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Letters

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Letters

An Earl Shaffer Memory

Reading Mills Kelly's historical piece on Appalachia Trail thru-hiking ("The Class of '51," Summer/Fall 2020) brought back a memory from 1968, when a friend and I were hiking the southern section of Vermont's Long Trail. Stopping at a lean-to, we were introduced to Earl Shaffer and told he was the first person to thru-hike the AT. Unfortunately, having just completed my freshman year of college, I was not smart enough to ask any interesting questions and don't recall any details of our conversation that evening. I was left, though, with an impression that he was a quiet, unassuming man, which is a lot different than you might expect from someone today with such an accomplishment. Thanks for the article that brought back this memory.

—*Douglass Teschner, Pike, New Hampshire*

A Ranger Bill Memory

I enjoyed reading William Geller's reminiscences of his experience as a ranger ("A Line of Scouts," Winter/Spring 2020). I spent a week at Mead Base [*Editor's note: then called New Hampshire Daniel Webster Council Boy Scouts of America Mead Wilderness Base Camp*] in the mid-1960s. I was a scout in Troop 142 from Moultonborough, New Hampshire. My older brother Tom attended the base a year or two before I did. The year I attended, 1966 I think, the rangers were Bill, Jerry, Dean, and Dave. I remember being impressed that Bill never bothered to wear a shirt, in spite of the mosquitoes!

My most vivid Mead Base memory was camping somewhere in the vicinity of Black Mountain Pond where there was abundant luminescent wood. While we scouts were putting up our lean-tos, unaware of this natural wonder, you used an axe to craft a totem pole. To our excitement, when darkness fell, we discovered first the bits of luminescent wood throughout the site, and then found that Bill's totem pole glowed with luminescence!

My other vivid memory was cake, baked in a Dutch oven, with fresh-picked berries. And a snack stop for instant pudding on the way up Sandwich Dome. Ha ha—the food memories are always vivid when backpacking.

That was one night of the typical route over Mount Israel, with stops at Guinea, Black Mountain, and Flat Mountain Ponds and an ascent of

Sandwich Dome. One of the guys in my patrol got bad stomach cramps at Flat Mountain Pond, and I think Bill ran back to the base for help, which impressed us scouts.

Mead Base was an influential experience for me. I went on to climb many of the New Hampshire 4,000-footers, majored in geology in college, moved to the Rockies, and worked around the world as a geologist. I am now retired in Idaho, and I am still downhill skiing, hiking, scrambling, bushwhacking, camping, and sailing. The leadership of Bill and the other rangers really made the Mead Base experience!

One question that has always haunted me: Where exactly was that campsite with the luminescent wood and the glowing totem pole?

—Charlie Visser, Boise, Idaho

Origin of a Remote Cairn

The Hancocks, North and South, found a special place in my heart (“The Hancock Loop Trail, Then and Now,” by Douglass Teschner, Winter/Spring 2021), and even more in that of Guy Waterman, my husband. We began



The cairn Guy Waterman built to memorialize his son, John, on the Hancock slide with the Osceolas visible in the background. DOUGLASS TESCHNER

referring to these peaks as a massif, since they contained features that made them worthy of greatness. They are remote. They both have slides that make challenging climbs. They are thickly wooded, as any party will discover if they attempt to bushwhack from the top of the North Peak's Arrow Slide to the ridge. They are forbiddingly steep. I remember, on a winter ascent of the trail to the North Peak, that the snow was so deep it was like climbing a ladder as we kicked our snowshoes into the slope nearly in front of our noses. Laborious and time consuming! The descent, however, was a glorious plunging glissade at warp speed down a narrow shoot overhung with branches that delivered us to the bottom in no time at all.

Doug noted, "Someone built a large cairn at the left/west branch of the downward arrow." Guy built a cairn in that spot on September 9, 1982, as a memorial to his son John's death on Denali a little more than a year before. Could this be the same cairn, nearly 40 years later?

Doug emailed, "Photos show the cairn—including one visible from the trail way below (at start of left fork). I was surprised to see such a solid cairn, which makes your explanation probably true (although would it have survived so well over so many years?)."

Doug also directed me back to Cecil Jones's article in *Appalachia*, June 15, 1967, "Hancock Adventure," in which Cecil, after thanking all who had helped with the construction, a party of ten that included the young Doug Teschner, commented, "And a Mr. Waterman of the New York Chapter had the honor of being the first hiker over the completed trail."

Whenever Guy and I would explore the Hancocks—by trails or slides—he would comment on that great pleasure of encountering Cecil Jones and his party just concluding their work that made those wonderful bristly mountains more accessible to hikers. After building the cairn for Johnny, some sixteen years later, Guy went on to the summit, thus completing his tenth round.

—*Laura Waterman, East Corinth, Vermont*

Douglass Teschner responds: I was thrilled to get Laura's letter with the likely explanation of that unusual cairn. I was a regular visitor in the 1980s and 1990s to Barra, Guy and Laura's off-the-grid homestead, and I still mourn Guy's death on Mount Lafayette on February 6, 2000. Thanks to Laura, I now have this great image in my mind of Guy, wearing his tam-o'-shanter, climbing the slide, selecting that location for the cairn, and his precise work to gather and assemble the stones into a fitting monument.

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