

Wachusett Views



Worcester Chapter
Appalachian Mountain Club

Winter 2024

A close-up view of our Chapter's vibrancy and dedication

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Winter 2024

Letter from the Editor

Welcome and thank you for supporting the Worcester AMC! Winter is here and it's a wonderful time to get outside.

On a very snowy day last year, I set out to hike a section of the Peru Peak Wilderness in the Green Mountains National Forest. As we hiked along, I was in awe of the quiet beauty surrounding me. This was a wonderful day, and even though it was very cold out, I was warm, and it was peaceful and quiet. Winter is my favorite time of year to get outdoors. If you love winter as I do, you will love living in New England.

In this issue, you'll learn about AMC's August Camp, a volunteer-run summer hiking program. You'll read about the amazing beaver, and our commitment to protect them. And lastly, you'll find out what all the great things our young members are doing! If you have a story or article to share, please write to me at newsletter@amcworchester.org. As always, I'm interested in hearing from you.

My hope is that in reading this newsletter, you'll be inspired to join us. We need you to help us protect the great outdoors and to enjoy it responsibly.

Thank you for reading, and enjoy the newsletter!

Nancy

Nancy Cahn, Wachusett Views Editor

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Under the Red Felt Crusher



Chris Pignatiello-Chatson
Chapter Chair

Happy Winter to my fellow Worcester Chapter members! I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to using my show shoes!!



And there's something about the sound of microspikes digging into the ice that makes my heart sing. Our fall season brought many Chapter activities, including our Annual Meeting and Social, as well as a Leader Recognition event in November. We are now working on the agenda for our annual Planning Meeting in January, an important gathering to help our Executive Committee to identify 2024 goals and objectives for our Chapter. This year, we will focus on aligning our plans with those of greater AMC, to have a united effort in moving these objectives forward.

AMC's Annual Summit on January 20th is a great opportunity for Chapter members to connect and learn. It is open to the public, AMC members, volunteers and staff. There is an *impressive* list of course offerings this year, check it out [here](#)!!

Finally, I want to congratulate the recipients of our Chapter's special awards, presented at the Annual Meeting held on Saturday, November 11, 2023:

Congratulations to all of you!!

Enjoy all that this season has to offer, and be safe....

APPIE OF THE YEAR: DAVID ELLIOTT

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: FRED MEZYNSKI

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: ERIC HARRIS

GOLDEN SERVICE AWARD: STEVE CROWE

CHAIR AWARD: WENDY DZIEMIAN

AMC's August Camp 2024

AMC's August Camp 2024 Central Cascades Sisters, Oregon



Three Sisters Wilderness

Immerse yourself in the beautiful landscapes of the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests, as well as the pristine Three Sisters and Mount Jefferson Wilderness Areas. There are miles of trails that offer some of the best views in all of Oregon— including Cascade peaks, glaciers, waterfalls, alpine meadows, summertime wildflowers, lava fields, mountain lakes, and other natural wonders.

Choose your own adventure from our diverse range of daily hikes.

Our full-service tent village accommodates up to 64 campers each week. Two-person tents with cots are provided. Our dedicated Croo will serve delicious home-cooked meals. Shuttle service will be provided from and back to the Portland Airport.

Camp Dates

Week 1 - July 20 to July 27

Week 2 - July 27 to August 3

Week 3 - August 3 to August 10

Week 4 - August 10 to August 17

We will be taking applications beginning 9 AM on January 2, 2024. All applications received in the first 10 days will be treated equally. There is no advantage to being the first in line; selection is by lottery. Applications will continue to be accepted after the lottery period to fill open spots. Watch our website, augustcamp.org, in December for details.

Cost is \$1700 per person for AMC members and \$2040 for non-members.

augustcamp.org

Top photo: Shane Kucera; bottom photo: John Rowen

First Time at August Camp

Written by Alan Snyder

We didn't *really* know what to expect.

Of course, certain things were clear and simple: Tent camping, with good cots for sleeping off the ground and enough headroom to stand up. Plenty of food from a sophisticated outdoor kitchen. No hot water, but you will be surprised by how effective a solar shower can be. And hiking, every day (plus or minus the optional activities), with choices according to interest and ability.

So we knew a lot, but we knew very little. What will it *really* be like? Will we be able to keep up with the group? Do we have it in us to get breakfast, get organized, and get on the trail every day? Will the food really be so great, considering our dietary preferences? Will we fit in socially? Putting our names in for August Camp, and accepting once our names were picked from the virtual hat, was a leap of faith. That leap was informed by the fact that trustworthy folks from the Delaware Valley chapter told us how great it is.

The materials and other information that came with our acceptance - the detailed packing list, the comprehensive online orientation session - told us something that's reinforced by every aspect of the August Camp experience: These folks have been doing this for a very long time (since 1887, to be exact). They have been keeping notes. August Camp works in well-established ways, even as those ways evolve with the times (it wasn't possible in 1887 to text the Transportation Coordinator).

As new campers (get used to being called campers - it's true, and it's charming), we had an Ambassador who was just a text or phone call away to answer pre-camp questions, and then was nearby (without hovering) to see that we got settled at camp. As first timers, we had green lanyards for our name tags, which signaled "this person might need a pointer now and then."

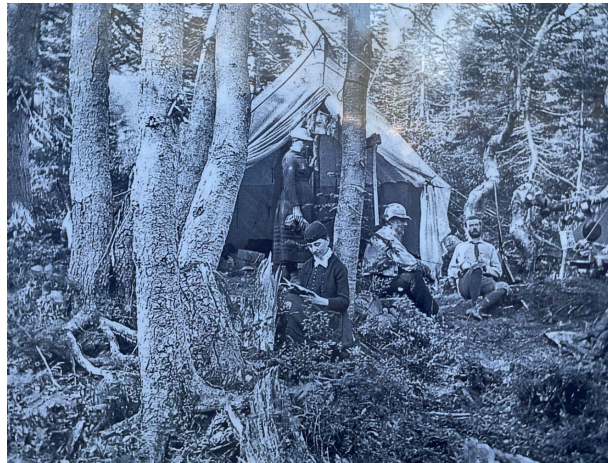
But in reality, the well-established rhythm of the day makes it easy to catch on: Reveille, coffee time, breakfast, gather your things, meet up with your hiking group, the day's hike, chill time or maybe a swim at the stream where the locals go, dinner, more chill time, campfire, bedtime. The rhythm happily repeats, the days sufficiently full and active that you most likely will be tired when you get back home, yet never at a pace that feels overwhelming or even rushed.

The centerpiece of each day - the hike - also felt “just right.” At campfire each evening, our hike leaders described the routes so that we could make informed choices based on our abilities and interests. From our site near Mount Hood, there were trails cut into the cliffs high above the Columbia River, and trails through dense old growth forest. There were routes that required us to keep moving at the planned pace, and routes designed for stopping to identify the flowers. A hike could include sun-baked stretches that had us remembering to keep drinking, and a half mile later a spot to lie down in the snow. The week’s hikes were a curated catalog of what the region had to offer, updated throughout the week as our hike leaders assessed conditions and learned what was most popular with the group.

On the final evening of August Camp, the postings of the next day’s hikes on the community bulletin board have been replaced by the airport travel schedule. At campfire, there are no next-day hikes to describe. How do we fill the time? Follies!

The annual vaudevillian review of skits and songs and whatever else people came up with. An hour or so of grownups displaying their full willingness to be silly, and occasionally deeply touching, with each other. A return to the lesser inhibitions of childhood, sprinkled with just a bit of adult emotion. A far better way to spend our final evening than organizing stuff that can easily be crammed into our bags and sorted out when we get home.

At August Camp you will meet people who are super-outgoing, people who are quiet and reserved, people who are outrageously funny, people who are deeply thoughtful, people of different national origins and ethnicities, people with different life pursuits and professions, all of whom are there because they love the land and love walking it together. No one will tell you how to be, other than to be a fellow camper and fellow hiker. The last two items on the official packing list are adventurous spirit and sense of humor. No one seemed to have forgotten those two items.



August Camp 1887



August Camp 2023

Conservation Highlight: Importance of Beavers

Written by Eric Harris

Edited by Elli Greenlaw



Photo courtesy of Mass Audubon

Anyone who has spent time in the outdoors in New England has seen evidence of the North American beaver (*Castor Canadensis*). Their distinctive creations, including dams, lodges, canals, and chewed stumps seem to be scattered throughout the landscape of the Northeast. Known as America's largest rodent, beavers fit their ecological niche by transforming the landscape into an aquatic paradise to fit their needs for survival. These social herbivores are able to store and cultivate their own food within their created wetlands while providing habitat for a plethora of wildlife species. The beaver is now an abundant critter on the landscape, however, that was not always the case; just short of 100 years ago they were regionally extinct.

The conservation success story of beavers after their total annihilation is nothing short of amazing. European settlers trapped beavers to near extinction in North America during colonial times for the fur trade. In the 1620s and 1630s, after the Plymouth colony was established, there were more than 10,000 beavers taken annually. The beaver pelts were so valued that they were used as an early form of currency in the colony. Although during the early 1800s, the desire and demand for beaver pelts skyrocketed, driven by the fashion industry's demand for luxurious headwear. The beaver pelt was the top choice among animal species due to its overall strength, malleable quality, waterproof characteristics, color-retaining ability, and long lifespan.

Eventually, the economic demand for beaver fur and the limited existence of wildlife management practices caused the total demise of the species in Massachusetts and beyond. In the 1830s, the demand from the hat industry decreased due to the evolution of style and societal necessities, but the damage to the beaver population had already been done. By the early 1900s, sportsmen and conservationists here in the Bay State began to lobby to establish restrictions on trapping. In 1928, an exciting discovery occurred in the Berkshire town of West Stockbridge, when local residents found a beaver colony; the first recorded sighting of beavers in Massachusetts in nearly a century.

The Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife began to reintroduce beavers starting around 1932 in a few locations around the state. However, we can thank New York state for today's viable beaver population, as many beavers are descendants of those that had survived the genocide in the Adirondack Mountains. Along with being physically introduced, some beavers naturally crossed over from the borders of New York. As stated in a New England News Collaborative interview with Ben Goldfarb, author of the book *Eagar: Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, Ben described New York's conservation success when beavers that were collected by biologists at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Centennial celebration were combined with beavers from Yellowstone. "And from there they bought seven live beavers from the Canadian delegation, and they took those beavers back up to New York, got a few from Yellowstone, and relocated about 20 beavers in 1904 and 1905 to the waters of New York. By 1915, just 11 years later, that population had exploded to 15,000 beavers from a seed population of 20 or so plus a few beavers who were there already" (Goldfarb 2018).

Before long, beavers made a great comeback by reestablishing themselves in areas of their native range of the Northeast. Most of the success came from beavers coming back to areas of vacant beaver wetlands established by their early descendants. However, during the time of the beavers' absence on the landscape, humans had moved in and colonized many lowland areas. We built homes, roads, and towns in river valleys adjacent to wetlands and habitat where beavers like to colonize. So, humans and beavers tend to clash over territory due to a certain desire for the landscape.

Beavers, like humans, are engineers of their environment, changing the natural world to meet their needs for survival. While we humans tend to prefer a dry landscape to build our houses and roads, beavers like to dam up rivers and streams, building up the water level to feel safe and to create easy access to tree stands for food. The result of these competing interests is conflict, which usually doesn't end well for the beaver. In much of their range, beavers are viewed as nuisances and pests because they disrupt the interests of property owners and municipalities. Solutions to beaver flooding problems can be tricky to solve, as noted by Laura Hajduk, a biologist with the Massachusetts Division Fisheries and Wildlife, in a 2009 New York Times article.

“When beavers are trapped, others move in to replace them...you can breach a beaver dam, but I guarantee you that within 24 hours if the beavers are still there it will be repaired. Beavers are the ultimate ecosystem engineers.” (Hajduk 2009).

Solutions to beaver damage problems are tough to deal with because there is no easy answer to every problem. “For example, flow devices do not control beaver populations. At the same time, trapping of beavers at a complaint site does not change the features of the site that attracted beavers in the first place” (Jackson and Decker 2004). The biggest problem facing human-beaver conflict has to deal with a lack of education and outreach to the public. It all starts with a landowner’s tolerance for the beaver’s presence and if the landowner is willing to coexist with the rodent. Fortunately, there are local folks out there fighting alongside the beavers to change the public’s perception. One person in particular is Mike Callahan from Southampton, Mass., the owner of Beaver Solutions, LLC, and the president of a nonprofit organization called The Beaver Institute. The organization’s mission is to educate the public by advancing beaver management and watershed restoration, training mitigation professionals, supporting scientific research, and increasing the public’s appreciation of the beaver’s critical role in creating climate resilient ecosystems.

The flow device is a wonderful invention that allows one to keep beavers on the landscape while regulating a desired water level. It works by protecting culverts and allowing water to pass underneath the dam via pipes to allow proper drainage without a beaver’s acknowledgement. These flow devices or so called “beaver deceivers” are proven to be very effective when properly installed and maintained. All it takes is a little upfront work and you can have a professional company install them for you. Once the flow device is working properly people only need to check it once annually to ensure no debris has clogged up the pipe. It is a little investment with the promise to resolve many beaver conflict situations and allow peaceful coexistence between humans and beavers.

Overall, the beaver is truly an amazing creature, creating such lush, resilient, and productive habitats. The wetlands they create are pools teeming with a diverse array of aquatic and terrestrial life of all shapes and sizes. These beaver habitats have been scientifically proven to not only promote biodiversity, but to also recharge groundwater aquifers, improve water quality by filtering toxins, provide a barrier against wildfire, protect against drought, and help fight climate change by sequestering carbon. As outdoor conservationists we must promote the importance of this keystone species and advocate for its protection. Although regulated trapping is essential for population management, we can cause great change for beaver conservation by educating people on how to positively deal with beaver conflicts.

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For the Love of the Outdoors

by Alexandra Molnar

Worcester Chapter Membership Chair

In May, ten 20s & 30s from across the region gathered at AMC's Corman Harriman Outdoor Center in Harriman State Park in New York for a weekend organized by AMC's volunteer relations staff to reconnect in person for the first time since before the pandemic. The Worcester, Connecticut, New York-North Jersey, and Delaware Valley Chapters were represented by dedicated volunteers of varying longevity with AMC; many I had met at previous events going back to 2017 while others I was just getting to know, as they have just joined the AMC in the past year and were not yet leaders.

We spent a few hours each day trouble shooting challenges, exploring new ways to engage people, and hashing out how to best connect with our members, all the while enjoying views of the pond from our table on the patio. The conversations were enriching, and I came back with a list of ideas to implement with the Worcester Chapter. But the biggest takeaway was the warm sense of camaraderie and passion for conservation that will outlast the actual items we discussed. We all hail from different places, pursue different careers, and have unique backgrounds. Despite our differences, we all are here to share the joy of the outdoors with others and care for the forests, mountains, and waterways that give us the gifts of inspiration, rejuvenation, connection, and beauty. Most of all, I cherish the notion that we're all out there – in the woods, at a mountain summit, in a city park – though geographically distant and with years in between in-person gatherings. I am grateful that AMC has brought us together and given us the platform to help preserve the nature we love and stretch our thinking and our friendships.

New Leaders, New Activities: Looking Back at the 20s & 30s Program in 2023

Written by Zenya Molnar

20s & 30s Chair

2023 is a year to be remembered with the Worcester Chapter 20s & 30s program. With six new 20s & 30s leaders, regular socials, and an expanded 20s & 30s committee, we've been able to offer over forty activities so far this year from ice skating in winter to full moon hikes throughout the summer and fall, apple picking, socials, trail crews, interchapter hikes with neighboring chapters, and trips to different states.

Congratulations to the new 20s & 30s leaders: Laura Reynolds, Dirk Auman, Jake Scoggin, Kristin Siok, Eric Harris, and Luke Chapdelaine! Highlights from the new leaders have been a summer solstice hike at Mt. Pisgah, an evening hike at the Crow Hill Ledges during the height of mountain laurel in bloom, and a hike at the Prison Camp in Rutland to name a few.



The three-night trail maintenance trip that we organized in the AMC Maine Woods in August was the first ever interchapter 20s & 30s trip, which brought together 30 young members from across New England and New York. We spent two days working alongside the AMC Professional Crew, building box steps, hauling lumber, stacking wood, and building bog bridges on the Henderson Brook Trail, part of the AT, in the 100 Mile Wilderness. It was the first collaboration of its kind with a volunteer group working directly with the Pro Crew, and the volunteer hours were used to match professional hours in order for the AMC to receive grant funding. Not only did we fulfill the number of hours needed for the grant match, but we also had a chance to stargaze during the Perseid meteor shower, swim in Long Pond at Gorman Chairback Lodge, and enjoy delicious group meals at Little Lyford where we were staying. It was also most participants' first time in the Maine Woods, including one participant from Europe who was working and living in Central MA temporarily, making the long weekend a formative one in many ways.

Earlier in the year, we had to contend with many rainy days that thwarted hike plans. Despite the threat of rain and gray skies, we were able to go forth with a hike on the Midstate Trail in April on the section that extends from the north side of Mount Wachusett over the summit to Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadows. It is always rewarding to introduce folks to Central MA's very own long distance trail, as most people have never heard of it and become inspired to hike the 91 miles themselves once they've experienced its varied beauty.

And with the Midstate Trail being so close by, we were back in June on a different section to trim mountain laurel growing wild over the trail as part of the Worcester Chapter TrailsFest event. On a misty June morning, over 10 20s & 30s helped to cut back mountain laurel in the Crow Hill section in Leominster State Forest.

With several new leaders who are actively leading and more who are training to become leaders in the near future, our hope is to continue to build a group of dedicated leaders and participants so that the 20s & 30s group can thrive and be a place of community for as long as AMC is around.



A New World

Written by Josmar Azzopardi

On the 5th of July 2023, I arrived in the new world, or how it was known some centuries ago. Originating from the small island nation of Malta, located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, this was the furthest west I had travelled yet! (from a Euro-centric point of view).

Life brought me temporarily to Northborough, MA, primarily due to work. Nonetheless, I'm a strong believer in work-life balance and had a sheer determination to discover what New England had to offer physically and socially. Some initial online research led me to find out about the AMC and that nearby there was the Worcester 20 and 30s Chapter. Its' social media presence was limited, but I was determined to meet people and get out on the trail.

Hitting the ground running during my first week, I joined a rainy Greenhill Park Hike and a super buggy Cedar Hill and Crane Swamp Hike. Both were enchanting in their own way! Coming from a drier island surrounded by turquoise clear beaches, the lush greenery felt like a fairy tale. During those initial days, I also met several people who later turned out to be frequent buddy hikers and finally friends.

Amongst many treks, in August I decided I also needed to give back to the land and community that inhabits it. This led me to join two trailcrews: one at Maine Woods and the other at Noble View. The moments in Maine will hold a treasured spot in my memories. Starting from a 5-hour drive (the longest yet at that point), arriving at 100 mile wilderness with no reception for 3 days, starry nights, tough damp watery trail work, swimming in multiple lakes, canoeing, climbing trees, Gulf Hugas trail, nice meals, campfire time, and discussion were just small textual notes that can never really contextualize the profound experiences of those days.

My time in New England also took me to the White Mountains. Whilst people might yearn for our sunny Maltese beaches, nowadays I yearn for the mountains. My first 4000-footer peaks were Mount Moosilauke and South Peak; which I solo-trekked with my water, sourdough sandwich and other trekking essentials. My heart still lays on that peak, seeing an endless horizon full of peaks and being in full awe. My diary states the following:

In Maltese (our mother language)	In English
1205 wasalna fuq. mqaccat. fil-beraħ. riħ naħħa xemx oħra ngħannaq il-blat izda nixtieq tgħanniqa lura waħda dejjema. Onestament serħan, mitluf u misjub. Hawnhekk għal dejjem marbut u maħlul.	1205 arrived on top. jutting out in the open. wind on one side sun on the other hugging the rocks however wishing a hug back an everlasting one. Honestly serene, lost and found. Here forever tied and untied.

Another White Mountain experience was this Autumn when I joined AMC to hike Mt Madison via King Ravine. I was ready for the next big challenge but had not yet fully understood the challenges that the weather will bring. As we reached the ravine, the weather was chilly and very damp as it had rained the previous day. The rocks were slippery, and each jump became more dangerous. We regrouped and decided that for everyone's safety, we should stop our ascent. The disappointment could be felt as we trekked down, yet we shared travel stories (& ascent cookies). Thinking back this was another true testament to how serious the AMC is in its approach; enabling so many people to access the beauty of nature in a safe and organized manner.

AMC through its various chapters gave me many other experiences; maybe the mountains, forests and lakes are the outright visible winners, but thinking back I treasure all the conversations on the same level. This was done across multiple chapters, across the New England map, across multiple age generations, during Wednesday Speaker Series, Potluck Dinners and Book Club Meetings.

The last part of my US journey has now taken me to the West Coast where I have ventured to Big Sur, Yosemite, Sequoia and Joshua Tree National Parks. They are simply profound bliss, yet I felt something was missing: the camaraderie of the AMC!

Special thanks go to the Molnar family who have been more than a second family during my 5 months on the East Coast. They not only supported me participating in the AMC but provided a way to experience family life from evening hikes, to stockpiling wood logs, to finally sharing their Thanksgiving dinner with me.

I'm forever grateful for all those who journeyed with me, for sharing their stories, and their love for planet earth.

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