

STEPPING STONE

Newsletter of the Bennington Section of the Green Mountain Club

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WINTER ACTIVITIES

Don't let the cold keep you inside! Winter is a wonderful season to enjoy our snow-covered mountains. It's also the season to keep prepared and safe. Wondering where to cross-country ski or snowshoe in the Bennington area? <https://www.benningtongmc.org/winter.html>



Being Outside is Good For Us!

Feeling a bit blue lately? Is your blood pressure high? Having a hard time focusing? No, we're not recommending the latest pill!

Numerous studies are now proving what we instinctively know - being outside is good for us! The World Health Organization, the National Institute of Health and many others are confirming the understanding that we are part of the natural world and that being out in nature, in both green and blue spaces, is beneficial for our psychological and physical health.

In a natural setting, it isn't just the blue and green colors that are soothing; the shapes of objects can be comforting, too. Looking at natural fractals - complex patterns that repeat at varying size scales in nature (ferns, flowers, mountains, or ocean waves) - induces more alpha wave activity in the brain which is associated with a relaxed but wakeful state and internalized attention.

We usually operate at a different pace while in nature allowing us to take in what we see, hear, smell and feel - to be fully present. People also find comfort in many sounds from nature - birds, animals, wind, and water. Think about what's NOT in nature - traffic and noise! It's been found that



inhaling volatile organic compounds like limonene and pinene while in a forest can decrease mental fatigue, induce relaxation, and improve cognitive performance and mood.

When people are in nature, they are often walking, gardening, cycling, hiking, etc. The combination of movement and natural scenery increase the health benefits. Even a few minutes outside can improve mood and cognitive function.

So grab time whenever you can - a walk in a green space on your lunch break, a quick cycle after work - or if you can't get out, bring nature inside with plants, photographs of nature, fragrant flowers or essential oils, and apps with sounds of birds, oceans or rain.

We are so fortunate to live in the Green Mountain State - let's all get out, enjoy it, and improve our health along the way!

Nature Notes: Snowshoe Hare

By Terri Armata



The Snowshoe Hare, (*Lepus americanus*), is a large hare of boreal forests. Here in Bennington County VT it is usually found in the higher elevations. White in winter and reddish-brown in summer, the ear tips remain black. The back feet and toes are larger and furrier than



other hare and rabbit species. While rabbits when feeling danger will freeze in place, the Snowshoe hare will run away. Their diet is grasses, plants and new tree growth in summer, and buds, tree bark and seeds in winter. Maturity is reached at the age of 1 year and they can live up to 5 years. They give birth in spring and summer to a litter of 4 to 8 babies.

The White Mountains Hiking and Hut System

By Robin Tarnas and Barb Raskin

Going into the wilderness for several days has always been a special kind of vacation. These are the places that stimulate the best memories. Past multi-day backpacking excursions to Glacier National Park, the Sierra Nevada, the central Rockies, the Smoky Mountains, the Olympic Peninsula, and the Porcupine mountains in the "Great State of Superior," as well as canoeing expeditions down the the St. John and the St. Croix rivers of Maine, among the islands of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and even the canoe trails of the Everglades have been among our most memorable trips.

But is there a more comfortable way of doing this? Can you go out for a few days without carrying quite as much gear and food? Can you plan for several days in an area with unpredictable weather and still build in a margin for safety?

The Appalachian Mountain Club hut system lets hikers in the White Mountains of New Hampshire do just that. You can wake up in a bunk, eat a warm breakfast, pack a lunch, and walk all day. After reaching a few peaks, you arrive at an AMC hut to get out of the weather, relax, talk with other hikers, and then are served a plentiful supper. This, we decided, was the best of all worlds.



Mt Eisenhower in the foreground, then Mt Franklin, Mt Monroe, then Mt Washington towering behind.

Additional photos on page 10.

This past September, we scheduled a multi-day hike on the Presidential Range with Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI). Even though we enjoy walking regularly, being over 70 years old meant that special attention had to be paid to building physical strength and endurance for this adventure. For several weeks prior to the trip, we scheduled regular climbs up local peaks. Mount Anthony, Bald Mountain, Equinox, Stratton, Greylock, Monadnock, and Auscutney were all part of the training program. Each day we also added more weight until our packs no longer were a burden.

When the week of the trip arrived, another challenge presented itself. Hurricane Ida came sweeping up the Atlantic coast, and there were predictions of rain with wind gusts up to 120 miles an hour at the highest peaks of the White Mountains. Visions of being another chapter in the books on disasters in the White Mountains danced in our heads. Happily, the organizers at REI

conferred with the AMC risk managers, and finally, just the day before setting out, the itinerary was amended to limit our exposure to the highest winds. We would avoid the Lakes of the Clouds and Mt. Washington, but still spend three days on the ridge.

At our scheduled time, we left the Highland Center base lodge and began our climb. By noon we had reached the summit of Mt Jackson (which was not named after the president, but rather after an engineer who surveyed this portion of the White Mountains.). There, the wind met our expectations. Braving gusts up to 70 miles per hour, we staggered up to the peak, grinned into the teeth of the gale, and scampered down below tree line before we could be blown away.

From there, we climbed down schist boulders, around granite outcroppings, and over a bog until we reached the Mitzpah Hut. After a hearty supper served by a cheerful hut crew, we anticipated a freezing night requiring our warm sleeping bags. We were surprised, however, at how much warmth six people can produce in a small unheated bunk room.

The next day dawned clearer with calmer winds, and we crested Mt Pierce and then Mt Eisenhower. The visibility was unlimited; we appreciated views from Vermont to Maine and from Moosilauke to Canada. The sun warmed us as we lounged on the rocks out of the relatively mild 35 mph winds. We returned to Mitzpah Hut for another comfortable night before waking fresh for our descent back to the Highland Lodge. A steady rain kept us alert as we navigated the mud, the creeks, and the eroded rocks down the trail.

The hike itself was, as with all wilderness adventures, entirely dependent on the attitude of the hikers. We were lucky to share this trip with an enthusiastic group of younger backpackers. Our Appalachian Mountain Club guides were prepared and knowledgeable. They answered our questions about the geology, the botany, and the history of these mountains. They made the experience even more rich and satisfying.

Did it get cold? **Yes.**

Did it rain? **Yes.**

Was the sky often cloudy and ominous? **Yes.**

Did the wind just about blow us off the face of the Earth? **It tried.**

But was it another exceptional opportunity to experience the beauty, majesty, and joy of our world?

Most decidedly, it was!

Here are some books and online resources we found to be of interest and/or helpful before our trip:

1. The Appalachian Mountain Club White Mountain Guide. It's the most comprehensive guide to the White Mountain hiking trails, with a number of section maps included. It's currently in its 31st edition. We were comfortable using a recently retired edition for general trail information as we were on a guided trip. If you're going to hike the Whites on your own, however, we suggest opting for the most recent edition with its updated information and maps.
2. A waterproof trail map of the White Mountains: nice to have when it's wet outside. We used the Map Adventures Outdoor Maps and Guides version, now in its 6th edition. It's also available in a digital form. <https://www.mapadventures.com/products/white-mountains-waterproof-trail-map>
3. The higher peaks of the White Mountains present the most challenging hiking terrain in the northeast. Even those of us who live or hike in the mountains of Vermont can be taken by surprise by the White's steep, rocky trails devoid of switchbacks, and the turbulent weather that can overtake the range's higher elevations with unexpected swiftness. The Appalachian Mountain Club would like to remind you of this, and have posted a very helpful introduction to the White Mountains: <https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/outdoor-resources/a-beginners-guide-to-hiking-in-the-white-mountains/> . The Presidentials are only a small portion of the Whites, and there are many wonderful day hikes to be found in and around the area as well.
4. For those needing more convincing that taking on the Whites unprepared is a bad idea, we suggest Not Without Peril: 150 Years of Misadventure on the Presidential Range of New Hampshire by Nicholas Howe. Published in 2009, there is now a 10th Anniversary edition which updates the documented "misadventures" in the intervening 10 years, as well as an afterward from the author, "offering a personal account of an evening spent at the Mount Washington Observatory while 160-mile-per-hour winds raged outside".

Mystery Photo

By Martha Stitelman



Where is this? Check the end of this newsletter to find out.

A Poem: In Which Medium

By Berta Winiker

And then there was North Pond in Savoy, close to the Florida town line

A young boy, maybe six, punctuating the stillness and squealing as he reeled in tiny sunfish, one after another. He wasn't new to fishing, each fish was simply new to him.

I wasn't new to kayaking, this pond was simply new to me.

At first glance, a smallish and unremarkable pond with a stream spilling out on one end. A starting point for exploring.

Two beaver lodges, in close proximity to each other. Competing business interests or a collaboration?

In no time, an embarrassment of riches and novelties. If I were only an artist, circumnavigating this bounty, eyeing subject matter, retiring to my easel, en plein air.

Oils would be an appropriate choice for the density of dromedary humps that boulder through the surface, familiarly and connected. Flecked, solid and saturated.

Pastels would seemingly suffice for the mass of porcupine quill grasses. A rather simple enough and monochromatic assembly of vegetation. A very pleasant rustle against the solid kayak.

Ink would likely do justice to a very delicate spread of grasses resembling miniature nonpareils. Intricate brush strokes required here for these lilliputian pincushions. Artistic license always an option, perhaps resize these for ease of display?

A mat of common four-petaled butter yellow flowers could be rendered in either pastel or watercolors. Give equal attention to the sweet cheer of the fresh, translucent green leaves.

Multiple choice in the confusion of clouds, coming and going. Watercolor one minute, a shift to oils in the next. What happens when oil and water are mixed? Can you mix mediums on one canvas?

I beg off here with my rudimentary knowledge of mediums. I am simply passing through with my camera eye, my delight in discovering new flora and fauna.

Waters Hill Cemetery

By Billy Martin

Located just off Route 9 in Woodford you'll see an old road/hiking path into the woods. Follow this for about a mile and you'll arrive at the old, abandoned Waters Hill Cemetery. This fascinating glimpse into history contains gravestones from 1794 - 1861. Imagine what life must have been like in this remote area during the early 1800's! Below are 2 articles about this remarkable place. This walk is 1.8 miles round trip with about 420 feet of elevation gain.





On a visit to this neglected resting place of Woodford's pioneers, the oldest inscription found on a plain marble slab, was as follows:

In Memory of Mr. Otis Eddy,
 Who died Oct. 22nd, 1794 In the 22d year of his age.
*Death, like an overthrowing stream,
 sweeps us away, our life a dream.*

Find much more information about his fascinating dip into our local history at: <https://www.benningtongmc.org/stories-and-podcasts/waters-hill-cemetery>

Padding in Florida

By David Pisaneschi

Overview

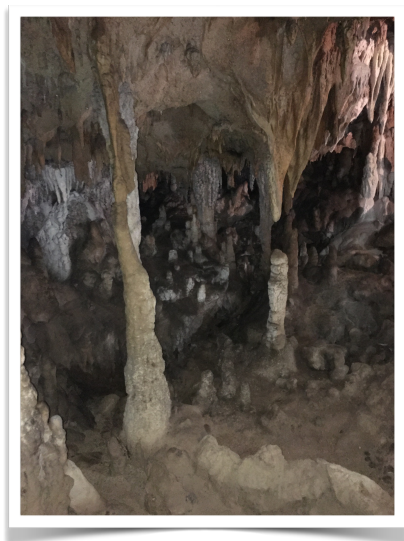
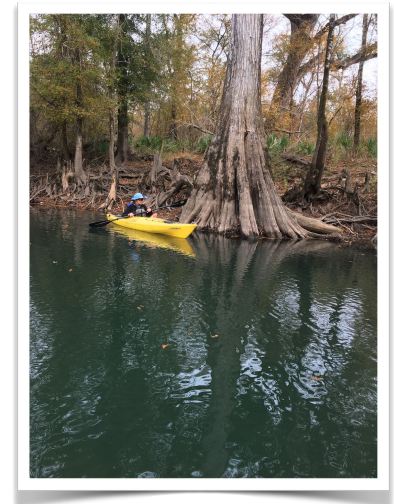
This trip involved paddling mostly on the Chipola, a major river of the Florida panhandle. Our campsite was a private group site which included a large pavilion and exclusive restrooms with showers. The pleasant initial weather gave way to heavy rains and cool weather midweek. A rebound later in the week was most welcome. Visiting the Olustee State Battlefield was a nice conclusion.

Sun , Nov 12

Arrived at Florida Caverns State Park and set up camp.

Mon, Nov 13

- Paddled the Chipola.
- Put In: Yancey Bridge. Take Out: Magnolia Bridge. Typical Florida lazy river.
- Paddled 11.13 miles in 4.25 hours



Tues, Nov 14

- Paddled Ocheeese Pond
- Explored cypress swamps which ring the lake's perimeter. Incoming rain in the pm forced an early take out.
- Paddled 6.30 miles in 3.25 hours.

Wed, Nov 15

Heavy rain continued Tuesday night into Wednesday. Drove to Tallahassee. Toured the historic state capitol.

Thurs, Nov 16

- Rain ended early in the morning - Paddled a wide section of the Chipola.
- In spite of heavy rain, the river was very low as evidenced by the waterline. Great views of the cypress swamps and forests along the edge.
- Put In: Cypress Creek Boat Ramp. Take Out: Dead Creek Launch Site
- Paddled 10.75 miles in 4.00 hours.
- Cave Tour; Took the one-hour cave tour at the state park, (FL Caverns SP).

Fri., Nov 17

- Morning: Merritt Mill Pond. This pond is a dammed section of the Chipola. Paddled up to the spring at Jackson County Park.
- Put in/Take out: Fish Camp Road
- Upon returning, we drove to our afternoon paddle site.
- Afternoon: Put In: Route 90 launch. Take Out: Magnolia Bridge.
- Put in at the foot of the dam required a 4-5 foot drop off the dock. Paddled Spring Creek into the Chipola.
- Covered 10.33 miles in 3.75 hours

Sat., Nov 18

- Broke camp. stopped at the Olustee State Battlefield
- Occurring in February, 1864, this was the site of the largest Civil War engagement in Florida, a Confederate victory saved Tallahassee.
- Unlike Vicksburg, at least the North was smart enough not to attack during summer. Afterwards, we continued our six-hour drive back to central Florida.

News from the GMC Main Headquarters



New Rental Cabin Opening

GMC is proud to announce a NEW rental cabin on the shores of Wheeler Pond, in Barton! Jean Haigh Cabin will welcome its first overnight guests starting December 15.

Jean Haigh cabin is insulated (though guests should be prepared for winter camping conditions), has sleeping bunks for eight guests, a woodstove, and a porch that faces Wheeler Pond. It replaces the former Beaver Dam Cabin, which was closed and then removed several years ago. It shares an outhouse with Hadsel-Mares Cabin, and both cabins will be rented to separate groups simultaneously.

Jean Haigh Cabin Reservation Webpage: www.greenmountainclub.org/about/gmc-rental-cabins/jean-haigh-cabin/

2024 Taylor Series Lineup

The James P. Taylor Outdoor Adventure Speaker Series is returning for its 32nd year in 2024. The Green Mountain Club has several exciting speaker events scheduled from January through March, all of which are free to the public.

The series will kick off on January 11 with a dive into the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps’ work in Vermont, then on January 17 a hiker will share his 2019 story of “tramping” over 900 miles on Te Araroa, New Zealand’s long distance hiking route, stretching 3,000 kilometers along the length of the country’s two main islands.. Stay tuned for registration links and the full speaker series lineup, including presentations on avalanche dogs, women’s Long Trail history, treks along Spain’s coast, and other adventure stories!



Winter Hike Recommendations and Safety Tips

Everything You Need to Know About Winter Hiking: <https://www.greenmountainclub.org/hiking/winter-hiking/>



A Big Thank You!

To Mike Rancourt for adding some much-needed gravel and hard-pack to the steps near the kiosk at the Bald Mountain trailhead on Branch Street. He filled the steps in with 3/8" washed gravel and tamped it in place. The upper steps, above the kiosk, got an additional thin layer of "shoulder stone" which packs well yet still drains. It looks great - thank you, Mike!

President's Message

By Reed Goossen, Bennington Section President

Happy Holiday Season to all of you. I hope you all are finding ways to light up against the darkness of the winter solstice. How? May I suggest going outside and being active? For example, walk or hike, and snowshoe or ski when snow is available. I find I am happier whenever I've been able to get some exercise out in the fresh air and whatever sun is available. This can be more of a challenge in these shorter days.

You may have noticed that the Green Mountain Club and, specifically, the Bennington Section, has been more apparent to the public than previously. Some of that is coming from the main headquarters and some of that is coming from the outreach efforts of some of the section leaders. This effort has been spearheaded by Ann and Billy Martin, so please thank them when you get a chance.

We will hold our annual meeting early in the spring, probably in mid to late March. At that time my term as your section president will be coming to a close. I do not plan to extend my time as section president after that, so a replacement is needed. Please consider who you think would be a good candidate for the next section president. If you would like to take the job, just nominate yourself. If you can think of someone else who might do the job, please let one or more of the officers know.

The duties of the section president haven't been detailed extensively in the section bylaws, but here are a few of the responsibilities of the president, as I see them:

- Act as the liaison between the section and the main club in Waterbury
- Set the date and place for the annual meeting and preside over that meeting.
- Attend monthly meetings over Zoom with the presidents of the other GMC sections, the club president, the director, and other staff members.
- Make decisions about questions of policy and small expenditures
- Consult with, and delegate tasks to, other officers as needed.

I made this list as inclusive as I could think of, though there may be a few items that I have forgotten to mention. The total time required for the position is not large. I'd say that on average it requires only a few hours of time per month.

Best wishes to all

Reed Goossen, Bennington Section President

Schedule of Upcoming Events: Winter 2023-24

Below are brief descriptions of upcoming events - ALL DETAILS WILL BE POSTED ON MEETUP.

Always check our Meetup Site for more information or updates to the following events, as weather or other aspects may change these dates and details. www.meetup.com/benningtongmc. Additional events will be added to Meetup as the season progresses. Join Meetup and receive emails about upcoming events.

Watch for a pop-up ski around the Hopkins Forest Loop in Williamstown, posted on Meetup and our website, should the snow be adequate. Leader: Margie March

Thursday, December 21 - Celebrate the first day of winter with an outdoor outing. Leader: Ken Milman

Tuesday, Boxing Day, December 26 - Leaders' and participants' Choice. Meet at Bennington Recreation Center at 1pm. Leaders: Lorna & Hamilton. Bring any holiday goodies that you would like to share, plus your own drink.

Monday, January 1 - Snowshoe, micro-spike or hike Bolles Brook trail (A traditional GMC Benn New Year's Day outing). Meet at Bennington Recreation Center at 1pm. Leader: Tim Marr

Saturday, January 13 - A relaxed pace wander on trails in the Greenberg Conservation Reserve in Bennington. Meet at Greenberg reserve at 413 Route 7 South at 1:00. Leader: Robin Tarnas

Saturday January 20 - Dewey Road Cross Country Ski or Hike. Access through Woodford State Park. Amount of snow may change location. Meet at Bennington Rec Center at 10:30. Leader: Reed Goossen

Thursday, January 25 - Full Wolf Moon Cross Country Ski/Snowshoe on Stone Hill, Williamstown. Meet at the far end of the Clark parking lot to ski up the hill for the view. Leader: Margie March

Saturday January 27 - Paran/Frost trail. This is a 4 mile out and back trail with 255 foot elevation gain. Boots or micro-spikes or snowshoes. 2-3 hours. Meet at Bennington Rec Center at 11:00. Leaders: Ann & Billy Martin

Friday, February 2 - Greylock Glen, Adams, MA. Look for groundhogs as we ski the trails and check out the new Glen Outdoor Center plans. More details closer to event date. Leader: Margie March

Saturday, February 10 - 3 mile loop trail around Adams Reservoir in Woodford State Park. Boots/Micro-spikes/Snowshoes. Meet Bennington Rec Center at 11:00. Leaders: Ann & Billy Martin

Wednesday, February 14 - Prospect Ski Cross country ski. Meet at Prospect Ski Center for a ski of 1 to 2 hours. Lunch afterwards in the lodge for those who wish. Meet at 10:30 am at Prospect Ski area. Leader: Lorna Cheriton

Saturday, February 24 - Full Snow Moon ski/snowshoe on Sara Tenney Trail in Williamstown. Meet at the pull-off, across from the trailhead on route 2, 2 miles up from the junction of routes 2 and 7. Leader: Margie March

Saturday, March 2 - Tibbitts State Forest Loop, snowshoes or micro-spikes. About 4.2 miles with 810 ft elevation gain. Meet 10:30 at the Bennington Rec Center. Leaders: Ann and Billy Martin

Saturday, March 16 - New lookout on Mt Anthony. Hike/micro-spike/snowshoe. Leaders: TBA

Tuesday, March 19 - Celebrate the Equinox with a hike up Mt. Equinox. Leader: Ken Milman

Mystery photo: Bay of Fundy at the upper end, where the tides were gentle. We drove around the north coast of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, finding lovely sheltered places to paddle, but were sent home early by Hurricane Lee.

Additional photos from Barb and Robin's hiking adventure in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

