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Timber, Shotgun, Boot, and Ski: Traditional Meets Modern at Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins

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Timber, Shotgun, Boot, and Ski

*Traditional meets modern at Gorman
Chairback Lodge and Cabins*

Andrew Riely



WE DON'T KNOW WHAT DREW WILLIAM P. DEAN TO THE RUGGED Maine forests in 1867. Perhaps the one-armed Civil War veteran sought relief in the woods, exhausted by a brutal war. With the loss of his arm, employment must have been difficult to come by. As the story goes, he and his 10-year-old son constructed an octagonal building along the edge of Long Pond, where Dean could be his own boss. A conventional rectangular structure would have required relatively long logs, but with the four extra sides, the walls were short enough so that Dean could handle the timbers himself.

In the wake of the Civil War, Americans pursued outdoor recreation in unprecedented numbers. The shift in attitude had begun years before, but growing ambivalence over industrialism and awareness of the country's shrinking frontier spurred Americans to deliberately cultivate self-reliance and wholesome strength in the outdoors as never before.

The Octagon still stands, although only the top plates of each wall and the framing members for the roof are original. Since Dean sold the camp in 1888, it has gone through half a dozen changes in ownership and name. Dean's Long Pond Camp became York's Long Pond Camp, then Chairback Mountain Camps, among others. Today the camp is the Appalachian Mountain Club's Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins. Its new name honors Leon and Lisa Gorman, who have enthusiastically supported the AMC's activities in Maine. (Leon is the chairman of L.L. Bean and grandson of founder Leon Leonwood Bean.)

Gorman Chairback is the last of the three camps the AMC purchased and reopened as part of its Maine Woods Initiative. Growing out of the club's Vision 2010, a plan to expand its mission of conservation, recreation, and education beyond the White Mountains, the MWI moved the club into a new role: land ownership. In 2003, the AMC purchased 37,000 acres from International Paper—the Katahdin Iron Works Tract—and, six years later, followed up with a second acquisition of 28,000 acres—the Roach Ponds Tract.

In August 2011, I visited Gorman Chairback for two nights to explore how the old Dean camp has changed. I found layers of human and natural history far older and more complex than I had anticipated. The region around Gorman has undergone a series of profound shifts since European-

Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins, seen from the water. ANDREW RIELY

descended colonists first came to the land in the seventeenth century. These early Americans killed and drove away the region's indigenous population, causing a reshaping of the sylvan landscape. First, around the edges, farmers converted the intervalles to pasture and tillage. They were succeeded by the powerful reach of American industrialization, which swiftly gathered the natural resources of the Maine Woods for its mills and factories. Even then, the loggers, or rather the men who employed them, turned to the woods for sport—hunting and fishing, in particular—to relieve their cares. Each layer of history, I found, is embedded in the cultural and physical landscape around Gorman Chairback. Today the new ethic of conservation and recreation leaves its own mark.

The new AMC property is a magnificent swath of forestland. Long and thin, it abuts and is bisected by the Appalachian Trail. Dozens of ponds and streams scatter the region, and one of Maine's most famous landmarks, Gulf Hagas, a strikingly deep and narrow gorge, is adjacent to the east. Gorman Chairback forms part of a chain of camps ideal for multi-day backcountry travel, whether in summer or winter.

The others are Little Lyford Lodge and Cabins, Medawisla Wilderness Lodge and Cabins, and West Branch Pond Camps. (The AMC does not own West Branch Pond but coordinates reservations with the owners.) Today, the Octagon is only one of eight outlying cabins (four more are in the works) from the main lodge. When construction is complete, Gorman Chairback will sleep 64. By backwoods standards, it is a luxurious retreat, offering a considerable degree of privacy and comfort. Cabins sleep anywhere from two to seven, and visitors need not bring sleeping bags, as each is outfitted with fully made beds. Propane lights, rustic furniture, and the sound of waves lightly lapping against the shore create an atmosphere highly conducive to reading and napping. Guests may borrow canoes and kayaks and paddle in Long Pond. In the winter, woodstoves in each cabin, a sauna, and radiant heating make the camp a snug refuge.

Long History of Human Use

It is tempting to imagine W. P. Dean and his son hacking the Octagon out of raw wilderness, but the region around Long Pond actually has a long history of human use. According to Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, a noted Maine historian active in the early twentieth century, Long Pond was part of the *Piscataquis-ah-wangan*, or Indian route, between coastal Maine and Quebec.



The Octagon, originally built in 1867, still stands at Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins. Only its roof framing and top plates of each wall are original. In the late 1860s, William P. Dean built the structure with eight short walls so that he could handle the timbers himself. Today, it is one of the outlying structures. HERB SWANSON

In Abenaki, *wangan* refers to the provisions and gear brought on a journey, whereas *ah-wangan* denotes the carrying itself. In later years, loggers adopted the term to signify the boats bringing their own supplies along the river.

During both eras, the easiest way of getting through the forest—at least during the warmer half of the year when the ground was wet and the air thick with mosquitoes and brush—was by water. Thus, the Abenaki “ah-wangan” ran up the Piscataquis River to Sebec River, up Long Pond Stream to Long Pond, and then to Moosehead Lake via the ponds now known as Trout, Hedgehog, Brown, and Big Wilson. Here, portages were frequent. From Moosehead, the route continued on to the West Branch of the Penobscot River and the height-of-land, then down the Rivière-du-Loup and Chaudière to Quebec.



Keith Hodsdon in an undated photo. The Hodsdon family was the last to run a commercial sporting camp on the property that became Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins. COURTESY OF KEITH HODSDON

Before encroachment by colonists, this route served as a means of trade, communication, and occasionally warfare among the Abenaki. During the seventeenth century and until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, the Abenaki and other northeastern tribes (most famously, the Iroquois and the Huron) were drawn into the rivalry between the English and the French, with devastating results. The watery highway became a path of attack for tribes allied with the French, who wreaked havoc among the English colonists and who themselves suffered many retaliatory raids. The frontier was steadily drained of its native inhabitants. Eckstorm, in a 1924 issue of *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*, writes of "heavy scalp bounties, ranging from twelve pounds for a male Indian under twelve years of age to forty pounds for an Indian man, with higher prices for captives taken alive."

General James Wolfe, commander of the daring British assault on Quebec, had not been dead long upon the Plains of Abraham before the English colonial authorities began to contemplate a permanent road linking the French Canadian capital with the thirteen colonies.

In 1763, the Treaty of Paris placed Quebec securely in British hands, removing the threat of raids by hostile Indians. The following spring, the colonial governor of Massachusetts, Francis Bernard, sent a group of men, now known as the Chadwick Expedition, to survey a route beginning at Fort Pownal (now Fort Point) on the Penobscot River.

The expedition included twelve men: four colonists and eight members of the Penobscot tribe. The leader and translator was John Preble, but because

the head surveyor, Joseph Chadwick, recorded the journey, his name stuck to the venture. According to Eckstorm, the large number of Penobscots suggests that some accompanied the English to keep an eye on their activities, reflecting the unsettled nature of regional politics in the wake of the last war.

The men largely followed the old Piscataquis-ah-wangan, but their map (reprinted in Eckstorm's article) suggests a slight deviation in the vicinity of Long Pond. Eckstorm does not mention this discrepancy, yet to my eye, it appears that Chadwick's party did not follow Long Pond Stream its full length. Instead, they deviated west before reaching Long Pond, portaging to bodies of water marked Hollogongo, Allegongermess, and Aroagongermes on Chadwick's map (probably Indian, Rum, and Wilson ponds). This path is more direct than the traditional route but would have compelled longer carries. Thus, if my analysis is correct, although Chadwick did pass through the immediate vicinity of Gorman Chairback, he did not actually paddle across Long Pond.

Chadwick's notes for the region, beginning at what is now Lake Onawa, read as follows:

OBERNECKSOMBEK Pond
has a Vary Remarkable Mouton the
which Serves to Rectefie our Reckeoning
about 50 miles Eich way—
On the Northly Sied of this Hill Lays a
Good being like Enterval Land the Soil is a Brown
Loum with sum Sand at 2 or 3 feet depe
Trees Large Elems & maples. On the higher
Land Bech & black Birch Trees &c

Lays in the Lattetude of 45 13"
And 86 miles Computed from Fort Pownall

The mountain Chadwick refers to is Borestone Mountain, just west of Lake Onawa, and the fertile "Enterval" later became Bodfish Intervale, named for the early settler Samuel Bodfish, who convinced eleven other families to move to the area in the 1830s.

Chadwick and Preble did reach Quebec, though because of discrepancies in the two maps produced by members of the expedition, Eckstorm believed that the other two Englishmen turned back at Moosehead Lake. The idea for the

road itself was shelved as colonial preoccupations shifted east, and Chadwick's account languished until Eckstorm's remarkable research unearthed it.

Central Maine was quiet for the subsequent few decades, but American independence and the advent of the Industrial Revolution unleashed forces that began to transform Maine's forest hinterland by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Pine Tree State (part of Massachusetts until the Missouri Compromise of 1820 ushered it into statehood) had become renowned for its timber early in the colonial era, when its tall, straight, and strong white pine were prized by the British Navy for masts. By 1691, it was illegal to cut any pine greater than 24 inches in diameter, and the government had hired several surveyors to cut on such trees a "Broad Arrow," marking it as the property of the King. Settlers all over the Northeast, who needed the good lumber themselves, deeply resented and often flaunted the law. In his history of New England logging, *Tall Trees, Tough Men* (W. W. Norton, 1999), Robert Pike speculates, "The King's Broad Arrow Policy did more to cause the American Revolution than the Stamp Act and the tea tax put together."

Most trees along the road to Gorman Chairback today are softwood—balsam fir and red spruce, with a few hemlocks and plenty of hardwood paper birch sprinkled in. These trees, although beautiful in their own way, were once more scarce. They grew beneath old stands of white pine, some of which, sources from the Colonial era tell us, grew more than 200 feet tall and 10 feet across. A tall stand around the lodge itself, though not reaching these massive proportions, evokes something of the old giants. Clearly, these residual white pine were allowed to grow up even as the surrounding forests were logged, starting with the pine and then moving on to the smaller, less valuable trees.

Even as the timber companies worked to extract a profit from the land, they observed the cultural shift that led many Americans into the outdoors during their leisure time in the 1850s and following the Civil War. Timber company owners realized there was money to be made by leasing out a few choice properties on their lands. Even if the profits were relatively small next to what they stood to gain from their logging operations, the owners or important shareholders could retreat to their camps for a relaxing few days of angling or hunting. Moreover, the leases often included clauses that excused the timber companies from liability if they carried out cuts in the surrounding forests or raised the level of an adjacent lake to allow a log drive. In the meantime, companies allowed the stands in the immediate vicinity of their camps to flourish, and even though the leases passed from owner

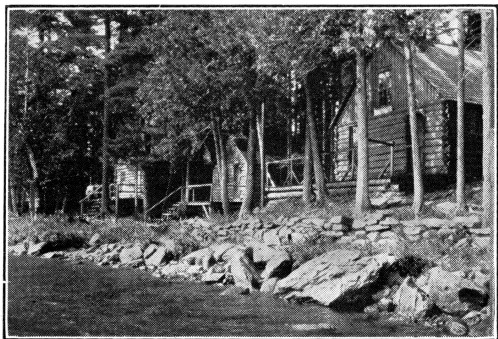
to owner, many camps endured, along with the surrounding trees. Thus, Gorman Chairback's white pines tower over its cabins, and just a few miles away, an enormous (by eastern standards) stand of white pine has survived for more than 150 years by a long-decayed cabin known as The Hermitage.

James Draper has found plenty of evidence of the old camps while paddling or wandering the pond shores. Draper is a retired designer of surveillance satellites and longtime AMC member who built his own camp 45 years ago on an island on Long Pond a mile or two west of Gorman Chairback. Clay potshards are particularly numerous now because the old guides would cache supplies of lard, liquor, and the like, easing their loads when they were actually out in the woods with clients in tow. These days, sportsmen are thin on the ground, according to Draper, who interrupted his gardening at his house in Newton, Massachusetts, to sit with me for an hour or two. "When we moved to Long Pond in 1965, we'd see fishermen every day. Now, we see far fewer."

W.P. Dean's Long Pond Camp was not the only lodge built on that body of water in the second half of the nineteenth century. By some measures, the region was less remote in the late nineteenth century than it is now, as the growth of the Katahdin Iron Works, only a few miles east of Long Pond, created a population center considerably closer to the pond than exists today. The local indigenous tribes had long used the iron ore, known as "bog iron" because of its formation in decomposed plants and organic acids in the soil on nearby Ore Mountain, to make red paint. Moses Greenleaf, an early American settler in the region, recorded that the Penobscots called the region *Mun-a-lam-un-gun*, meaning "very fine paint."

IN 1824, GREENLEAF FORGED A HORSESHOE FROM THE LOCAL ORE AND sent it the Maine legislature to encourage development. Investors took note; by 1846, after a succession of smaller companies tried their luck, the Katahdin Iron Works Corporation (KIW) took over smelting operations. Eventually, it ran a 55-foot-high blast furnace, fueled by charcoal produced on-site by a line of kilns. Now, at the old site across from the KIW checkpoint on the road from Brownville to Gorman Chairback, only one furnace and one kiln remain, but in 1880, according to J.W. Worthington, writing in the June 1939 issue of *Appalachia* (XXII no. 3), the KIW produced 2,000 tons of iron each year.¹ One ton sold for as much as \$47, and the operation sustained a village

¹ Worthington's article appeared in advance of the Appalachian Mountain Club's annual August Camp, which that year took place on the KIW land.



FAMOUS SINCE 1865

Shortly after the Civil War, the famous iron impregnated waters of the Chairback region were discovered. On the most important lake of this wonderful section of Maine are situated

Long Pond Camps

Ten cozy log cabins set at the edge of a lake that abounds with square-tailed trout and salmon. For the huntsman, this section always furnishes the limit in thrills and kills of moose and deer. For the health-seeker, Long Pond Camps are ideal. To fully appreciate all this send a postal to-day for the interesting booklet describing these features.

LONG POND CAMPS

RALPH E. YORK, Prop.

KATAHDIN IRON WORKS - MAINE

During the 1920s, York's Long Pond Camp (one of the forerunners of the AMC Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins) advertised abundant fishing and rest for "the health-seeker." It was one of many sporting camps that advertised in magazines.

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of 196 people. The hotel, stable, store, sawmill, gristmill, and various other buildings have since burned and been subsumed by the forest.

Teams of mules once hauled both the iron and wood necessary to the operation to the kilns and furnaces. The Bangor and Katahdin Iron Works Railroad, which became known as the K.I. line, reached KIW from Milo in 1882, providing rapid access to the rest of Maine and the Northeast. Regional tourism flourished: by 1900, 35 lodges, hotels, and sporting camps operated within 40 miles of Gulf Hags.

Golden Era of Hunting and Fishing

The hunting and fishing in those days must have been superb. Seven years after buying Long Pond Camp in 1888, the new owners, Albert Brown and his wife, Edith, built four additional cabins and opened the place to the public. Even then, a small band of caribou, numbered at 32 in 1898, still roamed what is now the southern section of the AMC KIW Tract near Caribou Bog and Benson Pond. Once part of a herd counted in the thousands, the caribou were gone by the early 1900s, though their legacy lives on in dozens of place names across northern Maine. According to Draper, hunters could even ship their fresh kills out via the new Canadian Pacific Railroad, which connected to the Maine Central Railroad in Brownville Junction. "You could put a red

flag out at Morkill [a few miles west of Long Pond], load your meat there, and have it shipped down to Boston.”

Among the many authors to celebrate this golden era of hunting and fishing camps was Holman Day, a Colby College graduate and author of such titles as *Kin O’Ktaadn* (1904) and *King Spruce* (1908). His poem, “Come Up and Fish,” contained in the former, ends:

Keep your ear out, city neighbors! Just the moment that she breaks
We will keep the wires buzzing with the tidings from the lakes.
Ah, to hear the reels a-purring. Don’t you see the taut lines slish?
But be patient! Soon we’ll hail you: “Ice is out; come up and fish.”

Day built his own camp across the cove from Gorman Chairback; apparently, he even entertained the Hollywood magnate Cecil B. DeMille, whom he had met while writing screenplays in Hollywood. Day’s camp is long gone, but from the dock at Gorman Chairback, you can still see the cliffs over which Day and his guests would hang their kills to drain them of blood.

During the 1880s and 1890s, the Bangor and Piscataquis and the Bangor and Aroostook Railroads took over the Katahdin Iron Works line, but it was discontinued in 1922. Operations at KIW had shut down in 1890, the easily accessible iron ore played out, whereas the vast deposits of the Mesabi Range in Minnesota could be manufactured into iron and steel far more efficiently.

Meanwhile, logging endured as a significant driver of the regional economy. Records of timbering operations from the nineteenth century are scarce, but KIW was an important stop on the tote roads that led to more northerly lumber camps on the Allagash River and west and east branches of the Penobscot River. Although the timber companies relied on rivers to float the logs to their sawmills, they used such roads during the winter for communication and to move oxen, men, and supplies to the camps.

The KIW region, as well as Long Pond itself, may have been devastated by the Piscataquis Fire of 1832, which passed through the Gulf Hags area while consuming 832,000 acres—5 percent of the state’s forestland. Worthington’s 1939 *Appalachia* article concludes:

If so, the lumbering industry, which played so important a part elsewhere in the history of the State of Maine, must for many years have been in abeyance in this region. There are some reports of old charred pine stumps, and it is an

interesting speculation whether the abundant birch of the early '40s, of a size suitable for making charcoal, which proved to be the moving factor in the establishment of the iron industry, was not the second growth which followed the fire. Probably K.I. was never itself the scene of great lumber operations.

Whatever the fire's path, succession eventually restored the forest, and with it, the appetites of the timber barons. Gulf Hagas's narrow proportions preserved the fine lumber upstream for many decades, but in 1879, the Pleasant River Dam Company, led by its president, Joab Palmer, resolved to blast out the narrowest sections with dynamite. In six weeks, Palmer's crew widened the bottleneck from 8 to 27 feet, allowing Palmer and several other smaller outfits to send nearly 80 million board feet of lumber down the Pleasant River over the next six years.

A couple of decades later, another notable logging operation operated for a few years on the south end of the AMC KIW tract. In 1908, Joseph Ray, originally of Ray, Minnesota, purchased Township 7, Range 9 (T7R9 NWP on government maps), which includes Gorman Chairback in its northwest corner. Four years later, he began construction on a town at the southern end of Caribou Bog, between Benson and Roaring Brook mountains. Here, at what became known as Ray's Town, Ray built two mills, the larger for softwood and the smaller for hardwood. Unusually for a Maine operation, he preferred to ship his lumber to market via railroad, so he extended a line two and half miles south from "Ray's Mill" along Caribou Brook to an intersection with the Canadian Pacific. At the other end of town, the rails ran as far as the north side of Indian Pond.

Like most operations, the loggers cut their timber during the winter. They were mostly active on the flanks of Barren and Roaring Brook mountains, from whence they skidded the logs down onto the frozen pond. When the ice went out in the spring, a boom held the logs until they were pulled to shore, where they were loaded onto the railroad cars and hauled to the sawmill. One year's work yielded 3 million board feet.

Ray's Mill was short-lived, however, because the mill complex burned down in 1916. Despite the payout from insurance, the Indian Lake Lumber Company, to which Ray had leased the operation in 1914, decided that too little good timber remained to justify rebuilding. The population, once 400 strong, dwindled, and in 1919, the Ray Lumber Company sold its land. Little now remains of Ray's Town save a few foundations.

Long Pond, too, was the site of major logging operations. The Seaboard, St. Regis, Champion International, and International Paper companies all owned the former Ray Lumber Company land during the twentieth century, and major logging operations continued until the 1980s. On big cuts, such as one performed by St. Regis on Barren Mountain in 1948, the loggers would build a dam at the top of Long Pond Stream to flood the area. Then, after a winter of cutting and sledding the wood down to water's edge, they would boom the wood across the pond. By this time, they were cutting pulp—4-foot-long softwood logs used to manufacture paper rather than boards. A decade later, cutting along the ridgeline of Third and Fourth mountains was so heavy that it discouraged visits to the sporting camp below. Even today, says Draper, the bottom of Long Pond is thick with sunken pulp.

Later on, the river men used steam- or gas-powered boats to haul the wood, but in the early days, they used a capstan winch mounted on a raft, or headworks, to warp the logs across the pond. A capstan winch is essentially an enormous spool attached by a thousand-foot-long hawser to an anchor. The process was incredibly laborious: as Robert Pike relates, twelve to fifteen men would wait by the capstan. They placed an anchor in a boat and dropped it ahead of the raft, at which point the men would push on the capstan bars, around and around, until the headworks reached the anchor. Then they repeated the process. It probably took at least a day to boom a full load from one end of Long Pond to the other.

The timber operations affected the water quality of Long Pond. The slag, detritus leftover from logging, clogged the lake and dirtied the bottom, making it, as a longtime resident of KIW, Sarah Green, described to Draper in 1965, a “mudhole.” Since he began visiting the pond, however, several beaches have reemerged. Among other factors, he credits the local moose, whose footfalls break up sticks and stir up the organic matter covering the bottom along the shoreline.

The most recent shift in the Long Pond area's economic orientation began, albeit slowly, in the 1930s, with the opening of the Appalachian Trail. Although the trail now descends from Chairback Mountain more or less directly toward Gulf Hagas, its original route swung west, past the “beautifully situated” York's Long Pond Camps, according to the 1934 *Guide to the Appalachian Trail* in Maine (published by the Appalachian Trail Conference). The trail builder, a registered Maine Guide named Walter D. Greene, was also a Broadway actor who appeared in seventeen plays between 1901 and 1936.



A guest at the camp celebrates her catch during a 1958 vacation. AMC LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE EAGER “APPIES,” AS AMC MEMBERS USED to call themselves, flocked north to travel the new Appalachian Trail. In a 1934 article in *Appalachia*, “South from Katahdin” (XX no. 9), AMC member Ronald L. Gower wrote about a club excursion to the region. After meeting Governor Percival Baxter, who suggested the AMC build a hut on Katahdin, the group of eighteen summited Katahdin and then moved south, eventually passing along the Pleasant River tote road (in those days, the AT made use of many backwoods roads). Gower wrote of this section, “At The Hermitage, a fine set of camps belonging to the pulpwood company which controls this section, the caretaker ferried us across the river. He seemed glad to see and talk with us, travelers being rare in this region.” The party stopped at York’s Long Pond Camps for the next two nights.

The group visited Gulf Hags, where Gower noted that although the gorge had been popular with tourists half a century earlier, it was “neglected and forgotten.” The locals were astonished by the club members’ pacific interest in the place:

The people in this section think of their woods in terms of three things only—pulp, hunting, and fishing. It is still beyond their ken that folks will travel far for solitude and scenery. In fact, one old fellow was so amazed at our lack of arms and tackle that he made it a point to cross-examine everyone in the party as to why he was there!

Gower and his companions ended up spending a third night on Long Pond because of a complication with their accommodations at their next stop, Bodfish Intervale. In the meantime, they scaled the peaks of the long ridge to the south of Long Pond. Gower's description might well describe the walk today:

The views are extensive from the peaks and ledge-outcroppings, with many small ponds like bits of glass in the dark green of the forest. As this section is overlong for one day, it is broken by a blue trail extending from the sag between Third and Fourth Mountains down to the western end of Long Pond, where we found a comfortable camp with all in readiness for us.

The AMC recently resuscitated that path as a blue-blazed side trail. The AT shifted to a more direct route north in 1983, but the restored Third Mountain Trail provides direct access from Gorman Chairback to the ridge. I hiked along it to the AT and thence to the summit of Third Mountain during my stay. The day was wet and cloudy, so I saw little of the surrounding country, but the forest, at least, was a vivid collection of greens and browns.

During the hour or so I walked on the AT itself, I passed several thru-hikers, each eagerly anticipating the summit of Katahdin less than 100 miles distant. Like the White Mountain huts, Gorman Chairback offers a work-for-stay program, allowing thru-hikers to complete chores in exchange for meals and lodging. At dinner the first night, I sat next to "Hightop" and "Boomer," who, in their 50s and footsore after a rough week in the 100-Mile Wilderness, had chosen to pay full price and marinate in relative opulence.

The AMC plans to expand the trail network, extending a loop south beyond Third Mountain to circle Indian and Dam ponds, where canoes and kayaks would allow hikers to break up their ramble with a paddle. While I was at Gorman Chairback, a trail crew was busily rearranging rocks by the lodge's dock, building up the shoreline to prevent erosion. During the day, the other guests were either out on nearby trails or

vigorously paddling on the lake, but I observed only one fishing. Still, Gorman Chairback's decorations celebrate its past as a sporting camp. Several outlines of fish, drawn in thick pencil on birch bark and now framed, line the walls. "Square Tail Trout, 13 in, 5 lbs, caught by Nat Sturgis, Age 10, July 3, 1936," reads one inscription. "Caught June 3rd, 1943, Long Pond, 13 lbs, By C.C. Wells."

The AMC is serious about providing a boost to the local economy—Rinard told me that four of the six people working at Gorman Chairback during my visit were Mainers. Bryan Wentzell, the AMC's Maine policy director, detailed a myriad of ways that the AMC reaches out to its neighbors, both economically and socially. Perhaps most ambitiously, the AMC hopes to bring every student in Piscataquis County onto the MWI land three times before graduation. During construction on Gorman Chairback, the AMC sourced its labor and materials locally, and it encourages guests to rely on local fishing guides, restaurants, and outfitters. A troop of Boy Scouts from Greenville has even adopted an MWI trail. Wentzell, who is chair of the Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority and sits on the board of directors for the Piscataquis Economic Development Council, noted that the AMC does not allow ATV trails on its property—like other landowners in the KI-Jo Mary Multiple Use Forest. "For years," Wentzell emailed me, "people have been able to drive and snowmobile pretty much anywhere they wanted. We don't have that policy—we have specific trails where we allow snowmobiling, so that is a change." AMC is working with snowmobile clubs to separate snowmobile trails from ski trails.

Perhaps most strikingly, the AMC is carrying out selective logging operations on the property, using sustainable harvesting techniques. Walter Graff, AMC senior vice president, said that the club manages the KIW tract on a 50-year plan, contracting with Huber Timber Resources. The plan is now being updated to include the Roach Pond Tract, and it includes a 20,000-acre ecological reserve that is closed to all vehicles and logging. Thus far, the harvest has targeted beech trees afflicted by Beech Bark Disease and softwoods, with the average annual yield amounting to 6,000 to 8,000 cords. The revenue offsets property taxes, logging, and road maintenance and construction on the MWI land.

Graff acknowledged the difficulty of cutting timber while providing a wilderness experience for guests. Timber management will be a new experience for many guests. The management plan initially focused logging on the region of the KIW tract south of the AT, but in 2010, cutting began on

patches considerably closer to the AMC camps. Rinard mentioned that he was developing a “forestry classroom” program to teach guests about the interplay between forest and wildlife ecology and sustainable forestry. Graff concluded, “Our entire project is designed to conserve this magnificent landscape and lift up the local economy. We strongly believe that healthy communities go hand and hand with landscape-scale conservation.”

The current extent of use on the new AMC property raises interesting questions about the future of the central Maine landscape and even the nature of the AMC itself. As Draper puts it, “Gorman is a tremendous opportunity to think about things we [the AMC] haven’t thought about yet.” A bearded, sardonic fellow, he mentioned that he hopes the camp will be “a pioneer in the value of the night sky.” Northern Maine is one of the few places in the eastern United States where light pollution has not obscured the stars. Considering the landscape’s ecological history, he offered, “It would be really nice to have a herd of caribou swimming along across Long Pond.”

A resurgent herd of caribou; a multilayered night sky—these emblems of wildness cannot endure without a well-informed public that understands the risks of forest fragmentation. Let us hope that those who visit this area are inspired to value the working forest, the history of the region, and the land’s wild qualities.

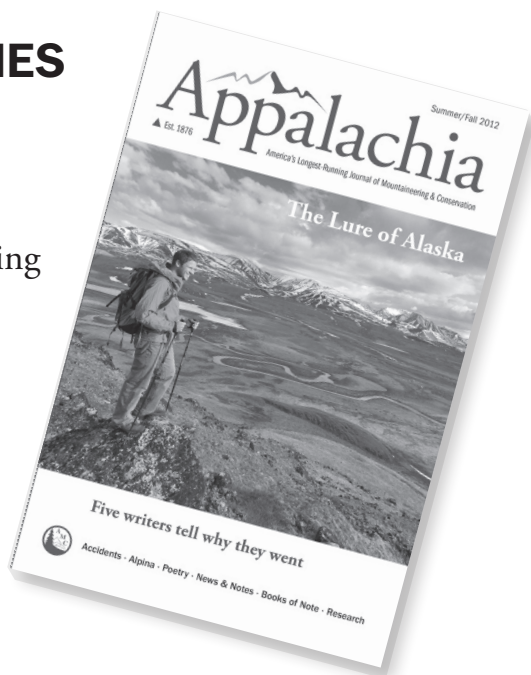
ANDREW RIELY teaches geography at the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C. He details his explorations, in cities as well as in the backcountry, at <http://gullivers-nest.blogspot.com/>

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