

# Long Trail NEWS



Quarterly of the Green Mountain Club

SPRING 2021



A Day in the Life of a GMC Caretaker | It's Never Too Late to Start Hiking! | Student of the Summit  
We Can All Belong: A Transgender Thru-Hiker's Reflections on the Long Trail



# Long Trail

NEWS

The mission of the Green Mountain Club is to make the Vermont mountains play a larger part in the life of the people by protecting and maintaining the Long Trail System and fostering, through education, the stewardship of Vermont's hiking trails and mountains.

## Quarterly of the Green Mountain Club

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FRONT COVER: Summit of Killington by Matt Heller

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PHOTO BY MICHAEL DILLON

Mount Mansfield summit on a busy day. Read more on page 6.

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## From the President

As we look ahead to another busy hiking and field season in 2021, I cannot help but be grateful for the overwhelming support GMC's community of members and donors showed during the past year. While the challenges of the pandemic do not disappear with the dawning of a new hiking season, we know that you, the members and donors, made the work of planning for this field season possible.

When the global pandemic started, we really didn't know what the financial implications would be, so we asked for your support. Those of you who could really stepped up and donated generously to both our Resilience Fund last summer and again this past December. Your commitment to the future of the Green Mountain Club is important and inspiring, so thank you for making a difference.

While we could not run a full field crew last year due to shared housing and safety concerns, your generosity and GMC staff's planning has positioned us for a busy and productive 2021 field season making up for lost time. We actually have two field seasons worth of work ready to

go, including at least six new accessible, moldering privies which gets us closer to our goal of replacing every pit privy on the Long Trail System. This work is especially important as we saw usage increase last season by an estimated 35% on trails maintained by the Green Mountain Club.

We at the GMC are always thinking of ways to provide better benefits and service to our members, especially during this pandemic. Hosting our education programs and workshops virtually has allowed us to welcome participants in larger numbers and from a larger geographic range. The friendly GMC visitor center staff now answers hikers' questions over phone, email, and social media, and thousands of hikers connect to share trail reports and give advice in our Facebook group. Websites and apps like Trail Finder and Avenza (my personal choice for paperless trail guides) allow you to access the entire Long Trail and more in the palm of your hand.

To the 600 new GMC members who have joined in the past year I say *welcome*, and thank you for choosing to support and engage with the club who keeps the

trails you tread open, safe, and enjoyable.

I invite all of you to continue to be good stewards of the Long Trail System as we

prepare for busy trails this year. Please call upon GMC expertise and knowledge to prepare for your next hike. Refer to GMC resources like the *Day Hiker's Guide* or Trail Finder to find an alternative hike if you discover the trailhead for your planned hike is crowded. It may feel frustrating, but the trail is here for all, so it is up to all of us to work together and practice patience and kindness as the numbers of hikers increase on the trails.

Though I'd rather be hiking together in person, I am happy that our annual meeting will at least be conducted virtually this year. Continue to be safe. Enjoy the Long Trail experience and our beautiful Green Mountains.

—TOM CANDON, PRESIDENT





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## Mountain Views

### The Arduous Path to Conservation

If this article (Celebrating Success after 34 Years, Long Trail News, Winter, 2020) doesn't beautifully chronicle the endless efforts by organizations like the Green Mountain Club to conserve lands, I don't know what does. My congratulations to the GMC for the wisdom and perseverance to be successful, and obviously the generations of staff and volunteers to pick up the baton over the thirty-four year span. The article reinforces our continued need to support organizations such as the GMC with financial support, with volunteer efforts, and with writing campaigns at a time when more people are enjoying hiking and camping, and at a time when the available land to conserve is shrinking.

—STEPHEN LUDWIG

### A Story That Needs to be Told

I really enjoyed the article on the saga of the Coddington Hollow property conservation. That is a story that needed to be told so that folks have a better understanding of how much effort goes into trail preservation. Well done!

—JOEL PAGE

### Maps Tell the Story

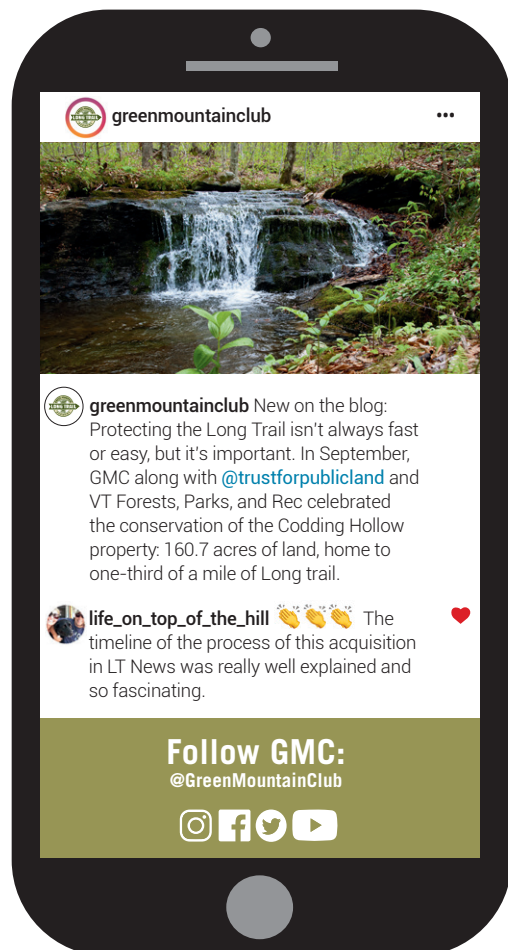
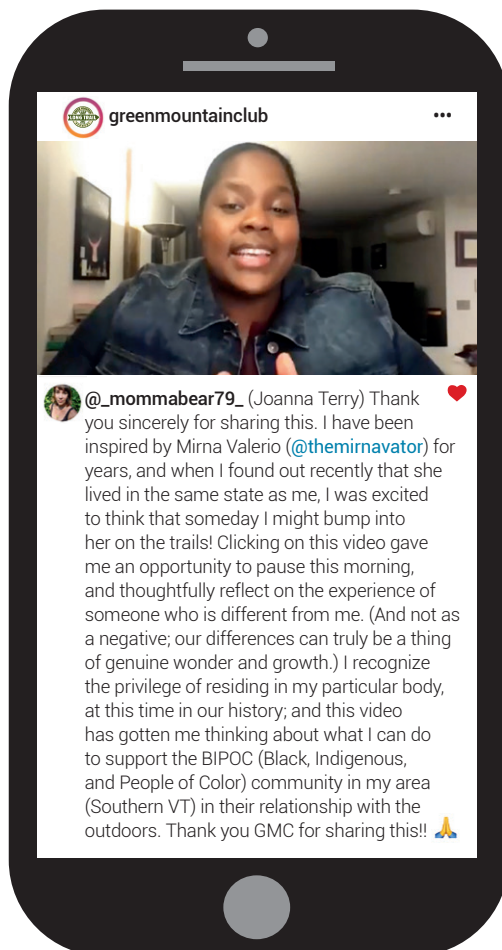
My husband and I enjoy reading the articles about the trails, land acquisitions and improvements. We think it would be a good idea for the articles about places to include a small map insert with nearby reference points or towns, just to give the reader an idea of the general location. We realize we could drag out the map or google it, but a small map insert would be most helpful. Thanks for your time and this beautiful publication.

—MONICA KELLY AND GLENN ANYON

### New Member Reflections

My granddaughter and I have enjoyed your trails at Stowe/Smugglers' Notch and Mt. Mansfield for years. As a public health physician and pediatrician, I especially like your maintenance work to keep the trails safe and protect them from erosion. Your work for enabling healthy, challenging, and enjoyable exercise and protecting the environment is good for individuals and the planet.

—DR. PHILLIP GIOIA



▲ In response to the January 7 Taylor Series talk by Mirna Valerio, *"Awe, Community, and the Outdoors: A Perfect Trifecta"*  
—From Green Mountain Club's Instagram @GreenMountainClub





### Thank You

One year ago, I was concerned about the impact of the pandemic on fundraising the Green Mountain Club does every year to make our work on the trails and in the mountains possible. Would there be extra expenses related to COVID-19? Would our members and donors still support the work we do on the trail? How would that work be impacted? Could we even *do* any work this year? What is going to happen?

Many of these questions, along with the uncertainties of the world around us,

loomed over me as the year continued, and plans and adjustments were made to the hiking season. Just as we at the Green Mountain Club learned that the trails could open in June and folks would be able to hike safely, we reached out to you and asked for your help with our annual fundraising.

What we discovered along the way was truly heartwarming. Within minutes of announcing our plans for the year and asking for support, you all stepped up in such meaningful ways. You immediately donated to our resilience fund and asked how you could support the staff. You encouraged us and reminded us that what

we do matters, because especially during times of social distancing, spending time hiking and in the mountains adds tremendous value to people's lives. You inspired us by sharing your stories about community and resilience – and gave us hope for the future of hiking and community in Vermont.

So, thank you. It's because of you that we are entering the 2021 hiking season with the confidence that we can get our work done. It's with your support that we will enter the post-pandemic world in an even better position to care for our beloved trails.

— ALICIA DiCocco, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

"I've been a GMC member for the better part of the last 15 years? Maybe longer. I lived about a mile from the Monroe Trail on the side of Camel's Hump for about 10 years awhile back and got to know some of the summit caretakers during that time.

They provided a window into how critical they were and the entire GMC is to protecting our natural world. I was always so impressed with their dedication and knowledge and felt that they really represented the club as a whole. With the increase in trail use I think it's more important than ever to support you."

—DON WELCH



PHOTO BY ILANA COPEL



# A Day in the Life of a GMC CARETAKER

As many more people than usual took up hiking last summer, the Green Mountain Club had to manage their impacts while making them feel welcome. Fortunately our caretakers can tap into more than 50 years of experience educating and connecting with hikers while maintaining trails and overnight sites. Dozens of paid GMC caretakers live in the backcountry each season, helping hikers learn how to care for the special places they enjoy. This critical work, made possible by your donations, minimizes the impact that we as hikers have on the Long Trail.

Below, **NIGEL BATES** takes us through a typical day in the life of a caretaker.



Nigel Bates

## 7:15 a.m.

I wake up on the caretaker bunk in Taft Lodge.\* Most caretakers tent outside their shelters, but tenting is prohibited at Taft to protect the fragile subalpine ecosystem there. I sleep at Taft during my workweek, Thursday through Monday. On days off I leave the mountain and recharge at GMC headquarters in Waterbury Center.

*\*NOTE:* In 2020 GMC did not station caretakers at Taft and Butler Lodges, to avoid the risk of COVID-19. We plan to resume staffing them this year, with appropriate precautions.

## 7:30 a.m.

After a few minutes to gather myself for the day, I climb down and make breakfast. I have to backpack my food to the lodge, so when I shop I choose lightweight but calorie- and nutrient-dense items. Today I opt for a big bowl of oatmeal with dried bananas, and plenty of maple syrup.

As I dig in, I chat with a few thru-hikers about their plans. They're headed south over Mount Mansfield to Puffer Shelter. I tell them about water availability, stress the ruggedness of the trail, and suggest Taylor Lodge as a fallback if they find themselves behind schedule.

I learned the basics of trail maintenance, privy management and informal hiker education in a two-week preseason

training, but like other caretakers, I learned the details of my range on my own.

## 8:15 a.m.

Once the hikers are off, I gather what I need for a morning on Mansfield's summit. Some of the supplies are obvious: food, water, a Long Trail map, a first aid kit, and lots of extra layers. Others might surprise you! I never expected to carry a ball of cotton twine (to delineate the trail above treeline), a tally counter (to record the number of visitors to the summit), or an extra dog leash (in case someone arrives at the summit without one), yet all of these are essential components of my summit pack.

## 8:30 a.m.

I start up the Long Trail toward the summit. My commute, while only 0.6 miles, is some of the most difficult terrain of the trail. Fortunately I'm now intimately familiar with it!

I arrive to find this morning's thru-hiker friends basking in the sun and taking in the marvelous view from Vermont's highest point. They're in luck — more than half the time, the summit is enshrouded in clouds. I point out some of the main features: Mount Washington and Franconia Ridge to the east, Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks to the west, and the spine of the Green Mountains stretching south to Killington.

Then I draw their attention downward to the alpine vegetation. These remarkable plants — diapensia, mountain sandwort, Bigelow's sedge and others — survive on only a few of Vermont's highest peaks, where harsh weather precludes trees. I remind them to step only on rocks above treeline to avoid trampling this fragile vegetation, a refrain I repeat countless times per day. Promising to do so, they continue their journey.



PHOTO BY SHERI LANSSEN



### 9:15 a.m.

A family of day hikers arrives. It's a beautiful Saturday, so they are bound to be the first of many. I click my counter\* four times as I say hello, and ask which trail they took. They hiked the Laura Cowles Trail, one of the more strenuous routes, and would like an easier way down. I recommend the Sunset Ridge Trail for stunning views as well as gentler terrain. I snap a family photo and remind them of the fragility of the alpine vegetation. They, too, promise to stay on rocks.

*\*NOTE:* Caretakers count hikers so the club can chart trends from year to year, and devise trail management strategies accordingly.

### 10:30 a.m.

The summit is getting busy, so it's time for a trash sweep. Caretakers lead by example, whether on duty or off, so we try to clean up while hikers are watching. As I crisscross the summit with my trash bag (staying on the rocks, of course), I talk with visitors about how we can all help keep the mountain clean. There are always many new hikers, and we strive to introduce them to the principles of trail stewardship in a welcoming and inclusive way. We hope to inspire all visitors, new or experienced, to pack out their trash, and maybe even some left by others!

### 11:00 a.m.

A man arrives and begins to set up a drone. I walk over, say a friendly hello, and ask him to refrain from flying the drone on the summit.

"Why not?" he asks, a bit irritated. I explain that drones have a negative impact, not only on other hikers but also on birds. On cue, a peregrine falcon appears overhead and dives into Smugglers' Notch. We're both awestruck. As he puts the drone away, I thank him for respecting the wildlife that call Mansfield home. This was an example of soft stewardship: taking an opportunity to make hikers aware of the impacts of their actions and empower them to make good decisions.

### 12:30 p.m.

My summit shift is almost finished, and another caretaker arrives for the afternoon. Since it's so busy we work together for a

## Want to Make a Caretaker's Day?

### FOLLOW THESE TIPS:

#### › Say Hello!

We're here to greet hikers and make your hike the best it can be. We love answering questions, snapping photos, and admiring the view with you.

#### › Stay on the Rocks.

Caretakers work at some of the most fragile ecosystems in Vermont. Help us protect this rare summit flora by stepping with care.

#### › Same Goes for the Trail.

We don't want to make trails any wider than they already are. If you must step off so people can pass safely, step onto a durable surface if you can, and step directly back onto the trail to avoid trampling a new path back to the trail.

#### › Pack it Out.

Caretakers spend a lot of time picking up trash, from dog waste bags to microtrash escaped from summit snacks. Do the right thing and take all trash and recyclables with you — and if you see trash on the trail, please take it in stride and pack it out too.

#### › Keep Wildlife Wild by Not Feeding it, Intentionally or Not.

Summit chipmunks are not actually native to the alpine zone, and only hang out there for snacks from humans. And birds will happily swallow crumbs and other food waste, but it's not good for them. Clean up after yourself and keep your snacks to yourself.

#### › To Pee or Not to Pee in the Privy?

Some privies at shelters and tent sites are composting privies, and too much urine can hamper the composting process, so users are asked to pee in the woods. Others use a process called moldering, a slow decomposition of waste that needs water from urine. Check the sign on the privy door to see what to do.

#### › Welcome all Hikers.

Above all, you can help caretakers by being welcoming and friendly to other hikers. If you meet new hikers, stop and say hello. Offer guidance, but avoid criticizing or policing mistakes. Shaming doesn't work for anyone. The trails are there for all, and you can help GMC ensure that everyone feels welcome on them.





# Find Your Next Hike with Trail Finder

The Green Mountain Club recently launched a partnership with Trail Finder, so now information on all club-managed trails can be found on the Trail Finder website at [www.trailfinder.info](http://www.trailfinder.info).

This free interactive mapping site includes a searchable database of more than 5,900 miles of hiking, cycling, paddling and ski trails in Vermont and New Hampshire, for users of all abilities and experience levels. The partnership will help the club remain the premier source of hiking information in Vermont.

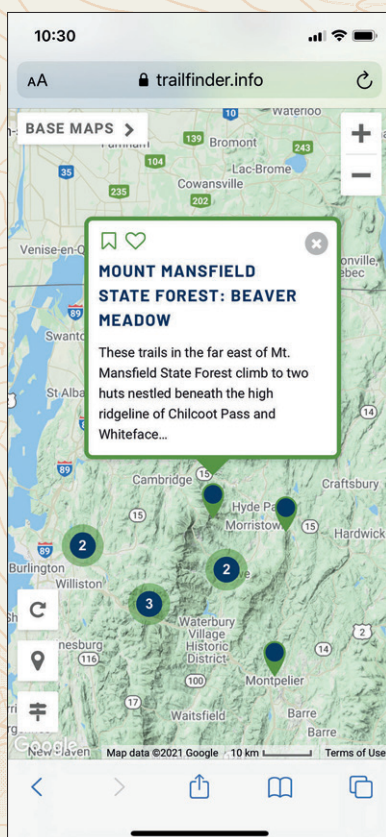
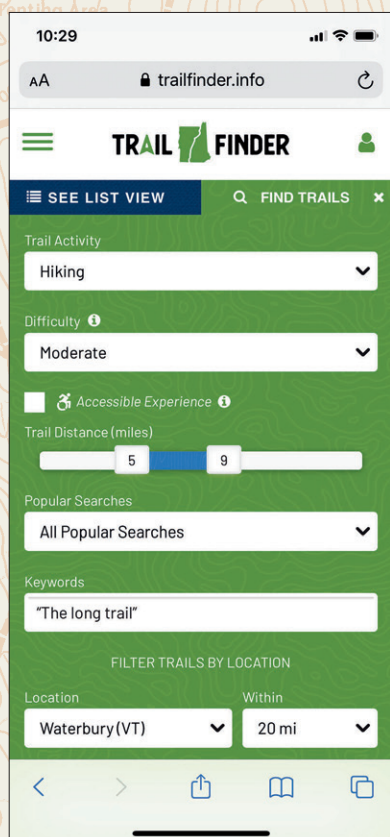
Trail Finder can help you discover new trails both close to home and farther afield this hiking season. Its detailed descriptions will help you prepare for hikes, and you can read and submit trip reports and comments. You can also keep a personal logbook in Trail Finder to keep track of completed and planned hikes.

Since Trail Finder gets its maps and other information directly from trail managers, GMC can instantaneously correct errors and post news of trail relocations. A trail alert feature enables trail managers to tell hikers about closures, parking problems, wildlife sightings, and so forth.

The feature can also help disperse hikers to reduce impacts on heavily used trails. If you find a trailhead parking lot full, Trail Finder can recommend comparable nearby trails. But please remember that Trail Finder is a discovery tool. It is not intended to replace paper maps.

Trail Finder will help GMC strengthen our relationships with other organizations providing outdoor recreation for Vermonters. It is overseen by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance in collaboration with the Center for Community GIS; the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation; the UNH Cooperative Extension; and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

— MATT KREBS, GMC OPERATIONS MANAGER



while to make sure everyone stays on the rocks while they eat lunch. When the rush subsides, I leave for some trail maintenance lower down the mountain.

## 1:30 p.m.

With more than 10 miles of trails in my range, there are always plenty of tasks. Today I decide to clip the corridor on the Hellbrook Trail. Corridor maintenance is a delicate balance: too narrow, and hikers are hit in the face with annoying branches. Too wide, and hikers tend to trample vegetation on the edges of the trail. I clip conservatively here to preserve delicate mosses and bunchberries along the path.

## 3:30 p.m.

I rush back to stir the composting run at the privy at Taft. Once a week I spend an hour digging into the pile with a spading fork to break up clumps and redistribute the mixture of waste and bark mulch for another cycle of heating. I explain to a curious group of teenagers that because Taft is such a popular site, it generates a lot of human waste, so we use high-temperature composting to speed the process. We all agree that the process is kind of gross, but also kind of cool.

## 5:00 p.m.

After dousing myself in hand sanitizer, I hike out to the Adam's Apple for a few minutes of solitude before overnight hikers start arriving. Caretaking is a full time job, and while I love interacting with people, it's important to find time to recharge and remember why I'm out here in the first place. The dramatic views of Lake of the Clouds and Smugglers' Notch never fail to blow me away.

## 6:00 p.m.

As it enters its second century, Taft Lodge welcomes a new generation of hikers. This evening while backpackers stream in I orient them to the privy, water source and washpit, gently reminding them of Leave No Trace principles as needed. As stewards of the backcountry, caretakers and hikers new and old should pass along our principles with kindness and respect.

Soon enough the sun goes down, chatter subsides, and hikers retire to sleeping bags. I climb to my bunk and join them in slumber. I'm tired, but it's a





Kati Christoffel (L) and Lacie Smith (R) folding up the Stratton caretaker tent

PHOTO BY NIGEL BATES

good fatigue, the kind you feel after a long day making a difference. Tomorrow I'll wake and do it all again. But every day on Mansfield is a little different, and I look forward to seeing what tomorrow will bring. 🌲

*From May through October Green Mountain Club backcountry caretakers from Stratton Mountain to Sterling Pond spend their days protecting ponds, summits and trails while helping the hiking public get more from their time in the Green Mountains. This rewarding and vital program is possible only through your support through memberships and donations. You enable each caretaker to protect the backcountry, and to welcome and inform the hiking public.*

**NIGEL BATES** started with the GMC as Mansfield Lead Caretaker in 2019 and is now entering his second season supervising the caretaker program.



2019 Lead Caretakers Taylor Radigan, Nigel Bates, and McV LaPointe





En route to Camel's Hump

PHOTO BY CHAD DINIUN



# It's Never Too Late to Start Hiking!

BY CHLOE MILLER

**K**atie Boyd, 48, is a lifelong Vermonter — but that doesn't mean she's always loved the outdoors. "It's kind of my schtick, that I don't like the outdoors," says the Northfield mom of two.

Boyd keeps busy as the office manager of Caledonia Spirits in Montpelier and raising her two teenage daughters. But after a divorce, and as her girls got older, Katie realized she was "facing middle age alone without kids, and I don't want to just be a workaholic." So she started hiking. When she saw a sign saying she was on the Long Trail at Sterling Pond on her first "real hike," Katie "literally cried. I was 46 at the time, and had never, in all my life living in Vermont, stepped on to the Long Trail."

Sunday hikes quickly became an essential ritual last summer for Katie and her close friend Lea, cherished times for just the two of them. "If my kids said, 'Oh, can you give me a ride?' I would say, 'No, Sunday is my hiking day.'"

Anyone who uses the trail system is a hiker, but Katie came to consider herself one over those dedicated weeks, a personal fitness journey culminating atop Camel's Hump on a sunny October Thursday. Hoping to avoid the record-setting crowds of last year's season, Katie and Lea took the day off for the climb. "It was really spur of the moment for me, which was great," Katie says, "because I don't think I ever would have mentally said to myself, 'Okay, I'm ready.'"

They took the moderately difficult Monroe Trail to the Dean Trail to the Long Trail, then descended Monroe, a round trip of around 6.8 miles. Katie recalls a sign indicating 1.7 miles to the summit. "Oh, that's a piece of cake," she thought.

It wasn't. "It was so steep, so rocky, and so hard." Facing the summit only seemed to make the miles crawl by more slowly. "I've discovered that looking at your destination can mess with your mind, because you feel like you're not getting any closer, it's still there." But they persevered, completing the hike in about seven hours. "Whenever I drive by Camel's Hump, I do a little



Lea (L) and Katie at Gore Mountain



Top of Camel's Hump

[smile], I'm just so proud of myself."

Becoming a hiker wasn't always easy or enjoyable, especially in a pandemic that impelled thousands of locals and visitors outdoors, sometimes flouting both hiking and Covid rules. Many popular Long Trail hikes were so crowded with hikers unmasked even when passing others that Katie and Lea began driving two or more hours from central Vermont to the Northeast Kingdom. An especially obscure trailhead there led to a charming encounter with a local hiker who showed them how to reach the trail from his son-in-law's back yard.

In July Katie had to turn back short of the summit on her first attempt on Mount Abraham with Lea, exhausted and worried about wearing herself out for the descent — an exercise in prudence many hikers would be wise to emulate. In the words of legendary mountaineer Ed Viesturs, "Getting to the summit is optional. Getting down is mandatory."

Looking back now, Katie feels confident that the steep pitches of Mount Abe would be feasible with what she's

learned, and it's first on her list for this summer. "It was just new. The first hike we did was easy, the second one was hard, and I just gave up. And then I didn't give up [again] for the rest of the summer."

Katie has learned how to have her best hiking experience, and what becoming a hiker later in life means to her. "I don't need to do hard, strenuous hikes in order to enjoy myself." Her approach shows all of us that hiking doesn't have to mean constant peak bagging or comparing summit lists. Knowing your limits and making journeys enjoyable is more likely to make hiking an activity you'll want to stick with.

After descending Camel's Hump too fast in order to make one of her daughter's soccer games, Katie suffered a minor knee injury that ended her hiking a few weeks before the season's end. Now she speaks up when a partner may be going too fast, and she can adjust the pace and strenuousness of her hikes accordingly. She's accepted the value of trekking poles for safer descents.

Katie joined the Green Mountain Club as an at-large member after her life-changing hiking season. "It's just a no-brainer that if I want to keep hiking on these trails, I need to keep them maintained, and the way to do that is support the organization that does the work."

She also looks forward to the day when group hikes will be safe again. Hikes are social excursions for her, and while Lea has been an excellent partner, Katie will have the club to keep hiking fun, safe, and part of her routine if Lea can't go.

"Becoming a hiker makes me very, very proud," she concludes. "I'm more physically fit, but more than that, it's just such good mental therapy. Every one of these mountains is completely different, has a different texture and feel and a different view. We love reaching the summit and enjoying a sandwich while we take in the view. Even if there's no view, it's this moment of solitude and quiet, where you just look over the mountains and think about how far you've come." 🥪





## Field Notes

A review of recent Field Notes suggested almost nothing has changed from a year ago, since the uncertainties of COVID-19 are still very much with us. Yet GMC's field leadership team anticipates the 2021 field season with optimism, having grown in strength, expertise and tenacity through 2020. Hiring members

of the 2021 field staff is well underway, and the number and quality of applicants has been outstanding. We expect a great team of returning and new staff to join us in May.

We spent the winter in **Zoom meetings** preparing a top-notch program, taking COVID-19 into account in every aspect to protect our staff and volunteers. Staff

members are ramping up systems for communication and continuing education for GMC sections, trail and shelter adopters, and other volunteers for field work. Volunteers will support paid crews on many projects planned for caretakers and trail crews.

Last year's 35 percent increase in trail use highlighted the value of our **caretaker program**. We plan to restore full staffing, with renewed focus on meeting and educating new trail users. Caretakers will also track and document usage and associated impacts, aiming to eventually spread impacts at overnight sites. We also will take another round of alpine plant monitoring photos on Mount Mansfield, a project started more than 10 years ago.

We will field two **Long Trail Patrol** crews and one **Construction Crew**. Projects include at least six moldering privies to replace pit privies: two at **Stratton Pond** and one each at **Melville Nauheim**, **Kid Gore**, **Old Job**, and **Lost Pond Shelters**. We anticipate funding through the Great American Outdoors Act for more privy conversions at **Emily Proctor** and **Boyce Shelters**, and received a generous private donation for conversion of the privy at **Minerva Hinchey Shelter**.

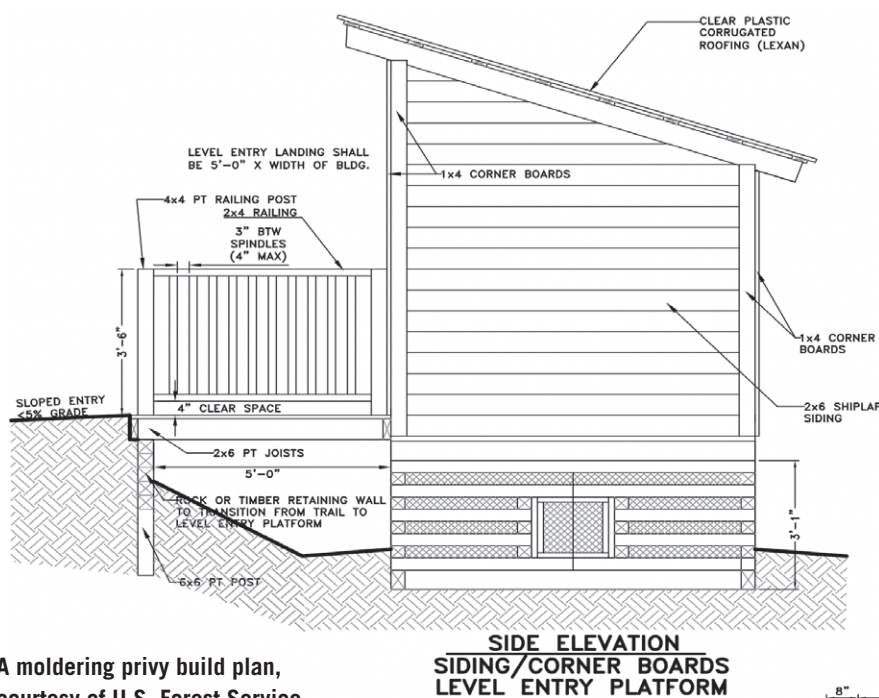
Thanks to a combination of public and private funding through member support over the years, **Winturri Shelter** will be the only GMC overnight site with a pit privy. We hope to secure funding and identify a schedule for that conversion soon.

We will also finish relocating the Long Trail/Appalachian Trail and other trails near Stratton Pond as part of the first phase of the evolving **Stratton Pond Area Management Plan**, work which began in 2019. A new trail will link the existing **Willis Ross Clearing** on the pond shore to the newly relocated LT/AT, and a second stretch will link the **Lye Brook Trail** to the future shelter site on the pond's north shore.

Tread upgrades and erosion control work will take place on three stretches of the Long Trail in northern Vermont: **Route 242 northbound to Jay Peak**; **Route 242 southbound to Bruce Peak**; and **Tillotson Camp to Haystack Mountain**. The Long Trail Patrol will also tackle smaller projects on the Long Trail in Bolton and on the **Sterling Pond Trail**.



Rolston Rest moldering privy



A moldering privy build plan, courtesy of U.S. Forest Service



Lastly, the long-anticipated construction of a new **Bromley Mountain Tower** is slated for this season. Contractors will do most of the work while the club manages the project in coordination with Bromley Mountain Resort and the State of Vermont.

As the GMC field season moves into 2021, we are also educating ourselves,

engaging our partners, and compiling resources to best support the diverse hiker base of the Long Trail System. We intend to provide our seasonal field staff with the tools and support they need for their health and safety. They are the public face of the club in the backcountry, and they are often the first to see and respond to any

form of discrimination or hostility. In fact, they may be on the receiving end of such discrimination themselves. We all have a responsibility to work towards a common goal of ensuring that all people feel welcome on the trail system.

— KEEGAN TIERNEY  
DIRECTOR OF FIELD PROGRAMS



## Field Team's Winter Highlights

**Isaac Alexandre-Leach, Field Program Coordinator**, has been coordinating the hiring of 38 field staff members, reviewing 100-plus applications, spending countless hours on Zoom interviews; planning field staff training; and guiding planning for seasonal staff orientation.

**Rosalie Sharp, Trail Field Supervisor**, spent the winter cutting lumber for six ADA-compliant moldering privies, and developing a robust training schedule for the 2021 field staff, assisted by **Nigel Bates, Caretaker Field Supervisor**, who recently rejoined us fulltime.

**Isaac, Rosalie, Nigel** and the entire field staff have been planning for COVID-19 contingencies as the impacts of the pandemic continue to change.

**Lorne Currier, Education and Volunteer Coordinator**, organized and hosted 20-plus Zoom-based community speaker programs and workshops that drew more than 1,200 participants, supported by **John Plummer, AmeriCorps Group Outreach Coordinator**. They are also developing systems for communication, training and continuing education for GMC sections, trail and shelter adopters, and other volunteers who support the club's field work.

**Keegan Tierney, Director of Field Programs**, has been managing the impacts of increased trail use in 2020; working with partners to ensure much needed outdoor-recreation stimulus funds reach our trails; and planning, coordinating, and scheduling this summer's lineup of field projects, which will make up for the reduced crews we ran in 2020.



# Student of the SUMMIT

Photos by Matt Heller, GMC's Fall 2020 Media Intern



View from Mount Belvidere



Heading south on the LT from  
Mount Mansfield summit

Pico Peak as seen from Deer Leap Rock, Killington





Installing a puncheon near the summit of Mount Ellen



View from Stowe



View from Killington Peak



Lenticular clouds forming over the Green Mountains

MATT HELLER is a senior Media Studies major and Environmental Studies minor at Saint Michael's College. He served GMC as a media intern in Fall 2020, producing photo, video, and written content to help further the club's mission.

*"As a student coming to Vermont from Connecticut, the Green Mountains were larger and vaster than anything I had seen before, but still relentlessly inviting. Photography became my way to document and preserve experiences in the wilderness, which soon became more of a passion."*

Thanks, Matt, for your work with the club — we wish you well!

Follow Matt's photography adventures on Instagram @mattheller24





## Sections Make the Club

### Meet the Presidents of GMC's Regional Membership Sections

Membership sections of the Green Mountain Club were established after 23 incorporating members formed the club in 1910 in Burlington. Today there are 14 sections, organized regionally, each responsible for trail maintenance on a section of the Long Trail, or on the Vermont Appalachian Trail or the Northeast Kingdom Trails.

Although many hiking clubs call their membership subdivisions “chapters,” the GMC chose the term “sections” because the first ones built sections of the Long Trail. Today sections work with club trail crews and individual trail adopters to keep trails and shelters in good condition. In non-pandemic times they also schedule outings and gatherings, from local hikes and meetings to international adventures.

Around 3,800 members—more than a third of the club's total—belong to sections, and the club would not exist without the work they do. While most section outings were suspended last year, we recognize and honor the work sections do, first by introducing the volunteer leaders who keep them functioning. This year we'll start with section presidents, working our way from south to north.

In this issue, meet the presidents of GMC's two out-of-state sections, the Connecticut Section and the Worcester Section in Massachusetts, and the Bennington section in southern Vermont.



### Meet JIM ROBERTSON Connecticut Section President

Imagine trekking the Hebrides Islands in Scotland, canoeing the Allagash River in Maine, and backpacking in Wyoming. Did you picture yourself with a hiking club?

That's the sort of outing that the Green Mountain Club's Connecticut Section plans. Scotland was in 2019, Maine in 2020, and Wyoming is slated for September 2021, says Jim Robertson, the Connecticut Section president. Such “high-adventure trips” have spanned the last 15 years, he adds.

Jim has been section president since 2015 and is seeking a successor for when his term ends later this year. It's not his first stint as president; he was elected in 1990 and held the seat for a decade before taking time off.

The Connecticut Section long predates Jim's tenure. “There was a critical mass of people, residents of Connecticut, who loved



going to Vermont and who had an affinity for the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail [in the late 1960s],” says Jim. Those folks asked GMC to establish a membership section in 1969, and it took off from there.

Today the Connecticut Section has 178 members and maintains the 12-mile section of the LT between the Stratton-Arlington Road and the Glastenbury Mountain summit.

Pre-pandemic, the section coordinated three to four trail work weekends each year, when its members visited Vermont to support GMC's construction projects, clear blowdowns on the ridgeline, and repaint blazes. They also organized about 60 other outings a year, including day hikes, camping trips, and some cycling and kayaking excursions.

Jim notes two factors that drew him to the Connecticut Section: the desire to give back to trails, and the section members. “There's that altruistic aspect, and the other thing that keeps me interested and engaged and involved—we have a great core of people that like getting together,” he says.

The section is now preparing for its next big trail project: refurbishing the Kid Gore Shelter.

The project will be primarily coordinated by GMC's director of field programs, Keegan Tierney, explains Jim. “We're going to try to support that with labor wherever we can, and we do have money set aside for that project.”

This year, amid proliferating COVID cases and out-of-state travel restrictions, the section has opted to stay closer to home, but expects to return to trails by late 2021.

### Meet RAM MOENNSAD Worcester Section President

Ask Ram Moenns about his favorite part of serving as president of the Green Mountain Club's Worcester Section. It is not all about hiking.

“My favorite part is the [Cedar Meadow Pond Camp], and when we go to the social gatherings [there]. Having a barbeque, helping out in the kitchen...that's my favorite part,” he says.

Ram has been president of the section since 2017 and preceded that with a four-year stint as vice president.

Why establish a section in central Massachusetts? The story goes that the idea developed at a “sugaring off party” of GMC members and Appalachian Mountain Club members in Worcester. AMC had a Worcester Chapter then, but GMC had no section there. So in March 1923, the GMC Worcester Section enrolled its first 11 members (there are 171 today).

The section maintains the Long Trail between the Stratton-Arlington Road and the Winhall River, which includes Stratton Mountain and Stratton Pond Shelter. In a non-pandemic year, Worcester Section members make two weekend maintenance trips to Vermont, camping at the Stratton Pond Shelter. They clean the shelter, remove brush and downed trees, and pack out litter.

More locally, section members participate in day trips around central Massachusetts. They enjoy outings at the section's Cedar Meadow Pond Camp in Leicester, Mass., which includes a cabin, trails and the pond. The section also helps AMC's Worcester Chapter maintain





the Midstate Trail, a 92-mile hiking path from Rhode Island across central Massachusetts to New Hampshire.

Ram first became enamored with the section while visiting Cedar Meadow Pond Camp. The Kenya native moved to the United States in the '70s, and later found work in New Hampshire as a state water commissioner. When he moved south to begin work at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, he started volunteering for the Conservation Commission in Spencer, Mass. A colleague connected to GMC invited him to the section's annual meeting at Cedar Meadow Pond.

"It was the group, the people, the friendliness. [And] I just loved the rustic look of the lodge. This was an eyeopener for me. I will never stop going there," says Ram. "We have a very, very, very enthusiastic group and membership.... We get along very well."

Conveniently, the camp is only two miles from Ram's home. He's been on the section's camp committee since he became a GMC member in 2011, and he helps maintain the property.

Ram's also focused on continuing to increase membership, developing more trip leaders in the group, and building awareness of Vermont's Long Trail, so newcomers are always welcome.

### Meet REED GOOSSEN Bennington Section President

Reed Goossen was about 12 years old when his father offered to take him and his brother, Dean, camping one President's Day weekend.

"He didn't expect us to take him up on the offer, but when we did, my mother made him go through with it," laughs Reed, now 72. "We were cold, very cold, but it was fun doing something exciting."

That winter camping trip was a formative experience for Reed, now president of the



Green Mountain Club's Bennington Section. The section, 156 members strong, maintains trails between Harmon Hill and Glastenbury Mountain.

It's not Reed's first time leading the section. In the early 1990s, Reed joined the Green Mountain Club in "a time of transition." In 1996, section members elected him president, a seat he held until 2000 before moving out of state. He was reappointed in April 2020 and moved back to Vermont shortly thereafter.

Amid the pandemic, his role looks a tad different. Last spring the section completed its annual 10-mile hike to Glastenbury Shelter, doing trail work along the way, overnighing at the shelter, and hiking out the next day. However, the group has not met in person since he became president because of COVID-19 precautions. "Other than organizing people to try to take on various roles—delegating—I haven't had to do much," Reed says.

He's being modest. Reed and other section members have represented GMC as part of the Bennington Outdoor Recreation Collaborative to secure grant money for signage directing people to recreational areas such as the Bennington Area Trail System (BATS), a combination of mountain biking and hiking trails traversing public and private land. The section also recently earned an "Appalachian Trail Community" designation for the town of Bennington, which could attract more hikers to the area.

In a non-pandemic year, the section repaints blazes, trims vegetation, and cleans leaves and sediment from waterbars, or small ditches that divert runoff to prevent trail erosion. Social outings include moonlit cross-country skiing, potlucks, snowshoeing, hiking, a knot-tying class, and volunteering for the Backcountry Film Festival.

When not hiking, Reed is partial to skiing. "Anyone who's an outdoorsman in Vermont needs to cross country ski," he says, although he also counts kayaking, canoeing, woodworking, gardening, and cycling among his hobbies.

— ANGELA HILSMAN  
GMC COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

## Section Directory

### Bennington

Maintenance: Harmon Hill to Glastenbury Mountain  
President: Reed Goossen, (215) 595-6391  
E-mail: rgoossen@gmail.com  
Website: benningtongmc.org

### Brattleboro

Maintenance: Winhall River to Vt. 11 and 30  
President: Bonnie Haug-Cramp, (802) 380-5165  
E-mail: onacloud@myfairpoint.net  
Website: brattleborogmc.com

### Bread Loaf

Location: Middlebury area  
Maintenance: Sucker Brook Shelter to Emily Proctor Shelter  
President: Ruth Penfield, (802) 388-5407  
E-mail: ruthpenfield@gmail.com  
Website: gmcbreadloaf.org

### Burlington

Maintenance: Winooski River Footbridge to Smugglers' Notch  
President: Jonathan Breen, (802) 764-1275  
E-mail: ghostman2651@aol.com  
Website: gmc Burlington.org

### Connecticut

Location: Hartford, Connecticut  
Maintenance: Glastenbury Mountain to Stratton-Arlington Road  
President: Jim Robertson, (860) 633-7279  
E-mail: jrobert685@aol.com  
Website: conngmc.com

### Killington

Location: Rutland area  
Maintenance: Vt. 140 to Maine Junction  
President: Wayne Krevetski, (802) 282-2237  
E-mail: wkreveski@hotmail.com  
Website: gmckillington.org

### Laraway

Location: St. Albans area  
Maintenance: Lamoille River to Vt. 118  
President: Bruce Bushey, (802) 282-2146  
E-mail: brbshey@comcast.net  
Website: gmclaraway.org

### Manchester

Maintenance: Vt. 11 and 30 to Griffith Lake  
President: Marge Fish, (802) 824-3662  
E-mail: marge.fish@gmail.com  
Website: gmc-manchester.org

### Montpelier

Maintenance: Camel's Hump to Winooski River Footbridge and Smugglers' Notch to Chilcoat Pass  
President: Dana Lawrence, (802) 223-1007  
E-mail: hikeski51@gmail.com  
Website: gmcmontpelier.org

### Northeast Kingdom

Maintenance: Willoughby and Darling State Forests and the Kingdom Heritage Lands  
President: John Predom, (802)-377-9654  
E-mail: gmcnek@gmail.com  
Website: nek gmc.org

### Northern Frontier

Location: Montgomery  
Maintenance: Hazen's Notch to Canada  
President: Ken Whitehead, (802) 933-5352  
E-mail: mrsswhitehead@gmail.com  
Website: gmcnorthernfrontier.org

### Upper Valley-Ottawaquechee

Location: Upper Connecticut River Valley, and New Hampshire  
Maintenance: Appalachian Trail: Maine Jct. to NH border  
President: Dick Andrews, (802) 885-3201  
E-mail: techcomm@vermontel.net  
Website: gmc-o-section.org

### Sterling

Location: Morrisville/Stowe/Johnson  
Maintenance: Chilcoat Pass to Lamoille River  
President: Kevin Hudnell, (802) 851-7019  
E-mail: khudnell@gmail.com  
Website: gmcsterling.org

### Worcester

Location: Worcester, Massachusetts  
Maintenance: Stratton-Arlington Road to Winhall River  
President: Ram Moenns, (508) 210-6965  
E-mail: shivratri@gmail.com  
Website: gmcwooo.org

## Join a Section!

Interested in taking part in section outings or trail maintenance volunteer opportunities? You can join a section or switching your section at: [www.greenmountainclub.org/members/our-sections/](http://www.greenmountainclub.org/members/our-sections/) or contact Rick Dugan, Membership Coordinator at [rdugan@greenmountainclub.org](mailto:rdugan@greenmountainclub.org) or (802) 241-8325.





## Membership & Communications Team Grows

Hikers are increasingly going online for hiking information and to connect with other hikers. So we have increased our communications efforts, and we now have staff members with more time to manage your membership and support your section.

### Meet Our Team >>

#### **RICK DUGAN** *Membership Coordinator*

##### **BACKGROUND**

Rick started in January 2020, as GMC's database manager, which proved quite challenging as we adapted to working from home due to the pandemic.

##### **GOALS FOR THE YEAR**

Evaluate and create meaningful membership benefits, create opportunities for member events (virtual and potentially in person), work with business members, and support sections on their membership activities.



#### **ERICA HARRIS** *Development Assistant*

##### **BACKGROUND**

Erica joined the Green Mountain Club in September, after volunteering with our Land Conservation program for several months. Her background is in development, most recently at the Columbia Land Trust in New York State.

##### **GOALS FOR THE YEAR**

Connect GMC volunteers and staff with donors and members, support GMC's donor program, manage GMC's monthly donor program, and connect with corporate sponsors.



#### **CHLOE MILLER** *Communications Manager*

##### **BACKGROUND**

Chloe joined the Green Mountain Club in December, and comes to us with a strong background in digital content creation, video production and communications

strategy. She moved to Vermont from New York City where she worked in digital media.

##### **GOALS FOR THE YEAR**

Produce the *Long Trail News*, develop digital and print communications strategies to provide better communication and hiking information for club members, and manage all club publications and member communication.



#### **ANGIE HILSMAN** *Communications Coordinator*

##### **BACKGROUND**

Angie joined the Green Mountain Club in January, after working at the Vermont Land Trust as its communications and outreach coordinator. Angie has wide

experience in digital and print publication and storytelling, as well as in environmental education.

##### **GOALS FOR THE YEAR**

Produce content for GMC's social media platforms and website, contribute to the *Long Trail News*, support communications by GMC's sections, and help share your stories.



—ALICIA DiCocco, DIRECTOR OF  
DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS



## End-to-End Panel Goes Virtual Once Again

The Long Trail End-to-End Panel is an annual Q&A, show-and-tell discussion intended for folks who want to learn about backpacking in Vermont from experienced Long Trail thru-hikers. Wondering about the best lightweight tent or what to eat besides PB&J? Sign up for this free virtual program to learn the ins and outs of a long-distance hike, and get answers to all your questions about food, equipment and planning.

**Friday, May 7, 2021 | 6 p.m. on Zoom**

Register and see other upcoming events at [greenmountainclub.org/workshops](https://greenmountainclub.org/workshops)

## The Long Trail is Darn Tough!

**SPECIAL EDITION GMC SOCKS AVAILABLE AT LENNY'S SHOE & APPAREL**



There's nothing better to keep your feet dry and comfy on a grueling hike than a Vermont-made Darn Tough wool sock. Now you can wear your favorite long-distance hiking trail with an exclusive GMC sock! This opportunity was made through partnership with Lenny's Shoe & Apparel, a corporate sponsor of the club. Lenny's will donate five dollars from each pair sold to the club.

Available for a limited time only at Lenny's Shoe & Apparel in Barre, St. Albans, Williston, and Plattsburgh, N.Y.; and at [www.lennysshoe.com](https://www.lennysshoe.com). \$22, while supplies last.

## SAVE THE DATE!

### Join Us for GMC's 111<sup>th</sup> (Virtual) Annual Meeting

The Annual Business Meeting will be held **Saturday, June 12, 2021 from 9-11 a.m.** via Zoom. Visit [greenmountainclub.org/annualmeeting](https://greenmountainclub.org/annualmeeting) for full details.

**GUEST SPEAKER, FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2021 AT 7 P.M.**

**Derick Lugo**, author of *The Unlikely Thru-Hiker: An Appalachian Trail Journey*. Derick Lugo had never hiked or camped a day in his life. This Brooklyn-born, New York City urbanite hopped a train to Georgia, grabbed a taxi at the station, and told the cab driver to drop him off at the beginning of the Appalachian Trail. Then he did as he has always done — put one foot in front of the other and never looked back.



## Don't Get Stuck in the Mud! Mud Season Reminder

The Green Mountain Club reminds hikers that spring mud season runs from snowmelt until the trails are dry, usually around Memorial Day weekend. We strongly encourage all hikers to please stay off high-elevation trails, and any other trails with significant mud, in order to avoid erosion and damage.

Depending on conditions, state forest trails may be closed by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, so please respect closure signs and avoid wet trails even if not posted closed. If you encounter a muddy section of trail, please turn around and find a dry trail.

Some roads and trails are usable in mud season, especially low elevation trails with southern exposure, which dry out faster. Paved mountain roads, like those on Ascutney, Burke, Okemo, Smugglers' Notch, and Mt. Philo, offer elevation and views, with no mud and no traffic until late in the season. We're asking for your help: can you spread the word about mud season and protecting high-elevation trails in your communities?

Feeling stuck in the mud this season? GMC will keep you busy with our spring mud season social media challenge. Follow us on **Instagram @greenmountainclub** to learn more about the challenge and a chance to win great prizes from local outdoor retailers.





Volunteerism is the core of the Green Mountain Club's mission of caring for trails now and for generations to come. If you like getting outdoors, meeting fellow hikers and helping fulfill the club's mission, you can make a difference this field season by becoming a volunteer.

To inquire about volunteer opportunities, email [volunteer@greenmountainclub.org](mailto:volunteer@greenmountainclub.org).

**“Thank you! We had a wonderful afternoon thanks to your helpful volunteers. Enjoying a sunny day on the trail as our journey finishes up.”**

—STEEP, 2019 Barnes Camp Log Book

## Volunteer Opportunities for 2021

### › Monitor Boundary Lines as a Corridor Monitor

Monitors visit their assigned parcels of land surrounding GMC-managed trails in northern and central Vermont at least twice a year to maintain boundary lines and ensure conservation restrictions are upheld. You will perfect your map and compass and bushwhacking skills; gain conservation experience; and observe wildlife.

### › Maintain the Long Trail or Appalachian Trail as a Trail or Shelter Adopter

Commit to at least three visits per year to an assigned section of trail or a shelter, and learn and carry out trail maintenance, carpentry and/or privy work. This boots-on-the-ground volunteer corps help GMC's 14 sections keep the Long Trail System open and enjoyable. Adopters were essential in 2020 during the global pandemic, especially since we were unable to run group volunteer outings.

### › Be a Trailhead Steward

New for 2021, the trailhead steward program will provide hikers with the information they need to be safe and minimize adverse impacts on natural resources at some of the Long Trail's busiest trailheads during peak times. Trailhead stewards should have abundant enthusiasm for meeting hikers, a basic knowledge of the Long Trail System, and patience and flexibility while developing this program.

### › Connect with Hikers as a Barnes Camp Visitor Center Volunteer

Volunteers at Barnes Camp Visitor Center at Smugglers' Notch State Park provide recreation, cultural and historical information to more than 12,000 visitors; greet Long Trail thru-hikers as they pass by; and are a welcoming presence at the southern gateway to Smugglers' Notch. Flexible shifts available May – October.

## GMC Volunteers Make the Trail Go On

### 2020 Corridor Monitoring Volunteer Impact

- 111 volunteer trips
- 702 hours volunteered
- 116 miles of boundary monitored or maintained

### 2020 Barnes Camp Volunteer Impact

- Visitors engaged: 3,370, despite a shortened season
- Volunteer Hours: 421.51
- Active Volunteers: 17

### 2020 Trail and Shelter Adopter Impact (The most ever!)

- Trail Adopter Volunteer Hours: 4,868
  - 500 more hours than any other year!
- Shelter Volunteer Hours: 724
  - 15 more hours than any other year!
- Trail Adopter Maintenance Reports: 377
  - 75 more trips than any other year!
- Shelter Adopter Maintenance Reports: 108
  - 20 more trips than any other year!
- Trail Miles Maintained: 416.1
- Shelters Maintained: 72 (every shelter on the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail!)

**“I did my fall maintenance day on this section today; hot and sunny. What a turnaround from skiing on Tuesday to this. This section is in good shape and ready for winter. There were no blowdowns, but I did brush in several areas where the trail was widening. The theme of the day was drainages: I cleared 58. That should do until spring!”**

—ROWAN KAMMAN, Long Trail: Lincoln Gap to Battell Shelter, 11/8/2020



Barnes Camp Volunteers

PHOTO BY CINDY GRIFFITH





## Board Report

The Board of the Green Mountain Club met on December 19 via remote conference.

Treasurer Nancy Thomas reported that despite impacts from the global pandemic, GMC's finances are in stable shape. Initial financial data from December showed revenue above projections and expenses tracking below budget. The auditor's report for fiscal year 2020 was presented with the club receiving a clean opinion. An outline of the fiscal year 2022 budget was presented as well as a status update on the endowment fund manager request for proposal process.

Executive Director Mike DeBonis commended staff for their hard work and success during a challenging year and outlined operational plans for the spring and summer seasons.

Director of Development and Communications Alicia

DiCocco reported that membership has increased to 9,887 members, continuing a trend of steady membership growth since October 2019. Alicia introduced two new staff: Communications Manager Chloe Miller and Communications Coordinator Angie Hilsman.

Operations Manager Matt Krebs shared the new Trail Finder platform including GMC-managed trail data. Providing GMC trail data on Trail Finder will help the club reach a broader audience, engage volunteers, recruit new members and increase the public's awareness of GMC and the Long Trail System.

The meeting concluded with a report from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group on activities since its formation last November and its plan of work for calendar year 2021.

—ED O'LEARY, SECRETARY

## Annual Election of General Directors

At the Green Mountain Club's 111th Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 12, four general seats will open on the board of directors. General directors serve with directors elected by the sections. Directors are elected to three-year terms, with

a limit of six consecutive years of board service. The GMC Nominating Committee presents the following candidates (full bios available on our website) for approval:



**NANCY MCCLELLAN**  
**SECOND TERM**

Nancy is vice president of the Burlington section and committed to trail preservation and supporting smaller sections of the club.



**RAMCHANDRA "RAM" MOENNSAD**  
**FIRST TERM**

Ram is president of the Worcester, Mass section.



**MILLIE MUGICA**  
**FIRST TERM**

Millie is an educator and parent who previously served a board term in 2012.



**JEFFREY WEHRWEIN**  
**FIRST TERM**

Jeff is an alumnus of Middlebury College and ultrarunner who currently resides in Boulder, Colorado.

## HOW TO VOTE

Vote for up to four directors. If you have a family membership, you may vote twice. All section and at-large members are eligible to vote.

For candidate information and to vote, please visit [greenmountainclub.org/vote2021](https://greenmountainclub.org/vote2021).



# We Can All Belong

## A transgender thru-hiker's reflections on the Long Trail

BY AUBRI DRAKE

In August 2018, I set out to hike the Long Trail with my friend Beth, who I met on the Appalachian Trail (AT) in Virginia in 2015 when she'd been a northbound thru-hiker and I'd been halfway through my four-year AT section hike. The Long Trail greeted us with drought and a record-breaking heatwave. While we encountered border patrol, dehydration, and lightning strikes close enough to smell ozone, the most frightening force of nature I encountered on that entire journey was a 10-year-old boy.

On day eight we took a lunch break at Montclair Glen Lodge, in the shadow of Camel's Hump. We were cheerfully accosted by a group of six day hikers, looking for answers to classic thru-hiker questions like, "Where do you get more food?" and, "Where do you sleep?" As we chatted amicably, one of their children, a boy around ten, elbowed his way through the group, ignoring the conversation taking place, and interrupted: "What *are* you? Are you a boy or a girl?"

My stomach clenched and my brain shot into overdrive; this was not the first time I'd had a child confront me about my gender nonconformity. I quickly started doing social calculus to determine the odds that one of these parents would become infuriated with me over the discomfort of their child. I've been dealing with angry and violent parents in public restrooms since I first cut my hair short in high school 20 years ago; I've been shouted at, violently chased out of bathrooms, and had people attempt to hit me, all because I needed to pee.

I existed uncomfortably in the world being read as a woman until I was 24, when I learned there were genders beyond boy or girl and discovered words to describe myself. I'm nonbinary, transgender, and queer; I use they/them pronouns with everyone in my day-to-day life, including professionally. I'm able to



fully inhabit my gender and bring my whole self to my daily life, which is not the case for many trans and non-binary folks. But on trail, I have to carefully weigh inhabiting my gender against the potential deadly cost of transphobic and homophobic violence. Violence which can start with a seemingly small, uncomfortable social interaction that goes very wrong, very fast, like a child saying to me "What *are* you?"

I've had young children ask, "Are you a boy or a girl?" coming from a place of genuine curiosity, as they try to track my gender onto the two binary genders they've been taught. But this was different. The derision in this ten-year-old's tone made it clear he wasn't *actually* asking a question; he had examined me and concluded that I wasn't performing maleness 'right.' This is where all violence starts – with dehumanization. In one single sentence, he had stripped me of my humanity – I was now an *it*.

I've repeatedly run into the sentiment on the trail and in hiking forums that "*politics don't belong on trail*." But the outdoor industry defaults largely to white, able-bodied, heterosexual, non-transgender hikers, and for those of us in marginalized communities, our very survival is political. By saying that politics don't belong on trail, they're saying that we

don't belong on trail. The wilderness doesn't 'see' gender, ability, sexuality, or race, but all humans do, and we bring our assumptions into the woods with us. Assumptions which have the power to erase, harm, and even kill those of us who transgress the norms. In a nationally representative survey of almost 28,000 transgender people, 46 percent reported being verbally harassed in the last year, with 9 percent being physically attacked for being transgender. And even beyond overt violence, the impacts of the stigma and discrimination faced by trans and non-binary people takes a toll on our mental health: 40 percent of survey respondents had attempted suicide in their lifetime, which is 9 times the rate of the general U.S. population.<sup>1</sup>

In the tense silence following the boy's accusation, I weighed many factors, including that the adults all looked horrified at what the child had just said. I took a calculated risk: I directly addressed the question. "I'm curious to know why you think it matters. Gender is a very personal question and we don't know each other. Why should it matter to you if I'm a boy or a girl?" The boy opened his mouth to respond and started to step towards me, and I was afraid for a moment he would hit me.

<sup>1</sup> James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality. Available online at <https://www.ustranssurvey.org/>



Luckily, his mother swooped in then, put a hand over his mouth, and said, “That’s a very good answer. That isn’t something you should ask other people, that’s very personal.” The group bid us a good day and left as quickly as their legs could carry them, but not before the adults gave me grateful looks for my attempt to peacefully defuse the situation. While the interaction was short, it took an hour for my hands to stop shaking, and I spent the rest of the day stuck in memories of all the times I’d been in danger because of who I am.

I urge you to consider the impact you have on other hikers, even in seemingly small ways. Asking people of color, “So where are you from?” may seem innocent enough if you’ve never been repeatedly interrogated by people who believe all Americans should be white. Asking someone whose gender you can’t quite figure out, “What *are* you?” may seem innocent enough, if you haven’t spent years experiencing transphobic harassment and violence. Those of us who hold marginalized identities must watch every interaction closely, because every person we encounter could become violent.

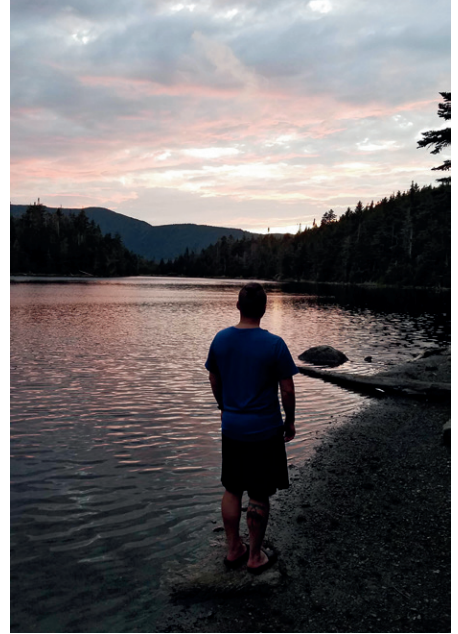
At the same time, we all have the power to make other people feel welcome in the outdoors. You can start by becoming more aware of your own assumptions — about things like people’s race, ability, or gender — and consider why you might want to question other hikers. Would you ask this question of a heterosexual white man? Would you ask this

question of *yourself*? Talk to everyone as if they belong, because we all do, whether it’s our first hike or our fiftieth, whether we’re doing five miles or 25. Be ready to support and stand with us in solidarity if you see someone else making us unwelcome.

At the end of a long day of hiking, I want to be greeted with camaraderie, to talk about the muddy trail, the endless last climb to the shelter, the mice doing trapeze tricks in the rafters, the state of the next water source, how many miles until the next stop in town, and exactly what we’re going to eat when we get there.

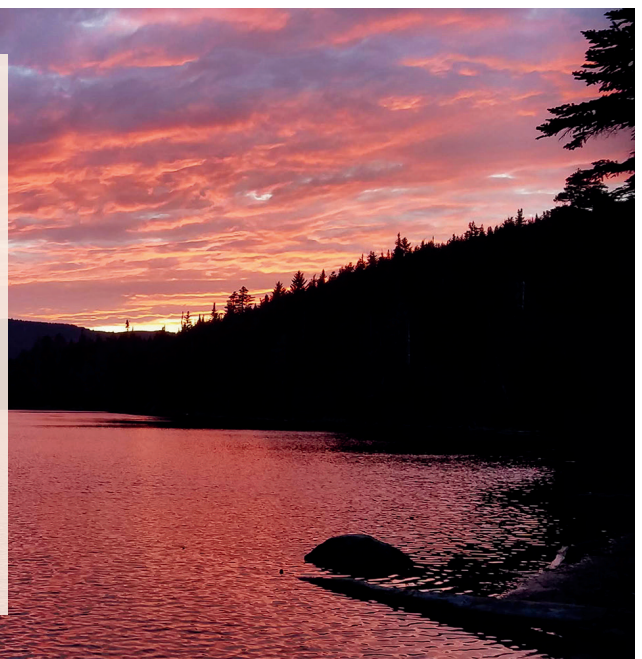
Next time we see each other in a shelter or passing by on the trail, I hope we can let go of our assumptions, say ‘hi,’ and ask each other *who we are*, rather than *what*.

*Aubri ‘Data’ Drake (pronouns: they/them) has thru-hiked many long trails, including the Appalachian Trail (2013-2017); the Long Trail and the Tour du Mont Blanc (2018); the John Muir Trail and the Tahoe Rim Trail (2019); and the Washington Pacific Crest Trail (2020). They’ve spent many weekends peak-bagging summits in the Northeast, completing the Northeast 115 Four Thousand Footers, the New England Hundred Highest, and the New England 67 Four Thousand Footers in winter; as well as ultrarunning the Northeast Ultra 8, and the New England Scenic Trail across Massachusetts. You can follow Aubri’s adventures on their blog ([www.transcendingmountains.blog](http://www.transcendingmountains.blog)) or on Instagram (@genderqueer\_hiker).*



## How to be an Ally on the Trail

- Educate yourself on the barriers faced by marginalized communities when it comes to getting outdoors and being safe there.
- Share this knowledge with friends and family.
- Be ready to stand in support and solidarity if you see someone making others feel unwelcome (while keeping yourself and others safe).
- Invite friends and acquaintances who hold marginalized identities to join you on a hike or adventure. Loan them gear if they need it.
- Follow and support organizations that facilitate access to the outdoors. Aubri recommends Outdoor Afro, Wild Diversity, Queer Nature, the Venture Out Project, and Unlikely Hikers, among many others. Follow them on Instagram and donate to their causes if you can.







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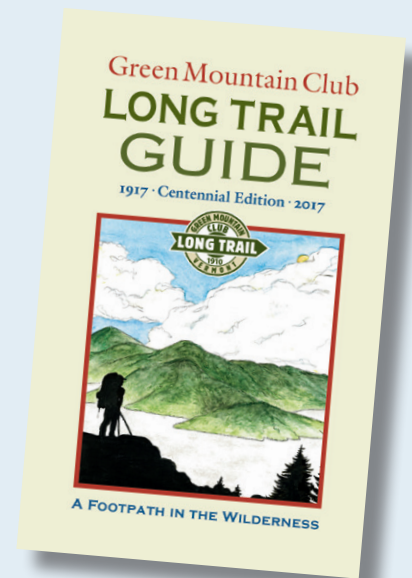
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