword

In college from 1955 to 1959 I accompanied Harvard Mountaineering Club friends to Canada and Peru. But the Tetons still drew me in. Sometime in the early 1960s, I did finally climb the North Face of the Grand, which had been on my to-do list since 1952. I would not have made it without the assistance of younger and stronger Harvard climbers. I owe a special debt to Pete Carmean for leading me over the top two pitches, the hardest on the route (see the photo). But I never did succeed on the Grand’s North Ridge, a prime Robert Underhill route from 1931. I was all prepared. Leigh Ortenburger had told me how to manage the crux chockstone: Start by facing out, then swing around past the stone. I never was able to try this. Bob Page, Leif-Norman Patterson, and I started off for the Grandstand, the huge bluff from which the Ridge (really an edge or corner) begins. Getting there is mostly a scramble, but the line is confusing. And you have to worry about rocks tumbling down from the North Face. By the time we three were atop the Grandstand, it was nearly noon and clouding up ominously. The ridge looked very forbidding, and we retreated. I wondered at the audacity of Underhill and Fritiof Fryxell who had pioneered it so many years before, when there were so few other routes on the mountain. These days, the top of the Grandstand is often reached by traversing from the Lower Saddle.

Even bolder was Bob Page’s and my attempt in the early 1960s on the direct South Buttress of Mount Moran. On the first ascent in 1953, its key pitch took some seven hours. Dick Emerson, a park ranger and one of the best climbers in the vicinity, led that climb, which required a daring pendulum from a partially driven wafer (very thin) piton. When finally freed
in 1979, it was rated 5.12-. I doubt that Bob and I could have managed it anyway, but we'll never know because the easier part of the route took us so long that we had to bivouac. It was a chilly night, aggravated by thirst. Dawn revealed Jackson Lake in all its watery blue, thousands of feet below us. We rushed down and never went near the South Buttress again.

In 2016, after more than 40 years, I returned to the Tetons. I was 79. My intent was to reclimb the Durrance Ridge of Symmetry—my first route in the range at age 15, 64 years earlier. I hired a guide, just as in 1952. Much had changed. Instead of half a dozen guides, the Exum service had about 40. And there was another service with 20. Fees had exploded; instead of $20, I would pay $575 for a full day. But it would be worth it, for such an end to my Tetons career—and to this memoir. To my surprise, my guide told me that Symmetry had declined in popularity. He had never done the Durrance and was unsure of the route into the approach gully. The path that I recalled from long before had vanished.

We started up a rocky bushwhack. Almost immediately I fell backward and bloodied my arm. I tried to continue, but clearly this was not my day, or my year. The September morning was crisp and sunny. I could see Symmetry, with its enticing routes, as though they were only a few hundred feet away. But they were too far for me. This was not how I had hoped to conclude this account, but sometimes the mountains make your choices for you.

Steven Jervis is the editor of this journal’s Alpina section, a lifelong climber, and former English professor at Brooklyn College.
Heron Heart

I’m thankful my beloved’s heart
is more patient than any mink
working the bank, and even though
I wade out into her deep riffle,
dark enough for nervous trout,
she waits for me to find my lie,
holds me there with a stare
I pray will linger like a thin bone
caught at the back of my throat.

Noah Davis

Noah Davis grew up in Tipton, Pennsylvania, and writes about the Allegheny Front. Davis’s manuscript Of This River was selected for the 2019 Wheelbarrow Emerging Poet Book Prize from Michigan State University’s Center for Poetry. His poems and prose have appeared in Best New Poets, Orion, North American Review, River Teeth, Sou’wester, and Chautauqua, among others. Davis has an MFA from Indiana University and lives in Missoula, Montana.
The Women Who Ran Sporting Camps

The making of a tradition in Maine

William Geller
In the 1860s, the land that became known as the 100-Mile Wilderness in Maine was home to some trappers and hunters who liked to talk. Soon enough, a few hardy city men heard of their exploits and asked the tellers to guide them into the depths of those remote woods to hunt. As the number of visitors, which they called “sports,” increased, the guides opened camps where they could stay. By 1910, their camps could not survive on just men. The owners turned to their wives for their cooking, ingenuity, and organizational skills. Their love of the wilderness and their work matched that of their husbands.

Women were either leading or had the predominant managing role in the seven sporting camps that operated in the southern 100-Mile Wilderness in 1934, the year the Appalachian Trail was completed. This was a notable contrast to the rugged-male omnipresence at the birth of the sporting camp era.

**Crude Lodging and Bear Meat Diets**

The stories from the birth of sporting camps in the 1860s were amazing. On a Greenville, Maine, hotel porch at the foot of Moosehead Lake in June 1867, 73-year old “Uncle [James] Lyford” regaled a group of vacationers, including a reporter from the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, with bear stories. Lyford, a hunter for the previous 58 years, had killed 340 bears, but wanted to reach 365 before he could no longer hunt. He attributed his excellent health to eating bear meat. On his hunting trips he always carried a Bible and he kept a daily journal. But he died a year later, in 1868.

Uncle Lyford, who lived in Sebec, and other guides were nearly all summer farmers and winter loggers who had grown up in the townships at the edge of this wilderness. Before the Civil War, family members also hunted and foraged to put food on the family table. On their trap lines they built tiny shelters. The game was meat for the family table, and the furs provided some family income. After the war, guiding became another way to help sustain the farm. Each guide took one or two sports; their trappers’ camps were too small for more. These hunting trips could last many weeks.

A guide’s greatest challenge was in bringing carcasses out of the wilderness. In March 1869, Henry Clapp, of Brownville and Lyford’s friend and successor as the region’s finest hunter, guided two sports for three weeks.

*Minnie Perham, who ran camps near Chairback Mountain from 1936 to the mid-1950s, taking a break. COURTESY OF THE NANCY MAE PERHAM FAMILY*
into this wilderness, sliced by a couple of logging tote roads suitable for only winter sled traffic. The sports packed their gear on their backs. Clapp made sure sports shot each animal where they could make a sled for the carcass and they could easily clear a path over which his horse could pull the sled back to their camp. They shot five moose and three caribou and trapped a number of small animals—a combined weight of over one ton. With aid of his horse, Clapp moved the mass to the Chamberlain Lake Tote Road, where he flagged an empty tote sled returning to Bangor, 80 miles away.

The lodging these men had was as crude as that of Thomas Waldo Billings, a friend of Clapp and successor to his mantle. Billings’s shelter on Long Pond had cedar-splits for three walls, a large boulder for the fourth wall, no windows, and a bark-covered pole roof with a smoke hole above the open fire at the base of the rock. They slept on spruce or balsam boughs placed on the ground. The cooking utensils were a fry pan and a pot. They stocked tea, sugar, flour, and slabs of bacon. What they shot or caught in the waterways was the primary source of food. The guide cooked.

In 1873, Phillip Randall and his son Charles, farmers in Atkinson, came north to hunt along the West Branch of the Pleasant River, a few miles south of Clapp’s camp, and found an abandoned logging camp near Little Lyford Ponds. The Randalls fixed up the log structure and hunted and trapped from it for a few years before using it as a sporting camp. Here, in a windowless chimneyless floorless log building, roofed with bark, heated by an open fire hearth in its middle, and vented by a hole in the roof, they ate at a rough log table and slept on platforms made of slim poles covered with boughs.

Upriver at the southwest corner of First West Branch Pond in 1879, the Randalls found another abandoned lumber camp. They turned this structure into a hunting camp that Charles opened as a sporting camp two years later. Over the ensuing years, the Randalls outgrew the old logging camp building at each site and began to build small sleeping camps with various capacities. By 1890, Charles had three sleeping cabins. The two old logging camps still had bunks and continued as the center of cooking and eating. Soon, however, such a structure was too rustic, and the Randalls replaced them with a new log building complete with floor and windows, a proper cooking hearth, and a chimney.

Horse teams and wagons became necessities for these camps. Philip Randall met his sports with his team at the Milo train depot 33 miles away. In 1883, the railroad reached Katahdin Iron Works (KIW), 12 miles from
his camp. For the next 70 years some sections of the roads to these camps remained so rough that guests preferred to walk and let the horse and cart haul the dunnage.
The opening of the railroad to KIW and Greenville (in 1883) eased travel to this wilderness, and that brought more sports, including those less rugged. The sports’ interests broadened to include fishing, which lengthened the sporting camp season to May through November. By the mid-1890s, Charles Randall, who had the most remote camp in this wilderness, maintained six sleeping cabins that could accommodate 35. Running a sporting camp of multiple buildings and multiple parties of sports now took the combined efforts of a whole family or considerable hired help and eventually both.

**Women Expand Camp Diets**

Women were helping run the camps by the early 1890s. The cook, now most often the owner’s wife, used a cook stove. Each meal of the day was no longer the same. The basic staples matched those of the logging camps: bread, donuts, cookies, pies, tea, beans, hot cereal, salt pork, potatoes, and local meat and fish. The women took charge of sleeping cabins that required regular cleaning and laundering of linens. The privacy afforded by the sleeping cabins encouraged a few sports to bring their wives.

By 1894 the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad (B&A) began publishing a yearly advertising book that focused on sporting camps. The pictures of long strings of trout and of game carcasses hung in the camp yard suggested everyone succeeded in their goals. And by the early 1900s, the B&A publication focused on attracting women. The Maine booth at the B&A’s yearly Boston and New York sportsman shows included Maine’s Cornelia Thurza “Fly Rod” Crosby, the event’s organizer and Maine’s first registered guide. Crosby was also a well-known prolific writer for the numerous sports magazines at the turn of the century.

A couple miles west of Charles Randall’s place, L. M. Gordon opened a sporting camp at the head of Big Lyford Pond, on the nearly continuously used site of Lyford’s and Clapp’s trapping camp. Four miles south of Phillip Randall’s sporting camp at Little Lyford Pond, over a low rise into the Long Pond drainage, Canadian photographer William P. Dean built a camp as a personal refuge, learned to trap, and was soon guiding from there. He called it Chairback Mountain Camp. Dean’s stereoscopic views and other pictures of Gulf Hagas, Long Pond, and the West Branch of the Pleasant River, are in collections at the J. Paul Getty Museum and the New York City Public Library.

A trail over Chairback Mountain linked the Chairback Mountain Camps to Joseph A. Thompson’s early (around 1870) house on Big Houston Pond.
which he called Saint’s Rest. Thompson was a friend of both Dean and Billings, and Thompson and his wife, Grace, allowed their camp to join with one Frank Tibbetts built in 1894 called Big Houston Camps. Access to the camp was from KIW, three miles east. On Long Pond’s south shore a mile east of the outlet in 1898, Monson farmers James S. and Mary A. Leeman and their two sons, Thomas and Arthur, built and opened a camp in 1898. They named it Camp Damsino after the line, “Damned if I know where the fish are.” They met their guests with a horse and cart at the Abbot Village train station and proceeded eight miles to their farm four miles north of Monson. After a night at their farm, they continued to Bodfish Intervale just above the head of Lake Onawa and went up Long Pond Stream to the former Trustim Brown home at the mouth of Vaughn Brook, nine miles from their farm. Here they left the horse and cart and walked the last five miles to camp.

In Bodfish Intervale lived the wilderness farming family of Nymphas Bodfish. Similar to James Lyford, Bodfish moved here with his parents in about 1830, and the family began to build this wilderness farm complex. The extended family lived year-round in the valley for more than 125 years, during which time they logged, hunted, trapped, farmed, guided, and hosted loggers, teamsters, and transients. When sports first came into the valley (1860s) with their guides, they could spend a night with one of the Bodfishes before moving on. Their farm was always a dependable and welcoming waypoint within the wilderness.

By 1900, another eleven sporting camps dotted the southern half of the AT’s 100-Mile Wilderness. But no others ever were established, and only the camps at Bodfish Intervale, Long Pond (two camps), Big Houston Pond, Little Lyford Ponds, Big Lyford Pond, and First West Branch Pond survived more than the next 30 years.

These seven surviving sporting camps shared a distinguishing element: a leadership chain of either women or wife-husband ownership. After Helen Brown’s husband, Albert, died in 1898, she continued to run Chairback Mountain Camps for at least another 22 years. After six years of two different male owners, Lillian and Ralph York revived the operation and sold in 1936 to Minnie and Earl W. Perham; Minnie ran the camps for the next 18 years. Phillip Randall sold his Little Lyford Camps after his wife Hatti died in 1900. The struggling new male proprietor sold to Clara and Edgar Sherburne about 1909, and they sold about 1928 to Grace MacLeod and Marion Call who for a dozen years advertised as “MacLeod and Call, Proprietors.”
They were followed by wife and husband teams, just as Gordon was at Big Lyford: Winfred and Everett Patten, Florence and Fred Webster, Annie Belle and Willis Sherman, and Eva and Ivan Sherman. Charles Randall at First West Branch Pond sold in 1914 to Alice and Louis Chadwick, and the sporting camp has remained in and run by the family since then. The Leemans on Long Pond sold in 1917 to a single man who operated it for four years before selling to Pearl and William “Will” Dore, who ran the sporting camp until 1949. At Big Houston a succession of eight male owners followed Tibbetts from 1896 until 1920 when Winifred and William Llewellyn “Lell” Arnold took over the operation and ran it until 1947.

**Comforts in the Wild, and Friendships**

Chairback Mountain Camps proprietor Helen Brown designed her dining room to please women guests, one of whom was Constance DeMille, the wife of actor and filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille. Mrs. DeMille told her New York
friends about the camps, attracting more guests. So women owners became friends with women guests, who would want to return with their husbands. The women camp managers told stories that showed they loved their work, tales of gardening, cooking, animal and bird sightings, raising wild animal pets, handling bears, and caring for sports who became ill or sustained fishing tackle or gunshot injuries. They worked with what they had. Their ingenuity attracted guests—also their friends—back year after year.

They knew how to make women comfortable. At Big Lyford Camps, Eva Sherman’s outhouses were not only extremely clean and neat; they included a bucket full of fresh pine needles, with which a user could cover the waste and keep the air fresh. A cabin girl cleaned the cabins daily, and once a week the huge copper pots went on the stove for laundry. Chairback Mountain Camps’ library with its books and comfortable chairs was a gathering place where women socialized. At Little Lyford Camps, newspapers came in regularly with the mail, and guests’ letters were taken out for posting. Big Houston Camps had an extensive set of walking paths. First West Branch Pond Camps guests used a hiking trail to the White Cap Mountain fire tower. Camp canoes and boats provided transportation for excursions to interesting picnic spots on the various ponds and lakes. The comforts also included porches on sleeping cabins; they provided a quiet contemplative spot.

These women managed the sporting camps’ greatest changes and challenges, which revolved around food. They moved away from the lumber camp hearty fare to more closely match, if not at times rival, what sports and tourists received at the hotels and inns at the edges of this wilderness. They changed the logging-camp-style meals to varied dishes emphasizing quality rather than simply quantity. Meals typically included meat, starch, vegetables, salad, and dessert, at both the midday and evening meals, until the 1930s, when the midday meal was a little simpler than the evening meal. In the late 1930s Minnie Perham at Chairback Mountain Camps never served a guest the same meal twice over a fourteen-day period. These women took great pride in their dishes’ appearance and the ambiance of the dining room.

The women planted, tended, and harvested vegetable gardens; the distances to tote in all expected foodstuffs on a regular basis were too great, difficult, and costly. Between the mid-1880s and the early 1900s, many camps’ hay and oat fields enlarged to include vegetable gardens and farm animals. By the early 1890s Charles Randall had a garden and chickens and pastured cows and horses. In the 1930s at Little Lyford, MacLeod and Call were still driving in a cow and toting in 30 chickens in May to start the season. The
The changes in the menu during each camp season reflected the women's ingenuity. With no garden to harvest and little to forage from the woods, their meals in May and June revolved around trout, potatoes, canned vegetables, beans, bacon, a little pork, bread, cookies, doughnuts, eggs, hot cereal, and pies. Clara Sherburne at Little Lyford Camps served a different trout dish at almost every meal: fried trout, pickled trout, stuffed trout, trout chowder, and boiled trout. In the early spring, when a camp had many sports fishing, the cook faced a daunting task. At Chairback Mountain Camps Perham organized a seven-step assembly line for preparing fish: cut open, gut, clean bloodstream, rinse, dry, newspaper wrap, place on ice in ice house. As soon as the dandelion greens and fiddleheads were ready, they were on the menu and any left over were canned for the following year. For fresh fruit, the women picked wild berries: strawberries in June, raspberries and blackberries in July, and then blueberries in August, often with the help of women guests. Women proprietors served the fresh berries with cream, used them in fruit pies, and canned them for next spring’s pies.

The menu also included fresh game whenever it was available. When a cook served a meat dish, she might not share that it was of a wild animal until asked. She created delectable recipes for the skunks, coons, and foxes caught trying to break into the hen house and porcupines that chewed on the cabins. MacLeod and Call chose not to waste bothersome animals they had to dispose of and served them as curiosity dishes, whereas Maude Turner, who succeeded them, cooked such game as a necessity to make ends meet. For hunting season, birds, small animals, deer, bear, and moose were all an expected part of the menu.

When the AT first opened in 1934, hikers relied on the shelter and services provided by the sporting camps of these women and their families. At the Bodfish farm, the first stop north of Monson, Sarah “Sadie” Bodfish and Edmond Drew greeted the hikers. Pearl and Will Dore provided
transportation up Long Pond to Chairback Mountain Camps for those who wished to not hike the Barren-Chairback Ridge. A side trail went down Chairback Mountain to Winifred and Lell Arnold’s Big Houston Camps; Lell guided the first group of hikers, all women, over the new AT route to Katahdin (August 22 to September 3, 1933). MacLeod and Call’s Little Lyford Camps hosted hikers bypassing White Cap on the Pleasant Valley tote road. Abbie and Fred Chadwick at First West Branch Ponds Camps welcomed the hikers as they came off White Cap Mountain on the AT.

The AT relocations between 1975 and 1983 moved the trail away from these camps, important Maine cultural resources and historical landmarks that pre-date the AT by more than a half-century. The sporting camps at First West Branch Ponds, Little Lyford Ponds, and Long Pond continue to offer public accommodations and are accessible from the AT.

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The Hancock Loop Trail, Then and Now

Reflections from one who helped build the trail

Douglass P. Teschner

The organization of the Four Thousand Footer Club in 1957 had a profound impact on the White Mountains, sparking interest in many New Hampshire peaks that, up until that time, had been rarely climbed. The Appalachian Mountain Club’s 1963 *White Mountain Guide* noted, “Leading to the summits of several trailless 4,000-foot peaks are paths which are not maintained.” These were typically minimally cut, hard to follow, and marked by rags or occasional cairns, although this changed dramatically as increasing numbers of people set their sights on climbing the 46. Galehead, then thought to be below 4,000 feet, and Bondcliff, believed not to rise the minimum 200 vertical feet above the connecting ridge to higher Bond, were both later added (after the U.S. Geological Survey topographical maps were updated) to make today’s list of 48.

The 1972 AMC *White Mountain Guide* notes that the ascent of Mount Hancock “was at one time more or less arduous; it was remote, it had no trails, and it had been devastated by logging and by the 1938 hurricane.” The guide went on to say that the completion of the Kancamagus Highway and trail-cutting work by the Four Thousand Footer Club and the AMC Worcester Chapter had made Hancock “readily accessible.” I was part of the Worcester Chapter group that built part of the trail, and this is the story of how it happened.

North and South Hancock were two of the officially trailless 4,000-foot peaks, but a rough trail, leaving the established Cedar Brook Trail, was developed by early peakbaggers. This 4-plus mile, lollipop-shaped route appears as a line of dots, unlike the usual trail dashes, on the 1963 AMC Franconia region map and is described in that year’s *White Mountain Guide* as, “harder to follow than regular trails and should not be attempted by inexperienced
parties.” The first mile followed old logging roads to a split where the trail to South Hancock went right and the route to the higher North Hancock left. The two peaks were connected by an obscure “herd path” along the connecting ridge. (Except for the landslide ascent described later, the current 4.7-mile Hancock Loop Trail closely follows this same route.)

The route up the North Peak was the most challenging part as it followed a prominent landslide, “in the form of a notched arrow with the point downward. The W branch of this easterly slide reaches high up in line with the summit and provides the route for the main peak.” This landslide, typical of those in the White Mountains, was a jumble of unstable rocks of various sizes, loose gravel, and exposed rock slabs—but for early peakbaggers it was seen as preferable to a steep bushwhack through the intense thicket of high-elevation spruce and fir.

In 1964, Cecil and Elaine Jones climbed Hancock along with their son Thaddeus (at age 10 then among the youngest to complete the 4,000-footer list). An article about their hikes in the *Worcester Sunday Telegram* of June 27, 1965, describes Hancock as the hardest. Cecil, a leader in the AMC’s Worcester Chapter, thought that there should be a better way.* The focus was on bypassing the slide and flagging the existing ridge route, leaving most of the remaining crude trail as is.

Work began in 1965 and was completed the next year after several trips, including one multiday encampment along the Cedar Brook in May 1966 where Elaine Jones, who was also leader of the Worcester Girl Scouts, cooked nourishing meals for our trail crew over an open fire. In addition to the Joneses, other trail-builders included Dave Fales, Gil Field, Tony Francis, Eric Engberg, Don Blomquist, Maurice Rogers, and me. In 1999, Elaine wrote me, “How well I remember the Hancock trips and camp—the second one was crossing the brook 5 times, with melted snow creating a depth and chill! Birds had stolen some of the colored tapes to mark the trail, and included pieces in nests!”

I began hiking through a Worcester YMCA summer camp and was eager to continue during the school year. No one in my family was interested in hiking, but camp counselor Brian Fowler suggested I reach out to the Worcester Chapter of AMC. I went on a Mount Washington hike with Cecil, who took me under his wing and recruited me for the Hancock project. It had

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* My recollection of this history is bolstered by Cecil Jones’s June 15, 1967, article “Hancock Adventure” that appeared in this journal vol. 36, no. 3, pages 511–513.
never occurred to me as a teenager that I would be building a new trail, but
the chapter was eager to have help, and I was thrilled to get to the mountains.

The section of trail bypassing the slide was initially flagged by Cecil and
Philip Bender, paralleling the slide on its right (east) side and pretty much
straight up the mountain. No one thought much about switchbacks back then
or anticipated the kind of erosion we see today from heavy trail use. North
Hancock had a viewless wooded summit, but on one work trip we lost the
flagged route and discovered a boulder with a beautiful view. I mischievously
spray-painted “1620” on this large rock, which was subsequently described in
the 1972 *White Mountain Guide* as “a facsimile of Plymouth Rock that affords
an excellent view” of Mount Carrigain and the Presidential Range.

The Hancock Loop was officially opened in 1966, even though the only
significant new work was the section bypassing the slide; the other four miles
received little work, although usage by an increasing number of peakbaggers
would eventually make the crude path more obvious. It has been the route of
choice and the only trail up Hancock ever since.

I kept in touch with Cecil Jones, especially in the late 1960s and early
1970s when I was on the AMC croo at Zealand Falls and Mizpah Spring
Huts. Cecil and Tony Francis led AMC’s annual hut-to-hut range walk from 1967 to 1981. Today a multitude of guided hikes and AMC excursions exist, but the range walk was the sole official AMC guided trip across the hut system for many years. I later helped Cecil run his annual Mountain Medicine conference at Pinkham Notch (where I met my future wife in 1979). Sadly, Cecil died at age 59 in 1986.

After that, I was living in New Hampshire and overseas and completely lost touch with the Worcester Chapter until I read a 2016 death notice in AMC Outdoors that compelled me to write this letter to the editor:

I noted in the Sept/Oct 2016 issue the passing of Sue Hall, a lifetime member of Worcester Chapter since 1954. In the 1960s, I was a high school kid from Westborough who had been touched by hiking at Worcester YMCA summer camp. My family were not hikers, so I connected with the AMC Worcester Chapter where leaders like Ralph and Sue Hall, Gene Skevington, Cecil Jones, Charlie Fay, Mauri Winturri, Don MacDonald, and Dave Fales took me under their wing. Those folks helped launched me toward mountaineering adventures in Africa, Mexico, Europe, and across North America. It has been

The lower section of the slide on Hancock has become forested in recent years.
DOUGLASS P. TESCHNER
a long time since I lived in the Worcester area and, for 12 of the past 14 years, I have been overseas, but I look back in fondness to those early days with the Worcester Chapter.

Soon after, chapter chair David Cole invited me to speak at the Worcester Chapter’s November 2017 annual meeting and 100th anniversary kickoff, which was a special opportunity to express appreciation to the chapter for getting me into the mountains as a kid after summer camp had given me that initial spark. My slideshow highlighted those early days and building the trail up Hancock. Former chapter chair Steve Ciras eagerly suggested we organize a chapter trip to Hancock to revisit that history, and I readily agreed.

I had been back to the Hancocks several times over the years, but it had been a while so, in June 2018, I did a reconnaissance, bringing along some old photographs and reclimbing the slide I had first ascended 53 years previously in 1965. The lower part is largely overgrown—it used to come all the way down and open up at the valley bottom next to the present trail. The upper slide, though, is still very active and as challenging as ever with loose rock and exposed slabs. Someone built a large cairn at the left/west branch of the downward arrow, and some adventurous hikers still take on the challenge.

Our July 2018 chapter hike was postponed because of flash flood warnings, but Steve and co-leader Charlie Arsenault rescheduled it for September 8, 2018, to coincide with the annual “Flags on the 48” that honors 9/11 victims with an American flag on each of the New Hampshire 4,000-footers.

Climbing the trail that day, I noted the severe erosion on the steep ascent paralleling the slide. I had heard some years ago that this section may have been rerouted, but, if so, it has the same character as our original—straight up the slope! Despite the best efforts of AMC trail crews to install water bars and rock steps, it is still in bad shape. Ditto for the initial steep drop off the South Peak, which we descended later in the day after crossing the ridge.

After raising the flag and honoring our country, I told the group some stories of the trail-building history, and several people joined me to find the “1620 rock,” which is not the same as the present outlook, which was obviously a later discovery. Vegetation has grown up all around “1620,” and there is no longer any view at all (and, of course, the spray paint is long gone).

It was a gorgeous day, and there were many hikers; the summit was very crowded. This is a big change from the 1960s when you might have seen one or two other parties. I was happy when my high school friend Eric Engberg, who was also one of the original trail-builders, made an appearance.
That same day, I noticed that the junction of the trail where it leaves the Cedar Book Trail has changed. My 1966 photo shows Cecil Jones admiring the new trail sign amid dense underbrush. Today that spot has heavily compacted soil with denuded bare ground multiple feet in every direction.

We like to think of mountains as unchangeable, but of course that is not true. This lesson came home to me years ago, the second time I hiked Mount Tom. My memory from the 1960s was a wooded peak with no view so, given that my policy is usually to return only to peaks I really liked the first time, I avoided returning to Tom. But when I went back up there in the 1990s, trees had blown down near the top, and the view was quite nice!

On Hancock there is obviously change as well. Plymouth Rock is overgrown and gone back to obscurity and a newer viewpoint has taken its place; also, a significant part of the lower slide has gone back to forest. Change is nature’s way.

Human impact is tougher to reconcile: the heavy erosion and soil compaction, not to mention people stomping or sitting on alpine plants on higher peaks above treeline. So many more people are enjoying the White Mountains today and that is great, but it certainly puts pressure on the landscape and challenges us to find ways to better manage the resource. In any case, I am hoping that the Hancock Loop is still around to be enjoyed for another 50-plus years!

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The Crawford Path in the News

White Mountain history and the communications revolutions

Susan Schibanoff

The tourist newspaper Among the Clouds, published daily on the top of New Hampshire’s Mount Washington in the late 1800s and early 1900s, is one of several papers offering researchers keys to early adventuring in the White Mountains.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS VIA WHEATON A. HOLDEN

Following his tour of the United States in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville observed, “In America there is scarcely a hamlet which has not its own newspaper.” His claim is exaggerated, yet it is true that newspaper production had increased exponentially after the American Revolution. Spurred by the Postal Service Act of 1792, which subsidized the cost of distributing newspapers and permitted printers and publishers to send their papers to one another for free, and by the key role newspapers played in the new democratization of America, including federal political campaigns and
elections, the number of newspapers published in this country had swelled from approximately 40 in 1780 to more than 575 in 1820. By 1820, at least 50 newspapers were being published in New Hampshire, and that number doubled within a few decades. And as early as 1822, Daniel Walker Howe remarks, “the United States had more newspaper readers than any other country, regardless of population.” If every hamlet did not have its own newspaper, even the smallest, most remote villages at least had access to one in the early republic.

This proliferation of newspapers is part of what historians term the communications revolution in pre-1850 America. Scholars differ on precisely what constitutes the revolution, when it began, when it ended, and its causes and effects. Yet there is general agreement that the invention of electric telegraphy, successfully demonstrated by Samuel F. B. Morse in 1844, represents a “climactic moment in a widespread revolution of communications” in which the rapid expansion of newspapers played a prominent role. The purpose of my article is to suggest the value of this underused resource in the study of White Mountain history.

Allen H. Bent, who published the definitive bibliography of the White Mountains for the Appalachian Mountain Club in 1911, acknowledges that the field of newspaper articles “contains much valuable matter”; as an example, he cites an article from a Concord, New Hampshire, newspaper of 1826 as perhaps the earliest description of Franconia Notch and an ascent of Mount Lafayette. Yet, Bent admits without explanation, his bibliography has “neglected entirely” this resource. Bent does include a generous list of articles from magazines such as The Granite Monthly, The Atlantic Monthly, and Scientific American (volumes 11–32) and from Appalachia (volumes 33–42), but not from newspapers. Most likely, Bent’s complete omission of newspaper items reflects his inability to access this large, ephemeral, often localized resource. Modern White Mountain scholarship also largely overlooks early journalism resources and probably for the same reason—a heretofore lack of easy access.

Thanks to a later “communications revolution,” the digital one of our era, however, early American newspapers are now within convenient reach. Readex’s Web-based America’s Historical Newspapers (c. 2004–) offers a vast and ever growing digitized collection of American newspapers from 1690 to the present, and I draw the material for this article from Readex’s online database. My case in point for the value of using newspaper resources in White Mountain history is the Crawford Path. I choose this example because the Crawfords’ trail is the oldest continuously maintained footpath in
America—in 2019, it celebrated its bicentennial—and thus its origin predates by decades most of the printed sources to which scholars typically turn for White Mountain history, starting with Lucy Crawford’s *History of the White Mountains*, first published in 1846.9

**Dating the Crawford Path**

On May 12, 1919, Allen Chamberlain wrote to Fred D. Crawford of Lancaster, New Hampshire, about the coming 100th anniversary of the Crawford Path.10 Crawford was a grandson of Ethan Crawford and great-grandson of Abel Crawford, the legendary trail cutters. A past president of AMC and member of the centennial committee, Chamberlain wanted to collect “all possible historical data” concerning the earliest days of the trail. He had consulted relevant published sources from the mid-nineteenth century, including Lucy Crawford’s *History*, the classic works written in the 1850s by Benjamin Willey, John H. Spaulding, and Thomas Starr King, as well as later guidebooks by Moses Sweetser, but Chamberlain suspected that there was earlier material that would be of “great interest in connection with this celebration.”

In particular, Chamberlain asked Crawford whether he knew anything about Ethan’s comment later recorded in the *History* that the cutting of the path was “advertised in the newspapers.”11 Such an ad, whatever form it had taken, might allow Chamberlain to confirm his conjecture that the trail was completed in June 1819. Chamberlain had looked through the files of the *Boston Patriot* for June and July of that year but found nothing. Perhaps it had been advertised in a Portland or Concord newspaper, he mused. Fred Crawford apparently knew nothing about the ad, much less possessed a copy of it, and arrangements for the celebration proceeded without it.

Chamberlain’s hunch that newspapers could provide the information he sought derived from his own experience. As a journalist, he had written on the White Mountains for the *Boston Transcript* and other news publications. As late as 1919, the papers were still covering the White Mountains in detail. The *New York Times*, for instance, reported the centennial celebration of the Crawford Path on July 6 of that year. There were even two tourist newspapers published in the White Mountains, the *White Mountain Echo* and *Among the Clouds*, to keep readers up to date on the mountains while they vacationed in them. Much of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century coverage was society news, the comings and goings of the rich and famous to one of America’s most fashionable summer playgrounds. The *Times*’s article on
the Crawford Path centennial, for example, concludes by noting that Mrs. Eleanor Ashby had arrived from New York to visit Mrs. William A. Barron at the Crawford House; the latter’s husband was the hotel magnate who owed the Crawford House and other White Mountain establishments. As Chamberlain intuited, however, earlier nineteenth-century newspapers are a rich source of historical information on the White Mountains as well.

Today, a century after Chamberlain unsuccessfully searched for the ad on the Crawford Path, it is relatively easy to find what he was looking for, thanks to Readex’s database. Chamberlain’s guess that the Crawfords’ ad might be in the Portland papers was correct, but not in June or July. Instead, on August 31, 1819, the Portland-based Eastern Argus informed its readers “with pleasure” that a new “foot way” had opened to the summit of Mount Washington. In contrast to the formerly traveled way through Adams (now the town of Jackson), the new path is “much shorter,” the announcement declared. Departing from the turnpike that passes through the notch, it considerably diminishes the “fatigue and difficulty” of the ascent, which was “very difficult in consequence of the numerous fallen trees, and thick shrubs, which were almost impenetrable.” The promotional piece in the Argus ends by noting, “Mr. Crawford, at whose expense the road was cut” also keeps a “house for entertainment” nearby and provides excellent guide service, “very accommodating to strangers.”

In the same week, the Portland Gazette published an ad that answers Chamberlain’s specific question of when the trail was cut. On August 24, 1819, this paper announced that the “excellent path” constructed “in June” from the road to the vegetation line made it possible to ascend Mount Washington “without extreme fatigue and a certainty of rending the firmest garments.”

Reprinted in the Concord Observer, the Salem Gazette, and other regional outlets during the fall of 1819 and the next few years, these two notices in Portland papers are among the earliest, if not the first, published references to the Crawford Path. Only one known hiking trail preexisted the Crawford Path in the White Mountains: the so-called Gibbs’ path, circa 1809. It had fallen into disuse by the 1870s.

**Trails as Commercial Assets**

Early newspapers also provide a window into the larger social and economic history of trail-building in the White Mountains. That the Crawfords were quick to send off a notice of their new trail to the newspapers reflects their
awareness that the newspaper was the most efficient advertising medium of the era. Teamed with a supportive postal system, the newspaper waged effective war against America’s “first enemy” after independence, the “tyranny of distance,” a challenge to the vast new nation as well as to isolated locations such as Crawford Notch in 1819.14

Before the 1830s, the American newspaper was typically a large format, four-page publication, three-quarters of which was advertising, an allotment that Tocqueville later contrasted to the more limited commercial space in French papers.15 More than half the newspapers published in large cities in 1820 used the words mercantile, advertiser, or commercial in their titles.16 Despite their relatively high cost and subscription requirement, newspapers were widely read. As Charles G. Scheffen demonstrates, there was a vast “underground” readership that begged, borrowed, or stole newspapers and a significant proportion of deadbeat subscribers, whom publishers kept on their circulation lists to attract advertisers.17 For the publisher, the profit was in advertising, not subscription fees. And for business owners like the Crawfords, the profit was in their inns, not the associated trails per se.

Much like a real estate developer today who builds a recreational amenity such as a golf course to sell nearby condominiums, the Crawfords built a path to the summit of Mount Washington to attract paying guests to their inns. Unlike contemporary turnpikes, such as the one through Crawford Notch in 1819, there was no fee system to use the Crawfords’ path, but it behooved those who ascended it to stay overnight at Ethan’s or Abel’s inn and retain their services as guides on the mountain. The primacy of trails to the Crawfords’ lodging business is reflected in an item in the Crawford Papers at Dartmouth College entitled “White Mountains Mount Washington Hotel.” Signed by Ethan A. Crawford and dated July 1835, it appears to be ad copy that Ethan sent to newspaper editors either to publish verbatim or to use in composing their own publicity articles. It opens by singing the praises of his “spacious and commodious Hotel” and immediately mentions the hotel’s trail to the summit, “constructed on the best route after the whole region was thoroughly explored.”18

Safety over Scenery
The Crawfords knew how to market their inns, and they knew how to publicize their trail most effectively. The earliest newspaper ads for the path also reveal the Crawfords’ awareness that to increase their audience beyond a few hardy adventurers, they had to promote the trail as safe recreation, not a dangerous
ordeal, however “sublime” the scenery. Until 1819, ascending Mount Washing-
on was almost exclusively the province of explorers, scientists, and fit college
students; even so, it was an onerous bushwhack experience. If the Crawfords
were to expand their lodging business, they needed a trail accessible to a wider
audience and, more important, they needed advertising that overcame nega-
tive public opinion about the White Mountains—indeed, about mountains
in general.

The Romantic era’s glorification of hill country and corresponding love
affair with scenery sweeping the continent and England had not saturated
all levels of American society yet. As the Salem Gazette of September 7, 1819,
observed, through a “fearful view of the Mountains themselves” as well as
“report” that has “vilified these noble mountains,” many have permitted
“every wish to sicken and every exertion to be discouraged” to ascend Mount
Washington. Further, “till within a few months ago,” climbing Mount Wash-
ington was so arduous that it would “deter any one from the labour, who was
less than an enthusiast, or who possessed less than an iron constitution.” But
now, the Gazette continued, with the new shorter, easier, and safer Crawford
path, “more will be induced to tread” the mountains. . . . We can now advance
with comparatively trifling exertion and not the least danger.” Throughout
the first year of publicity for the Crawford path, regional newspapers repeated
this pitch, stressing safety over scenery.

**Getting Guests to the Trail**

Ethan Crawford’s journalistic campaign immediately began to pay off; after
the 1819 advertisement, he remarks in the History, “We soon began to have a
few visitors.” As the volume increased, Ethan addressed the second problem
concerning the new trail—its location. The Crawfords had situated the trail-
head just north of the narrow gate of the notch, presumably because it was
immediately adjacent to the turnpike (currently Route 302) that ran from
Abel’s inn to Ethan’s inn, spaced some twelve miles apart. Nevertheless, the
location still required visitors to stay eight miles south of the trailhead at
Abel’s inn or four miles north at Ethan’s tavern. “L,” a man from New York,
remarked in an 1820 excursion account published by the Columbian Centinel
in 1824 that his party stayed overnight at Ethan’s inn and proceeded four and
a half miles south on the turnpike the next morning to the trailhead. There,
they sent back their horses and gigs; when they returned, as arranged, their
horses were waiting for them. After the rigors of the overnight ascent, “L”
enjoyed the luxury of “being seated once more in a carriage.” He likely would have enjoyed his excursion less had he been forced to walk back to Ethan’s.

The distance of the Crawford path from lodgings was potentially more than a problem of inconvenience for guests who had to shuttle to and from the trailhead. It could develop into a problem of competition if a rival built an inn nearer to the path, as Ethan explained to a judge in Lancaster in 1834. In 1828, the Crawfords moved to block such a challenge by constructing lodgings next to the trailhead at Elephant Head; younger Crawford son Thomas managed it. On August 1, 1831, Henry James Tudor recorded in his diary that he stayed at Thomas’s inn and began to ascend Mount Washington “directly in the rear of the house.”

In 1820, Ethan again addressed the trailhead proximity problem by building a new trail, the second Crawford path, which led directly east from his existing inn to the base of Mount Washington and ascended to the summit along the approximate route the Cog Railway would use in 1869. In his letter to Judge Upham, cited earlier, Ethan states, “In 1820 Charles J. Stewart and myself in March ran a strait line to the foot of Mount Washington, spent three days, and camped out two nights” to lay out this trail. By 1821, the second Crawford Path was finished. Although the footpath started directly from Ethan’s inn, it still covered more than nine miles to the summit. This led Ethan to address the third problem associated with the path now that the ascent of Washington had begun to appeal to a wider audience than hardy “enthusiasts”—its overall length, nearly nineteen miles, which the press commented upon negatively. On November 25, 1823, for instance, the Salem Gazette noted that a horse or carriage can get no closer than nine and a half miles to the summit and that “most visitors” are unable to walk that distance and return the same day, requiring “a night in the open air or upon the ground under a bark hut.”

Ethan used the newspapers to communicate his intentions to upgrade the initial six miles of the second Crawford path (today the Cog Railway Base Road) into a carriage road, thereby reducing foot travel to the summit to two and a quarter miles. The Gazette article of 1823 concludes by noting that Crawford, who opened the footpath, is willing to make a “good carriage road” to the base of the mountain “provided he can be insured the sum of five hundred dollars to indemnify him for the expense.” A subscription has been opened for this purpose, the Gazette wrote, and it urged all those “who ever intend making a visit to the mountains” to consider investing a few dollars “for their own ease and comfort.” But the next year, July 12, 1824, The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics informed readers that Crawford had
concluded “not to attempt making a carriage way the present season”; instead, he had rebuilt “two good camps” at the foot of the mountain.

On July 1, 1828, however, the Eastern Argus was able to tell readers that not only had Crawford repaired the ravages to the turnpike from the devastating freshet of 1826 that had swept away the Willey family, rendering it “perfectly safe and pleasant for travelers,” but he has “made a comfortable carriage road to within about two miles to the base of Mount Washington.” Further, Ethan and Abel had erected large and commodious buildings just north of the notch for those who “may wish to visit Mount Washington from that place,” that is, the first Crawford path, as well as to witness the effects of the “great avalanches” of 1826. The text of ad copy dated July 1835, quoted earlier, boasts that Crawford’s road to the summit of Mount Washington, “constructed at great expense,” is now “in complete repair and is the only way by which the Mountain is ascended on the western declivity.”

168 Newspapers in Three States
In fewer than ten years, the Crawfords had cut two paths to the summit of Mount Washington and established inns at or a carriage road to their trailheads, not to mention constant improvement to these trails and the erection of camps and shelters along the way. Both trails underwent realignments and changes over the years, with the discontinuation of the second Crawford path after the construction of the Cog Railway in 1869. Nevertheless, together, the Crawford paths brought the ascent of Mount Washington into everyday reach and ensured its ever-increasing popularity. The Crawfords’ accomplishment is testament to their stalwart nature, but it also pays tribute to their business acumen, their awareness that publicity beyond word of mouth report was crucial to their success.

They were fortunate that the New England states were especially rich in newspapers as the Crawfords expanded and improved their assets. By 1819, in addition to the 50 newspapers in New Hampshire, neighboring states were similarly endowed. Maine had at least 18 newspapers by 1819, Massachusetts more than 100. Their editors were receptive to a variety of material about the White Mountains, also called the White Hills—America’s new playground. The article authors were more often men than women. Accounts of visits to the mountains and ascents of Mount Washington appeared frequently. Newspapers further created and then capitalized on reader interest in the White Hills by publishing such miscellaneous notices as the first snowfall on Mount Washington, as did the Boston Commercial Gazette on October 25, 1821, for instance.
And these early papers always appeared hungry for news of the Crawfords, who never seemed to miss an opportunity to promote their inns and trails.

**Bad Press**

Not all the news on the Crawfords and their paths was positive, of course. The papers published accounts of new rival trails from the east that claimed to be superior approaches to Washington. The path from the Hanson Farm in Pinkham Notch, for instance, is not only shorter than a Crawford route but “nowhere crossed by deep ravines or dangerous precipices,” according to a writer in the *Salem Gazette* of July 21, 1829. And firsthand stories of those dangerous precipices could undermine confidence in the safety of Crawford paths. A notable example is the “Ascent of Mount Washington by a Lady of Portsmouth,” published on September 9, 1843, by *The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*. The editor prefaces the piece with the observation, “We have seen many interesting accounts of visits to the White Mountains, but never before read one so graphic as the following.” It’s an accurate introduction to a piece that describes what it was like to ascend the Northeast’s highest mountain on horseback, presumably riding sidesaddle\(^\text{21}\) via the second Crawford trail, which had been converted to a bride path in the early 1840s. Mr. Fabyan was the lady’s guide. (Ethan had only returned to the Notch in 1843 after a temporary withdrawal, and Fabyan now owned his inn.)

The writer from Portsmouth mounted the celebrated horse named Colonel and commenced the ascent on a day near 90 degrees. The ride started out pleasantly enough but soon encountered “wet, muddy places” where logs were laid across the path and the horses stepped between them. “Their feet went so far down in the mud,” she writes, “I almost feared they would never come up.” The writer calmed herself only to encounter what seemed to be a “very irregular flight of stairs.” “The horse would place his foot on a stone once or twice to see if it were sufficiently firm, and finally conclude to go on one side of it.” As the trail grew steeper, perspiration dripped from Colonel’s face, and “he breathed so violently that I seemed to be riding on a pair of living bellows.” As she crossed the Ammonoosuc River seven times in the ascent, “the sound of horses’ feet on the rocks, and the water flying in all directions, were not particularly soothing. No bridges in this region, of course.”

Having ridden seven miles to the base of Mount Washington, the party dismounted, rested the horses, refreshed themselves at a spot then called Moss Cup Spring and then pressed on to the final two miles of steep climb before
“You never saw horses go over such a path; none but such as were trained to it could keep from falling and killing themselves and their riders.” The riders did not attempt to guide their horses; the writer herself “merely held the reins carefully so in case of accident I should not be off my guard.” On the final ascent, the trail passed so close to the abyss that the writer dismounted, “crawled away from the brink, and fairly clung to the rock.” Fabyan encouraged her to remount—“Not I,” she cried as she grabbed an outstretched hand, looked directly on the ground “so as not to become dizzy,” and made her way past the “horrible place.” Having reached the summit on foot with the aid of a hoe as staff, the writer received ample reward for her effort: “All fright and fatigue were amply repaid by the magnificence of the view,” but she still had to cross the “awful place” at the precipice on her return. The lady from Portsmouth concludes her account not with lavish praise for the guide, the sublime view, or the Crawford trail, but for Colonel, the trusty steed who carried her through the ordeal terrified but otherwise unscathed.

The Crawfords’ relentless effort to publicize their trails and inns also came in for ridicule. In the Portsmouth Herald, September 18, 1832, a correspondent lampooned Ethan’s plan to publish the guest register for his inn, “White Mountain Album.” The British travel writer Harriet Martineau, who visited Crawford Notch in 1835, remarks that the elder Crawford “almost insists that his guests shall write” their impressions and observations in his “pet album,” evidently with an eye toward using this material as publicity fodder. The Herald’s correspondent panned Ethan’s entries as a “flat and insipid” collection of the “same story told over and over again of the marvels, wonders, and experiences of those gentlemen and ladies who have ascended and descended the highest land in North America,” to which they sometimes attach “their original poetry or villainous dog-general rhyme.” “Galen forbid,” the correspondent continues, that Ethan ever execute his intention to “send his album to Boston for publication” and thereby “such nonsense find its way outside the gap of the mountains.” Ethan never published the album. Not all the news is fit to print.

On August 12, 1833, John Palmer penned an appreciative comment in the guest register of Ethan’s hotel after his ascent of Mount Washington with Nathan Ball of Boston: “God made the mountain, but Crawford made the road.” He praised E. A. Crawford as one “who has done much to facilitate” this ascent. Palmer’s association of the creator of the mountain with the creator of the road reflects Ethan’s near legendary reputation for turning the wilderness of Crawford Notch into a tourist mecca, if not paradise.
well-known fortitude, strength, and derring-do have been rightly celebrated as the engines of his accomplishment, but it was more than prodigious personal agency that made both Ethan and Abel the founding fathers of White Mountain tourism. Their endeavors were supported by the ideology of republicanism, which, Scheffen writes, created the belief that access to the news, and therefore to newspapers, was an American birthright. In the new republic of the United States, newspapers were the “book of the people.” The Crawfords settled the wilderness, hacked out trails, and built inns, but, in this book, they also wrote White Mountain tourism into existence.24

Notes
11. Chamberlain to Crawford.
12. The reference to torn clothing probably alludes to earlier ascents on the eastern side of Mount Washington through a “formidable hedge” of spruce and fir. This “zone of evergreens
has always constituted one of the most serious difficulties in the ascent of the White Hills,” although a path cut by Colonel Gibbs “much facilitates” the passage through them, according to Jacob Bigelow’s account reprinted in The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics, August 11, 1821.

13. Other early functional paths made and used by Native Americans and white settlers may have developed into hiking trails, but no definite dates can be established. See Guy Waterman, An Outline of Trail Development in the White Mountains, 1840–1980, eds. Al Hudson and Judith Maddock Hudson (Randolph, NH: Randolph Mountain Club, 2005), 2.


15. de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 209.


19. Letter to Honorable Nathan Upham from Ethan A. Crawford. Crawford Papers, MS 626. Rauner Special Collections, Dartmouth College. This 1834 letter to Judge Upham of Lancaster concerns the poaching of Ethan’s trail by a rival, William Dennison, who wants “whole use of my road, and I am not willing to give him that privilege.” By using Ethan’s road, Dennison could claim that his route to the summit was shorter. See also Crawford, History, 48. In 1832, Dennison promoted his White Mountain Hotel by advertising it as located “one half mile from E. A. Crawford” and possessing “everything necessary to ascend the mountains,” including, presumably, use of Ethan’s trail (New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette, August 6, 1832).


24. In a work in progress, I examine early newspapers as “the people’s guidebook” to the White Mountains.

Susan Schibanoff is professor emerita of English and gender studies at the University of New Hampshire. She lives in Franconia, New Hampshire.
Letters

A Tribute to Gene Daniell, from a White Mountain Guide Co-Author

On December 11, 2019, New Hampshire lost one of its truly original and unique individuals, Eugene “Gene” Daniell, with whom I had the pleasure of working for over a decade on the 25th and 26th editions of the AMC White Mountain Guide and the first edition of the AMC Southern New Hampshire Trail Guide.

Gene and I met on a beautiful late-summer day in September 1982 on the summit of Mount Jefferson—he with his two young children and I with mine. He told me about his work on “the book,” and I challenged him that one day we would work on it together.

Six years later, I got in touch with him to remind him of my commitment, and he challenged me back by assigning me chapter 2 of the guide—wheel, measure, and log—and never expected to hear from me again. Chapter 2 covers the Northern Presidential Range (Mounts Clay, Jefferson, Adams, Madison), which has by far the steepest, roughest, and arguably most beautiful trails in our mountains. The way mileages are measured in the book is by taking a surveyor’s wheel with 800 rotations to the mile and rolling this wheel over every rock, cliff, crevice, and stream and thus calculating the mileage to the nearest 0.01 mile.

I completed the challenge in three weeks, and a partnership was born that lasted over a decade. Our division of labor initially was that I would hike and measure each and every trail, and Gene would take my measurements and observations and convert them into trail descriptions. Eventually he began trusting me with the writing. I would send him the log along with a draft description, which he always found a way to make more eloquent. We eventually broke the guide (which we had begun calling “the brick” because it had become so large and cumbersome) into two books, dividing the trails of the White Mountain National Forest with those trails south of that region into the southern guide.

My favorite part of the project was visiting him in his home in Concord amid his stacks and stacks of stacks and stacks. He collected copies of anything pertaining to the New Hampshire outdoors. His home was a library unlike any I had ever seen, organized in a labyrinth that only he could decipher. We would
go over the copy of each trail description and then debate for hours whether a trail was very steep, steep, rather steep, moderately steep, or somewhat steep. His acerbic wit, erudite mind, and endlessly curious intellect was a source of great pleasure, and I never tired of our time together. His friendship, collaboration, and unique way of looking at the world equaled the joy for me of exploring every inch of our state’s extraordinary 2,000-plus miles of trail.

Gene shared an indelible part of my life, and I will always be grateful for the time we shared doing something that was such a great source of passion and pleasure for us both. I hope that wherever his spirit resides, he will finally be able to peakbag to his heart’s content without any further limit of body or time.

—Jon Burroughs, Glen, New Hampshire

Common Loons on Squam Lake

I am writing to provide some clarifications to the article, “Common Loons Struggle on a Lake That Should Be Perfect for Them” (Research, Winter/Spring 2020), for which I was interviewed.

The article stated that one of the problems facing Squam Lake’s loons is “leaking chemicals outlawed years ago but still used to kill insects.” It is important to note that the Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) has found a wide range of contaminants that may be impacting Squam Lake’s loons. While insecticides such as DDT and chlordane are some of these contaminants, they also include PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], dioxins/furans, flame retardants, and PFAS contaminants [per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, industrial chemicals]. We do not believe the insecticides or other legacy contaminants like PCBs, dioxins, and furans are currently in use. These contaminants have been banned for decades and their use is illegal, but they do persist in the environment. We believe the legacy contaminants we discovered in Squam loon eggs and the Squam watershed were applied to the landscape prior to being banned and, at least in the case of the DDT we found in sediments, have recently become mobilized. Also, we do not know whether these contaminants are leaking into the environment. We do not have proof of that with the insecticides, although it is a possibility, and we suspect another mechanism for the known site of PCB, dioxin, and furan contamination.

The article also stated that, in response to the decline in Squam’s loon population between 2005 and 2007, “Scientists began to question the water quality.” What occurred at this time was that LPC tested unhatched loon
eggs from failed nests and found elevated levels of chemical contaminants in Squam eggs compared with loon eggs from other lakes. The discovery and ongoing testing of contaminants in unhatched loon eggs from failed nests has been an important part of LPC’s research on Squam, links these contaminants directly to loons, and led to our testing of crayfish and sediments and subsequent discovery of areas of contaminated sediments in the watershed, which was referenced in the article.

Subsequent to this research showing elevated levels of contaminants in loon eggs, LPC has been emphasizing the need for a broader definition of water quality, but it needs to be put in the context that these contaminants biomagnify and bioaccumulate as they move through the food web. It does not suggest that swimming, boating, and other recreational water activities are a problem on Squam. However, given the movement of these contaminants through the food web and the levels we found in Squam loon eggs and tributary sediments, the recent issuance of a fish consumption advisory on Squam due to elevated levels of PCBs is not surprising.

Finally, I would like to clarify the statement in the article, “Loons were shot in apparent protest by fishers in spring 2014.” Two loons were shot in spring 2014 with rifle slugs and federal investigations were carried out, as loons are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but the perpetrators were not found and there is no proof as to their motivation and whether or not they were anglers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these clarifications, and thank you for highlighting the plight of loons on Squam Lake in *Appalachia*.

—Tiffany Grade, Moultonborough, New Hampshire

Tiffany Grade is the Squam Lakes biologist for the Loon Preservation Committee.

*Editor’s note: In the article, which I reported and wrote, the list of possible predators should have included ring-billed gulls (not ring-necked gulls). I should have clarified that the screening on the floating rafts created for common loons to nest is made with natural vegetation; the top is covered with manufactured material. As Grade notes, loons are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act; they are a state-threatened species in New Hampshire but not a federally listed one. The LPC has banded at least twenty loons on Squam Lake—more than “several” as the article said. In both 2016 and 2017 but not 2015, a single chick survived on Squam Lake.  

—Christine Woodside*
Wilson “Snowflake” Bentley, Photographer
1865–1931

He catches snowflakes in a velvet box,
in a forest of yellow birch and sugar maple,
lungs filled with gathering cold. The tripod legs
of his giant camera break the ice. A crow calls
as the first flakes drift. He lifts crystals with a feather
onto a glass microscope slide, adjusts the pulse of knobs

and dials. He experiments with the camera: the smallest aperture,
long exposures. Nature’s designs come into focus:

hexagonal arms, dendrite stars. Jewels never seen before.
Perfect symmetry—it’s own miracle. What is delicate

quickly melts away. Summer nights, he hangs a bed sheet
on a neighbor’s clothesline, projects slides of winter’s beauty

for the children of Jericho.

Francis Lunney

Francis Lunney’s poems have appeared in Outside Bozeman, Tar River Poetry, Salamander, and Blueline. One of his poems is part of the Poetry in the Park installation at Edmands Park in Newton, Massachusetts. He also had a poem aired on WCAI’s (Cape Cod’s NPR station) Poetry Sunday program. He currently lives in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where he works as a reading specialist.
Accidents

Analysis from the White Mountains of New Hampshire and occasionally elsewhere

“HEAR THAT?”

“What? I don’t hear anything except background hum.”

“Exactly. That’s the sound of our absence.”

That imagined exchange, between two imaginary friends atop Franconia Ridge, recalls last winter in the Whites, a quiet season that ended with the whisper of closure. With the late March closing of Mount Washington’s
east-facing ravines and a number of trailheads, we entered a different sort of shoulder season, one of folding in instead of melting and blooming out.

Even before stats from the coronavirus began accumulating, winter 2019–2020’s climbing and sliding season had raised barely a ripple of worry and seen only a few sloughs of people-catching snow in the usual slick spots. The weather had been ho-hum (for winter), and, whether through sudden wisdom or accumulated karma, backcountry wanderers and adventurers hadn’t set off any major rescue efforts and the swirl of story they summon. A few of us had found trouble, of course, but the practiced people who extricate us from that trouble did exactly that. Or, we got ourselves out.

Then, first with a sort of cirrus overlay that suggested some change in the offing, and then in fits of arrival, the virus moved in. We learned quickly to eye each other as carriers, animals to be avoided or kept at distance (which got tagged oddly as “social”). Work went home with us; we grew overly familiar with a small cast of characters and a small set of rooms. From which we began to plan escapes, virtual and real. So many new Houdinis in tight spaces. We grew adept at twisting and turning within our bonds, slipping, finally, out.

But once out, where? Many of us who dream mountains turned to our local trails and lands, any place where a tree grew and the land roughed up, if we were lucky enough to have such places close by and preserved. Already bonded with a set of local trails and lands before the pandemic, I felt those bonds intensify as winter waned and spring tried to come on. My foot-dependent sister- and brotherhood reported the same.

Then, as March appeared and deepened, the viral storm broke. For those of us accustomed to mountain storms, so demonstrative with their racketing snows and rains and deep-voiced winds, this contagion puzzled. So little announcement; for some, no announcement at all, their roles simply being transport. “Take me to work,” or, “Take me shopping,” the virus might have said. And, for a while, we did.

The storm did raise its voice in our media, which, once they latched onto numbers and early deaths, raised a ruckus. And, given many platforms from which to speak, we joined in. “Can you hear me now?” asks a cell carrier’s old ad about coverage. “Now?” “Yes,” we all answered from our pods of place. “Yes.” The storm, true to its mimicry of mountain cousins, was in full voice. We sheltered in place.

Here, before we return to a few ideas about bringing our mountains to our places, are a few incidents from the winter past.

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Getting Out

January 16 broke as a usual gray winter day. Mount Washington’s Observatory reported an average temperature of 4 degrees Fahrenheit and winds in the 40s, with a storm blowing in later in the day. For Gary C., age 62, such days suggested getting up into the mountains. He had already completed his list of 4,000-footers in winter, and he was back at the midpoint on the list and on Mount Willey for a second go-round.

A little after 1 p.m., on a steep section near the top, Gary fell, injuring his right leg to the point where he knew he needed help. Absent cell phone service in this spot, he began trying to slide himself down as a form of self-rescue, while also hoping and waiting for help; an hour or so later he got the luck of two prepared passersby. When Jessica S. and Monica N., both age 28, arrived, Gary said he thought he’d broken his leg and couldn’t walk.

The two passing hikers were able to get Gary up, and, with their assistance, he moved short distance downhill, but then he had to stop and rest. Still some 2.5 miles from the trailhead, the group decided that Jessica would hike out and call for help, and Monica would keep working with Gary to get closer to down. Jessica got to her car and found a house that let her call 911 at around 4:10 p.m. She reported Gary’s injury and his and Monica’s location as the point last seen. New Hampshire Fish and Game set about organizing a rescue.

Sgt. Alex Lopashanski headed for Crawford Notch, arriving there a little before 6 p.m., noting that the temperature was 23 degrees and that “it was extremely windy with blowing snow.” Lopashanski had summoned conservation officers to climb the trails leading up from Gary’s and Monica’s respective cars. Just before 7 p.m., as two COs were starting up the Appalachian Trail from Willey Station Road, they saw headlamps, which turned out to be Gary and Monica. Gary was then taken by ambulance to Littleton General Hospital. He reported to Lopashanski the next day that he had a fractured kneecap and separated quad muscle in his right leg.

Comment: This Thursday afternoon rescue caught my eye for its hiker competence and resilience. Begin with beginning: When Gary slipped near Mount Willey’s summit in the early afternoon, he was already on the way down; a little later, when his rescuers found him, they too were headed down. That’s as it should be in mid-January, when days are short, and when weather’s on the way. NHFG reported that all three hikers were well equipped. Gary had the gear to wait, and Jessica and Monica had the gear to slow down and help him. Gear (in all seasons) is about two things: being where you are safely, and being able to wait there safely.
As I have noted many times, downhill is winter’s problem direction. Even with traction devices, a hiker negotiating a steep, slippery section risks falling, with the fall’s effects multiplied by sliding’s quick accelerant. Which offers different consequence from that of the other three seasons. What would be a bump or a bruise from a summer sit-down can ramify quickly when we slide downhill and collide with whatever’s at the slope’s edge. The best winter hikers I know are far warier of steeps when there’s ice around than at other times. And they switch over to crampons whenever the slope grows steep, even if it’s only for a hundred yards of walking. Also, they will shift their routes from a steep open slope into trailside woods, even if that makes for thicker going.

Jessica and Monica brought skill and reassurance with them when they arrived at Gary’s accident. They got Gary up and moving slowly down and were able to summon help quickly. Their decision to split up, while carrying its own risk, offered help in the two most likely scenarios—Jessica would get organized numbers of rescuers if Gary was unable to move enough to get out, while Monica would work to help him down, either getting him to the trailhead or shortening the carryout.

The other arena in any rescue lies inside the person in trouble. Not long after his rescue, Gary posted a description of it on his Facebook page. Its lines help us appreciate his efforts and, especially, admiration for the work and composure of his rescuers. Here are two illuminating clips from that post:

Last Thursday while descending the Willey Ridge Trail in Crawford Notch I slipped pinning my right leg behind and subsequently heard a loud crack/snap above the knee near the femur. Obviously in pain, I placed my hands under my hamstring to straighten my leg. There was no support, no pressure, no muscle coordination, leg was limp. Hiking solo, I knew that I was in serious trouble and proceeded to slide/crawl through eight inches of fresh snow for the next twenty minutes. Time became a constant factor with shock and hypothermia imminent. The typical hiking day turned into life-threatening hike on a grand scale.

Jessica volunteered to trek back to her vehicle and drive to [the Appalachian Mountain Club’s] Highland Center to contact the appropriate officials. Monica’s calm demeanor and my insight concluded that we were on our own and that this was to become a self-rescue, for rescue was at least 6–8 hours away. With blowing winds, dropping temperatures in the teens and wind-chills below, for the next 6 hours I hobbled while Monica packed trail, gullies,
chopped ice/snow repeatedly from my micro spike while I bent the damaged leg. We traversed countless gullies, streambeds with me balancing precariously on two hiking poles over the next 2.5 miles. Monica's repeated statements that “we are close,” that “we are going to succeed” and her refusal to leave me in the woods that evening in extreme conditions was nothing but positive coaching.

Finally, past the point of exhaustion with Monica’s pigtails encased in ice, my backpack frozen to my Gore-Tex slicker, we arrived at the trailhead/parking lot at approximately 7:15 p.m.

We all can hope for this sort of help and resilience when a hike goes wrong.

Solo note: Gary’s crisis was intensified by his being alone when he fell. Even as I practice and support hiking solo in all seasons, I prepare for possibly being stranded when injured and accept that my risk is heightened. Had Jessica and Monica not come along, it’s likely that, at the least, he would have spent the night out injured and alone. How such a forced night out unfolds is unpredictable. But all of us who walk out solo should have conversations with ourselves that ask how we would fare in such a scenario.

**Reminder “Rescue”**

Here’s a short read. On March 26, a clear, 40-degree day, at 6 p.m., NHFG received word of a 911 call from Brittany L.-D., who said that she and her friend Vanessa S. (whose ages were not reported) had lost Mount Passaconaway’s Dicey’s Mill Trail on their way down and needed help getting out. NHFG was unable to reach the two hikers via phone, so they dispatched CO Joseph T. Canfield to the trailhead. As he pulled up, he saw two women getting into a car. They were the hikers who had called.

Brittany and Vanessa reported losing the trail at a river crossing rife with ice, where they had sought an easier route. They said they had called because the hike seemed to be taking longer than it should and they couldn’t rediscover the trail. Canfield found that, although they had microspikes and adequate clothing and supplies, they carried no map, compass, or headlamps. The pair had been relying on the app AllTrails on their phones.

**Comment:** So, no rescue at all, nor, I would say, any need for the call. Headlamps? Always, in any season, for any length hike. The ongoing hiker migration from maps and compass and capability with them to map apps that rely on signals and GPS? A problem, with more frequent disorientation and loss of context; the mountains simply don't fit on a little screen.
Note the diversion to avoid ice that gets the pair off-trail. Such diversions are good practice, but they do put more pressure on one’s route-finding and sense of a place.

Appalachia Editor-in-Chief Chris Woodside offered the following anecdote as support for this comment: “I had a sobering experience with AllTrails in late July in Royalston, Massachusetts. The app would not load when I needed to check where I was. Not even the map as I’d last viewed it would show up on the screen. Reception was too spotty. I agree that actual maps and compass are paramount. The problem as I see it now that the app failed me is not only a lack of wider context but the danger of suddenly not having a map at all.”

Off the Rails
On March 22, a late-afternoon phone call alerted NHFG to 35-year-old Ashley F.’s fall near the Cog Railway on the west side of Mount Washington. Ashley’s friend and hiking companion Lindsay T. had made the call. The weather was clear with temperatures in the 20s.

Earlier in the day, the two friends, equipped with experience and good gear, had climbed Washington via the direct approach of the railway corridor. Their microspikes had offered good purchase on the firm snowpack, which, in places, filled in the gaps between stones. Bathed in the westering sun, Ashley and Lindsay began their descent, again following the path of the railway.

Near the steep section called Jacob’s Ladder, Ashley slipped and began to slide on the slick surface. In Lt. Mark Ober’s incident report, based on interviews with Ashley and Lindsay, he wrote this: “She slid uncontrollably headfirst toward Burt Ravine. After sliding for approximately 200 feet, she was able to turn her body just before striking rocks, which stopped her fall.”

When Lindsay made her careful way down to Ashley, she found her with a serious, bleeding gash near her hip and what seemed to be broken ribs. The pair was now perched on a ledge just above a steep drop-off, and Lindsay was sure they couldn’t move safely, even if Ashley were able to walk. Lindsay called 911, and at 4:15 p.m. Ober got the call, with Lindsay’s phone number and her coordinates, which placed the pair at around 4,700 feet, roughly two miles from the base. Ober’s calls to Lindsay went unanswered.

Ober contacted three NHFG COs and the Twin Mountain Fire Department, asking that they make their tracked all-terrain vehicle available. He then set out for the Base Station, arriving at 5:30 p.m. Unable to locate the pair with
binoculars or his spotting scope, Ober was pleased when he got Lindsay’s call. (Her phone had been turned off on advice from 911 to preserve her battery.)

Lindsay gave Ober a clear sense that Ashley’s injuries were significant and that they were stuck in this steep, iced terrain. At 6:30 p.m. Chief Jeremy Oleson of Twin Mountain Fire started up in his tracked ATV, reaching Jacob’s Ladder in roughly 10 minutes. There, he was stopped by the steep, exposed slope. At 7 p.m., the three COs started up on snowmobiles. They were able to cover roughly 1.5 miles before terrain and absence of snow halted them; they hiked up to join Oleson. When the four rescuers reached a level adjacent to the stranded pair, they set up their ropes and, while Oleson belayed them, the COs worked their way over 200 feet of steep, icy terrain to Ashley and Lindsay, reaching the pair at 7:45 p.m.

The COs determined they would need a litter and more gear to move Ashley and that once she was off the ledge, they’d need a better way down than snowmobiles. Ober called the Cog Railway and asked for a train to carry Ashley down. The railway hurried to ready a train, and Twin Mountain Fire called in two emergency medical technicians.

One of the three COs returned to the base on his snowmobile for the added gear and brought it back up, and the COs worked to secure Ashley in the litter and then move her to the tracks. At around 9:30 p.m. the train started up. As the train climbed, the three COs brought Ashley up to the tracks: two COs hand-hauled the litter, while one stayed next to it, maintaining balance. Then CO Robert Mancini returned to the ledge to help Lindsay up from it.

A little after 10 p.m., the train arrived, and by roughly 10:30 p.m. Ashley and Lindsay were aboard it and headed down. The train and passengers reached the base at 11 p.m., where an ambulance met them. NHFG and Twin Mountain personnel spent the next few hours retrieving gear, clearing the mountain a little after 1 a.m.

In subsequent interviews, Ober learned more about the genesis of the accident. Ashley, Lindsay, and two other friends had started up the railway corridor in the early afternoon, finding firm snow and good going with their microspikes. At the top, their two friends set out down the Crawford Path, while Ashley and Lindsay aimed back down the railway. There, in the steep section where Ashley fell, they encountered conditions icier than they’d found on their ascent. The warm spring sun had melted some of the snow and then the afternoon’s cooling had refrozen it as ice.

When Ashley slipped, she landed on her butt and began sliding quickly; her body also turned with her head pointing downhill. As she neared the edge
of Burt Ravine, she was able to spin and ended up hitting the rocks with her side. That both stopped and injured her.

Lindsay said, “It happened so fast.” When Ashley slipped, she rapidly slid out of sight, and Lindsay began calling her name and descending carefully in the direction of Ashley’s slide; at a small crest she looked down and saw Ashley on the rocks. Lindsay was able to reach Ashley and make her 911 call. She turned then to keeping her friend warm while they waited. The wait would stretch out into hours, as is common with injuries in remote places.

Comment: A headshot of Mount Washington’s west side makes obvious the snow-season appeal of a railway corridor route to the top. It’s close to a straight shot, open and sun-happy on a clear late March day. Yes, it’s steep in its direct approach to contours, but the tracks climb between Burt and Ammonoosuc Ravines, avoiding their dark, iced rocks or the trails that climb fitfully around them. Experienced hikers like Ashley and Lindsay wouldn’t see trouble in such a climb.

Each climb is different, however, with variations showing themselves in subtleties and little surprises. This one turned on a change noted by Ober in his report: The snow was firm and the temperatures in the 30s as the four climbers went up in the early afternoon; the March sun would have been strong on the slope. By the time Ashley and Lindsay started down, the sun angle was dropping and the temperature cooling. When they reached the steep section where Ashley slipped and slid, the surface had iced over, making her descent riskier; when she slipped and hit that surface, she accelerated quickly.

Ober also noted that, ideally, the pair would have been equipped with crampons and ice axes—better traction and a possibility for self-arrest. But even those added pieces of gear wouldn’t eliminate risk on an iced-over steep slope. As the U.S. Forest Service snow rangers in Tuckerman Ravine often write about the danger of long, sliding falls, there is very little time (or chance) for self-arrest on a steep, open, icy slope. If self-arrest doesn’t happen immediately, the force of your body sliding at speed will overpower whatever strength and technique you bring to your attempt at self-arrest.

I recall working to learn self-arrest skills during an Appalachian Mountain Club winter workshop. We were on a moderately steep, open slope with a level, soft-snow runout at its base as insurance. Lying on my back, head pointed downhill, I shoved off tentatively; even having been instructed and warned about how quickly I would gain speed, I was shocked by it. There
was simply no traction between the synthetic shell I was wearing and the icy surface, and I felt out of control immediately. After a few attempts, I succeeded in rolling over and digging in the point of my ice axe (held firmly to chest with both hands)—while remembering not to dig in with my crampon-points at the same time to avoid ankle injury. Each attempt was experimental, fraught; only occasionally did I succeed. My primary takeaway was this: DON’T FALL.

That was when I knew I would slide and had had a chance to review technique before each attempt. What about an unexpected slip? I wondered. I knew my chance of self-arrest, even with more practice, would be on the low side of slim. “It happened so fast,” said Lindsay, of Ashley’s fall.

All of this suggests that those of us who go out and up in winter need winter eyes. Those eyes see familiar slopes, especially open ones, differently. Alert for shifts in surface and the ways snow and ice vary, even on the same slopes and with each passing hour, winter eyes also scan constantly for where a fall can take you. “Where might I end up?” they ask. The USFS snow rangers cite the need for such awareness repeatedly as they write about conditions, winter climbing, and skiing in the steep ravines on Mount Washington’s east side. It takes only a little imagination to extend that need for winter eyes to any snow or ice slope you may be contemplating or crossing.

Crampons: It is also vital to carry these on any big mountain or open slope in the winter Whites. Using them effectively takes instruction and practice, but while microspikes may get the majority of the wear on any given day, crampons simply offer superior traction. That’s even more evident when headed downhill, our problem direction.

**Sliding Example**

Here is a point of emphasis added to the incident just described. It took place on March 9, and my hope is that when you read this, the video clip of the fall (linked to from the Mount Washington Avalanche Center’s website) will still be available at mountwashingtonavalanchecenter.org/long-sliding-fall-chute-3/. The narrative here is also based on that site’s description.

March 9 saw mostly sunshine, and, for Mount Washington, it was mild, with a temperature average of 28 at the summit. A significant snowpack made Tuckerman Ravine a lure on such a day. Around noon, AMC’s Hermit Lake caretaker happened to look up and see a body come hurtling downslope from
the gully known as the Chute. The caretaker and a snow ranger responded and found, to their relief, that the skier seemed uninjured. He was able to walk down to Hermit Lake; from there he was driven in a snowmobile down to Pinkham Notch.

The falling skier was reported to have been climbing near the Chute’s top in leather boots with microspikes and without an ice axe; his skis and ski boots were on a backpack.

Comment: The snow rangers point out both the risks of such a climb and the necessity of using stiff boots, crampons, and an ice axe on such steep snow, when not belayed by a rope and partner. They write, “Preventing a fall from happening is a climber’s/skier’s primary means of safety since arresting a fall with an ice axe is difficult with, and impossible without.”

Closures in Late March

A March 20 podcast posted on the Mount Washington Avalanche Center site and conducted by Andrew Drummond of Ski the Whites featured lead snow ranger Frank Carus and visitor and volunteer Mike Austin, who runs an avalanche education school in Chamonix, France. Carus and Austin have done a good deal of snow training and skiing together. Drummond’s podcasts are available at mountwashingtonavalanchecenter.org. Search for the March 20 podcast under “News.”

On Austin’s first morning at Hermit Lake, a call came in at 10 a.m. saying that a hiker was stuck on the headwall. Austin and Carus climbed up to help. The hiker, a visitor from New Jersey, had “frozen” on the icy, steep slope, and as Carus talked to him, the hiker said he had been in a hospital emergency room at home, and, with a little more probing, Carus learned that there had been a COVID-19 case in that ER the day before.

That moment of exposure and recognition crystallizes the new risks rescuers assume when a pandemic is on. That story, joined with the general late March scene in Tuckerman Ravine, led the USFS to close the Cutler River drainage visitors at the end of March. In their March 28 podcast, Carus and Drummond could easily look up and count groups of skiers walking closely together and headed for more crowding in the bowl above. The drainage would stay closed until June 8, when it joined a number of other White Mountain locales in a general reopening of trails. A few days after the decision to close, Mount Washington Avalanche Center suspended avalanche forecasting, even as it acknowledged that doing so deprived those going to other
backcountry locales of a vital snow-knowing resource. The suspension represented an underlining of the recommendation—from all manner of authorities—that we, the mountain-going public, shift our goings-out to local ones with low risk.

**What’s Different:** Even six months before this column sees print after our truncated winter, much has been written about our changed worlds, the mountain one included. Adjectives for difference pile up like winter snows: strange, odd, unprecedented, life-altering, isolating, mind-boggling. You have your own go-to descriptors. The mountains are—as they always are said to be—still there. If we leave aside the other 800-pound gorilla in the room, climate change, the mountains are largely themselves. Only the slow melting of stone toward the sea registers on them over many human lifetimes.

But we, of course, have changed, have had to alter behavior or stubbornly resist such change, even as our expectations for what we’ll find in the mountains and who we’ll be there have endured. We still seek “freedom of the hills”; we still want a linkage with a physical (and spiritual?) self who, like any good animal, needs getting out for exercise, vision, and affirmation. And so, as of this writing, we still go.

Those who watch over the mountains, who monitor our comings and goings and rescue us on occasion, suggest we take the frontcountry alterations of behavior (distancing, awareness of aerosols, regard for fellow seekers) to the mountains. Many of us have. Others, not so much. See, for example, the aforementioned USFS closure of the Cutler River drainage (the Tuckerman Ravine side of Mount Washington) and a number of trailheads in spring 2020 because of disregard and crowding. Where we are headed next with our backcountry lives seems as uncertain as our lives in our cities and towns.

In the late spring, I asked USFS trail steward and AMC Board of Advisors member Chris Eliot to reflect on this time. Chris lives in Ossipee, New Hampshire, and spends a good deal of foot-time in the Whites:

In terms of volunteer work, WMNF has suspended all the trailhead and other steward responsibilities for the summer. We were also instructed that while we could wear our volunteer gear on hikes we should not proactively be giving hiking advice. Slowly but surely they have been opening up trailheads and parking areas but some still are “closed.” Of course this does not prevent hikers from parking on the Kanc [Kancamagus Highway], near the
AMC Crawford and Pinkham centers and heading to the mountains. I was just at Crawford midweek last week and saw about 30 cars [even as the Highland Center was closed then].

In my limited travels throughout the Whites I would say that that trails are at 50 percent of normal activity. An interesting and probably expected development has been the increase in the hiking of lesser known and utilized areas. We have discovered many Audubon sanctuaries, Nature Conservancy tracts, and Society for the Protection of NH Forest reservations. Also, I have climbed many 2,000-foot mountains and hills that were previously under the radar screen for me. This latter occurrence has been quite rewarding, as I would probably have continued to overlook them without the pandemic. While the lengths of these hikes have been shorter, the views have been better than I would have expected.

At a recent AMC Board of Advisors Zoom meeting, many other participants echoed these sentiments. With proper social distancing we have also been connecting with peers for an every-Sunday-morning hike. The lower elevations have been more inclusive for those who don’t want to or can’t do the higher mountains. We consider ourselves extremely fortunate that we have these opportunities and recognize that many others do not.

One certain change goes to the heart of this column. Our search-and-rescue work has had to change in how we imagine it and how we practice it. Even with full protective equipment, there is no social distance in a rescue effort. Instead there is an intimacy. It sounds a trifle hyperbolic, but it is also true that rescuers bring with them the touch of life. Whether it’s splinting a fracture, rewarming someone going cold, or the desperate hope of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, rescuers are suddenly close. And in that closeness they are exposed to whatever we “have.”

That, I would argue, has put an even greater responsibility on us. Going out into the mountains always carries its risks, but it is up to us to minimize them more vigilantly than in the past. As NHFG’s Colonel Kevin Jordan announced as the COVID-19 storm broke, “This is not the time for epic hikes or backcountry adventures.” Instead it is (and always will be) a good time to savor the renaissance of self to be found on any trail up any rise in any woods.

It may seem odd—but these are “odd” times—to turn to a poet of place for advice about how to be and go outdoors, but Wendell Berry’s “Traveling at Home” gets at the heart of going out . . . and coming back:
Even in country you know by heart
it’s hard to go the same way twice.
The life of the going changes.
The chances change and make it a new way.
Any tree or stone or bird
can be the bud of a new direction. The
natural correction is to make intent
of accident. To get back before dark
is the art of going.

Another Way to Get There: Following Steve

There are few more knowledgeable (and understated) White Mountain walkers than Steve Smith, owner of Lincoln’s Mountain Wanderer Bookstore, author of AMC’s iconic White Mountain Guide and several other books set in the Whites, and curator-creator of Mountain Wandering, my favorite White Mountain blog. When I can’t reach the Whites and pine still for connection to my home ranges, I check the blog every day. Two or three days of each week’s seven, I find a new, photo-rich post, which is a signal to settle back and trace slowly along Steve’s wanderings. Often, I break out a map to follow along. Those wanderings take me out of whatever little pocket of work or woe I may be tucked into.

In these days of closures and low risk-taking, because he is also a mountain citizen and former rescuer with Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue, Steve has been staying low and at distance from others, which takes him often into off-trail woods to visit historic sites or ledgy viewpoints. He is a frequent bushwhacker. The “whacking” he favors doesn’t scuffle with thick firs and hobblebush—though he will do so if necessary—but rather it’s hardwood whacking through big well-spaced trees. Steve’s a hardwood connoisseur, enriching his blog with photos of large or anomalous birches and maples and ashes of various configurations and ages. He likes his hardwood groves almost as much as his ledges, where, given clement weather, he gazes out, names what he sees, and (sometimes) naps.

So what, if you were to click on mountainwandering.blogspot.com/, might you find? Where might you go? More than 1,000 possibilities have been archived over the past eleven years. Finger-walking back through these archives is like finding eleven seasons of backlogged episodes of a show you’ve begun to favor. Riches!

We all could do worse (much) than to walk like or with Steve.

—Sandy Stott
Accidents Editor
Polar Vortex

Far to the north, a whirling mass
of arctic air sheds sheets of itself southward.

I pull my fingers out of their wool sheaths,
curl them into my palms for warmth,

and follow your signature in the snow
through the field, through a break

in the stone wall, where last summer
a garter snake and her heaped-up hatchlings
lay on sunbaked leaves.
Now they lie below, slow but awake.

I trudge onto the frozen lake,
Thoreau’s quiet parlor of fishes,

and stand as far as I can from any shore—
while down below, the spotted turtle rests
beneath a blanket of mud, his heart
beating once every eight frozen minutes.

Laurie D. Morrissey

Laurie D. Morrissey’s poems have appeared in The Worcester Review, Poetry East, Blueline, Acorn, Frogpond, Modern Haiku, The Heron’s Nest, and many other journals. Her collection of haiku, the slant of april snow, was published by Red Moon Press (2019). She lives in New Hampshire and is a poetry editor at The Worcester Review.
Alpina

A semiannual review of mountaineering in the greater ranges

COVID-19

On March 18, 2020, Everest commentator Alan Arnette wrote in his blog, “I think it is safe to rule out climbing anywhere for the next several months.” His observation was swiftly followed by the announcement of the closure of Denali for all of 2020. Everest and other Himalayan peaks were closed. Nepal began to reissue climbing permits for the fall climbing season in August 2020, but many expedition operators were still wary of resuming trips. “I think running an expedition now would be trial and error,” Lukas Furtenbach, owner of Furtenbach Adventures, told Rock and Ice in July. “Trial and error was never our strategy for expeditions, where we are responsible for the lives of our staff and our clients.”

In Memoriam

Joe Brown (1930–2020). One of the greatest climbers of the twentieth century, the Briton Joe Brown, died on April 15, 2020, after a long illness. He was 89. No brief memorial can do justice to his career. Some of it may be found in his early (1967) autobiography, The Hard Years (Gollancz). It abounds in understatement and humor.

Brown burst upon the British rock-climbing scene in 1951. He was at the center of the Rock and Ice Club, which dominated British rock climbing in the 1950s. Often partnering with Don Whillans, Brown revolutionized the standards of what could be done in Wales and elsewhere in Britain. In 1952 he was the first to lead the famous Cenotaph Corner, a short but gorgeous line on Dinas Cromlech in Wales. His main focus was on Clogwyn Du’r Arddu in Snowdonia National Park, also in Wales. “Cloggy” is a dark and fearsome cliff. There, he and his cohort opened many steep routes, often in the rain, of which Wales provides a lot.

With Whillans and others, he made many hard climbs in the Alps. He broke into major mountaineering with the 1955 expedition to Kangchenjunga, at 8,586 meters the third-highest peak in the world, and at the time...
the highest still unclimbed. His participation was noteworthy because, like Whillans, he was of working-class background, unlike almost all of his predecesors. He trained as an apprentice plumber and general builder. Rock and Ice member Vin Betts, remembering Brown in Jim Perrin’s book about Whillans (*The Villain: The Life of Don Whillans*, Hutchinson, 2005), said, “Joe was elected to go and climb Kangchenjunga with the toffs as the first of the working-class lads to go on a Himalayan expedition.” He performed brilliantly and was first on top. Just before the summit, he spied a steep crack. This was Brown’s specialty. He turned his oxygen tank to full blast, placed a piton, and got up. The next day, a second party found an easy snow slope that obviated the crack.

The following year, Brown ventured to the Karakoram with a small group for a go at the Muztagh Tower (7,276 meters), made famous by the iconic 1909 Vittorio Sella photograph, which made it look even harder than it is. Brown led the way to the west summit. Perrin wrote that by this time Joe was “the most considerable all-round mountaineer in the history of the sport in Britain.”

Brown never again went as high as these two mountains, but he remained active into his 70s. He made three climbing ventures into the wet, wild, and little-explored jungles of Guyana and Ecuador.

In 1975 and 1976, despite protesting that he was too old, he was part of the first ascent of the stunning Trango Tower (6,286 meters) in the Karakoram. He was also featured in BBC live broadcasts of him climbing, for example, a frightening sea stack, the Old Man of Hoy.

He participated in a number of movies, including Fred Zinnemann’s *Five Days One Summer* and *The Mission*, in which he doubled for Robert De Niro.

**Dee Molenaar (1918–2020).** If climbers survive their time in the mountains, they often lead long lives. Noel Odell, the last man to see George Mallory and Andrew Irvine on Everest in 1924, lived to 96. The great Italian alpinist Ricardo Cassin died at 100. Five of the seven survivors of the American K2 expedition of 1953 lived into their 90s. On June 19, the last of them, Dee Molenaar, died in an adult care home in Burlington, Washington. He was 101. In 1971 The Mountaineers published *The Challenge of Rainier*, his story of serving as a summit guide in the 1940s, a definitive account of the mountain for which he is best known.

He was also a gifted visual artist. Aged about 90, he provided maps and sketches for *Fallen Giants* (Yale University Press, 2010), a magisterial account of Himalayan climbing by Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver.
John Evans (1938–2020). John Evans died January 9. Among his many achievements was the first ascent of the 6-mile-long and very difficult Hummingbird Ridge on Canada’s highest peak, Mount Logan (5,959 meters). Despite a number of subsequent attempts, and its inclusion in Allen Steck and Steve Roper’s seminal 1979 book, Fifty Classic Climbs of North America (Sierra Club Books), this route has never been repeated. Evans also made first ascents of the two highest mountains in Antarctica. In 1976, he was a member of the Nanda Devi expedition that opened a very hard route but ended tragically with the death of Devi Unsoeld, daughter of Willi Unsoeld, and namesake of the mountain on which she died. Evans went twice to Mount Everest, including the famously contentious and failed international attempt in 1971.

Mark Powell (1928–2020). A bright star of the early Golden Age of Yosemite Valley climbing died July 2 in a hospice in California. After a slow, overweight start, Powell became a bold and innovative climber. In 1955 and the following year he made fifteen significant first ascents in Yosemite Valley.

He lived for a time in the valley’s Camp 4. Photographer Jim Herrington, author of the book The Climbers (Mountaineers Books, 2017), described Powell as the “original dirtbag climber.” In 1957, Powell partnered with Warren Harding and led some pitches on early attempts on the Nose of El Capitan.

Then, in September 1957, Powell fell 30 feet on an easy route. His left ankle was badly broken. Rescue was slow and an infection set in. He was left with a permanent limp. Late in life the pain became so intense that he had the foot amputated. The accident did not end Powell’s climbing career, but it damaged it badly. It left many peers wondering what more he might have accomplished.

Winter 2020
In the greater ranges last winter there was some success, but the major prizes were elusive.

First success: On January 25, Spanish alpinist Alex Txikon reached the top of Ama Dablam (6,812 meters) in Nepal. Txikon, along with Jonatan García, Pasang Sherpa, Cheppal Sherpa, and Kalden Sherpa, made the ascent amid high winds, deep snow, and cold conditions.

After Ama Dablam, Txikon and company attempted Everest (8,848 meters) by the standard South Col route. They were turned back by dangerous conditions: some 18 inches of fresh new snow on the Lhotse Face.
While Txikon’s group was heading for the South Col, a lone German climber, Jost Kobusch, was making an even more audacious effort. He climbed via the nonstandard West Ridge—first climbed in 1963 by Americans Tom Hornbein and the aforementioned Willi Unsoeld—without Sherpa support or supplementary oxygen, as is his customary style. In 2017, Kobusch made the first ascent, solo, of Nangpai Gosum II (7,296 meters), at the time the fourth-highest unclimbed mountain in the world. According to a Facebook report, this winter he reached about 7,360 meters on the West Ridge—a significant accomplishment.

**K2:** Same old story. The second-highest peak in the world remains the last of the fourteen 8,000-meter peaks (8,611 meters) without a winter ascent. A seven-person expedition led by the Nepalese mountaineer Mingma Gyalje Sherpa and John Snorri of Iceland threw in the towel after barely starting up the mountain.

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**Denis Urubko Retires**

After a spectacular career in the greater ranges, the Russian-Polish Denis Urubko, 46, has given them up. “I plan to stop risky mountaineering, in any mountains,” he confirmed February 19, 2020, to the Spanish website desnivel.com. Urubko has been a supremely successful mountaineer, but also a controversial one (see Alpina, Winter/Spring 2019, for his “daring (or reckless)” winter attempt on K2). Urubko was the fifteenth person to summit all fourteen 8,000ers, and the eighth without using supplementary oxygen. He had made the summit of one or another 8,000er 22 times. In January 2018 he played a leading role in the amazing rescue of Frenchwoman Elisabeth Revol from high on Nanga Parbat (8,125 meters). He and three others had been helicoptered from their winter attempt on K2, as noted in Alpina, Winter/Spring 2019.

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**It Could Happen to Anyone**

An expedition to the Gasherbrum massif showed how inhospitable and dangerous the greater ranges truly are in winter. Simone Moro and Tamara Lunger, two of the foremost winter mountaineers alive, were trying to enchain Gasherbrum I (8,080 meters) and Gasherbrum II (8,035 meters)—which would be a first in the winter season. Partway into the trip, Moro attempted to cross a snow bridge that Lunger had already
crossed. It collapsed under Moro’s greater weight. He fell 65 feet into a crevasse and nearly dragged Lunger in with him. With her help, he was able to claw his way out, in two hours. They were airlifted by helicopter to Skardu, Pakistan.

In an interview with *Rock and Ice* magazine, Moro said,

My weight and how I was falling was so abrupt that Tamara was not able to hold [the fall]. Remember, too, that she was in snowshoes, which acted like skis. So she was flying, literally, and she landed just a half-meter before the crevasse edge. So I fell 20 meters headfirst, hitting all over the walls. I hit really hard on my back.

**Spring 2020: The Virus Strikes**

This section might almost be left blank. In March, Nepal closed all its mountains. Chinese authorities had already closed the Tibetan side of the mountain. Other closures ranged from **Denali (20,310 feet)** to peaks in Yosemite to such decidedly smaller crags as the Shawangunks in New York. So the season was uniquely quiet in the mountains, big and small. It became a time for people to stay home and dream of their next adventures. And a time for the mountains to recover from all that human activity.

There were 51 Everest summits early this spring, all from the north and split between two Chinese expeditions: one a commercial expedition made up of Chinese nationals, the other a government expedition by Chinese surveyors with the goal of remeasuring the mountain’s height. The results of the new measurement had not been released at press time.

Clearly, COVID-19 had its effect on the economy. Mingma Gyalje Sherpa told the climbing writer Stefan Nestler: “The owner of a hotel in Gorakshep (the last village near Everest Base Camp) has already bought enough food for the whole season. This food with limited date won’t be able to be used after six or seven months. The market price of the food, cargo to Lukla, and seven days’ work by porters to Gorakshep is all a total waste.”

The *Kathmandu Post* of July 5 reported, “Struggling shop owners have put their businesses for sale to pay off their debts but there are no buyers.” In the tourist center of Thamel, the newspaper went on, 270 travel and tour agencies, restaurants, curio shops, and hotels had closed over three months.
Fighting in the Mountains

Some areas that saw no climbing did see plenty of fighting. The seemingly endless India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir continues.

In other areas as high as 14,000 feet, India has another adversary: China. Casualties have remained low, but could accelerate. The New York Times reported on May 31 a “melee” at Pangong Tso, a glacial lake 83 miles long, that resulted in injuries. Two weeks later the Washington Post reported, “Twenty Indian soldiers were killed in clashes with Chinese troops high in the Himalayas . . . marking the most serious conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbors in decades.”

Belgian climber Sean Villanueva O’Driscoll works his way up one of two new lines he and Nico Favresse opened in Patagonia. NICO FAVRESSE
The deaths occurred in the mountainous region of Ladakh, where India and China share a disputed—but largely peaceful—border. No Indian soldiers had been killed in clashes on the frontier between the two countries since 1975, experts said.

**Patagonia**

Before the virus shut things down, a number of bold routes were opened on the granite spires of Patagonia.

Belgian climbers Sean Villanueva O’Driscoll and Nico Favresse, frequent partners and big-wall troubadours who lug their tin whistle and small guitar on multiday climbs, opened two new lines, both on Aguja Poincenot. They named one of the climbs Beggars Banquet, “because we borrowed all the gear we used to climb it and also after the Rolling Stones’ album,” Favresse wrote in a press release afterward.

Perhaps the most stunning climb of the season was the completion of Marc-André Leclerc’s Visión, a difficult and committing new route on Torre Egger opened by Brette Harrington, Quentin Roberts, and Horacio Gratton. It was a multiyear project for Harrington. The route was first envisioned by Harrington’s late partner Leclerc, who died in 2018 in an accident in the Mendenhall Towers, Alaska. Harrington decided to realize the climb in his honor.

“Climbing Torre Egger has been a dream for me primarily because of Marc’s stories,” Harrington told *Rock and Ice* magazine. “He always talked about the beautiful Torre Egger as being the hardest summit of all the towers in Patagonia. It is the overlooked by its sister Cerro Torre and guarded by the steepest walls.”

Another significant first ascent was 600-meter The Die Is Cast, climbed by Italians Matteo Della Bordella, Matteo Bernasconi, and Matteo Pasquetto. Della Bordella told Italian journalist Federico Bernardi that the route “follows a system of very logical cracks and the pitches slide one after another in a spectacular way. . . . A truly dreamy climb!” Bernasconi, 38, died later in the spring in an avalanche in Italy.

Finally, in February, German climber Fabian Buhl completed the first paraglide descent from the summit of Cerro Torre after climbing to the top—a magnificent multisport achievement.

—Steven Jervis and Michael Levy
A Raven Funeral

In the white hills above my cabin
I come upon a mystery. A hundred ravens,

little black-robed priests, circle a small field,
sitting in trees cawing at the center

where a raven lies dead in the snow. As if
by signal, they stop and fly away,

leaving an uninvited guest
standing in the silence of their wake.

John Smelcer

JOHN SMCER is the author of 50 books, including his poetry books Indian Giver (Leapfrog, 2016) and Raven (Leapfrog, 2019).
News and Notes

A COVID-19 Timeline of Northeast Outdoor Closings

The new coronavirus and the disease it caused, COVID-19, acquired global pandemic classification in March 2020. Federal, state, and local governments in the Northeast focused first on medical supply chains, workplaces, and essential businesses. As an afterthought, or perhaps aftershock, land managers realized that people were rushing to get outside onto public lands in April and May during “mud season,” when use traditionally is low because snow is melting out and new plants struggle to take hold on new ground. Early spring can also be a dangerous time for recreators who find dirt at the trailhead but, up high, ice, sudden snow squalls, or swollen rivers.

Land managers and governments responded to this high use by closing some trailheads and parking areas. But they closed sites only within their management. Hikers could find that confusing. For example, on April 24 the White Mountain National Forest closed several areas it controls but not trailheads on private or state-owned land. The popular trailhead known as Appalachia on Route 2 in Randolph, New Hampshire, where trails on the north side of the Presidential Range begin, stayed open because the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over that area.

If people violated the trail closures, they could be fined or face criminal penalties. Later, these same organizations, land managers, and agencies planned for “reopening” by limiting parking lot capacities, removing picnic tables and water fountains, and requiring visitors to answer questionnaires.

Following is a brief timeline of COVID-19’s track across public lands in the Northeast. This is by no means exhaustive or complete. It shows the different ways the federal, state, and local governments and the trail clubs, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and Randolph Mountain Club, maintained facilities and trails in high-use areas. Appalachia deadlines stopped this timeline with mid-July. It will continue in the next edition.

March 2020

March 16: AMC closes all lodges and food services throughout the Northeast, including the New Hampshire facilities, the Highland Center in Crawford Notch and Joe Dodge Lodge at Pinkham Notch. AMC suspends all in-person staff and volunteer-led programming until further notice.

March 28: The National Park Service closes all overnight shelters (56 total) and privies (75 total) along the Appalachian Trail in Virginia (11 shelters, 12 privies), Maryland (1 shelter, 2 privies), Pennsylvania (8 shelters, 6 privies), New Jersey (1 shelter, 1 privy), New York (5 shelters, 5 privies), Connecticut (7 shelters, 16 privies), Massachusetts (1 shelter, 4 privies), and Maine (22 shelters, 29 privies). (In Vermont and New Hampshire, where the federal authority is the U.S. Forest Service and local clubs operate the campsites, see April 24, April 30, and May 6.)

April 2020

April 2: WMNF closes Tuckerman Ravine, Huntington Ravine, the Gulf of Slides, and all facilities and parking lots at Pinkham Notch Visitor Center (which AMC manages under a special use permit). The Mount Washington Avalanche Center suspends avalanche forecasting.

April 3: Vermont State Parks closes the Long Trail and associated side trails on state land.

April 16: Baxter State Park closes the park and offices until further notice.

April 24: WMNF closes more than 100 sites, including trailheads, campsites, and campgrounds. These include popular sites such as Diana’s Baths and the Lincoln Woods trailhead.

April 30: AMC announces it will not open its high huts in the White Mountains for the rest of 2020. AMC also closes all of its lodges throughout the Northeast until further notice.

May 2020

May 1: WMNF reopens all trailheads it closed on April 24. However, the April 2 Tuckerman Ravine/Pinkham Notch order remains in place. All campgrounds, campsites, and shelters remain closed.

May 4: New Hampshire announces reopening guidelines for private campgrounds and New Hampshire State Parks, effective immediately once guidelines are in place. Hampton Beach State Park remains closed.

May 6: The Green Mountain National Forest closes overnight camping at designated sites, restrooms, and outhouses at campsites on the AT and Long Trail.
May 22: WMNF opens campgrounds in advance of Memorial Day weekend. Group sites and some dispersed camping areas such as Tripoli Road remain closed.

May 22: Vermont State Parks reopens the Long Trail and side trails on state park lands.


June 2020


June 8: WMNF reopens the east side trails up Mount Washington and the Cutler River drainage. Services are limited. No camping will be allowed in the Cutler River drainage, including at Hermit Lake Shelters, tent platforms, and Harvard Cabin.

June 13: In Virginia, a 27-mile section of the AT including McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs reopens. Many designated campsites remained closed along the AT between Georgia and Maine, including the terminus on Katahdin, in Maine’s Baxter State Park.

June 15: Baxter State Park opens road gates for vehicle access to 60 miles of trail and to streams and ponds for hunting and fishing. High-elevation trails remain closed. Gates are open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., and no overnight camping is permitted.

June 26: Green Mountain National Forest reopens for overnight camping at designated overnight sites on the AT and Long Trail.

June 28: RMC reopens its Log Cabin and The Perch for overnight use. Crag Camp and Gray Knob remain closed. A caretaker patrols the camps but does not collect fees, and users are encouraged to donate through RMC’s website.

July 2020

July 1: Baxter State Park opens all trails and roads and opens to overnight camping. Bunkhouses remain closed.

July 1: AMC opens its lodges: in New Hampshire, Pinkham Notch Visitor Center and Joe Dodge Lodge, the Highland Center, and Cardigan Lodge; in Maine, Medawisla Lodge & Cabins, Gorman Chairback Lodge & Cabins; in New York, Stephen & Betsy Corman AMC Harriman Outdoor Center; and in New Jersey, Mohican Outdoor Center. The following remain closed: AMC’s high huts in the White Mountains, and some campsites. AMC programs including August Camp, Teen Trails and Teen Wilderness Adventures, and the White Mountain Hiker Shuttle are canceled.
July 10: WMNF opens designated backcountry campsites, tentsites, and shelters for overnight camping.
—Sally Manikian, with organizational, government and task-force press releases.

Researcher Tracks COVID-19 Risks in High Seasonal-Home Areas
In the early weeks of the new coronavirus spread, research from the University of New Hampshire suggests that many owners of seasonal houses across the United States decided to do their quarantining in those second homes.

Dr. Jess Carson, research assistant professor of public policy at the University of New Hampshire’s Carsey School of Public Policy, identified a faster spread of COVID-19 cases in areas with more seasonal houses between mid-March and mid-April.

The graph here shows that on March 11, when the World Health Organization declared a worldwide pandemic, in rural areas where seasonal houses...
make up 25 percent or more of the residences, the positive case rate accelerated faster than in both rural counties with fewer seasonal houses and urban areas. This research confirmed anecdotal reports in seasonal communities of an influx of non-year-round residents to their second homes, or renting vacation homes, including counties in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.

“This research captured a pattern that was specific to the initial weeks of the pandemic,” Carson told *Appalachia*. “By April 9, rates in urban counties had eclipsed those in rural places with high seasonal housing. By the end of April, the gap between rural counties with higher and lower shares of seasonal housing had closed.”

Carson said as the virus spread farther throughout rural places, other COVID-19 hotspots in rural areas developed, “as the virus left fewer communities untouched.” Since that time, she added, other researchers have identified other rural areas as hotspots, “namely those home to prisons and meatpacking plants. And of course, because ‘rural’ is not a monolith, the spread, short-term outcomes, and long-term implications of the pandemic are likely to remain uneven within and across rural places.”

—Christine Woodside, with thanks to Dr. Jess Carson

Two Stories of Backcountry Quarantining in 1882 and 1918

Quarantining to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus echoes a practice residents of backwoods Maine engaged in to save themselves at least twice in history. Loggers resorted to the practice during the 1882 smallpox outbreak, and some parents living in the Millinocket area applied it during the 1918 flu pandemic.

Starting in 1881, Maine public health regulations for lumber camps required that the logging camp boss remove men with smallpox from the main camp compound and place them in a separate small camp. The rest of the camp’s crew had to remain in the woods where they were, but they could continue to work. Efforts to keep the healthy men at the camp even with a doctor’s presence and sterilization, which included the burning of all bedding and other items, was difficult because of the men’s fear. Officials pursued the escaped men, caught some and brought them back, but many more made it home to Quebec through the woods. Some camps in later years built what the men referred to as “pest houses.”

In 1882, in response to a smallpox outbreak, lumbermen set up a hospital camp on one of the Jo-Mary Lakes. Joseph A. Thompson, longtime woodsman from the Houston Pond area, recorded its presence as he and
a companion paddled by it on their route south from the West Branch of
the Penobscot River through the Jo-Mary Lakes to Katahdin Iron Works.
Logging camp bosses brought their smallpox-stricken men there until they
became healthy or died. Maine history chronicler Fanny Eckstorm learned
from Lewey Ketchum of six men who died of smallpox and whose graves
were at “Logan Joe Mary,” perhaps the site of the hospital camp.

By the early 1890s, vaccinations were a requirement for those in lumber
camps and working in the mills. In late 1903, smallpox was prevalent in the
Lower Chain Lakes area that abuts the Jo-Mary chain, and Maine recorded
2,096 cases with 9 deaths.

**The 1918 Flu Epidemic.** The large island in Lower Togue Pond at the south-
ern edge of what would become Baxter State Park was home for an unknown
number of Millinocket children during the summer of 1918. The only reference
to this event was a 1918 note in the Thomas Welcome Clark family logbook;
children lived in a tent camp on the island for the summer. Their families pre-
sumably quarantined them so they would escape the flu pandemic.

Clark, a married man with family, was a Great Northern Paper Company
engineer who in 1908 began renting the small camp at the head of the island
for some of each summer. Fred M. Peasely, a married Millinocket hardware
store owner with two children, owned the camp and the island lease. Fortu-
nately Mother Nature made this island level and rock-lump free with a
pleasant forest—ideal for tenting. The only way to reach the pond was with a
horse and cart from Millinocket followed by a canoe paddle. The Clark family
eventually bought the island and has retained its ownership.

Curiously, not once in my last ten years of West Branch log driving research
have I discovered information pertaining to the 1918 flu and logging camps.
The current pandemic caused me to search again, this time through additional
public health resources. For those hired to work in the logging camps at that
time, regulations required a physical, but by late fall 1918 the priority for men
was World War I. Recruiters for the winter logging operations were picking
men in groups off the streets, allowing them to bypass the physical. Public
health officials knew of this and began sending inspectors to the camps after
they opened in late fall. What they might have encountered is unknown, but
surely finding flu would have been worthy of reporting. Each camp had its
own cutting crew and they stayed in the same place and by common practice
never left during the season, an unenforced quarantining. The flu had nearly
ended in Maine by the time they came out of the woods in late April 1919.

—William Geller
The Outdoor Citizen: Get Out, Give Back, Get Active
By John Judge
Apollo Publishers, 2019, 280 pages.
Price: $24.99 (hardcover).

This compelling call to action by the president and CEO of the Appalachian Mountain Club is a well-researched, exceptionally detailed blueprint for saving the planet.

Adhering to its subtitle, John Judge calls for a comprehensive agenda that includes creating more urban green spaces, expanding alternative energy generation, eating locally sourced food, maintaining healthy, active lifestyles, supporting stricter environmental regulation, and promoting a more equitable economy that encourages increased philanthropy.

A former chief development officer for the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, Judge makes his case in a no-nonsense, orderly fashion that befits his upbringing as the son of a Marine Corps drill sergeant.

He writes,

When our small house began to feel too small, and my parents began to lose patience, we’d hear the command, “Get out!” It was a call for us kids to go outside and play, to give my parents space in order to preserve their sanity. . . . When he bellowed at us to get out we knew we had to follow orders. In retrospect I have great appreciation for this. My parents wanted us out of their hair and inadvertently inspired in us a lifelong appreciation of the outdoors.

Judge pulls no punches in his disdain for the Trump administration’s environmental policies, taking particularly sharp aim at U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew R. Wheeler, whom he describes as “one of the politicians most dangerous to the outdoors.”
Commenting on Wheeler’s appointment following Scott Pruitt’s resignation, Judge writes, “Wheeler has much the same goals as his predecessor in terms of rolling back environmental protections and promoting coal.”

Conversely, Judge heaps praise on a number of philanthropists who have supported environmental causes, including Michael Bloomberg. The former New York City mayor “displays a commitment to climate-saving values and a resistance to political insouciance, a boldness that all Outdoor Citizens can emulate in their own lives and actions, even if their pockets aren’t as deep,” Judge writes.

Each chapter highlights observations and specific recommendations. A sampling:

- “We need to get rid of coal as fast as we can. Natural gas, while a fossil fuel, is a step up because it releases half as much carbon dioxide when combusted, and far less sulfur, mercury and other particulates.”
- “If the grocery store you frequent isn’t selling locally sourced food, ask for it! If they refuse to carry it, move your business to one more eager to source locally.”
- “Our ancestors used to walk everywhere in search of food, collecting plants and berries, hunting, and fishing. The exercise was built into their lifestyle and dwarfed the amount of exercise we might squeeze into a quick gym visit today. In today’s developed nations, food is far more easily accessible, and we have other modes of transportation besides traveling on foot. But while the advances provide a cushy lifestyle, the resulting decrease in exercise has negatively affected our health.”

Judge calls for a wider “outdoor global community,” where people around the world work together “advancing sustainable development goals, combating climate change, and propagating the best Outdoor City leadership to support conservation in developed and developing nations.”

These initiatives are big, even grandiose: His heart is in the right place. If even a tenth of what he recommends comes to fruition, the world would be a better place.

—Steve Fagin
I wish I could tell you that I paddled 730 miles down the Green River in an inflatable boat with Heather Hansman. Rafting through Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado, we could have shared what she calls the “specific joy in reading water.” The trip would have been an education, too: the two of us paddling through this remote tributary until it joined the Colorado River (though honestly, she’d be doing most of the work), while she described the current state of water usage. “It’s abstract and diffuse until you’re in it, and then it’s even more complex,” she writes. It’s also something most of us in the moist East rarely think about, but which she has researched down to its molecules.

Almost a century ago, water allocation in the Colorado River system was rigidly divided—based on incorrect calculations—among seven adjoining Western states. Since then, use-it-or-lose-it rules have led to contentious relations between the upper basin ranchers and farmers in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico and the lower basin industrialists and urbanites in California, Arizona, and Nevada. Caught in the middle are environmentalists, recreationalists, and dam managers. “No one is really in the wrong,” Hansman muses. “There’s just not enough water for them all to be right.”

Tackling rapids together, I would have learned in person about water purification, fracking, fish hatcheries, trans-basin diversion, Indian reservation law, and the geologic effects of damming—dense stuff she tries hard to lighten. We would also have met an extraordinary collection of people: bowlegged ranchers, starchy hydraulic engineers, geomorphologists, fly shop owners, river runners, water board managers. Lurking along the shores, never in plain view, are developers who want to siphon billions of gallons over the Continental Divide (one proposal is called “the zombie pipeline,” because each time it’s killed, it rises again). “The history of the West is the history of the Colorado River,” Hansman would tell me while we portaged around a rough stretch (she’s carrying the raft, me the light oars), and “between evaporation, reduced flow and increased use, the West is sucking itself dry.”
There is enough partisan anger to power your appliances but also, sometimes, dialogue. “How does society settle on a hierarchy of uses?” she asks. Options do exist: We could reenvision the Colorado River basin as unified by purpose, instead of separated by state. Or, we could bank water as a currency, where agriculturalists lease their rights to urban areas without losing them. The most temperate and equitable strategy requires that everyone yield something: “Adaptive management” balances urban need and habitat preservation.

Hansman and I would have traveled together, “eye level to the riverbanks,” through these historical, political, scientific, and literal landscapes. Sadly, she took her Green River trip without me. But satisfyingly, it led to this treatise on water’s beautiful and endangered existence. We traveled together in spirit.

—Elissa Ely

Paths Less Traveled
By Gordon DuBois
Price: $20 (paperback).

This quirky and appealing guidebook starts out with a verse from the Grateful Dead tune, “Ripple,” and then moves on to quote Henry David Thoreau’s Walden and Emily Bronte’s Often Rebuked. It immediately got my attention.

Indeed, in some ways Gordon DuBois’s autobiographic narrative of his ramblings through New Hampshire and beyond invokes the Dead’s lyrics: “And if you go no one may follow, that path is for your steps alone.”

The book compiles hiking columns he has been writing for New Hampshire’s Laconia Daily Sun since 2015. They cover a range as broad as the White Mountains. Chapters cover a mysterious Cog Railway car from Mount Washington that wound up on Mount Oscar, an old mine shaft, whacky bushwhacks, and adventurous treks throughout New Hampshire’s Lakes Region.

DuBois always walks with his faithful dog, Reuben. The afterword, incidentally, is told through Reuben’s eyes: “So many dogs are cooped up at home, never given the opportunity to run free through the woods and find their own path. But when I hike with you and our friends I can be myself.”
DuBois is an engaging storyteller who also possesses some serious hiking creds. He has hiked the Appalachian, International Appalachian, Long, Cohos, and John Muir Trails, as well as summited New England’s Hundred Highest peaks in all seasons and in winter only, the Northeast 111 Club peaks, the Trailwrights 72 Summits, and the Adirondack Forty-Sixers.

Those who thumb through Paths Less Traveled might be tempted to recite the chorus from “Truckin’,” another classic Grateful Dead tune: “What a long strange trip it’s been.”

—Steve Fagin

Desert Cabal: A New Season in the Wilderness

By Amy Irvine
First Torrey House Press and Back of Beyond Books, 2018, 98 pages.
Price: $11.95 (paperback).

Edward Abbey was laid to rest clandestinely in the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness 30 years ago. His death did not put to rest debates about his controversial life and literary legacy. Abbey courted controversy in both his personal life and his art. Allegations of racism and sexism trailed him throughout his life and have continued. Nevertheless, his place in the canon of American environmental literature seemed unassailable largely as a result of his masterpiece Desert Solitaire (Simon & Schuster, 1968). In Desert Cabal, Amy Irvine stages a heartfelt intervention with the late author at his burial site that admonishes him for his personal shortcomings and undercuts the reputation of his most well-known work.

Irvine is an unlikely critic of Abbey. Raised in the arid lands of Utah that Abbey loved so much, Irvine was steeped in his writings. Her adventurous experiences as a river guide and rock climber were in no small part mediated by Abbey’s observations. Her love for Abbey’s distinctive voice and curmudgeonly personality is palpable. She is quick to praise Abbey’s prescience in laying out the dangers posed to America’s public lands by industrial tourism and alerts him to the pernicious new threat to Utah’s canyon country that
comes from the over-caffeinated hordes of mountain bikers that have loosed themselves on the fragile desert landscape.

Irvine gives a nod to Abbey for his criticisms of America’s two major political parties. Abbey threw his verbal darts across the political spectrum, heedless of whom he offended. Irvine shows herself to be an heir of Abbey in this regard, castigating President Trump for his relentless assault on public lands and environmental regulations. And like Abbey she has a keen eye for the hypocrisy of the left, relating the story of a dinner party held at a McMan- sion in Utah at which the guests ridiculed “rednecks” for their unsustainable lifestyles.

Yet Irvine sharply criticizes Abbey’s predatory behavior toward women. Although eco-feminism has been an important strain in environmental thought since the 1970s, Desert Cabal is one of the first works in this genre that has been shaped by the #MeToo movement. Irvine challenges readers who continue to look past Abbey’s overt sexism and lecherous male gaze. She claims further that Abbey’s sexist attitudes contributed to his narrow, gendered celebration of the solitary wilderness experience that ignores that fact that for many women wild lands are seen more as potential ambush sites where they could be sexually assaulted than as pristine places to relax and recreate.

Irvine’s most significant criticism of Abbey is that the rugged individualism that pervades his work is a fiction and that his promotion of it is both naive and dangerous. She notes that the self-reliant, reclusive persona that Abbey constructed for himself in Desert Solitaire is at odds with the fact that in the original manuscript of the book he foregrounds the importance of his wife and children to his experience. The omission of this detail in the final draft of Desert Solitaire is perhaps unimportant in and of itself, but it helps perpetuate a cultural mythology of radical individualism. In Irvine’s estimation, the survival of the American democracy and human species cannot be trusted to the lone rebels celebrated throughout Abbey’s writings. Desert Cabal is a powerful rejoinder to Abbey’s vision and a timely reminder that the solutions to our vexing political and environmental problems require a vast network of citizens working purposefully together in solidarity rather than in solitude.

—David M. Chamberlain
How to Solve a Problem: The Rise (and Falls) of a Rock-Climbing Champion

By Ashima Shiraishi (author) and Yao Xiao (illustrator)


Price $17.99 (hardcover).

The book starts with a young woman, in polka-dotted capris and a purple T-shirt, finger-crimping off a trailer-sized boulder in Central Park, in the shadow of Manhattan’s skyscrapers. She is the teenage phenom Ashima Shiraishi, one of the best climbers in the world and unquestionably the best to emerge from a city where “climbing” is traditionally in reference to a corporate ladder.

A product of Central Park’s famous bouldering scene at Rat Rock as well as of New York City’s modern wave of big climbing gyms, Shiraishi is expected to be the top-ranked U.S. female competitor in the rescheduled Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021, where climbing will make its debut as a medal event. She will be only 20 years old. Given her superhuman climbing ability, it is befitting that How to Solve a Problem: The Rise (and Falls) of a Rock-Climbing Champion is illustrated in an anime style that portrays Shiraishi as an unlikely superhero.

Geared toward young readers, the book offers a glimpse into how a high-caliber climber such as Shiraishi deconstructs a seemingly unscalable rock wall into a series of body movements that look like an exquisitely choreographed dance routine. Shiraishi specializes in bouldering, a type of climbing that focuses on scrambling up, around, and underneath boulders and low rock cliffs. A boulderer does not use a harness or ropes, only crash pads, because there’s a lot of crashing. “Each fall is a message, a hint, an idea,” she writes. “A new way to move from over there to over here.”

I’ve been following Shiraishi’s career since 2013, when I started climbing at her gym. She was then 11, a pixieish girl with long black hair, blunt bangs, and colorful elastic pants sewn by her mother. (Her father cuts her hair.) “There’s Ashima,” a friend whispered as we passed her at Brooklyn Boulders. She was already climbing at an elite level. In a 2016 profile, the New Yorker called her “perhaps the first female climber whose accomplishments...
may transcend gender, and the first rock climber who could become a household name.”

*How to Solve a Problem* centers on Shiraishi’s feat, in 2014 at age 13, of climbing the V14 boulder problem Golden Shadow in Rocklands, South Africa. (She was the second woman to ever climb V14.) “And so I started. And so I fell. And so I climbed again, listening to what the fall had told me.” That’s a good lesson for climbers and non-climbers alike, and one reason why I’ll be giving this book to my niece this holiday season.

—Stephen Kurczy

**The Adventurer’s Son**

*By Roman Dial*


At its best, *The Adventurer’s Son* looks inward with a deep lens that reveals wisdom born from tragedy.

“Parents aren’t supposed to pass out pills, smoke dope, or drink booze with their kids, and we never did,” Roman Dial writes in a more reflective moment. “Instead, we bought them airplane tickets to exotic lands. Travel itself can be an addiction. Adventure is. Here I was, searching for [my son] missing on a trip that traced directly back to me.”

This memoir centers on Dial’s search for his son, Cody Roman Dial, who went missing in 2014 in the Costa Rican jungle. It would be a nightmarish tragedy for any parent, and it’s a story worth hearing, falling in the vein of Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*.

Part of my difficulty with this book, however, was how Dial seemed to search for his son with the sense of adventure he might devote to climbing a mountain or kayaking a rapid. Unraveling the mystery came across, too often, as a way to talk about himself and remark on his own skills as an outdoorsman and biologist.

Dial is well known in the outdoors community, perhaps most of all for founding the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic, a multiday race described by *Outside* as the “toughest wilderness challenge in the world.” For that and other escapades, Dial literally claims a chapter in the world of extreme...
backcountry adventure. In the 1997 book *Escape Routes*, David Roberts described Dial as a “pivotal figure” for combining mountaineering, backcountry navigation, and mountain biking to “blitz” his way across glaciers and tundra, sometimes in defiance of federal regulations and park rangers. In a more egregious example of such an “adventure,” Dial biked illegally into the Grand Canyon and rafted without a permit down the Colorado River. His renegade attitude would inspire his son to take similar risks.

In 2014, Dial’s son embarked on an illegal solo jungle trek through Costa Rica’s Corcovado National Park. Cody, then 27, had no permit, partly because he did not want to hire a guide as the park required. Before setting off, he emailed his parents a basic itinerary. Dial initially drafted a cautionary response that said, “I don’t think you should go the way you’ve planned. It seems too dangerous.” Rethinking his message as too negative and parental, Dial deleted the draft and instead wrote a lighter message that concluded, “Off-trail jungle walking can get pretty disorienting.” The nonchalance of those words may have egged Cody to live up to his father’s expectations of what it meant to be an adventurer.

When Cody failed to emerge from the jungle after several weeks, Dial and his wife started a multiyear search that involved the Costa Rican government, the U.S. Defense Department, and several psychics. It sparked a *National Geographic* whodunnit series called *Missing Dial*. I watched the first of four episodes, finding it overwrought and silly, begging the question of why Dial OK’d its production. He was setting himself up to relive the tragedy in real time.

The book’s closing chapters deal with *National Geographic’s* hasty conclusion that Cody was murdered. Just as that TV series aired, park authorities found Cody’s remains—nearly two years after he went missing—ruling that he was killed by a falling tree, not foul play.

At its heart, this is a story about a father’s reckoning with the idea that cultivating a sense of adventure in his son could be as deadly as teaching a child to drink or do drugs. As a new father, I was challenged to think about how parents might responsibly nurture a child’s appreciation for the outdoors in a way that doesn’t lead to a premature end.

In a review for the *New York Times*, Blair Braverman—a contributor to *Appalachia*—suggested a more appropriate title for this book could have been *The Adventurer’s Father*: “This is what it means to raise a child, to introduce that child to the world, and to bet his life—and his joy—on the odds.”

—Stephen Kurczy
The Appalachian Trail: Backcountry Shelters, Lean-Tos, and Huts
By Sarah Jones Decker
Appalachian Trail Conservancy/Rizzoli
Price: $27.50 (trade paperback).

This engaging book of photographs and text by a 2008 Appalachian Trail thru-hiker includes appealing pictures, descriptions, and histories of more than 275 shelters along or near the trail. Sarah Jones Decker includes useful statistics such as elevation, distance from the trail, size, names of maintaining trail clubs, distance to water sources and privies, and more. There is a nicely done overview of the AT and the creation and evolution of its shelter system and, at the end of each state section, an essay on a topic such as privies, caretakers, dealing with bears, and my favorite, “The Shelter Graveyard,” about preserved former shelters.

As a small coffee table book, it is too heavy to carry when hiking, but those planning AT hikes or remembering one will enjoy it and find its data useful.

—Nat Eddy

Compiled and edited by Ken MacGray with Steven D. Smith
Appalachian Mountain Club, 2021, 368 pages.
Price: $23.95 (trade paperback with pull-out map).

Ken MacGray is a hiker, writer, and photographer living in the area this book covers, south of the White Mountains. Steven D. Smith, a hiking enthusiast and search-and-rescue volunteer, is a veteran editor of AMC’s White Mountain Guide and Southern New Hampshire Trail Guide. This useful guide allows safe and enjoyable hikes on the many trails on Mount Monadnock, Pack Monadnock and North Pack
Monadnock, Mount Sunapee, Mount Cardigan, Mount Kearsarge, and many more. These mountains once were covered in AMC’s *White Mountain Guide* until they outgrew their extra section in that book.

—Christine Woodside

**AMC’s Best Day Hikes in the Shenandoah Valley: Four-Season Guide to 50 of the Best Trails, from Harpers Ferry to Jefferson National Forest**

*By Jennifer Adach and Michael R. Martin*

_Appalachian Mountain Club, 2020, 230 pages.*  
*Price: $18.95 (trade paperback).*

Hikers of all levels and interests will find great day trips from the Blue Ridge Mountains in southwestern Virginia north to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. More than half of the hikes explore gorgeous Shenandoah National Park. Other walks visit historic sites, state parks, and George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Trips range from quick rambles with views, like Raven Rocks and Compton Gap on the Appalachian Trail, to longer hikes, like the alpine meadow–topped Cold Mountain and Riprap Hollow with its swimming holes, views, and waterfalls. The authors have covered thousands of trail miles and regularly lead trips. This guide includes detailed directions and trail descriptions, easy-to-follow hiking maps, and photos. The handy trip planner lists difficulty levels, elevation gains, whether to expect fees, which hikes have waterfalls (fifteen of them), whether dogs are allowed (most of the 50 hikes are dog-friendly), and estimated hike times.

—Christine Woodside
**Attitude**

They have one, Mute Swans do.
A local, plumed of ballet and fairy tale,
cruises my wind-chopped pond,
tracks me from the corner of her eye,
turns her whole self, not to lose sight.

Land-bound as I am, she knows
I’ll advance only to the reeds
at the edge and so patrols just near.

On land, I know she’d arch her neck,
nip my sneakers, hiss, wag her tongue,
but here, she reserves the royal ruckus
for the one swan daring to drift
too close, for the one who will receive
the wing-slapping runaroud all the way
across the water, out of the water,
into the pines on the far shore.

She feels no force to join any noisy wedge
withdrawing south. She stays, eager
to fend off fox, fisher cat, snapper, all intruders.
A northern *conquistadora*.

*Ann Taylor*

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A Peak Ahead

Off Trail

The new coronavirus crept into North America almost a year ago, relentless and unpredictable, on a path with no clear end. It breathed shadows onto every route I have followed in my life, even daily routines in town. But despite the threat of illness all around, somehow I know better than ever what truly matters. For me, that means continuing to move toward forests, hills, and waterways.

Following this thinking, Appalachia is gathering stories for Summer/Fall 2021 that head right into that sense of uncertainty—off trail. Here is a glimpse of what’s coming up:

Steven D. Smith, who knows every trail in New Hampshire’s White Mountains and who edits the Appalachian Mountain Club’s White Mountain Guide, narrates his personal history bushwhacking up Scar Ridge, “dark, massive, and densely wooded, its northwest face raked with glistening slides.”

Lisa Ballard swore off trailless peaks more than 40 years ago. In summer 2020 she went against her word, pushing through the nearly fourteen miles to the top of the famously inaccessible Mount Marshall in the Adirondacks of New York, an experience that changed her attitude.

Our Accidents editor, Sandy Stott, writes of tracing a stream to its source in the Shem Valley below Mount Cardigan in New Hampshire. He’s explored this area his entire life. “It’s both a filling in of a long-walked picture, and still, surprisingly, a place where you can suddenly feel disoriented, a little lost,” he says.

Some other stories include: a doctor recalling the day his best friend died in front of him on Mount Madison, and a hiker veering off her route up Owl’s Head while pondering the imminent loss of her partner to a terrible disease.

As always, Appalachia will include analyses of accidents in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, reports of major climbs in the greater ranges, and stories about science and conservation in wild areas.

We are working on making some back issues of this journal and all issues going forward available online via an open-access arrangement with Dartmouth College. The latest issue will be available online starting three months after publication. We are excited by this opportunity to share our mission of publishing great wilderness writing with a wider public.

—Christine Woodside
chris@chriswoodside.com
Since 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club’s journal, *Appalachia*, has delivered inspired writing on mountain exploration, ecology, and conservation; news about international mountaineering expeditions; analysis of Northeastern mountaineering accidents; and much more.

**In this issue of *Appalachia***:

**Eight Weeks on Scudder**  
Writing from the fringes of the White Mountain National Forest

**The Vertical Mile**  
A climber tops out, repeatedly, on a 32-foot Connecticut ledge

**The Closed Outdoors**  
Derick Lugo quarantines in New York

**Going Small**  
Father and daughter naturalists explore their urban yard

**Androscoggin Constant**  
Berlin, New Hampshire, belongs to geese and bears

**Lockdown in the Alps**  
Chamonix becomes a ghost town

**The Accidents Report**  
Rescues in the White Mountains during the pandemic

**Also:** A Tetons memoir, part 2, Waterman Fund Essay Contest Winner, “The Wild Self.”

$10.95 US

Sales of AMC Books and *Appalachia* fund our mission of protecting the Northeast outdoors.