Fellow Appies,

Spring is here but you wouldn’t know it if you were on our recent winter hiking series trip to the Crawford Notch with hikes to Mount Willey, Field and Tom. I recently had the opportunity to participate with a group of members to help them have a winter hiking experience. Boy, did they get a full blown experience. The snow base was higher than the trail signs (about 6-8 feet deep) with another three to four feet of fresh snow fall. We had white out conditions and the trail markers were underneath the snow, blow downs made the trail corridors indiscernible and the unbroken trails burned our thighs as we took turns breaking trail. We ended up bushwhacking and had to dig out three hikers from spruce traps (including me). Sounds like a bad experience? Not if you were there. Everyone had huge smiles on their faces as they had the opportunity to experience winter hiking with one experienced winter hiker for every two participants who gave helpful tips and made sure everyone had fun and returned safe and sound. This trip was just one of the many “intro” workshops that we will be offering this year as part of our 2010 goals.

Back in January, your Executive Committee locked themselves in a room on a Sunday to establish goals for this year to help increase activities, participation and opportunities for our membership. The first goal was to build out “annual trips”, inter-chapter activities, low cost multiday trips and expand geographic focus. This all encompassing goal was affectionately nicknamed “world domination”. If you know of annual trips that you loved but are no longer annual, let us know.

To be successful at this goal we must increase the number of our leaders which leads into our second goal to recruit and develop a leader mentor program. Instead of leaving our leaders out on their own, we want to provide more of a team atmosphere to help each other out and share experiences. This is in addition to providing our usual leadership and wilderness first aid programs.

Finally to help our members start we will have a series of introductory workshops to help you find your limits in new activities. We already have intro workshops in kayak safety, map and compass, intro to paddling, beginners cycling, intro rock climbing, intro to backpacking, ice ax self arrest, winter hiking and we have just begun to develop our workshops.

We hope these goals will help you achieve and test your limits!

Keep your feet moving! Steve

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During February break, there was no sitting home being bored watching T.V. for two 12 year old 6th graders. My son, his friend in year round adventure, and his Dad combined our families and headed north to adventure. Our venture started at Pinkham’s Joe Dodge Lodge where we bunked for the night. The kids watched the “Everest” movie to get geared up for their 3.8 mile hike up to the hut. We chatted with mountaineers eager to do Mt. Washington that weekend. Having done Lonesome Lake Hut and Zealand Hut already in winter, this completed our final year round huts together with our good friends.

We set out on a brilliantly sunny morning with temps in the 30’s which was perfect for winter hiking with large packs. It was a moderate hike along the beautiful 19 Mile Brook Trail that was packed down with several feet of snow. There was no need for snowshoes, but we found the microspikes very helpful. We made it to the hut several hours later where we enjoyed the beautiful new cabins which are weather tight and surprisingly warm for being unheated. We shared the facility with other students also exploring winter adventure and enjoyed the camaraderie of the older students, teachers, hutmaster, and guests. Our kids were the youngest but came with a lot of experience with the hut system. The ambience was like one large family playing games, chatting, and cooking up delicious meals while sitting around the main hut’s wood stove, smelling fresh baked cookies and all the amazing meals people prepare. The other students had fun playing ice hockey on the mountain lakes with a supply of ice skates and gear available.

The winds were howling as a reminder that blue skies don’t always mean good weather so we quickly ran back to the cabin after some outdoor exploration around the hut. The temps fell into the 20’s at night and we all had a great night sleep. The morning was peaceful, quiet and pristine with a new snowfall overnight that made this trip one to remember instead of sitting around all week with the kids saying “I’m bored”. Some suggestions for hut travel with kids are to bring a friend, plenty of snacks and extra warm gear, a deck of cards, and your sense of adventure allowing for extra time on the trail. It will likely be a highlight of any kid’s vacation, especially when shared with close friends! The kids could potentially be our next hutmasters and croo down the road, all because they were exposed to the huts at an early age. Go ahead and get packing your family for a hut trip! It is a wonderful bonding experience to share the wilderness with your kids.
National Trails Day on June 5, 2010 is an opportunity for members to get out and do something. National Trails Day brings greater awareness to trails, along with their many benefits and pleasures. Whether the event involves one trail or a variety of activities, National Trails Day is a wonderful opportunity to introduce people to trails. Many new trail users become dedicated to trails and their preservation once they get out and learn about them and they realize the many volunteer and paid hours required for creating and maintaining the trails. This year we will have different projects going at Wachusett Mountain and along the Midstate Trail. Join us for a fun filled rewarding day...

Sat. June 5. National Trails Day...Wachusett Mountain State Reservation. Meet at 9:00 at the Visitor Center. Join the Worcester AMC Chapter in a day of trail maintaining projects. No experience necessary. Tools supplied. Bring water, packable lunch/snacks, work gloves, and wear sturdy boots and clothing appropriate for conditions. Pre- registration is required. For Info and to pre- register Contact: Register with Steve Crowe steve@SunshineLandscapingCo.com (508-450-1091).

June 7 and 8, 2008 Reconstruction work continues on the Pine Hill Trail at Wachusett Mountain. Join along in setting rock steps, building rock structures for drainage and waterbars and setting scree walls for trail definition. Join experienced leaders to learn the fundamentals of safely moving rock, trail stabilization and treadway protection. Learn the mechanical advantage of moving rocks with a grip hoist and highline system. Tremendous opportunity to be involved in a local project whose results will be around for decades. Tools and training available, bring lunch, water, and work gloves. Meet at Wachusett Mountain. Visitors Center, 8:30 to 4:00.

Register with:  Steve Crowe
steve@SunshineLandscapingCo.com cell phone: 508-450-1091.
4 Sargent Street
Cherry Valley, MA 01611
(508) 892-3042
Worcester Chapter Spring Picnic

Save the Date – Sunday, May 23, 2010

We’re baa-ack…. at Hopkinton State Park! Join us for an active, fun-filled day! The fun starts at 10 AM and goes until 4 PM. This is a great way to meet fellow AMC members! Activities will be offered for all ages and abilities: hiking, biking, paddling, swimming, games. BBQ lunch. We’ll provide burgers, hot dogs, and drinks. Please bring a side dish or a dessert to share. $5 admission for non-AMC members; $10 per family. For more information: http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/hsp.htm

Leaders: Debora Herlihy, Pat Lambert amcspringpicnic@yahoo.com

Volunteers of the Month

Pat Lambert, Vice Chair

The Volunteer of the Month (VOM) is a non-Executive Committee member who has gone above and beyond the call to duty in supporting our Chapter. Congratulations to the following winners:

November Steph Keimig
December Barbara Jansen, Dave Laska
January Don Cunningham
February Pam Landry

VOM’s will be entered to win a prize at the Chapter's annual meeting in November. In the past, we have given away a free stay at an AMC destination. If you know of a volunteer (who is not a member of the Executive Committee) who you would like to recognize for their contributions to the Chapter, please e-mail Pat Lambert (plambert119@yahoo.com) by the 25th of the month. Winners are selected at our monthly Executive Committee meeting. Thanks!

By Barbara Dyer

For the past five years, I’ve had the pleasure of attending A Mountain Classroom program in the White Mountains with my middle school students thanks to the Worcester Chapter for providing some of the funding. This year we offered our first annual winter session in January. Thirteen 8th graders from Ayer Middle School had the adventure of a lifetime! Our days were filled with hikes through the glistening Basin, frozen Arethusa Falls, and Mt. Willard's spectacular views where we studied the glacial cirques. We snowshoed in three feet of snow, a first for all the students. Our big project was to build a snow shelter to house all of us. It took two days to shovel and pack the snow adding sticks in about 6 inches to stop us from hitting the walls when we shoveled the inside out. The next day we shoveled a tunnel into our living room surrounded by snow and we were able to successfully and warmly seat 15 inside our snow cave. Such great fun and hard team work we shared. We ended our days on toboggans going down a huge slope out near the Highland Center where we lodged for 2 days and 3 nights. My students and principal and I all had a memorable experience that will surely last a lifetime. Our next adventure will be in June at Cardigan Lodge. If you are a teacher or parent interested in learning more about A Mountain Classroom, please feel free to contact me at barbaradyer@hotmail.com.
Have you ever listened to frogs calling in the evening on a cool spring night? Some of the first signs of spring to many people who live in New England are the calls of wood frogs, spring peepers and American or Fowler’s toads. More and more people are now learning about amphibian breeding in seasonal ponds, often called vernal pools in the northeastern US. Certain species of amphibians depend on fishless ponds to avoid predatory pressure; therefore there are often more productive amphibian communities in ponds that dry up at the end of the summer. This annual occurrence tends to keep the fish away.

Vernal pools are relatively common throughout our region. Some counties have more than others due to geology, but even in the highest mountain ranges and most remote islands, if you look hard enough, you can find one or two. When I became interested in amphibian research, I quickly learned that each pond tells a different story and is a reflection of the local environmental conditions. The same species may occur at a series of ponds, but in different combinations. For example, some ponds may be dominated by wood frogs with relatively few spotted salamanders whereas other ponds may have more spotted salamanders than wood frogs. Why? Is it because of how fast or slow the ponds dry out? How does the thickness and moisture of the topsoil affect amphibians who live close to or underground? How does the relative abundance of each species change over time?

My colleagues and I are interested in how variations in environmental conditions affect the behavior, timing, intensity, and breeding duration of amphibians. We began recording frog calls using remote digital recording devices to evaluate the intensity and timing of each species’ breeding choruses in 2009 at three study ponds: near the summit of Wachusett Mountain, Princeton, MA; Hermit Lake, Mt. Washington, NH; and at the eastern end of Nantucket Island, MA. Each area contains spring peepers and green frogs, but wood frogs have never been found on Nantucket and toads have not been found there for more than 50 years. The spring peepers from Mount Washington begin calling much later than the southern New England populations, but call much later into the summer. By studying populations that are already very different, but are linked together with similar species, we will document how each amphibian community varies from year to year over a relatively short period of time (5 year preliminary study). This will provide us a baseline for comparison in the future. If only Thoreau had a few of these recording devices in his day. Thank goodness he kept detailed notes! When you’re out hiking around, listen for the frogs calling, they have a lot to say.

This research is supported by the Appalachian Mountain Club-Worcester Chapter, Nantucket Biodiversity Initiative, Mount Washington Observatory, and the Friends of Wachusett Mountain.
The Midstate Trail is a 95 mile hiking trail running from the Rhode Island border through central Massachusetts to Mt. Watatic on the New Hampshire border in Northern Worcester County. The trail crosses a variety of topographies on public and private lands.

The trail is divided into about 26 sections maintained primarily by unpaid volunteers who adopt and commit to maintaining a section of the trail. Each section can have more than one maintainer to help share the tasks.

It wasn’t long ago that trail work consisted of clearing the brush and blow-downs from the trail and keeping it blazed so people could find their way. Today the most compelling reason for trail work is to conserve the fragile soils on which our trails are built and protect them from the never ending onslaught of boots and water.

Periodically there are basic instructional/social gatherings to assist and instruct maintainers. Also at large maintainers and members of the Mid-state Trail Committee are available and willing to assist section maintainers in projects requiring chain saw work and/or additional labor.

FOR INFORMATION on how to adopt a section, on maintainer duties, on what sections need maintaining, and on how to begin, contact—

Maintainer Coordinators

Ed Faron @ 508-892-9237; faron41@charter.net

Don Hoffses @ 617-429-7539; rockypond@charter.net

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE MIDSTATE GO TO www.midstatetrail.org

May 17th-21st National Bike to School and Work Week

Since 1956, the third week of May and the third Friday of May are designated as national bike to school and bike to work week. I am challenging you to ride at least once to work during this time and get a colleague or your kids to join you. Biking to work is Green, reduces your carbon footprint, reduces traffic and can save you money. I have been commuting on my bike for two years and have never been healthier. I estimate that I save an average of $50 a month just by biking to work, $500 per year. Automobiles are the larges source of CO2 in our atmosphere and by biking we can reduce the amount of CO2. It is easy to ride to work or school and fun.

Here are some tips on how to commute safely, provided by the League of American Bicyclists.

1. Start slow
2. Drive to work and then bike home, do the reverse the next day.
3. Buy a bike lock or bring bike into your office.
4. Bike slowly so you do not need to shower.
5. Keep extra clothes at the office to change in to.
6. Rain Gear. The same rain gear we use for our other outdoor adventures can be used for biking.
7. Wear a helmet and follow the rules of the road.
8. Bike rack, panniers in case you need to run errands.

Let’s all take the challenge May 17-21 and see how many miles biking the Worcester Chapter AMCers can do. More details, including a contest, will be posted on the Conservation Page of the Worcester AMC website.
Hiking leaders of the Worcester Chapter wrapped up another successful season of winter hiking. This season, many leaders and trip participants took part in the annual Explore Your Inner Winter Hiker Series. The goal of the Series was to introduce three season hikers into the wonderful world of winter hiking.

The Series was structured into two tracks, an Easy to Moderate track and a Moderate to Difficult track. Each participant selected and signed up for hikes in the track that suited their personal goals. The 16 hikes in the Series were completed between December and March. The Winter Hiking Series provided great field experience for the participants in the Annual Explore Your Inner Winter Hiker Workshop held in November.

The Easy to Moderate track focused on shorter local hikes, giving folks a chance to learn and practice winter hiking and snowshoeing on many of our local trails.

The Moderate to Difficult track focused on building skills and endurance ordering the hikes to have each hike progressively more difficult than the last. The progressive nature of these hikes gave participants the experience and confidence to hike the more difficult peaks in the Area. Hikers started with Mt Wachusett and ended with above tree line hikes at Moosilauke and Mt Flume/Liberty in the White Mount National Forest.

Many thanks to the dedicated leaders and co-leaders for providing guidance and leadership to the newest winter hikers in the Worcester chapter.

Congratulations to the hikers who participated in the Winter Series. Whether you snowshoed the local trails in our area or the steep and challenging trails up north, you should now consider yourselves 4 season hikers.

Hiking leaders from the chapter are already planning a repeat of the Winter Hiking Workshop and Hike series for the 2010/11 winter season. We'll be holding the very popular Explore Your Inner Winter Hiker Workshop on two nights. Nov 3rd and Nov 10th. The first night will cover the basics of preparation and equipment for folks wanting to get out and snowshoe locally. The second night will feature advanced topics for participants looking to tackle the high peaks up north.

A group of happy Explore Your Inner Winter Hiker participants, after conquering Mt Wachusett.

Enjoy your spring, summer, and fall.

Charlie Arsenault

Hiking Chair
Highland Center weekend in the White Mountains was a great success. Two great hikes, spectacular weather and marvelous company made for a memorable weekend.

Photos by Bob DesRosiers

Editor, Barbara Dyer. All newsletter submissions should be sent to barbaradyer@hotmail.com. We reserve the right to edit for length and content. All contributions are welcome. Summer deadline June 15.

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