

The Stepping Stone – Autumn 2020

Newsletter of the Bennington Section of the Green Mountain Club



Pre-Social Distancing Somerset bike trip

CLUB OFFICERS:

President: Reed Goosen

Vice President: Tim Marr

Secretary and Director: Martha Stitelmann

Treasurer and Membership Co-ordinator: Bill Lyons

For information only. Officers not elected are

Co-ordinator of Trails and Shelters: Matt Vezina

Communications (website and Meetup): Ann and Billy Martin

Newsletter: Hal March and Lorna Cheriton

UPDATE Due the Coronavirus pandemic, the print version of the Spring/Summer issue of **The Stepping Stone** newsletter was postponed. The current digital version appears on our BenningtonGMC.org website under **NEWS**. Check our **Bennington Section Meetup Group** for new trips or events as they are listed.

Message from the Section President

The current pandemic has altered the way the Green Mountain Club (GMC) has been able to function. The annual meeting of the main club had to be held virtually this past June, and since April I have been meeting with the other section presidents and the GMC leadership in Waterbury once a month virtually by use of Zoom.

You have probably noticed that our section of the GMC has not posted any outings, other than trail work, since the start of the COVID -19 lockdown in March. Initially the Long Trail was closed, and the GMC put a moratorium on outings. That has since been lifted. In June, a committee was formed (with thanks to Tim Marr for representing the Bennington Section on this committee) to establish guidelines for how to run safely outings during this pandemic. These were finalized in late

June and now appear on the GMC website, <https://www.greenmountainclub.org/> then clicking on “News/events” and choosing the link you wish as either a trip leader, which has the entire document, or as a trip participant, which shows the parts you need to know if you are not the leader of the outing. Or, you can follow one of these links:

1. 1) https://www.greenmountainclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full-GMC-Guidelines-For-Section-Outings-in-the-Age-of-COVID-19_Final_6.29.2020.pdf
2. 2) https://www.greenmountainclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GMC-Participant-Guidelines-For-Section-Outings-in-the-Age-of-COVID-19_Final_6.26.2020.pdf

I encourage our leaders to start planning and posting trips again, but only by following these guidelines. Any leader may make his/her own more restrictive guidelines as well, for example number of participants. The main purposes of these guidelines are to minimize contact with possible COVID-19 and to also ensure that contact information is available should it be necessary to do any contact tracing.

We are encouraged to stay in the state, although since Berkshire County in Mass, and Rensselaer and Washington Counties in NY are currently marked green on Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development's weekly map of safe places to travel without needing to quarantine (<https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel>), outings to those areas also should be acceptable.

Some of you may recall that I served as the section president from 1996 to 2000. My, how times have changed, especially this year! Back in the day I drove to section presidents' meetings no more than once a year, where the topics of discussion did not include how to safely enjoy the outdoors and the Long Trail without coming too close to other hikers. I can tell you that the club is still doing its work of maintaining and promoting the Long Trail. Some 3600 hours of volunteer work have already been recorded for this year. This year is the 100th anniversary of the oldest GMC shelter on the trail, Taft Lodge. On September 19 there will be a modified celebration held in the parking lot for access to the lodge, across from Barnes Camp. It will start at 12:30. There will not be live streaming this event, but if you look for a video there should be one on the main club website sometime afterwards.

Please get outdoors and be active, with limited numbers of people. Be healthy and be safe.
Respectfully, Reed Goossen, Bennington Section President.

NATURE NOTES The Putney Mountain Hawkwatch by Terry Armata

This season the Putney Hawkwatch (Sept 1, 2020 to November 10) is sharply curtailed due to Covid-19. Only a limited number of observers are on the mountain any given day. Each day's volunteers will be exclusively from those who are on our roster of long-time qualified personnel. They will work from a very limited, roped off, watcher-only area and only those with assigned duties can be accommodated. Over the years many 'Friends of the Watch' have also spent time with the designated watch crew but this year are asked not to come so those present maintain needed social distancing while monitoring raptor flights. The hiking trails are open, you're welcome to use them.

The Putney Mountain Hawkwatch has done an annual fall raptor count since 1974. Data collected at the site is part of the Raptor Population Index, a study of raptor population trends in the Northeast. Since 2003 Monarch Butterfly flights have also been recorded. Watch results will be posted daily and can be viewed at www.hawkcount.org.

From Terri's Vt eBird mail group: Turkey Vultures grace our state from early spring to late fall but few of us have had the privilege of observing their "nesting" behavior. The video [link below], created with a minimum of human intrusion, shows these secretive birds as they raise the next generation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig3c1k7S2zw>

Northeast Wildlife Trackers Online Conference

Have you seen animal tracks in the forest, the mud, the snow and wondered: What animal made those? Where was it coming from and going to? Where does this animal live? What does it eat? How does it interact with other creatures nearby? Northeast Wildlife Trackers are a group of enthusiasts who share a passion for collaborative exchanges on all aspects of wildlife tracking. They have a team of experts with many years of experience in tracking and educating. This year the annual Tracking Conference (October 13-17) will be online. Presenters and attendees from all over the world will take part. <<http://northeastwildlifetrackers.com>> for more information. The cost is \$25 until September 30th and \$35 after that.

What is a monadnock? A Double Ascent

In late August we had the fun of ascending the 3,165 foot Mt. Monadnock, which is about a two hour drive from Bennington. Located in towns of Jaffrey and Dublin, in southern New Hampshire, Mount Monadnock is said to be the third most climbed mountain in the world behind Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Tai in China. Its bare summit gives hikers an incredible 360 degree view of all six New England states as well as Canada.

The term monadnock has come to be used to describe any isolated mountain and the name has been interpreted as “the mountain that stands alone.” The summit of this mountain was not always bare. In 1800, the first of two major fires was set on the lower slopes to clear them for pasture use. This fire swept through the red spruce forest of the summit and flanks of the mountain. 20 years later the second major fire swept through as local farmers wanted to rid the mountain of wolves thought to be denning in the blow downs. The fire killed the vegetation, destroyed the topsoil, and before plants could start to retake the mountain, much of the soil washed down the mountain leaving the exposed rock.



Coming Down a large rock fact on the Marlboro Trail
Mount Monadnock was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1987 and is the northern

terminus of the 110 mile Metacomet-Monadnock Trail and the southern terminus of the 50 mile Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway.

Short trails, longer trails, popular trails, less traveled trails, rocky trails, forest trails - there are trails here for everyone. If you don't want to climb to the summit, there are many easier hikes to enjoy. There are 38 different trails that make up about 35 miles of maintained hiking trails, all well marked.

We camped in Gilson Pond campground which is part of the Monadnock State Park which is convenient to many of the trails. The first day was one of those perfect hiking days - cool, dry, breezy with a clear blue sky! We headed out on the Birchtoft Trail which starts right from the campground. This leads to other trails to the summit and we chose the Red Spot Trail and was the wind blowing like mad up high! We returned the same way to make a round trip of about 6 miles.. The Birchtoft trail is quite moderate and only gets a bit steeper toward to end. The Red Spot trail entails quite a bit of rock climbing on large slabs of stone angled in many directions and goes up a steady incline. We sat out the next day with some rain, rested up and then the following day tackled the mountain from the other side using the less traveled, no fee Marlboro Trail. This is a beautiful trail as you climb rocks up to a forest area and then more rocks to another forest area, again and again and take in multiple views along the way. Be prepared to use hands and feet to climb on some of the steep, rocky areas!

The summit is well worth the climb! The views extend in all directions and you truly feel like you are on top of the world. On the second ascent we were really lucky to be at the bottom of the clouds as they swirled and danced all around us, forming and reforming in a myriad of shapes, then parting to let the blue sky show through. At the summit we were pleased to see people of all ages from a couple of intrepid children to 75 year olds and all in between.

The campground is well run, clean and sites are spread out from each other. The state park limits the number of people allowed in for day use, which keeps the trails from getting too crowded. Currently you need to make reservations ahead of time for both day use and camping.

This link will give you information about the mountain as well as details about all the different trails. <http://www.mount-monadnock.com> See more photos at the benningtongmc.org website under News.

All in all, it was two challenging but rewarding hikes! We hope that your Monadnock experience will be as good as ours was.

Ann & Billy Martin

Profile of Hamilton Topping by Lorna Cheriton

As PJ Beaumont hands the leadership of trails and shelters maintenance over to Matt Vezina, here's a profile of a past Co-ordinator of Trails and Shelters for our Bennington Section of the Green Mountain Club.

Hamilton Topping studied forestry at Paul Smith's College in upper New York state and, after working as a surveyor, took the New York state civil service exam, passed that and began his career as a forest ranger. He served most of his career in the Catskills region of New York State, living in Tannersville and raising two daughters there. His duties as a law enforcement office included building trails, fire control, responding to calls of disorderly campers, search and rescue for missing persons, and recovery operations after plane crashes. Much of his work was solitary, with freedom

to determine his own schedule and activities, but he was usually accompanied by his dog.

His first dog, Streak, came into his life when he was six years old and had just returned from the doctor after a cousin smashed Hamilton's finger with a mallet. The puppy, given to him for comfort by his mother, hid under the buffet and the little boy, hurting, also crawled under the buffet with the frightened pup.

As an adult and serial dog-owner, Hamilton owned an Airdale, Hector, a husky, Aspen, and Sam, all large dogs that accompanied Ham in his forest ranger truck. One would not let an assistant into the truck to get the equipment Hamilton had asked him to get; the resourceful assistant resorted to simply opening the door and the dog jumped out to run and join Hamilton, letting the assistant easily obtain the equipment.

Working in the woods, the dogs were sometimes unable to resist chasing porcupines; the resulting removal of quills from the dog's muzzle was always painful. But, even after enduring removal of a mouthful of quills, one dog stood quivering with indecision on seeing his next porcupine, finally unable to resist chasing it and getting a second mouthful of quills.

During his career as a forest ranger, Hamilton volunteered for numerous forest fires in the western US, serving as leader of a troop of men. Perhaps the most extreme incident occurred when he watched from a distance in horror as a huge tree fell directly on one of his men who had been unable to tell what direction the tree would fall. Rushing over, Hamilton and his men found that the man was uninjured, having fallen where a large rock protected him from certain death.

Later in his career, Hamilton was promoted to captain and accepted a position on Long Island, New York. There he supervised other rangers and, as a law enforcement officer, investigated reports of unauthorized activities such as burning without a permit and issued appropriate tickets. Earlier, in the Catskills, he had needed to approach a noisy and disorderly group of camping bikers. Approaching them alone but with his night stick, he realized the night stick might be turned against him so wisely turned and left the night stick in his truck, and dealt with them unarmed except with the authority of his words.

Always an outdoors man, he enjoyed hiking and canoeing. In his 40s, he took up running, joining an informal club and entering races, including five marathons (New York and London, England among them).

Late in his career, he took a leave of absence from work to through-hike the Appalachian Trail, starting at Springer Mountain in Georgia and hiking half the 2200-mile trail before a serious muscle tear forced him to leave the trail.

Besides running and hiking, Ham took up contra dancing at the urging of a colleague and later English Country dancing in New York City. At a dance weekend event, he met Lorna Cheriton; their first dates were hiking, canoeing the Esopus Creek during spring flood, and contra dancing.

Hamilton took early retirement in 1994 after 34 years as a forest ranger. His first goal was completion of his Appalachian Trail hike. He and Lorna traveled to West Virginia and began the second half of the trail, hiking north through forests where hordes of gypsy moth larva, seeking cooling breezes, hung from the trees, nipping the skin of hikers who bumped into the dangling worms. Then through the Pennsylvania section, notorious for rocks standing on edge and making hikers' feet very sore. After one fall, he lay on the ground, certain he had broken his wrist which would have ended his second attempt of the AT. Another time, a black-faced hornet flew into his forehead and stung, the pain almost making him pass out. One eerie occurrence was the darkening of the sky in mid-day; away from news, he had not known an eclipse was expected and could appreciate the mystery it had been to native Americans.

After standing atop Mount Katahdin in Maine in triumphant completion of the AT, Hamilton accepted an assignment in Guatemala with the Peace Corps to which he had applied before retiring. During his year living in the old colonial city of Antigua, he volunteered with the God's Child Project, leading teams of American volunteers in building concrete floors in kitchens to protect

crawling children from the parasites and infections so rampant in poor people's dirt floors.

Returning to the US, Hamilton chose Bennington for its proximity to natural forest and because it was close enough to his aging parents for him to help them, without being so close that he would be always at their beck and call. He quickly became involved in the Bennington Section of the GMC, hiking, skiing, paddling, leading outings and doing trail work. Among the trips he led was the yearly and challenging cross-country ski to Heartwellville, until the route became impassible because of blowdowns from a hurricane.

Becoming Co-ordinator of Trails and Shelters for our Bennington Section of the Green Mountain Club, he planned and led spring and other trail maintenance projects. He continues to do trail work, to volunteer as a community member on Restorative Justice panels, has served as deacon and trustee at Second Congregational Church, and uses his 1996 truck to pick up vegetable donations from Mighty Food Farm and deliver them to the Kitchen Cupboard.

Remembering Tom

Please note that this is a short excerpt - see the Bennington GMC website for more remembrances and photos of Tom. <https://www.benningtongmc.org/news/rememering-tom>



Joy that after a long bushwhack up from Hell Holler, we finally found the AT!

Tom Longtin, an avid outdoorsman, creative artist, computer scientist, engineer, and friend passed away in May of 2020. Tom - skier, hiker, bicyclist, snowshoer - was a long time

Bennington resident who knew every local trail, marked and unmarked, and all the history of the area. Tom had other talents in addition to being an outdoorsman. Tom's house contained many amazing artistic creations. A talented computer graphics artist, he created sculptures and puzzles in wood, metal, particleboard and plastic, often involving complex geometric designs and knots. He was active in Bennington's art community and has had various sculptures exhibited around town. (https://www.arsmathematica.org/is2003/3dsc/tom_longtin.htm)

There was always something interesting to see when out with Tom. We skied by the phone lines, pipes and manholes in the old Bennington watershed, bushwhacked up Bald Mtn to discover that the "Yellow Trail" was really the town boundary line, figured out the best way to snowshoe to Boxcar Rocks, and held our breath when meeting a moose in Medburyville. He might tease us by leading a group twice around "Twice Around Peak", but didn't hesitate to pull Margie out when she broke through the ice of a Woodford beaver pond.

We moved to Bennington less than 2 years ago, so didn't know Tom as long as many others, but our lives were enriched by the times we spent together. We marveled at the creations in his house; metal sculptures, intricate puzzles, inlaid hardwood flooring cut from his laser printer and the myriad of machines that he used to construct them. We went on numerous hiking and snowshoeing adventures with Tom - and every trip was truly an adventure.

To any complaint following an activity - too tired, sore body part, etc - he'd say: "That means you either need more of it - or less of it."

From Martha Stitelman: Tom was my hiking buddy, my cycling partner, our cross-country skiing friend, and my inspiration to return to dump-picking and dumpster-diving.

We miss you, Tom.

Charged up with Pedal-assist Electric Bikes by Lorna Cheriton

In 2019 Hamilton began researching the possibility of our buying bikes with electric pedal-assist capabilities. He found that the least expensive start at around \$1700. I thought I preferred to wait until I got old before resorting to an electric-powered bike. Once I was persuaded, though, there was still the negative impact of having two more bikes to store in our garage. We already had as many bikes as kayaks, one less than half a dozen of each.

Consulting Peter Hall of Highlander Bicycle and discovering that we could purchase electric battery packs that Peter could install on our existing bikes... caused a re-orientation in our thinking. Peter ordered the "E-BikeKit" (Electric Bicycle Conversion Kit System) battery packs, \$1100 each, and installed them on our hybrid bikes, recommending against having them put on a thin-tired road bike. Hamilton's bike required more modifications and more time than did mine because of previous modifications that Peter had done for Ham. When Peter unpacked a \$5000 bike built with electric assist already installed, he commented to us that our bikes with batteries added were at least as good, at a much lower cost. Later, Hamilton investigated and bought on-line a RAD-bike, which has especially wide tires.

My first ride was from Highlander Bicycle up the hills towards our house and the first hill made me a convert – it was such fun climbing even steep hills with so little effort.



The bikes have a monitor screen on the handle bars that shows the level of power, the speed and the distance traveled. The bike's computer can be set to give various levels of power. Initially, Peter set ours with five levels, five being frighteningly fast unless you are on a steep uphill. Bicycling with our friend Tim Marr who was on a non-electric bike, we found one level too slow and the next up too fast for Tim's pace. We took our bikes back to Highlander and Peter adjusted them to make nine levels, with less difference between the levels, and level nine equivalent to the previous level five. After each ride, we plug the bikes into their chargers in our garage.

These bikes have let us travel further than we could previously, in trips up to 25 miles, exploring new roads and hills that had made previous routes prohibitive.

Nauheim Shelter Logbook

Would you like to find out more about shelters along the Long Trail? Do you know what a shelter logbook contains? We'll give you a very quick glimpse here and encourage you to go to the Bennington GMC website to listen to a podcast about this topic. <https://www.benningtongmc.org/news/log-book-melville-nauheim-shelter>

Each shelter along the Long Trail contains a logbook where hikers write their thoughts, on hiking, life in general, trail conditions, and more. Their writing may be humorous, serious, reflective, descriptive, and the book contains drawings as well. Some hikers have been on the trails for months while others are only out for a couple of days. You'll find such interesting trail names such as "Mustard and Catsup", "The Wind", "Prof. Bean", "Sir Stops a Lot" and many more.

Here are a few samples of writing from the book:

7/12/19: The old goat is happy to be in Vermont kicking up her hoofs!

7/11/19: K1 back on the trail. Easy day here from Bennington. Love the AT and so happy to be back. Did my 500 miles and now not worried about the miles, just relishing the journey and time out here. Love the comment "it's a people path, not just a wilderness path." Love meeting y'all along the way. Being here is so peaceful and way cool. My other half K2 is in Great Barrington today. Miss him but cheering him on to Katahdin. He's the super kiwi hiker - I'm the kiwi wandered. Will meet up again soon!

9/15/19:

fallen leaves
 beneath bare feet
 a solace found
 in none other than home,
 a place we all know,
 but not all can find.
 We are not lost here
 Finally,
 we are found.
 Gentle rustling trees,
 endless life as far as the eye can see
 The open space
 holds us in a tight embrace
 a time where we feel safe
 I feel most alive
 surrounded by life.

8/26/19

Vermont's a state that's very hard
 It requires sweat and blood
 But you'll never, ever find yourself
 Standing in the mud.
 That's a lie, that's a lie, that's a lie, lie, lie!!

OK, you've now read a few samples from the logbook. Remember to check the website to hear and see much, much more!!