

# Long Trail NEWS



Quarterly of the Green Mountain Club

FALL 2023

## HISTORIC JULY FLOODS

What it Means for the Long Trail System

SPOTLIGHT on Volunteers > Trail Angels | Annual Awards | Volunteer Trail Crew



# Long Trail

N E W S

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:** Caretaker Ariella Thompson and Field Coordinator Nigel Bates survey the Clarendon Gorge Bridge on July 12, 2023, after devastating flooding took place statewide in the days prior. The bridge was found to be in good condition. Photo by Lily LaRegina

## C O N T E N T S

Fall 2023, Volume 83, No.3



Homer Stone Brook Bridge during the flooding in July. Read about the flood's impact and club's response on page 8.

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## From GMC to You

**T**his has been a trying summer for families, businesses, and communities across Vermont who were impacted by the devastating July floods. Our hearts go out to everyone that was impacted by the storms and is in the difficult process of digging out, recovering, and rebuilding. Vermont's recreation trails, while beloved, took a necessary back seat to more important storm response and GMC staff and volunteers focused on supporting family and community immediately after the storm.

Once safe, we deployed staff to conduct a rapid infrastructure assessment and begin the process of tallying impacts and planning recovery. It was because of your ongoing support that our staff and volunteer base were trained and able to quickly assess the state of the trails, keeping our hiking community informed with timely updates. We were blown away by everyone's willingness to stay off the trails, help communicate our trail messaging, and support each other.

The Long Trail System sustained widespread damage, but thankfully, trail impacts were less severe than Tropical Storm Irene and no major trail infrastructure was lost. How well the Long Trail System weathered the storms has to do with

geography and storm severity variability, but also has to do with how the trail is built and maintained. Thanks to your support, we have been able to invest in creating durable trail infrastructure like the Long Trail Footbridge over the Winooski River and the complete top-to-bottom rebuild of the Burrows trail that is still under way. These trail structures are designed to hold up against intense storms, as we saw them do in July.

The July storms are an important reminder that what was once considered a 100-year storm event can happen anytime. In response, we are prioritizing climate change adaptation, and we will be implementing strategies over the next decade to help the trail withstand more severe and frequent storm events. This work will cost more money, take more time, and look different than traditional trail work, but it is necessary if we are serious about ensuring that the Long Trail can withstand intense storms and remains a world-class trail that is accessible to all who wish to use it well into the future.

While this season has been dominated by storm response and recovery, we also welcomed Nancy McClellan as the new GMC President. Nancy and her husband Elliot were first introduced to the club as trail



**Mike DeBonis**

adopters, and in the 15+ years since, Nancy has served the club as Vice President of the Burlington section, chair of the Long Trail Capital Campaign committee, co-chair of the Development committee, a member of the DEI working group, and most recently as Vice President of the organization. We are in good hands as we welcome Nancy to the Presidency.

I want to thank you for being a valued member of the hiking community and for your ongoing support of Vermont's trails. It's because of you that we move into the second half of our field season with hope and optimism for the work ahead on and off the trail.

—MIKE DeBONIS  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Nancy McClellan**

**I**want you to know that as a GMC member, you are the heart and soul of this organization; you are what makes it remarkable and successful. Your volunteerism, financial gifts, and general support allow us to shine as leaders in outdoor education and recreation, in

## A Message from GMC's Board President Nancy "Yellowjacket" McClellan to You

land management and conservation, and in trail maintenance. I am honored to be your president and during my time, I am committed to working with staff and volunteers to further our work on justice, equity, inclusion and belonging, increasing our climate resiliency efforts, and continuing to secure the permanent protection of the entire Long Trail. I spend many hours every week on the trail, so please say hello and share your hopes and dreams for GMC with me if you see me out there.

### How I got my trail name

Within ten minutes of starting my 2004 Long Trail end-to-end hike in Williamstown, Massachusetts, my dog stirred up a ground wasps' nest. As I was being stung, I realized I had forgotten to

pack my EpiPen. Popping Benadryl into my mouth, I ran back to an opening I had seen in the trees to a development. I yelled to a man out in his yard to call 911. He darted into his house and returned with a medicine kit and administered epinephrine to me. I had lucked upon the athletic trainer at Williams College! When the ambulance came, they administered more epinephrine, put me on oxygen, packed me in ice, and pulled 31 stingers from me.

Later, as I was looking at photos of the trip, I saw one taken at the trailhead. I had on a yellow top and black shorts. The trail chose my trail name.... Yellowjacket. And, I never hike without my EpiPen!

GMC BOARD PRESIDENT  
NANCY "YELLOWJACKET" MCCLELLAN





## Mountain Views

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## Great Experience

What a great experience! Thank you, GMC, for all the work you do on the trail. The continuous work throughout the length of the trail is very evident, every caretaker I met was an awesome steward, and the variety of shelters was really cool. 272 tough, yet rewarding miles.

—TONY OEHLER, IN THE GMC FACEBOOK GROUP

## Fun Little Glance into Long Trail History

If any of you get the quarterly magazine I really loved the story on the Gorham Lodge stove saga! (Summer 2023 *Long Trail News*, page 6) Check it out. What a fun little glance into some Long Trail history. And a nice reminder for me to say a big thank you to the amazing teams that make the Long Trail continue. I'm honored to have visited your beautiful state and cannot wait to come back!

— NIKKI SMITH, IN THE GMC FACEBOOK GROUP

Join the conversation  
on Facebook!

Join the Group here:



Tony Oehler celebrates at Journey's End.

## Remembering Robert "Steady Eddie" Kerker

GMC was saddened to learn of the death of Appalachian Trail section hiker Robert "Steady Eddie" Kerker earlier this summer.

Mr. Kerker lost his life crossing the Stony Brook during catastrophic flooding that faced Vermont on July 10 and 11, according to state police investigation.

The loss of "Steady Eddie" is felt throughout the trail community, as we mourn the tragic death of a fellow long-distance hiker. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family, friends, and hiking companions.

GMC thanks the Vermont Search and Rescue teams for their extensive training that allowed them to respond quickly and engage multiple partners in the search for Mr. Kerker, including GMC staff and volunteers. We are grateful for their leadership and dedication to the safety of hikers in Vermont.


— MIKE DeBONIS  
GMC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Long Trail News Welcomes Your Comments.

Letters received may be edited for length and clarity. GMC reserves the right to decline to publish those considered inappropriate. Letters may not be published.

SEND TO: Chloe Miller, cmiller@greenmountainclub.org or  
Letters to the Editor, GMC, 4711 Waterbury-Stowe Road, Waterbury Center, VT 05677





# DARN TOUGH VERMONT

## Gives to the Long Trail

*Protecting our feet and our trails through corporate giving*

BY ALICIA DICOCCO

After conducting a training session for about 40 newly arrived seasonal staff members back in May, I opened a box of socks donated by DARN TOUGH VERMONT. Everyone jumped up to find their size and favorite style, comparing the designs they loved most — giddy to get three pairs of hearty wool socks to wear while living and working in the mountains for five day stretches. In a summer of record-breaking rain, changing into a cozy pair of dry socks after a wet day would be a cherished luxury.

DARN TOUGH's generosity didn't stop with socks. They renewed their financial commitment to the Long Trail and its hikers by upgrading their corporate sponsorship level, truly making a difference in the work we can do. After losing time in the field because of flooding, and money for essential recovery work, we are grateful to DARN TOUGH VERMONT for so generously supporting the Long Trail this year.

"The Green Mountain Club has been protecting and maintaining Vermont trails since 1910," said Jake Largess, DARN TOUGH VERMONT's Category Manager. "Our socks have a deep, intimate connection with these trails and have for years. Without the Green Mountain Club, our employees and their families wouldn't have access to some of the best hiking trails in the world. We are thrilled to support the Green Mountain Club moving forward to help ensure our trails can be enjoyed for many generations to come."

In addition to supporting the Long Trail, DARN TOUGH has a regular program to help feed Vermonters in need, and the company immediately led the response to flooding by setting up charitable giving options for flood relief. They also operate a corporate volunteering program for their employees, so you just might see some DARN TOUGH employees working on the trail this fall.

Our entire community of supporters enables our crews to maintain the 500 miles of trail we use and love, whether large corporate sponsors or members like you who renew their commitment each year. We are immensely grateful to you and to companies like DARN TOUGH for your support.



# TRAIL ANGELS

## FOSTER Community AND Connection

BY CHLOE MILLER



Hiker Missy Bellavance (left) and Thais Gherardi returning to the trail after the flood.

Mid-afternoon, Monday, July 10. Several inches of rain have already fallen at Thais Gherardi's hiker hostel, Wicked Waystation, as she eases her old 15-passenger van along U.S. Forest Service Road 71, trying to reach seven soggy and frightened hikers who hiked out from Story Spring Shelter as catastrophic flooding headed for much of Vermont.

Thais finds the road barricaded. Without cell service, she worries they'll wonder where she is. She sends seven texts to no avail, but then connects with a hiker's Garmin InReach satellite communicator. She backtracks, stops at the Stratton Fire Department to check on roads, and finally reaches the hikers a few hours later.

At the hostel seven miles from the LT/AT crossing of Kelley Stand Road there's no power or water, but the group is grateful to be safe and dry. "Thais housed us and hauled water in and took us to places to charge and shower," said "Won't Get Up – WILL!" (the trail name of one of the hikers). "She was nonstop for 48 hours. She fed us and made sure we were all healthy and strong enough to go back on trail once it was deemed safe. She was definitely a calm in the storm."

Trail angels take many forms, all magical for a weary long-distance hiker.

They pick up hikers hitching into town; provide grassy campsites; hand out cold drinks or snacks at trailheads; and come to the rescue in myriad ways, big and small.

Many trail angels fly under the radar, crossing paths serendipitously with hikers just when they need something most. Some provide trail magic regularly, like shuttle driver Elizabeth Ingram Paashauss and hostel proprietor Thais. They share a deep appreciation of the community and connection between the trail, its hikers, and its neighbors.

"While hiking the Long Trail in 2019, we fell in love with the trailside communities," said Elizabeth. "Everyone had some connection to the trail or hiking. As hikers, you always want to give back in some way." She and her family decided to move here, landing in Montgomery in 2021.

Thais's journey to the Long Trail was similar. Her family lived in a New York City suburb, commuting an hour each way. In 2018 they moved north seeking more community-driven lives. "We had the opportunity to purchase an old farmhouse, and wanted to create a socially and economically meaningful project. That's where the hostel came from." When hikers take "zero" days (rest days) with her, she introduces them to her small community

near Stratton Mountain, taking them to farmstands, festivals, concerts and more. For a fee she also provides warm beds, hot showers, and laundry facilities.

Elizabeth and her husband Adam provide shuttle rides, mostly to and from the northern half of the trail, often connecting Burlington Airport and the northern terminus. Using Google Calendar and texting, often over several days, they help with the logistics and changes of plan needed to get everyone where they need to go.

So what's so special about driving back and forth on Vermont's winding roads, and offering other help? Hikers and trail angels agree it's providing what a hiker needs most when it's least expected.

In 2021 thru-hiker Joshua "Pace Car" Johnson fell and broke his finger approaching Haystack Mountain, 20 miles from Canada, with minimal cell service. Elizabeth texted his parents to coordinate a pickup, and drove him to a hospital for a splint late in the day. Pace Car pitched his tent on Elizabeth's family land that night; then they returned him to Hazen's Notch to finish his end-to-end hike. "I was elated to not have to cancel my hike so close to the finish line," he said. "The generosity of others was the most memorable part of my hike."



According to Katie Houston, “During my time on the Long Trail, trail magic made me grin from ear to ear several times over. One day I realized I’d dropped my phone’s charging cable somewhere on a 14-mile day. I quickly hopped on the Facebook Group for the Long Trail and posted a vague request for assistance from a trail angel. Within an hour, Thais hatched a plan to leave a cord in a baggie at a trailhead 12 miles north with my name. The next morning, I was back in action without a step out of place.”

The generosity of the hiking community, trail angels, and trail neighbors is boundless. Thais says that after the flood, Stratton Mountain Resort offered showers and electricity to hikers and neighbors. And hikers staying at her hostel did Thais’s laundry and chores once power returned, unasked.

Of course, the real magic is connections: “Before I started shuttling hikers, I thought of trail magic as chocolate and Gatorade,” said Thais. “But there are so many precious moments. So



PHOTO BY KATIE HOUSTON

Thais left a phone charger for an AT hiker.

many singular conversations and healing moments between guests and me. Maybe it’s because you’re likely to never see that person again, so you feel comfortable sharing certain things, but the beautiful moments of people opening up, and showing trust in me, that is what trail magic means to me.”



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH PAASHAUS

Elizabeth Paashaus and family became trail angels after their 2019 Long Trail thru hike.

## Keeping trail magic, well, **MAGICAL!**

Even the best-intentioned acts of kindness can have unintended consequences.

Hitchhiking or sharing space with strangers carries some level of risk for all parties. Nearly all trail angels and hikers mean well, but stay alert and have an exit plan if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. The Green Mountain Club does not routinely vet volunteers listed on our Shuttle List, but if you have a bad experience, please tell us at [gmc@greenmountainclub.org](mailto:gmc@greenmountainclub.org)

The term “trail magic” is often used for food and drinks left at trailheads as treats. However, unattended food and drink, and trash, attract bears and other critters. So please do not leave unattended goods, especially in the Green Mountain National Forest, where they will be removed.

Want to share your own trail magic? You can set up at a trailhead out of car and foot traffic, and make a hiker’s day with a few easy offerings:

- Fresh fruit and veggies: Hikers eat lots of processed foods. Cold watermelon, berries, tomatoes, or zucchini are refreshing on a hot day.
- Stack a cooler with cold canned drinks (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic are appreciated).
- If you have an extra folding chair or two, hikers love to put their feet up for a moment.
- Keep duct tape, ibuprofen, moleskin, and other hiker essentials for common frustrations.
- Take a hiker’s trash! Thru-hikers must pack out their waste. Bonus points for clean gallon Ziplocs to replace personal trash bags.
- Visit <https://appalachiantrail.org/explore/hike-the-a-t/thru-hiking/trail-magic/> for more guidance on trail magic

*Thanks to SARAH GREGORY for sharing some of these ideas, and all the trail angels who foster a strong hiking community!*



# The Great Vermont Flood

Thanks to YOU, the hiking community, for enabling rapid response and coming to the trail's aid

By Mike DeBonis and Keegan Tierney

On Sunday, July 9, Green Mountain Club staff members and hikers started to understand the severity of the weather forecast. It had been a wet couple of weeks, but the consensus was that it was nothing out of the ordinary. However, by midday, pockets of torrential downpour were crossing the state, and the National Weather Service issued its first ever “High Risk of Excessive Rainfall” alert in Vermont. The Monday forecast was two to five inches of rain, with seven inches or more in unpredictable areas along the spine of the Green Mountains. We were paying attention now.

You made it possible for GMC to spring into action when we realized this would be more than just another rainy day. There are no relief funds for our type of emergency response, so the club relies on its core base of support when we must shift from funded projects to unfunded emergency response.

We pulled all field staff from the backcountry for their safety, and alerted hikers via social media and our website. The trail community really came together to help each other hike out, find rides, bypass closed roads, and find safe places to wait out the storm.

## Infrastructure Assessment and Response

By Wednesday, July 12, river levels had peaked, and our staff mobilized for the first phase of the assessment plan devised by Director of Field Programs Keegan Tierney:

- 1 Primary Rapid Infrastructure Assessment
- 2 Secondary Assessment: high-use LT and AT segments, side trails, and all overnight sites
- 3 Volunteer-Powered System-Wide Trail Sweep and initial recovery

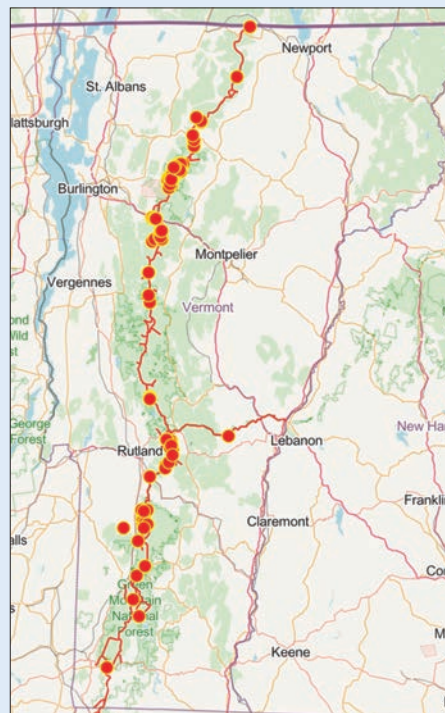
Working in threes for safety, field and office staff members fanned out to document damage. The primary focus the first day was road and trailhead access, and major structures like bridges and shelters. Some pieces of trail, like those in Winooski Valley farm fields and the Lamoille River high water channel crossing, were still under water. We found scouring and erosion at bridges, but no complete washouts.

Using our new GPS-enabled mapping system to report, staff members surveyed trails for landslides, blowdowns, flooded sections, and damaged structures. The initial evaluation was favorable: no major infrastructure lost, no washouts threatening hikers or trail continuity. Some field staff members began returning to regular projects and ranges by the end of the week. But the flood remained the top priority, as caretakers monitored their ranges for minor and moderate damage. One trail



PHOTO BY OLIVIA BERNIER

Several sections of the Old Job Trail washed out and “felled” into the trailside stream.



Field Staff utilized a new ArcGIS mapping system to submit sites of flood damage.



PHOTO BY LILY LAREGINA

Keegan Tierney monitors erosion on the Sterling Pond Trail on a post-flood assessment.



crew and the special projects crew pivoted to assist community flood relief projects in Waterbury, Middlesex and Bolton.

After staff's initial assessments we had still evaluated only about 100 miles of the 500-mile system. Only now, thanks to the corps of volunteer trail adopters, are we closing in on a statewide inventory of trail damage.

Heavy rain and flash flood warnings through the rest of July were an added challenge. Saturated soils and high water raised the risk of every storm, and complicated trail assessment.

## Climate Change and the Long Trail

Though the floods brought climate change to the forefront, we have been discussing the resulting natural and human resource impacts of it for years.

Research at the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in New Hampshire indicates that northern New England is getting warmer and wetter. For the Long Trail this means a longer hiking season, less snow and more ice in winter, and more frequent and stronger storms. Oh, and mud season is now no longer just a season, but can occur anytime – fun.

## Managing the Trail for Climate Change Impacts

Some of our trails are more than 100 years old. The management strategy for most has been and still is to conduct annual maintenance and deploy professional crews periodically to repair the most damaged portions. This strategy worked well for more than a century, but with more intense and frequent storms, we must rethink construction and maintenance.

Two current situations are instructive: the Burrows Trail on Camel's Hump and the Sterling Pond Trail in Mount Mansfield State Forest. Both are enormously popular, steep trails, and they suffer from chronic erosion. The way they differ is that the GMC and our partners are rebuilding the Burrows Trail from top to bottom, while the Sterling Pond Trail is receiving the status quo model of few weeks of crew work annually for the most urgent needs.

Rebuilding the Burrows Trail is a massive and expensive undertaking. It will take three years, dedicated staff, multiple crews and \$750,000. This project alone is at least 25 percent of the club's annual trail budget.



But the investment is already paying ▲ off: trail structures installed in 2022 on the Burrows Trail held up in the July storms. Stone structures did what they were designed to do: moved massive amounts of water off the trail, and kept it off to protect the hiking surface.

By contrast, the Sterling Pond Trail was a wet, muddy mess. Previously repaired stretches suffered damage as water overwhelmed drainage structures above them, and as hikers avoided muddy or flooded areas, widening the treadway.

Perhaps rainfall was worse on the Sterling Pond Trail than the Burrows Trail, but even allowing for that possibility, it is striking how well the Burrows Trail held up and how poorly the Sterling Pond Trail fared.

The Burrows rebuild is showing the effectiveness of large investments in our most vulnerable and popular trails, and we hope to do similar work elsewhere.

The money and staff capacity required can't be ignored, but in the long run this strategy could cost less, and provide better hiking as well.

## Looking Forward

July's flooding created about a quarter of a million dollars' worth of minor repair projects for future field seasons. But it

also reminded us our management and maintenance of trails must evolve.

As the climate changes, Vermont may not always see major infrastructure damage, especially as we work with these events in mind. Often we will see minor to moderate erosion, washouts, blowdowns, and other damage scattered along our trails.

We need a comprehensive evaluation of the Long Trail System for climate resiliency, examining drainage structures, routes in flood-prone areas, and old legacy trails that go straight up and down slopes and become raging streams in storms. Many trails will need a lot of money and skilled trail crew time to match the quality of the upper half of the Burrows Trail.

Beginning with the most traveled and vulnerable trails, we can steadily build and improve trails to survive more powerful storms. Investments may include trail hardening measures like stone steps; relocating extra muddy or erosion-prone segments; and training volunteers to spot problems early and to understand how a trail's environment and use affect it.

Finally, we need to consider establishing a climate change recovery and response fund. This will enable us to quickly deploy crews and material to fix minor and moderate storm damage without shortchanging our normally scheduled and funded field work. 🌿

## How YOU Can Help



Your membership contributions and donations make it possible for the Green Mountain Club's expert trail designers and builders to test new methods for resistance to extreme weather, and to strategically plan investments for resilience of the 500-mile Long Trail System.

**THANK YOU** for your continued support and for being part of the solution for managing trails for climate change.



# Volunteer Trail Crew Takes on Boot-Eating Mud

BY MICHELLE GOODELL

PHOTO BY MICHELLE GOODELL



Michelle Goodell, left, and another volunteer move a stepping stone using a sling carry.

This year the Green Mountain Club's Volunteer Long Trail Patrol (VLTP) took on the Long Trail/Appalachian Trail between Kelley Stand Road and Forest Road 71 near Stratton. Hikers probably remember that stretch as two miles of mud ravenous enough to eat an entire boot (or more). Diverting water from the trail on such a flat tract of poorly draining soils is challenging, if not impossible. But the

VLTP aimed to get hikers out of the mud in as many places as possible.

The crew delivered, with stunning results! Led by Dylan Mark in his second year and assisted by Katy Swenson and Ella Xu, each week the VLTP welcomed five to eight new volunteers to spend a week in the woods experiencing life on a trail crew.

After a quick but thorough orientation, most volunteers found they learned best on the job. Solving problems

together, they set roughly 30 BIG step stones, built three new water bars, set and secured two new check steps, added support stones to existing staircases and creek crossings, and filled about 40 feet of old turnpike with crushed rock to raise the trail. And in the seventh and final week they planned to add about 10 more step stones.

Joining a trail crew immerses volunteers in the essential work of maintaining a trail, an excellent way to challenge one's self, give back to the trail, and go home with vivid memories of new experiences. Thanks to energetic and willing volunteers, the club can field the Volunteer Long Trail Patrol every year.

— KEVIN HART, TRAIL CREW SUPERVISOR

## Outtake from Week Five July 20-25

Jellybean. Cucumber. Mudpie. Eight strangers around a table introduced ourselves by choosing a food starting with the first letters of our names. Members of the Volunteer Long Trail Patrol, week five, we gathered from Illinois, South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont to spend five days in the woods hardening the trail.

This was a chance for me to give back to the Long Trail while honing my backcountry skills. I began my hiking journey in 2007, when I took the GMC *Introduction to Backpacking* course before a solo thru-hike of the LT the next year. Grateful for my experiences on the trail, I later joined the GMC Board and served two terms as the Burlington Section's representative. But despite my club activities, my outdoor skills had become rusty, so in July I went to the woods.

Unfortunately, our VLTP hitch followed two weeks of intense rain and flooding. Luckily we were able to work as planned, blessed with mostly sunny days interrupted by only a few rainstorms. One lane of the road to the site was washed out, but deep mud puddles on the trail were the only reminders of the deluges Vermont had seen.

Rocks were our main project: find them in the woods near the trail; dig them up; move them; place them; crush them. Heavy rock bars leveraged our muscles to shift them, or a Gripoint, a manual pulley





PHOTO BY MICHELLE GOODSELL

**This “turnpike” is filled with a layer of small, crushed rocks to raise the level of the trail.**

contraption, for the really big ones. As a hiker, I had imagined helicopter drops of materials — pre-made bags of small stones to spread on turnpike walkways, for instance. Or I assumed trails just happened to come upon convenient rocks along the way. These illusions died fast as we spent hours placing just one rock in just the right spot, or smashing stones into small pieces of crush.

As we worked we got to know one another. We shared our relationship histories, our career aspirations, our families and our tattoos. We took turns leading and offering suggestions. We created camaraderie and respect for our differences. The work was demanding, but support was constant.

Chatting up the local birds with a bird call app brought unexpected excitement as juncos dive bombed our work site. I enjoyed quiet time, too, reading in my tent before sleep. Without cell service, I found a chance to just be.

On our final evening we hunkered together under the main tarp as thunder rumbled. As hikers often do, we dreamt of foods to be eaten and plans for *the first thing I’ll do when I get home* (Hot shower! Laundry!). The next day we said our goodbyes – full of memories of hard work, laughter and the peace of the woods. 🐾



PHOTO BY MICHELLE GOODSELL

**Volunteer crews set 30 big stepping stones through a muddy section.**



PHOTO BY MICHELLE GOODSELL

**Week Five Volunteer Long Trail Patrol.**



# As the Skies Clear

PHOTO BY ADAM JOHANKNECHT

## PHOTOS FROM GMC STAFF

Caretaker Adam Johanknecht • Caretaker Lead Adrienne Bartlett  
Communications Coordinator Lily LaRegina • Trail Crew Lead Byron Bixler



PHOTO BY LILY LAREGINA

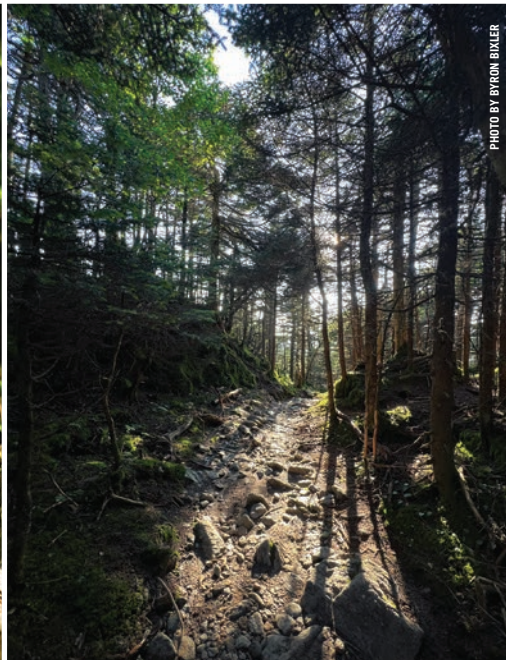


PHOTO BY BYRON BIXLER



PHOTO BY ADAM JOHANKNECHT



PHOTO BY ADRIENNE BARTLETT



PHOTO BY LILY LAREGINA





PHOTO BY ADAM JOHANNKECHT



PHOTO BY BYRON BUXER



PHOTO BY LILY LAREGNA



PHOTO BY ADAM JOHANNKECHT

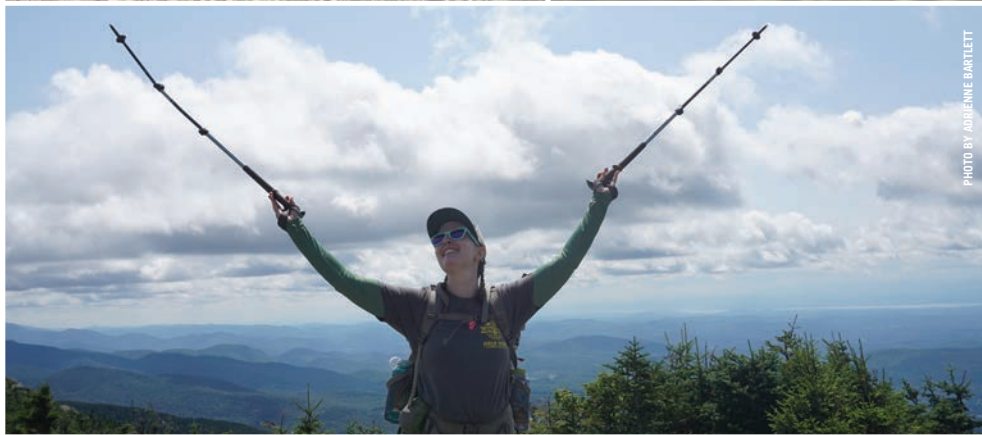


PHOTO BY JULIENNE BARTLETT

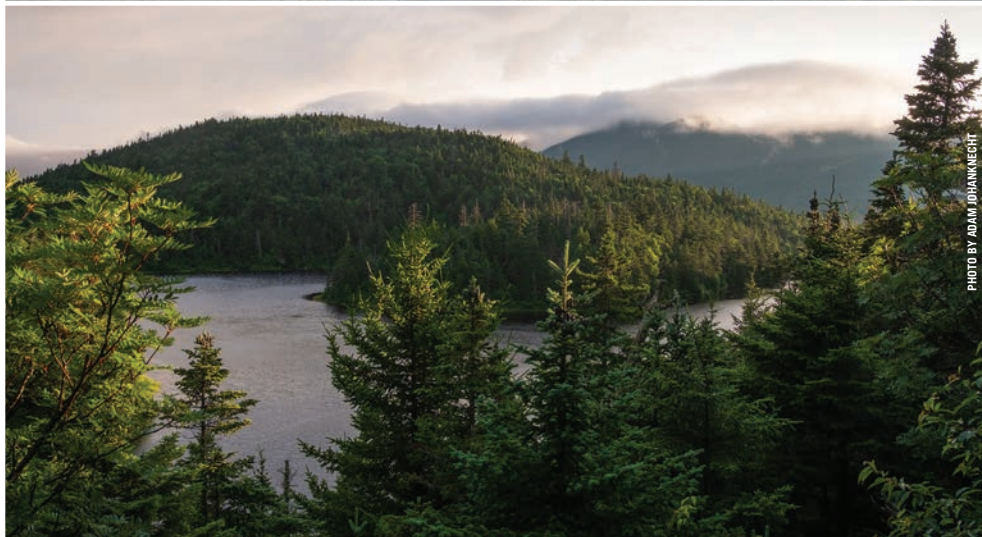


PHOTO BY ADAM JOHANNKECHT



PHOTO BY LILY LAREGNA





THIS FIELD SEASON HAS BEEN A TRYING ONE, not least because historic flooding interrupted operations for about two weeks. We pulled all field staff members out of the woods on Sunday, July 9, in anticipation of the weather. Special thanks go to southern caretakers Dan Lane, Chris Neureiter, and Ethan Crump who went beyond their normal responsibilities, coordinating exit plans and bringing their fellow crew members to safety. Thanks to the swift response of seasonal staff and volunteer trail and shelter adopters, we were able to quickly survey damages and devise plans to address acute issues.

The seemingly never-ending rain this summer did impact morale, and we dealt with more mid-season personnel changes than usual. We are grateful to our talented field staffers for persevering and taking the unexpected in stride. As of mid-August we're cautiously hoping for drier skies and a productive second half of our season.

For this issue, I've turned the reporting of field notes over to the GMC's fearless field leaders.

—KEEGAN TIERNEY, DIRECTOR OF FIELD PROGRAMS



PHOTO BY ADRIENNE BARTLETT

Mansfield Caretaker greets visitors at Mansfield Visitor Center.

## Northern Caretakers ▲

Our stellar northern caretakers are stationed at Long Trail shelters on Mount Abraham, Camel's Hump, Mount Mansfield, and Sterling Pond, where I support them as they live and work. They care for four of the five 4,000-foot peaks in Vermont, three of which have rare alpine zone habitat, and associated trails, shelters, and privies. They educate hikers on alpine vegetation, Leave No Trace Principles, and backcountry safety.

The passion and perseverance I've seen in our field staff this season is inspiring. Vermont has been dealt a hand of rain, intense storms, wildfire smoke, and flooding, and our staff has responded with impressively positive attitudes and care for the trail and hikers.

We've continued improvements at the Mansfield Summit Visitor Center at the top of the Stowe Auto Toll Road, with more information on alpine vegetation and current research on the mountain, and have collaborated with UVM researchers, Abenaki leaders, and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. On a busy weekend the center sometimes sees more than 1,000 visitors a day, many new

to Vermont's mountains. We believe education is the best way to encourage visitors to care for summits and trails as much as we do.

I encourage you to greet a caretaker when you see one; ask about the plants, birds, and landscape around you (or about how our privies work!). They are eager to share their wealth of knowledge.

—ADRIENNE BARTLETT, NORTHERN LEAD CARETAKER

## Southern Caretakers ▼

I was a caretaker from 2009 to 2012 at several GMC sites, and I returned this year to supervise caretakers stationed at popular ponds and overnight sites along the Long Trail/Appalachian Trail from Stratton to Killington. It's been great to have the opportunity to pass on my knowledge and experience in my role as the southern lead.



PHOTO BY DAN LANE

Longtime Stratton Mountain caretakers Hugh and Jeanne Joudry, center, visit with current southern caretakers.



All the caretakers and ridgerunners in southern Vermont are new to the GMC this year. But they have stepped up to embrace the challenges of the season: maintaining trails, educating hikers about stewardship, and composting human waste at backcountry privies. Despite heat waves and relentless rain, they've persevered, stayed on top of trail surveying and maintenance, and managed to have a lot of fun along the way.

For many years caretakers charged backpackers \$5 a night, but this year we changed to a donation-based model, which hikers have willingly embraced. Of course, caretakers are doing as much work as ever. If you are one of those who have donated after staying at an overnight site, thank you for making it possible for us caretakers to stay in the woods, keeping shelters, trails, and especially privies in good working order.

—DAN LANE, SOUTHERN LEAD CARETAKER



**Installing rebar to set stone steps on Burrows Trail.**

## Burrows Trail Crew ▲

The Burrows trail crew lead began the season under the leadership of Byron Bixler, at worksites low on the mountain, where we built three long staircases and



**Fresh stone staircase on Burrows Trail.**

rehabilitated four water bars. Through wildfire smoke and torrential rain, we then moved our tools and rigging gear up the mountain to a spot just below the point where the crews left off last year.

July's flood forced suspension of trail work for about a week, so we spent a few days cleaning up damage in Waterbury. Fortunately the work GMC and partner organizations put in on the Burrows Trail in the last season and a half survived the flood almost entirely unscathed, evidence that large stone trail structures effectively divert water from the trail.

Undaunted by environmental hardships, we have been working harder than ever. We've added three new sets of stairs, two of which were difficult because of unusually high or completely exposed bedrock. We implemented a couple of new rock work techniques, and so far the results look great! We rebuilt three water bars in the same area with the help of an AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps crew. The project is in great shape as we approach the midseason crew switch, when the southern trail crew, led by Amy Brown, will move on to Burrows.

—JUSTIN TOWERS

BURROWS TRAIL PROJECT COORDINATOR

## Southern Trail Crew ▼

The Southern Trail Crew spent a largely successful two-week hitch at Seth Warner Shelter, raising the ground in front of the shelter to comply with U.S. Forest Service specifications. We often rolled and set rocks under the watchful eyes of hikers planning to stay the night. Having an audience was...an experience. The shelter remained open, and it was understandable hikers would move in to stay dry or secure a spot. Still, it was tough to answer questions while handling large rocks.

We are now at work on the "stairway to Heaven," a notorious steep and rocky climb up Harmon Hill south of Route 9, aiming to complete badly needed repairs. It's a challenging section because of a poor layout and some collapsing stone steps. Despite personnel changes and interesting but troublesome weather, we are moving along. We've reset about five jumbled and highly inconvenient rocks into inviting steps, and added three new stone steps. And we have carefully lowered about 20 stones down the steep hillside to be set as support rocks or gargoyles — irregular stones enclosing the staircase to discourage hikers from leaving it.

The attitude and efforts of the crew have been admirable, even if occasionally flavored with a healthy dose of gallows humor. Sometimes making repairs feels like applying a Band-Aid to a gaping wound, given the pitch of the staircase. Still, many hikers we've encountered seemed grateful for any kind of improvement. Structures in exceptional disrepair are an incentive for us to do our work with utmost care. Though no work is immune to the toll of time and weather, we hope ours will stand the test for many years. Thank you for supporting the club and making it all possible.

—AMY BROWN, TRAIL CREW LEAD



**New stone steps on the Route 9 staircase.**





## Special Projects Crew ►

The Special Projects Crew finished several weeks of building a new Sunrise Shelter, about a mile south of the site of the 1964 shelter, which was in disrepair. In consultation with the Green Mountain National Forest, GMC decided to site the shelter farther from the road, conforming to current management standards. The hard-working crew of three raised a beautiful timber frame, 12-bunk, four-walled shelter with the help of volunteer Chip Swanson, a retired timber framer. A volunteer group decommissioned the old site in early August.

The crew pivoted from their regular schedule during and after the flood, and spent several days helping cleanup and recovery efforts in Waterbury, Middlesex, and Bolton, earning special praise from the Waterbury Emergency Coordinator for its stamina and enthusiasm.

Special Projects will finish the season completing Stratton View shelter, repairing the Stratton Mountain Caretaker Cabin, and several weeks of trail work on Laraway. 🐾



PHOTO BY DYLAN NORRIS

Sunrise shelter in progress.



PHOTO BY MATT VEZINA

Ella Xu, trail crew member, contemplates a rock.



PHOTO BY DAN LANE

Southern caretakers set up a tent over the Stratton Mountain caretaker site.



PHOTO BY CHRIS NEUREITER

Southern Caretakers Olivia, left, Dan, and Grace, right, set a rock on the LT/AT south of Stratton Mountain.





# STEWARDING IN PERPETUITY

## GMC completes an inventory of conserved land boundary lines and reenergizes the Volunteer Corridor Monitoring Program

*By Mollie Klepack Flanigan, Director of Land Conservation*

A key component of the Green Mountain Club Land Conservation Program is the Volunteer Corridor Monitoring Program. This cohort of about 65 specially trained volunteers completes annual inspections of the boundaries of the club's conserved lands to ensure land-use agreements are being upheld and that there are no encroachments. Most of these lands provide protected backcountry corridors for the Long Trail or the Appalachian Trail.

Several years ago, we realized that a concerted effort was needed to assess the conditions of the boundary lines in order to keep our conserved land protected and set our corridor monitors up with manageable sections to steward. So in 2018 GMC began a comprehensive boundary inventory, cataloging the locations and conditions of 178 miles of boundaries. The project took more than 640 field days and 3,800 hours by 88 volunteers and staff, and was finished in 2022.

Why did we invest five field seasons of bushwhacking through Vermont's backcountry? I'll try to break it down:

### What do we mean by "GMC conserved lands," and why does GMC have them?

When the Long Trail was built in the early 1900s, much of the northern portion crossed private land, and GMC brokered informal handshake agreements with landowners to route the trail. Those agreements made the trail possible, but in the 1980s there were several significant relocation requests by landowners and substantial of tracts land on the real estate market. The continuity and natural character of the trail was threatened, so the club launched a campaign to protect more than 70 miles of trail by buying land along the trail and transferring it to federal



or state ownership, or keeping it when needed.

This effort has brought the Long Trail to 97 percent protection, with just over six miles remaining. The club owns a number of properties outright, but most acquired parcels were transferred to the State of Vermont, and GMC holds conservation easement on each of them. We call all of these properties "GMC conserved lands." The club owns 17 properties, totaling 3,487 acres; and 61 conservation easements, totaling 16,341 acres.

### What happens after a property is purchased? How does GMC ensure it stays protected?

One of the most important ways is to make sure we know where the protected land is. That may sound overly basic, but

it is a key requirement. After all, you can't protect something if you don't know where it is. The parcel's boundaries must be well marked so neighbors and members of the public know when they cross them.

A licensed surveyor must, or at least should, survey the boundaries to mark them, and produce a detailed map.

Without well established and well maintained boundary lines, the risk of neighbors or members or the public using a property in ways contrary to its conservation guidelines increases. Violations of a conservation regimen are called encroachments, and some examples GMC looks out for are tapping of maple trees, timber cutting, construction of permanent hunting stands, waste dumping, and operation of motorized vehicles.

*continued on page 18*





A well-marked boundary line includes painted blazes on trees, a rebar pin at each corner, and signage indicating the owner.

### How is a boundary marked?

The edges of a property should be marked with blazes, which are axe cuts on every tree within six feet of the boundary to remove some bark so the wood beneath can be durably painted. The term blaze can be confusing, because we also call the white or blue marks on trees along trails blazes. In the context of a boundary, however, a blaze is made by a licensed surveyor in very particular arrangements to show where the boundary line is in relationship to that tree. For instance, one blaze on the side of a tree indicates that the boundary is on that side of the tree, two to six feet away. A blaze on each side of a tree indicates that the boundary runs through the tree.

Every place the boundary changes direction there should be a “pin,” which are usually a rebar stake with a cap.

Finally, signs should be hung periodically around the property informing neighbors and the public who owns the land, and, if need be, other signs to inform people how the property can and cannot be used.

To keep a boundary well marked requires regular visits to refresh the paint on blazes, keep pins free of debris, and so forth. Repainting a line once every five years is a good cycle. If we don't keep up with maintenance, blaze paint fades and lines disappear to the untrained eye. If boundary lines are not maintained, they can be lost

all together and can only be reestablished by a licensed surveyor. Surveying a property costs tens of thousands of dollars, so careful maintenance not only protects the property but ensures that the costly investment of a survey is defended.

### Who maintains boundary lines?

Landowners are typically responsible for boundary line maintenance, although GMC maintains boundaries on state forest lands where we hold conservation easements as well as on land we own. We do so through a management agreement with the state as a way to add maintenance capacity to the state forest system with our volunteer corps. Our Corridor Monitoring Program pairs volunteers with GMC conserved lands where they annually maintain boundary lines and monitor the conservation easement terms. The Corridor Monitoring Program was established in the 2000s, but by then many boundaries were in poor shape and hard for volunteers to follow. When I started at GMC in 2016, it was clear boundary lines were in a wide variety of conditions, and a comprehensive approach was needed to understand the program's status, needs, and trouble spots.

I integrated the program's records with a computer-based mapping program, ArcGIS; determined that GMC was responsible for 178 miles of boundary lines;

and launched a boundary line inventory in 2018 to assess conditions and map the locations of those lines.

### What did the Boundary Line Inventory involve?

Volunteers and staff armed with property survey maps and compasses made numerous field visits to each conserved property to locate its boundaries, repaint all the blazes we could find, and map boundaries using GPS receivers. Where we couldn't find blazes we hung brightly colored flagging tape to approximate boundary locations.

We found some truly spectacular and remote places along the way, but also rather challenging sections, for many lines run through high-elevation spruce-fir forests where visibility is less than a foot. And lines often run straight over cliffs and across bogs, ponds and brooks.



Eliza Letourneau peeking through spruce fir.





PHOTO COURTESY APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Good boundary lines have frequent, clear blazes.



PHOTO BY MOLLIE KLEPACK FLANGAN

Fair boundary lines have blazes, but they are too infrequent to be rated as a good line.



PHOTO BY MOLLIE KLEPACK FLANGAN

Poor boundary lines have few to no blazes and are primarily marked with orange flagging tape to approximate the boundary location.

## So, what were the results?

We now know that, of our boundaries,

- 47 percent are in good condition
- 21 percent are in fair condition
- 16 percent are in poor condition
- 8 percent are lost or were never established

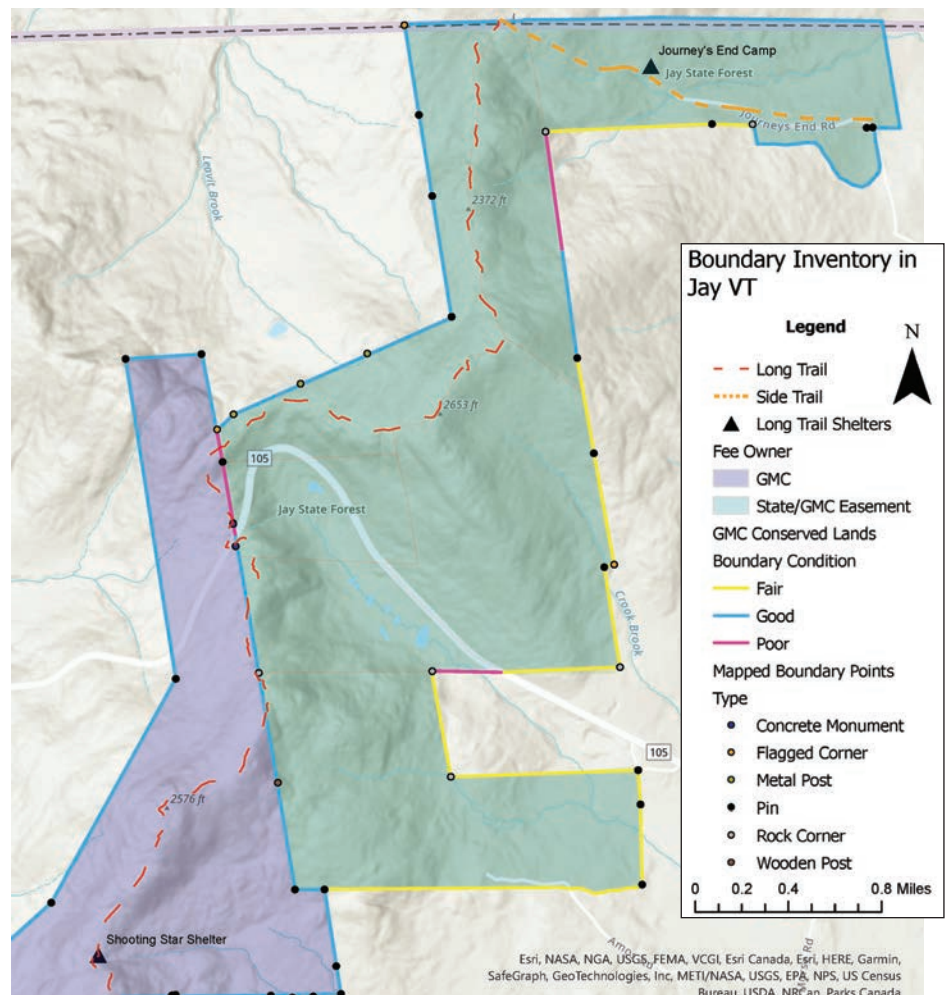
We also created a dataset of more than 570 corner points that document the lines, and which have been used to improve our property maps.

## How will the Boundary Line Inventory be useful going forward?

We will work with the state to see if we can resurvey lines on state forests that were inventoried as poor or lost. In addition, the club will look for ways to improve boundary lines on several poorly surveyed properties we own.

The inventory has already been a huge help in improving management of the GMC Corridor Monitoring Program. I can now assign volunteers to manageable sections of line, and provide them accurate information on what they will find along the way.

Knowing the conditions of all the lines has removed some of the adventure and mystery from the club's stewardship program, but I think we can all trade that for the peace of mind of knowing our conserved lands are being responsibly protected.



This map shows the condition of boundary lines on a GMC-owned parcel (shaded purple) and a state land parcel (in green) in northern Vermont.





# Outstanding Volunteers and Senator Patrick Leahy Honored at Annual Meeting

At the Green Mountain Club's 113th Annual Meeting at the Craftsbury Outdoor Center in June, members discussed club business and honored some of the club's most dedicated volunteers.

## VOLUNTEER OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARDS

### Ruth Penfield

With quiet and determined management skills, Ruth Penfield is a driving force in GMC's Bread Loaf Section. She began volunteering with the section 12 years ago, when, as publicity chair, she ran the annual meeting and created a website to bring the section into the digital age. She maintains the website and promotes the section's activities to this day. In 2015 she assumed the section presidency, a position she held even when a successor fell through in 2020, until I took on the role in 2022. Today she answers countless "How did we do this last time?" questions and we hope to rely on her expertise for years to come. Thanks to Ruth for her strong leadership and dedication over the years.

—NOMINATED BY DAVID MORRISSEY  
BREAD LOAF SECTION PRESIDENT



Nancy McClellan and Ruth Penfield

### Kathy Astrauckas

As Chair of the UVO Section Outings Committee, Kathy Astrauckas goes above and beyond in coordinating a robust schedule of outings. Although the UVO Section is not the largest in the Green Mountain Club, it schedules an average of nearly three events every week, and have done so for years. Kathy considers every capable new member a prospect for her slate of nearly two dozen outing leaders, and recruits and orients every prospect.

Kathy's encyclopedic knowledge of places and trails within driving distance of the Upper Connecticut River Valley enables her to spot errors or ask questions about proposed outings to avoid mistakes or improve descriptions, a process requiring dozens of phone calls and emails every quarter.

Kathy also serves on the GMC Trail Management Committee, where she pays close attention to every detail. She has section hiked most of the Appalachian Trail, an experience which, combined with extensive regional hiking and backpacking, enables her to make valuable suggestions.

—NOMINATED BY DICK ANDREWS  
UVO SECTION PRESIDENT



Kathy Astrauckas and Nancy McClellan

### George Roy

For 45 years George has been one of the most hard-working and committed members of the Brattleboro Section. He is a lifelong hiker — George finished hiking the Long Trail in 1993, and through hiked the Appalachian Trail in 1996. When the Brattleboro Section built Spruce Peak Shelter in 1983, George was there on all eight work weekends. He also helped with the reconstruction of William B. Douglas Shelter in 2004. He is a certified chainsawyer, and is always ready to wield his saw during spring and fall trail work weekends. George represented the Brattleboro Section on the GMC Board of Directors from 2000 to 2005, and later served as section president from 2006 to 2018. Thank you, George for your outstanding contributions to our section and the club.

—NOMINATED BY JOE COOK  
BRATTLEBORO SECTION SECRETARY

### Kevin Williamson

Kevin has been the Northeast Kingdom Section Trail Maintenance Coordinator for many years. He manages all volunteer trail adopters in the section — 33 at last count! — and is responsible for a portion of the trail himself. If there is a gap in coverage, he steps up to make sure the trail is maintained. Section members call him "One-Cut Williamson" because he favors the axe. During his hundreds of hours working on trails, he has worked on the fire towers on Bald Mountain and Mount Monadnock (Monadnock Mountain is currently closed to hiking), helped create new trails, explored old ones, and investigated opportunities to reopen Monadnock Mountain to hikers. He also helps the section keep its maps and publications up to date and distributed.

—NOMINATED BY JOHN PREDOM  
NEK SECTION PRESIDENT





Marcelle Leahy, Parick Leahy, Mike DeBonis, and Nancy McClellan

adversaries to work out their differences. In 2015 we celebrated the 100-year goal of acquiring a permanent route for the Long Trail across the Winooski River Valley, which required a right of way over railroad tracks in Bolton. At the annual meeting Senator Leahy humorously recounted the story of a pivotal phone call with a key railroad executive that secured the critical right of way.

To honor the senator's decades of contributions, GMC staff and leaders planted a sugar maple at the club's headquarters on Route 100. Like Senator Leahy, the sugar maple is tough. Its strong branches withstand the fiercest storms and its expansive network of roots connects firmly to Vermont's soil. The maple is in it for the long haul, remaining in the canopy long after others have left. It serves with a purpose, providing shade, shelter and resources for decades, and in the case of GMC, keeping watch, checking in from time to time, just to make sure the club and trail are hale and hearty. 🍁

## Senator Patrick Leahy Receives Honorary Life Award

### *Sugar Maple Planted at Headquarters to Celebrate Club's Top Honor*

Patrick Leahy was a longstanding force in the United States Senate, serving 48 years before retiring in 2023. His unwavering support of conservation and forestry initiatives on and off the Long Trail was essential in solidifying the club's foundation and trail protection work.

In the 1980s Leahy secured funding for a landownership study along the Long Trail, setting the stage for the club's Long Trail Protection Campaign. During his tenure Congress added 100,000 acres to the Green Mountain National Forest, and numerous town forests were created thanks to the senator's Community Forestry Act. His work to create both the Forest Legacy Program and Water Conservation Fund substantially supported protection of the Long Trail from Stratton Mountain to Jay Peak.

Senator Leahy also spearheaded

passage of the Vermont Wilderness Act of 1984 and the New England Wilderness Act of 2006, which together created the White Rocks National Recreation Area, the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area, Big Branch Wilderness, Peru Peak Wilderness, George D. Aiken Wilderness, Bristol Cliffs Wilderness, Glastenbury Wilderness and Joseph Battell Wilderness, and expanded several of Vermont's existing wilderness areas. The Long Trail and/or its side trails go through several of these special landscapes.

Of course, it's one thing to quantify bills passed and acres of land preserved. It's another to recognize the senator's extensive behind-the-scenes work. Leahy went to work on behalf of the club countless times, with phone calls, letters and conversations that encouraged



Sugar Maple planted in Leahy's honor at GMC Headquarters.





PHOTO COURTESY JANEEN BURROWS

Burrows family meet at the trailhead.

## Burrows Family Hosts Family Reunion on the Burrows Trail

THIRTY-FOUR MEMBERS of the Burrows family convened in Stowe for a reunion in July. According to family lore, Sara “Dolly” Smart married George Howard Burrows, and they lived at Burrows Hill Farm (formerly Liberty Farm) at the base of Camel’s Hump in Huntington for decades. George maintained the trail to the summit, called the Huntington Trail, with the help of his nephew, William M. Burrows. George

died in 1943, while Dolly stayed in the house and became known for serving tea to hikers. By the 1956 edition of the *Long Trail Guide* the trail had been officially named the Burrows Trail.

“We were grateful the weather cooperated for the weekend when 34 of the Burrows family enjoyed the Green Mountains!” Janeen Burrows said. “Sixteen of us made it to the top of Camel’s Hump.”

## Bernie Sanders visits the Long Trail!

U.S. SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS of Vermont paid a visit to the Long Trail on Saturday, June 10, after an outdoor recreation town meeting at Barnes Camp in Stowe. Bernie spoke about the community-building and healing powers of time outdoors enjoying nature, and GMC Executive Director Mike DeBonis described the club’s work on trails to the crowd of about 150 people. After the speeches, coffee, and bagels, some of the group joined Bernie and Mike for a hike on the ADA-accessible Barnes Camp boardwalk and Long Trail.



PHOTO BY LILY LARENSINA



PHOTO BY NATHANIEL ASARO

## Favorite Fall Hikes

FALL HIKING is, or soon will be, upon us. A wet summer like this one typically foretells a more colorful and earlier foliage season than usual. If you’re eager to get outside and enjoy it, remember to brush up on fall hiking safety basics. Fallen leaves can hide irregularities, and make trails slippery and hard to follow, so wear supportive footwear, consider trekking poles for stability, and pay attention to trail blazes. Keep shorter and cooler days in mind as the season advances.

Visit [greenmountainclub.org](http://greenmountainclub.org) for dozens of our favorite fall hikes, like this one:

### BUTLER LODGE LOOP Underhill

4.5 miles

1,700 feet elevation gain

This scenic loop offers a bit of a reprieve from the crowds on Mount Mansfield’s summit.

Park at Underhill State Park, then follow the Butler Lodge Trail to the Wampahoofus Trail for 0.1 miles before turning left onto the Rock Garden Trail for 0.6 miles.

At the next junction, turn left onto Maple Ridge for 0.4 miles, then left onto the Frost Trail to return to the trailhead.

This loop has excellent views, exciting rock scrambles, caves, and birch forests. Butler Lodge is a perfect spot for lunch.



## WALKING TO WRITE

# The Long Trail Transports

The September sunlight squeezing between dark spruce trunks ignites the morning mist. The green glow of moss turns the suspended water molecules an ethereal green. *That's the word I've been looking for—ethereal!* I stop, take out my phone, and write “ethereal” in my Notes App under “Words and Phrases.”

I started hiking a half hour ago from Appalachian Gap, where my husband Jim dropped me off. My destination is 11 miles south at Lincoln Gap. I love this stretch of the Long Trail (the Monroe Skyline)—walking over Stark Mountain, Mount Ellen, Lincoln Peak and finally Mount Abraham. I'm fortunate to live 14 minutes from the trailhead. In the last four years I have walked this stretch once or twice a year while writing my memoir of walking Grande Randonnée Cinq (GR5) in Europe. I also walk the dirt roads of the Mad River Valley and climb the service road at Mad River Glen during mud season while writing in my head. But it is the Long Trail that transports me back to the GR5, and I connect to my European experiences of 2018.

I'm new to writing but not to hiking — both walking and hiking are in my blood. At age 58 after our 1,400 mile walk the length of Europe, I had a powerful desire to write about our walk on the GR5. I spent 2019 recording stories from our three month adventure, and I spent the next three years shaping and cutting the narrative. The act of walking clears my mind and helps me see where the story needs to go. Walking the Long Trail pushes my body, but it also pushes my brain to see my story from different perspectives, like seeing the flowing ridgeline from the Mad River Valley. And then experiencing the rugged terrain that is not so flowy.

As I continue to walk through

the ethereal mist on the Long Trail, I realize I'm walking at an *ethereal pace*. I'm floating. When we were walking on the GR5 in the Alps one morning with streamlets burbling, cow bells echoing off the valley walls, and wildflowers dancing in the breeze, I felt I had fallen into a



Kathy Elkind

pace at which I just flowed through the mountains. No effort was involved, just celestial steps on the path leading onward. And the words I'm searching for are “ethereal pace.” I have found the words for one trail on another trail.

By midday I arrive on the summit of Mount Ellen and enjoy the spectacular view of Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks to the west. I sit in the shade and savor a peanut butter sandwich and dried mango slices. It's the perfect day for walking in the mountains, not too hot, no clouds. I relax and let my mind and heart wander through the landscape of my soul. Walking through the creative crevasses of my brain, lunging from right brain to left brain I seek new ideas and metaphors. *How far is a minute? How far is a minute uphill?*

I begin walking again, and I'm surprised as always at how steep the descent of Mount Ellen is. Using my hands

to lower myself down the stony trail, I wonder, *how far is a minute downhill when sixty-year-old knees are involved? I need to write about pace, distance, and time. And how they transport us.*

I've been reading *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*, by Kerri Andrews, about the lives of ten famous women writers who used walking to support their writing. They also wrote about walking itself. Their stories have inspired me to trust that walking in the mountains will guide me on my writing path.

Later in the afternoon I arrive on top of Mount Abraham with its 360-degree view. Surprisingly, only one other person is here. I traverse the bedrock summit, staying off alpine plants, and lie down on the warm granite and close my eyes. My body needs rest. The last 2.6 miles is all downhill, and my knees are not sure they can make it. Half an hour later I open my eyes, and the words “unimaginable beauty” form in my mind. Yes, this is unimaginable beauty, and those are the words I need to describe the Jura Mountains in France. Again, I add words to my phone, because my short-term memory for details is fading.

The walk down toward Lincoln Gap is long. Somehow miles grow longer as the day does. My body and mind are done. No new writing inspiration comes—I'm spent. The Long Trail has done its job of transporting me, and I'll sleep well tonight.

As I fold myself into my car, every muscle screaming, I send gratitude to the Long Trail and the Green Mountains for providing the sacred activities of walking, hiking, pondering, and creating.

*Kathy Elkind is the author of To Walk It Is to See It: 1 Couple, 98 Days, 1400 Miles on Europe's GR5, now published. She lives in the Mad River Valley.*





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# LONG TRAIL DAY: NEW DATE OCTOBER 7

Given the pressing needs of our state following the July flooding, Long Trail Day has MOVED! You still have time to support work to repair and restore the trails and celebrate your love for the Long Trail.

Get started at [greenmountainclub.org/longtrailday](https://greenmountainclub.org/longtrailday)



**1. REGISTER AND CUSTOMIZE  
YOUR ONLINE FUNDRAISING  
PAGE**



**2. COMMIT TO RAISING  
\$272 TO SUPPORT  
WORK ON THE TRAIL**



**3. REACH OUT TO FRIENDS  
AND FAMILY TO ASK FOR  
THEIR SUPPORT**



**4. JOIN US FOR  
GUIDED HIKES AND  
INTERPRETIVE  
PROGRAMS**



**5. ENJOY CELEBRATIONS  
AND TRAIL MAGIC AT  
BARNES CAMP AND  
LOCATIONS AROUND THE  
STATE**



LONG TRAIL DAY 2023