



MAINE

WILDERNESS MATTERS

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Appalachian Mountain Club
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Climate Change and the Maine Woods *By Kristen Grant*

On the morning of December 31, 2006, Hugh Ogden strapped on his cross-country skis in preparation for crossing Rangeley Lake to get to his car parked on the mainland. He was familiar with the vagaries of the ice on Rangeley Lake and had crossed the lake safely many times before.

Hugh was a poet and professor based out of Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., but he had fallen in love with Maine and spent as much time as he could on his island in the lake. Maine fueled his poetry, and he wrote moving homages to the culture and wilds of Maine.

No one knows for sure what happened next, except that Hugh never made it to the mainland. The next day his body was found where it had broken through the thin ice of the too warm early winter. The ice, always thick enough to cross at that time of year, could no longer be assumed safe.

Most of us over a certain age probably have similar stories of noticeable warming of the climate over the past several decades. Peter Roderick, former AMC Maine Chapter Chair and newspaper boy from the 1950's, remembers winters when 40 degrees below zero happened now and again and 20 below was not unusual.

These observations are more than just anecdotal.



Dawn near AMC's Medawisla Lodge in the 100-Mile Wilderness. Kristen Grant photo.

A recent study published in the science journal PLOS ONE confirmed what we know that more and more there is a lack of sustained cold, which has contributed to weaker ice conditions and an exponential increase in drownings in the winter. We can add these deaths, each one a tragedy, to the growing list of negative consequences of climate change, such as heat waves and drought, stronger and more destructive storms, and sea level rise.

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AMC Maine Policy Updates *By Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director*

Legislature and Congress

As this newsletter goes to print (late December 2020), the Maine Legislature is convening and planning for how it will function in unprecedented times. We expect committee work to take place virtually, with legislators not meeting in person until April or May. While that caution is clearly called for—one senator has tested positive for COVID-19—it creates a special challenge for both lawmakers and advocates. To stay informed about the issues AMC is working on, and to raise your voice at key moments, sign up for the Conservation Action Network at www.outdoors.org/conservation-action-network

The most pressing issue the 130th Legislature will address is climate change. We are all experiencing its effects: drought, flooding, extreme weather events, negative impacts on wildlife, shorter winters, and reduced winter recreation. We must act now to slow climate change and adapt to it.

Gov. Janet Mills has shown tremendous leadership in this area, convening a 39-member Maine Climate Council, which created a detailed Climate Action Plan to make Maine carbon neutral by 2045. Titled *Maine Won't Wait*, Maine's Climate Action Plan is available at <https://bit.ly/3lsFRAr>

One critical strategy is to keep forests as forests. Our 17.6 million acres of forest sequester 60% of Maine's annual greenhouse gas emissions. Further, they lie at the heart of the most intact, unfragmented ecoregion east of the Mississippi, making them essential to climate resilience and habitat connectivity. The Climate Action Plan calls for increasing the acreage of conserved lands in the state to 30% by 2030, which will require additional funding.



Big Spencer Mtn. dominates the scenery of the Maine Woods for miles in every direction in the Moosehead Lake region. Carey Kish photo.



The grandeur of the Maine Woods is on display from the summit of Mt. Kineo, which offers one of the finest mountaintop panoramas in all of Maine. Carey Kish photo.

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Wilderness Matters



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Newsletter submissions and photographs: Send to Carey Kish, Editor, at newsletter@amcmaine.org | (207) 838-9669

Deadline for submissions to Wilderness Matters (Spring Issue) is March 1, 2021.

Submission info: Wilderness Matters is your chapter newsletter. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to contribute, be it stories, news, opinions, photos, or whatnot. We want to hear from you!

Please email submissions to newsletter@amcmaine.org.

Submission guidelines: Articles, opinions, stories and should be limited to 400-500 words maximum (word counts greater than that may be edited or may not be accepted) in an attached Word or similar document that is clearly labeled. Images should be reduced in size to 1024 x 768 pixels or thereabouts and include a photo title, captions and any other identifying info plus proper photo credit. Use of Dropbox to send images would be great too. Thank you!

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Find us on www.facebook.com/MaineAMC/

AMC Maine Chapter 2020 Chair's Report

The AMC and the Maine Chapter have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic this year like numerous other organizations. We have restricted our spending to essential items, and significantly reduced the number of volunteer-led trips while moving to an online format for meetings, training and programs.

The AMC developed COVID training and instituted protective criteria in the spring for volunteer led trips. 12 Maine Chapter leaders and others have taken this training and several trips have been offered since June. Wilderness First Aid and Leadership training were canceled this year, but we are planning to bring them back later next year.

Chapter membership remains strong with a total of 6,198 members currently, including 799 new members this year. We are also in good financial position with assets of \$71,599. Our spending has been less this year due to meetings moving to online and the canceling of Leader and Wilderness First Aid training.

For 2020 to date, we have had more than 350 participants engage in 36 of our activities led by 19 leaders. Two-thirds of these activities were in the first two months of 2020 and overall Maine Chapter activities are down by 65% from 2019.

Trail work activities were also reduced this year, with five trail work trips and 24 people participating. Eight "Peter Roderick Trial Work" scholarships for trail work in AMC's Maine Woods Initiative were awarded this year, but the spring work trips associated with the awards were rescheduled to next year due to the pandemic.

Although our Programs Chair position is vacant, 11 webinars were held in 2020 on various topics, including two instructional ones. More programs are in the works for this winter.

New this year we are adding a Leadership Committee to manage trip leader requirements and training for all Chapter committees which will off load these duties from the Outings Chair.

Looking forward to 2021, we will continue with online meetings and webinars and are anticipating reduced trip activity in the winter thru summer and hopefully resuming leader training in the fall.



Maine Chapter Volunteer Opportunities

If interested, please email the contact listed for more information and to apply for the listed position.

Executive Committee : nominating@amcmaine.org

Membership Chair

Outings Chair

Programs Chair

Trail Work Leaders: trails@amcmaine.org

Outings Leaders: outings@amcmaine.org

To volunteer for a committee, please contact the committee chair. See editorial box on this page or visit amcmaine.org/committees/executive-committee/ for a complete list of committee chairs.

Policy *continued from page 1*

AMC has long supported the effective Land for Maine's Future program and will work to see it get a new infusion of funding, along with investments in our state parks and in ways to help communities meet the match requirement to win Land and Water Conservation Fund grants. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the importance of open space for recreation and respite.

There have been hijinks surrounding the implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act. We are hopeful that cooler heads will prevail, and that Congress will see to it that its intent—to fund repairs at national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges, and to fully fund outdoor recreational opportunities for all Americans—becomes reality.

Other State Issues

On October 26, AMC joined the Natural Resources Council of Maine and the Maine Chapter of the Sierra Club in filing suit against the Army Corps of Engineers for failing to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement of the New England Clean Energy Connect power transmission corridor under the National Environmental Protection Act.



A wilderness view like few others can be enjoyed from the summit of Moxie Bald Mtn. on the AT just east of the Kennebec River. Much of the awful NECEC transmission line running from the Canadian border past Coburn Mtn. will destroy this vista forever. Carey Kish photo.

We acted because we knew that the Corps was poised to issue a permit for the project--and they did so late on November 4. We have also appealed the permit issued by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection in partnership with NRCM and Trout Unlimited. We are watching several other processes that we are not directly involved with: a lawsuit charging the permitting decision should have been made by the Board of Environmental Protection, a lawsuit challenging the lease of public lands for the transmission line without legislative approval, and a new petition to force a public referendum on the project.

I am following developments and have provided comments on a metalics mine proposed for Pickett Mountain, northeast of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and

not far from the headwaters of the Seboeis River. This is the first proposal to come forward under Maine's relatively new mining law, and it is critical that LUPC ensure protections for Maine's unique undeveloped areas.

We also submitted comments on the



The incredible wild view from the peak of Coburn Mtn. northward to Number Five Mtn. The dreaded NECEC transmission line will run right across the middle of this view, ruining it forever. Carey Kish photo.

redevelopment of Saddleback Mountain ski area and on the management plan for Tumbledown Mountain, which has become an exceedingly popular destination, with detrimental impacts on the fragile mountain landscape.



AMC's Maine Woods Initiative lands as viewed from Monument Cliff on the AT on Third Mtn. Carey Kish photo.

Getting the Word Out about the Maine Woods Initiative

On October 13, Susan Arnold, Steve Tatko and Eliza Townsend welcomed five representatives from state government for a tour of the southern section of the AMC's MWI holdings.

Participants included Judy East, Director of the Land Use Planning Commission; Naomi Kirk-Lawlor, the Senior Planner with LUPC leading the Moosehead region planning process in the wake of the rezoning requested by Weyerhaeuser; Sarah Demers, Director of the Land for Maine's Future program; Molly Docherty, Director of the Maine Natural Areas Program; and Bethany Atkins, Habitat Grants Biologist with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.



Photos: Charles F. Dingman

Topics included our forestry operations, habitat restoration, recreation and lodging, economic impact, and the Pleasant River Headwaters project. The day was greatly informative, and we intend to offer similar opportunities in the future.



Two hikers enjoy the view over AMC's Maine Woods Initiative lands to the White Cap Range from Monument Cliff on the AT atop Third Mtn. Carey Kish photo.

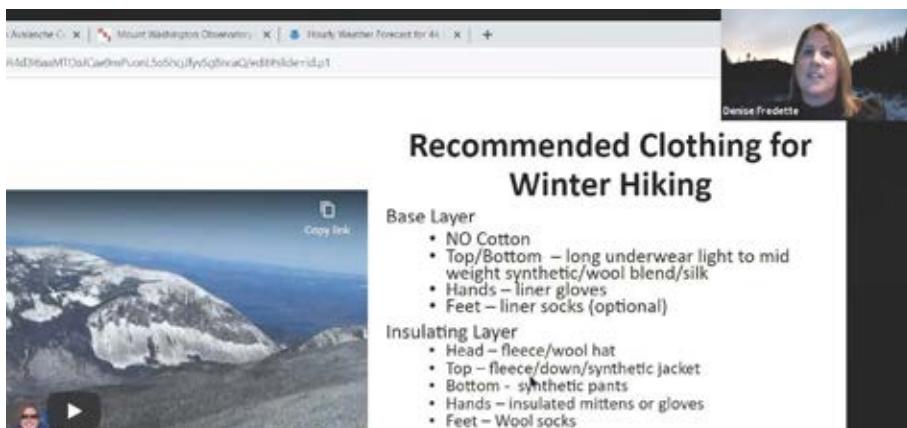
WINTER CALENDAR: OUTINGS | EVENTS | MEETINGS

Note: As of early December 2020, there were only two trips posted to the calendar and both were wait listed. Therefore, there was little need to print the calendar here. That said, please do check the calendar (<https://amcmaine.org/calendar/>) throughout the winter for more outings as they are posted. Hopefully the pandemic situation will improve, and more leaders (and participants) will be comfortable doing so. Thank you!

Connecting through Technology

By Denise Fredette

As 2020 unfolded and the COVID-19 pandemic became prevalent in the Northeastern U.S., AMC paused all in-person activities through the Spring. When trips were eventually allowed to resume, there were some new guidelines, and many leaders were hesitant to offer trips during a pandemic.



Chapter volunteers still wanted to connect with members and share outdoor experiences, but how? We started utilizing a chapter Zoom account to hold meetings, host educational and adventure-based presentations and offer instructional workshops, all of which had previously been in-person events. Often, we were learning on our feet and figuring it out as we went along.

The latest Zoom event was the Introduction to Winter Workshop, that received an overwhelming response in registrations, so much so that we decided to livestream to our AMC Maine Facebook page, and all told, nearly 100 people tuned in.

We can't wait until the time (hopefully soon) when more leaders feel more comfortable offering activities and we can all get back together doing the things we love. Until then, however, if you see an activity of interest on the calendar tagged "BeOnlinewithAMC," check it out. We would like to see you, and it's another way we all stay connected, the best we can.

Check out lots of AMC Maine Chapter content, from programs to webinars and more on YouTube at: youtube.com/channel/UCsKrBOnKCLuUO4n-5uvGSgQ/videos



Climate Change *continued from page 1*



A skier on the trail in the deep woods near AMC's Little Lyford Lodge. Carey Kish photo.

While the Appalachian Mountain Club is committed to measuring and documenting the impacts of climate change, it is also dedicated to fighting it. One important ecological tool AMC employs is something called carbon sequestration. This might sound complicated, but it is just the simple act of preserving forests to absorb carbon dioxide rather than cutting down the trees. This sequestration reduces the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere and helps to slow global warming.

Currently, the AMC manages almost 75,000 acres of land in Maine's 100-Mile Wilderness region, a globally important ecological jewel that has some of the largest swaths of undeveloped forests, lakes and ponds in the U.S. Not only is this land critical for wildlife, but it also sequesters an enormous amount of carbon dioxide. As AMC seeks to continue to support land conservation, they have also invested in developing forest carbon offset credits that generate income to support our land ownership.

These carbon offset credits are sold to major corporations that are trying to offset their emissions. AMC then uses that money to buy and preserve more land or support other land conservation projects. It is not the intent of the program to allow companies to "pay to pollute," but is rather intended to get them to work on reducing their carbon footprint. As part of this carbon offset program, AMC is also committed to maintaining the level of carbon stocking in the Maine forests while driving down AMC's own carbon footprint.

For any of us who have spent time in the 100-Mile Wilderness, the sheer beauty and peace of the area is enough for us to want to protect it. There are miles and miles of trails to explore, ponds and lakes to traverse and wildlife to observe. The clear night skies reveal multitudes of stars hidden by light pollution in other areas. The quiet of the woods heals and soothes you, especially at a time as difficult and tumultuous as this past year has been.

These reasons alone would be enough for us to protect this forest. Add to all this splendor the fact that this area can help fight climate change by providing carbon sequestration and the case is clear that we must do all we can to preserve this land.

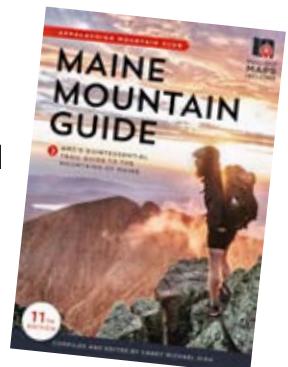
If you are interested in this topic and want to learn more about what AMC is doing to fight climate change, visit AMC's website at www.outdoors.org and enter the search term "climate change."

Winter Hikes at Acadia National Park/Mount Desert Island

By Carey Kish, editor of the AMC Maine Mountain Guide

Winter is a great time to visit Acadia National Park for some hiking, snowshoeing and skiing fun. Drawing just a tiny fraction of the summer hoards, you'll feel like you have the place almost all to yourself. Most of the Park Loop Road is closed this time of year, but a good chunk of the park is still very accessible via public roads. And while Bar Harbor and neighboring communities may be quiet, there are still plenty of places to stay, eat and shop when you're not on the trail.

Here are a handful of awesome hikes to get you started on your next Acadia winter adventure. Enjoy!



Sand Beach from Great Head

GREAT HEAD

Access to Great Head in winter is either from Schooner Head Road or the Sand Beach parking lot on Ocean Drive, which is open from Schooner Head Road to Otter Cliff Road. Start at either trailhead for a nice loop hike around Great Head (150 feet) of about 2 miles, with good views of the Beehive, Champlain and Gorham mountains, and the ruins of an old stone teahouse on top to boot. MMG, pp. 425-426.



View from Huguenot Head on Mt Champlain

MT. CHAMPLAIN

Start from the trailhead parking lot at the north end of the Tarn. Hike the stone stairs on the Beachcroft Path up and around Huguenot Head, then scamper up to the top of Mt. Champlain (1,057 feet) for fabulous 360-degree views ranging from Dorr and Cadillac mountains to Frenchman Bay and Schoodic Peninsula. Descend via Champlain North Ridge Trail, then walk the Park Loop Road and Route 3 back to your car. About 3 miles. MMG, pp. 422-424.



On the Cadillac Mtn South Ridge Trail

CADILLAC MOUNTAIN

Begin on Route 3 in Otter Creek, just opposite the entrance to Blackwoods Campground. Hike north on the Cadillac South Ridge Trail. Skip the side loop to Eagles Crag, as there are much better views above. Follow a rocky ridge through a forest of pitch pines and jack pines to reach the Featherbed, a pretty tarn. From here to the Cadillac summit you'll climb fully exposed on granite bedrock with terrific views in every direction. 6-1/2 miles round-trip. MMG, p. 435.



Harbor Brook Trail, Land and Garden Preserve

LAND AND GARDEN PRESERVE

From Route 3 between Seal Harbor and Northeast Harbor, hike north on Harbor Brook Trail along the pretty brook, then turn west on Asticou & Jordan Pond Path. Take Asticou Ridge Path over the wooded peak of Eliot Mountain (458 feet), then walk down and out to Route 3 via the Eliot Mountain Trail. Turn left on the highway to return to the trailhead. The lovely Preserve, former Rockefeller family land adjacent to ANP, is 1,165 acres in size. MMG, pp. 455-457.



Somes Sound from Acadia Mtn summit

ACADIA MOUNTAIN

From Route 102 on the way into Southwest Harbor, climb the mountain (681 feet) by way of the Acadia Mountain Trail for terrific views over Somes Sound, a natural fjord, to Norumbega Mountain and a jumble of barren-topped peaks beyond, and south to a host of offshore islands. Drop steeply down Acadia's south slope, then hike back out to the road on the Man O' War Fire Road. 2-1/2 miles. MMG, pp. 457-459.



Snowshoeing on Beech Mtn

BEECH MOUNTAIN

Beech Mountain Road is plowed to within a half-mile of the Beech Mountain parking lot, so you'll have to walk a little further in winter than summer. Hike the Beech Mountain Loop Trail up to the firetower on top (841 feet) for grand MDI views, then head west to the spectacular cliffs overlooking Long Pond and to Western Mountain. For bonus points, when done, hike out to Beech Cliff for a great look out over Echo Lake. A little over 1-1/2 miles. MMG, pp. 461-465.



Skier on the carriage roads near Eagle Lake

CARRIAGE ROADS

If you've never cross-country skied on Acadia's historic carriage roads, well, make this the winter to do so (hopefully Mother Nature will cooperate with good snow). Volunteers groom and track some 20 miles for an experience you'll not soon forget. Popular jumping off points are the Route 233 parking lot near Eagle Lake and the Brown Mountain Gatehouse on Route 198. Check the "Friends of Acadia" Facebook page for the latest trail grooming updates.

ALL PHOTOS BY CAREY KISH



Maine Woods Initiative Report *By Paul Hahn*

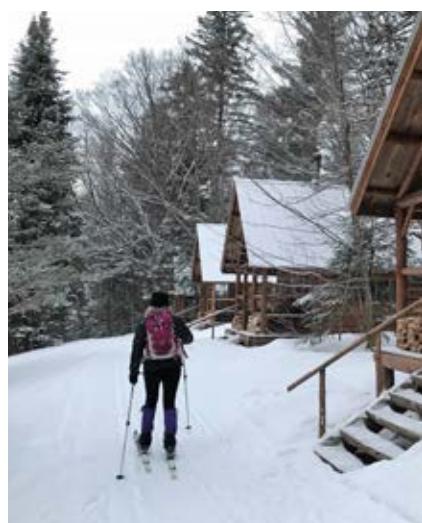
In this summary I will attempt to give the readers an update on the AMC land and lodges in our Maine Woods Initiative. By now, I hope everyone knows that the Club and its 12 chapters own 74,000 acres of land and three lodges in the Maine forest near Greenville and are working to acquire an additional 27,000 acres known as the Pleasant River Headwaters Forest.

This summary evolved from staff reports given at the Board's MWI Committee meeting, chaired by Robert Hecht (former AMC Board member) and facilitated by Susan Arnold, Vice President for Conservation, on November 18, 2020.

The summer season at the lodges, despite COVID-19 and the closing of Little Lyford Lodge for repairs and updating, did well as people wanted to be outdoors and often stayed longer than normal. The work at Little Lyford has been completed and will be open for the winter season.

As readers may remember, AMC continues to fundraise to complete the acquisition of the Pleasant River Head Waters Forest. Once acquired, this land will enhance AMC's conservation and sustainable forestry programs and grow the total MWI lands to more than 100,000 acres.

Too often it is forgotten that the Club practices sustainable forestry management on its 74,000 acres, which result in logging operations that produce income for the Club and as well as manage the forest to sustain growth and enhance its conservation values.



A skier glides past log cabins at AMCs Little Lyford Lodge. Carey Kish photo.

Watershed restoration continues; 2020 was the 9th season. Six miles of brook trout habitat were opened this year, bringing the total to more than 60 miles of re-opened trout streams. AMC is involved with several state agencies, Trout Unlimited, and NRCS, in a pilot project. Streams altered years ago by log driving will be brought back to normal conditions. This project supports the return of Atlantic salmon, which for the first time in 180 years have spawned in the Pleasant River.

There are three other on-going projects. AMC is part of a 2 1/2-year effort entitled First Light Learning Journey, which is aimed at uniting the Four First Nations with the conservation community. AMC implemented a permit system for Wabanaki basket makers to harvest brown ash on AMC land to sustain their craft.

This summer access to the planned Shaw Mountain Hut was improved despite encountering significant ledge. The 1.35 miles of existing road were improved along with installing 38 culverts to slow the effects of water on the road and stream runoff. The meeting

also reported on the results of the MWI timber inventory conducted this past fall. The inventory is done every 10 years to determine new growth, establish annual allowable harvest and to show how the forest has changed.

MWI staff also reported that the Club will be applying for Dark Skies Park designation in early 2021. There are 130 such designations in the world. More funding is needed for lighting infrastructure upgrades in the area in order to achieve the Reserve designation, which will continue to be AMC's ultimate goal.

The staff in Greenville continues to work with local organizations, public and private, to connect MWI and the Moosehead Lake region to other outdoor organizations such as Moosehead Lake Regional Development Corporation, Moosehead Outdoor Alliance and Moosehead Trails. There has been increased activity of people recreating in the Greenville area as well as an influx of new families establishing permanent residence.

The winter season at the Lodges is fast approaching. The winter season starts January 14, 2021 and runs through March 6. All three lodges will be open. The hours of operation will be from 1 p.m. on Wednesday through 3 p.m. on Sunday. This will allow staff two days to do the cleaning and preparations required by the CDC. The lodges will be staffed from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. when common areas will be open. For the MLK weekend, the schedule will allow for Sunday night service, closing at 3 p.m. on Monday. President's Week calls for full-service February 14-21. Details on the services provided can be found at outdoors.org. It makes good sense to check the website as dates and services may change due to the pandemic.

It is my hope that you will enjoy and support the Club effort by visiting and enjoying a winter experience in the Maine Woods. Hiking, skiing, and snowshoeing are all there for you to enjoy. Have fun.



Comfy log cabin interior at AMCs Gorman Chairback Lodge. Carey Kish photo.

A Recap of the 2020 Maine Chapter Annual Meeting

The Maine Chapter's annual meeting was successfully held online this year on November 14 due to COVID-19 restrictions for in-person meetings. John Mullens, AMC's Regional Director, was the host for the meeting.

A summary of the chapter's activity for the year was provided by our Chair, Cindy Caverly, and the chapter financials by Janet Roderick, Treasurer. You can view the chapter's 2020 Annual Report on our website at amcmaine.org/amc-maine-chapter-2020-annual-report.

Paul Hahn, chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the 2021 Maine Chapter Executive Committee slate of candidates, which were voted on and approved by those present. The 2021 Maine Chapter Executive Committee nominees slate can be found amcmaine.org/2021-executive-committee-slate-of-candidates.

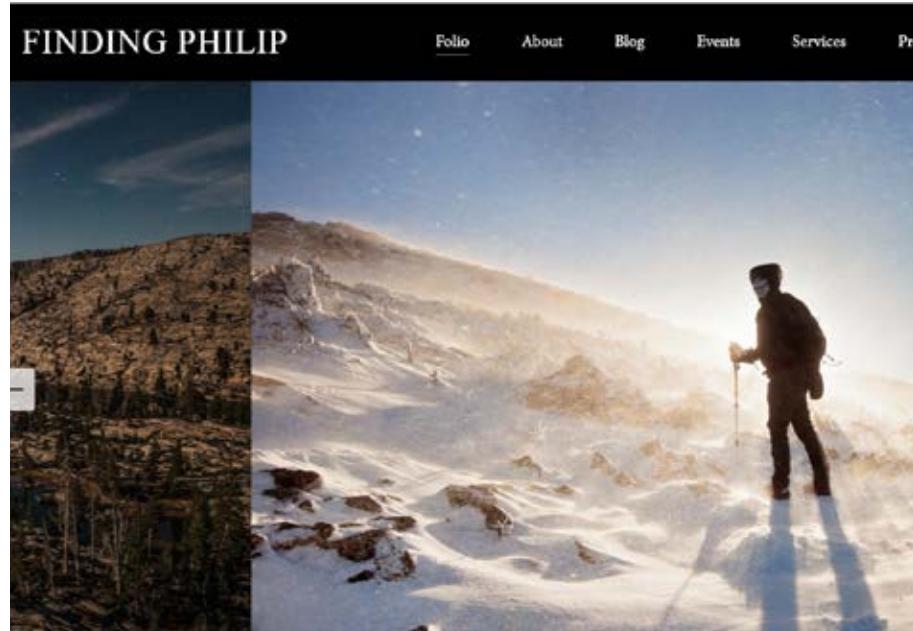
Cindy Caverly, our departing Chair, was recognized, as well as departing Executive Committee members Denise Fredette (Outings Chair) and Kristen Grant (Membership Chair).

The six 50-year and 32 25-year Maine Chapter members were recognized by John Mullens.

The Outings Committee recognized leaders that have led three trips in the past year as well as leaders that have led each year for the past five years. A special recognition was given to Carlyn Welch, who is retiring as a leader this year after leading trips for the Maine Chapter for 33 years.

New this year, a photo contest was held with the winners announced at the meeting. Contest categories were "most liked on Facebook" and a category that was "judged" by professional photographer Jerry Monkman. The winning photos can be viewed at amcmaine.org/photo-contest-winners.

Our AMC speaker was Paul Cunha, Vice President of Operations, who is responsible for AMC's lodging, including the Maine Woods Initiative. Paul spoke about the impact of COVID, the precautions they have taken for reopening the Maine lodges, and the 2021 schedule.



Philip Garcia, aka "Finding Philip," was our featured speaker. Garcia described what it takes to be the holder of the fastest known time (FKT) for both the White Mountains grid (hiking all 48 4,000-footers in every month of the year) and "redlining" the Whites (hiking all trails in the *AMC White Mountain Guide*).

Videos of both the Maine Chapter annual meeting and Philip Garcia's inspiring talk are posted on the AMC Maine YouTube channel: youtube.com/channel/UCsKrBOnKCLuUO4n-5uvGsgQ/videos

Outings Committee Annual Report for 2020

In 2020, there were 36 events led by 19 leaders with more than 350 total participants. There were:

- 10 snowshoe hikes
- 2 Nordic ski trips
- 7 hikes
- 2 leader meetings
- 1 backpacking trip
- 4 instructional webinar workshops
- 2 social events
- 8 webinar presentations

In 2020, there are 34 active leaders and 7 leader applicants. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we offered our instructional workshop online as webinars, which were well-attended. We cancelled our in-person leader training for 2020. Leader training modules were offered online in November and December of 2020. All in-person AMC activities between March 15 and June 23 were cancelled or postponed. AMC's leadership has adopted increased safety precautions and guidelines for all in-person activities due to the pandemic.

Each year, the Maine Chapter recognizes leaders who have led at least three trips in a year as well those who have been active leaders for at least 5 years.

3 TRIPS LISTED THIS YEAR (Oct 2019 - Oct 2020)

Debby Kantor	Jeanne Christie	Stan Moody
Denise Fredette	Michelle Moody	Sarah Hunter

5-YEAR LEADERS (an * means "not previously recognized")

Bill Brooke	Jeanine Libby	Peg Nation
Cindy Caverly*	Jeanne Christie	Peter Roderick
Debby Kantor	Kim Sanders	Stan Moody
Denise Fredette	Michelle Moody	

LIFETIME LEADER AWARD

Carolyn Welch (AMC Maine Chapter leader for 33 years)

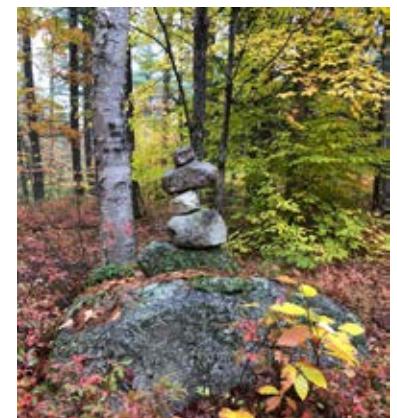
Love Letter continued from page 8

a tree, I wouldn't be able to see it anymore. Or maybe it thought that; it's fun to make up your own stories about these things.

Getting to the woods became important enough to me that I started to wonder how I would keep it up while also continuing to work 40 hours a week, especially with sunset moving up to 4 p.m.

I started to block off numerous 2-hour chunks of time on my work calendar titled just "Sunshine," and negotiating my responsibility to my newfound relationship with the forest and my responsibilities at work was getting to be a bit cumbersome. I had a breakthrough when I started to identify mid-day meetings where I would not have to talk much and started taking those while hiking in the woods. I've found I pay much better attention this way than I would have if I were home and had the ability to "multitask." It's really a win-win for everybody.

This morning I hiked three miles in the quiet and the rain, thinking about how the winter storm that would come in the afternoon would again quickly change the scenery. Knowing how everything in the forest (and in life) is so transient makes me appreciate it more. I looked at the brown leaves and acorns covering the trail and wondered how long it would be until I saw them again. I'm looking forward to getting to know the forest in winter.



A Love Letter to My Local Forest

By Whitney Plasket



This morning I woke up and remembered that, based on how the weather forecast looked yesterday, early morning was the best time to hike today. It would rain all day and turn into snow mid-day for our first winter nor'easter of the season in the afternoon. I made some coffee, put it in a travel mug, donned my rain pants (the sound they make reminds me of wearing two garbage bags side-by-side) and raincoat, and headed to my town's forest for the 49th time in four months.

Ever since August 2016 when I did a hut-to-hut Presidential Traverse with friends in the White Mountains, I've felt a strong pull to that area and often pulled up mountain-forecast.com and newenglandtrailconditions.com during the week to figure out where in the Whites I, or I and a friend, would hike that Saturday. I felt the need to go despite the forecast at 4,000+ feet often being iffy. If it was too iffy, which it often was, I would stay home and try another week. This year with COVID afoot and the recommendation to stay local, I tried out a few hikes near Grafton Notch and even took to trying to enjoy walking on the roads near my home. At 45 mph with no real shoulder, though, it got intimidating.

I convinced my non-hiking husband to go out for a quick hike in early August, and we drove nine minutes to the town forest. I had been there two years before and got hopelessly lost finding my way back to the car, eventually getting the blue Google map dot of me pointed in the direction of the parking area. They have since posted many signs around to show you were you are, and have encouraged use of online maps. I had even prepared a CalTopo map in Avenza this time, to make sure we wouldn't get lost. We did.

But I went back, just a couple days later. The forest was so close and there was nearly no one there. We saw two bikers over the span of an hour that first day. This felt good not only due to trying to stay distanced with COVID, but because it felt like I had the whole 40-some acre forest to myself. I had been spending most of my waking hours for five months sitting at a desk about seven feet from my husband (who I love very much). I eagerly welcomed the amount of space and peace the empty forest afforded me.

There are about seven miles of trails available, with great variety between them. There are four miles of wide trails with a carpet of soft white pine needles that rope around the boundary of the property and give you a real sense of open space. The pines are so tall that it feels almost like you're walking through a vast green aisleway, like the trail is something for giants. There are also three miles of skinnier



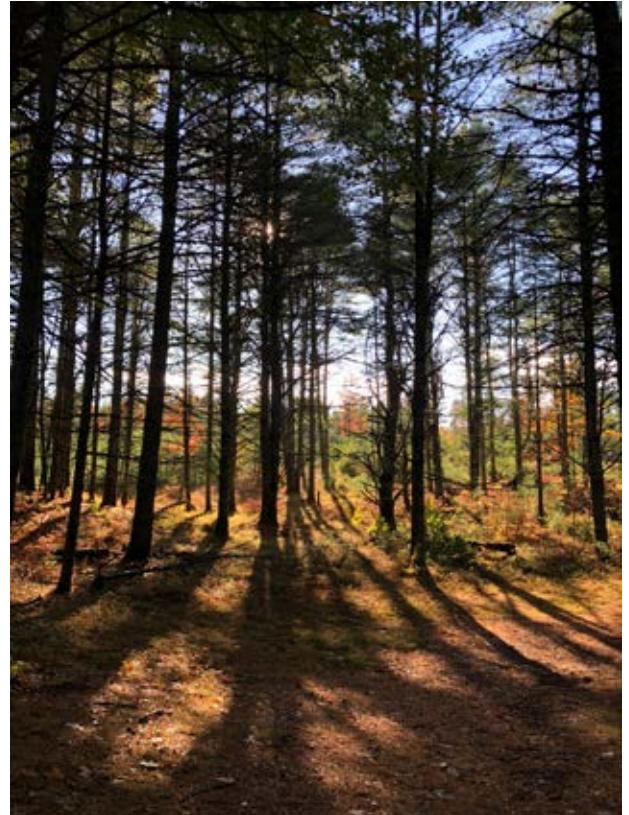
trails with more roots, rocks, hills, and great wetlands and swamps. It's quieter in that part of the forest, and for weeks each time I hiked its far limits, I would see deer in the woods with me.

I experienced for the first time there what it was like to come across a deer in the woods rather than see it outside in my yard or something. Animal meeting animal.

With respect to my note about getting lost above, there are also three totally separate blue trails that have nothing to do with one another. In winter, once the trails are groomed, I won't be able to use the wider trails anymore unless I'm on cross-country skis. By late August, I had promised the forest that I would learn how to cross-country ski this winter, so I can continue to explore her full breadth and length.

I started to make the trip every 2 to 3 days, picking a different trail route each time, making a kind of game of it. Sometimes I would stop mid-quick pace and just soak in the beauty and the silence. Sometimes I would very slowly and mindfully take each step. One time I even stopped and turned myself completely around mid-hike to see what that felt like. This kind of play

was a breath of fresh air. At a time when there didn't feel like there was much I could control, I could choose spontaneously to drive to the forest and hike whatever trails I felt like. There are a lot of things being cancelled this year, but the woods have always been there for me. It now feels like an extension of my own yard.



I started to go even more often, every other day or every day now. I have always felt a pull to nature. I've wanted to enjoy memoirs and poetry on being in nature (Thoreau and Mary Oliver), but they just make me feel like I should put down the book and go outside instead. By weaving this forest into my day-to-day life, I feel very much now like I'm a part of nature rather than a person who likes and sometimes visits it.

By going to the same place over and over, I've become intimate with how the forest changes over time (and there's still so much to learn). The green ferns and brush turned so quickly to yellow after the first frost, green leaves changed to red and yellow almost over a span of just two weeks, they fell and painted the forest floor and trails brilliantly. The reds and yellows faded to brown over about a month. The yellow-brown beech leaves hang on while the lively green of the trunks and tall pines continue. There are so many blue jays, and I had previously always attributed their calls to crows. There were hundreds of baby frogs in August, followed by a mass of chipmunks, then swarms of chickadees in November. Once, a squirrel dropped a pine cone it was eating on my head and then passionately scolded me for it. Another day, a baby deer, its sibling and mother doe stared at me for a long time and the baby walked toward me, not knowing quite what I was. We stayed like that until I decided to give the poor mother a break and move on. I saw a porcupine two weeks ago wandering around during the day who thought that if it hid its head in

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