

Long Trail NEWS > WINTER 2025



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

4

Field Season Report

10

New FKTs on the LT

16

Trail Talk: Accessible Trails

Long Trail NEWS

WINTER 2025, Volume 85, No. 4

The *Long Trail News* is published by the Green Mountain Club, a non-profit organization founded in 1910.

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.

We are committed to ensuring the GMC and Long Trail System are places that are inviting, safe, and open, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

The Green Mountain Club and Long Trail System are located on land which is the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples including the Western Abenaki. This land has served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. We recognize and respect them as the traditional stewards of these lands and waters, whose presence continues to enrich our community. We strive to respect and protect the lands within our use.

Michael DeBonis, Executive Director
Chloe Miller, Communications Manager & *Long Trail News* Editor

Richard Andrews and Jenny Montagne, Copyediting
Sylvie Vidrine, Graphic Designer

Green Mountain Club
4711 Waterbury-Stowe Road
Waterbury Center, Vermont 05677
Phone: (802) 244-7037
E-mail: gmc@greenmountainclub.org
Website: greenmountainclub.org

The *Long Trail News* (USPS 318-840) is published quarterly by The Green Mountain Club, Inc., 4711 Waterbury-Stowe Road, Waterbury Center, VT 05677. Periodicals postage paid at Waterbury Center, VT, and additional offices.

Copyright © 2025 The Green Mountain Club, Inc., All rights reserved. The opinions expressed by LTN contributors are not necessarily those of GMC.

GET IN TOUCH! Email the editor with your feedback at cmiller@greenmountainclub.org.

FRONT COVER: Hikers reach the snow-covered summit of Camel's Hump just before sunrise, February 2024. Photo by Lily LaRegina.

Dear friends of the Long Trail,

In fall 2023, GMC launched a five-year strategic plan focused on protecting and managing the trail resource, improving operational excellence, and prioritizing people. After two years, I am happy to report that with the support of our members and donors like you the club has made significant progress with some notable priorities completed:

- ✿ Eliminated the last pit privy on the Long Trail System. Now all 70 privies are composting models that are better for the hiking public and the environment.
- ✿ Completed the GMC headquarters renovation with the construction of the Rothberg-Birdwhistell Visitor Center in Waterbury Center.
- ✿ Published the 29th edition of the *Long Trail Guide*.
- ✿ Launched a GMC trail ambassador program to help GMC staff and volunteers best represent the club in public and on the trail.
- ✿ Invested in growing our major donor and planned giving programs, critical for the club to meet its annual operating budget and to grow our endowment.

As we look forward, we are focused on major initiatives to improve the organization and trail resource. These initiatives unfold over longer timeframes and will rely on the support of our members, donors, and partners to be successful.

Improving trail sustainability - We are currently collecting the best data that has ever existed on Long Trail conditions and needs. These data will enable the club and our partners to identify trail sections that are the highest priority for action and investment. In an environment where the availability of funding to support work on federal land is uncertain, the club's ability to allocate available resources to areas that will have the greatest impact is more important than ever.

Protecting the Long Trail - Our strategic conservation plan is a road map for permanently protecting the Long Trail and associated trails in the Long Trail System. Securing permanent, legal protection for these final stretches is essential – it guarantees public access, preserves the continuity of the Long Trail, and protects our investments in sustainable trail infrastructure.

Strengthening GMC as an organization - The club may be 115 years old, but it is constantly evolving to best meet the needs of the trail and hiking community. As part of this self-improvement effort, the club is undergoing a comprehensive review of its governance to make sure the club's structures and systems are operating as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Over the years, the Green Mountain Club has faced its share of challenges. This year has been no exception with federal funding cuts and a historic drought. But one thing has always kept us strong: the incredible support of members, donors, and volunteers like you who make it all possible. As we wind down the calendar year, I hope you will consider making a year-end gift. Your support ensures that even in challenging times we can care for the Long Trail and stay true to our mission of making the Long Trail play a larger part in the life of the people.

Thank you,



Mike DeBonis, Executive Director



Mike DeBonis

Editor's Note Regarding Fall Issue

We heard from several members with concerns about the cover image of the Fall issue of *Long Trail News*. While the photo was intended to show a volunteer demonstrating the height of surrounding mountains, we understand that the hand gesture may have appeared offensive when viewed out of context. We appreciate those who brought this to our attention.

Although no offense was intended, we recognize the impact the image may have had and apologize for any harm caused.

Thank you for your feedback and for helping us uphold a respectful and welcoming Long Trail community.

Caretaker Program

This article is an excerpt from the full season recap on pages 4 and 5.

The **caretaker program** continued its excellent work of backcountry stewardship, education, and waste management. Caretakers staffed busy summits and ponds through a significant stretch of lovely weather in late summer and through the fall continuing the important work of protecting alpine summits.

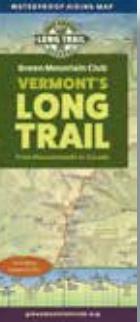
The dry summer and significant volunteer support in mulch packing led to a highly successful composting season with 1,215 gallons of human waste composted and no partially completed human waste left to overwinter.

Caretaker Supervisor **Sarah Bailey** and Visitor Services Manager **Emily Mosher** launched a new volunteer initiative – the **Volunteer Trail Steward program** – to train volunteers stationed at the Mt. Mansfield Visitor Center. This program launched with great success and helped augment and increase visitor contacts at the top of the Stowe Toll Road, which sees hundreds of visitors per day.

Statement of Ownership: Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation: Filing date, October 28, 2025. Long Trail News. Publication No. 318-840, published four times per year. Office of publication, editorial and general business office located at 4711 Waterbury-Stowe Road, Waterbury Center, Vermont 05677. Editor: Chloe Miller. Owner: The Green Mountain Club, Inc. Average number of copies each issue during preceding twelve months: Total number of copies printed, 6,412. Total paid distribution, 6,325. Total free distribution, 88. Total distribution, 6,412. Office use and otherwise not distributed, 0. Total, 6,412. Percent paid distribution, 98.63%. Number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: Total number of copies printed, 6,531. Total paid distribution, 6,481. Total free distribution, 50. Total distribution, 6,531. Office use and otherwise not distributed, 0. Total, 6,531. Percent paid distribution, 99.23%.

LONG TRAIL MAP—7th Edition now Available

The updated 7th edition of the Long Trail Map is now available for purchase online, at the GMC Visitor Center, and at area retailers. The map contains new hiker information boxes and reflects the most up-to-date trail and shelter information, including the relocated Seth Warner and Sunrise Shelters, rerouted trails around Stratton Pond, and new Stratton View Shelter.



\$12.95, or \$10.36 for members with code **member20**.

Digital version coming soon through Avenza.

greenmountainclub.org/LongTrailMap

Photo Contest WINNERS

Thank you to everyone who shared a look at hiking in Vermont for this year's annual photo contest. Out of over 200 images submitted, photographer Mark Paquin took the top prize with this shot captured on his July thru-hike.



PHOTO BY MARK PAQUIN

Sunrise at Spruce Ledge

See all category winners on the GMC blog:

greenmountainclub.org/2025-photo-contest-winners/

Bring some Long Trail memories home with you with the 2026 Calendar, a Year on the Long Trail (\$12.99, or \$10.39 with code **member20**), greenmountainclub.org/2026calendar



FIELD NOTES

SEASON RECAP

BY KEEGAN TIERNEY, DIRECTOR OF FIELD PROGRAMS

THE 2025 FIELD SEASON WAS ONE OF THE MORE STABLE IN MY TIME, despite constant uncertainty concerning federal funding and operations during the government shutdown.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Senior Trail Technicians Andrew Muller, Matt Vezina, and Garrett Hogan started their season with emergency repairs at **Clarendon Gorge Bridge**. They then returned to their original schedule, building a fully accessible trail to **Jean Haigh Cabin at Wheeler Pond**. The woodshed and ramp to the rear deck are fully accessible as well, and with the privy also modified, users with a wide range of mobility can enjoy the facility.

The crew moved on to sill and porch repairs at **Spruce Peak Shelter**, installing logs the Brattleboro Section prepared last fall. Next they laid the groundwork for next year's repairs to **Taft Lodge**, harvesting and de-barking logs near the **Monroe Trailhead** in Camel's Hump State Park, in consultation with our partners at the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. They also supported the helicopter airlift of the logs to the lodge.

In June, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review was completed and plans approved to build an additional shelter at the popular **Battell Shelter** site to accommodate heavy usage



The new Battell Shelter sits across a clearing from the existing shelter.

there. August's airlift delivered materials, and the crew began work immediately, concluding in October.

Finally, the senior tech team restored sills and replaced the floor at **Beaver Meadow Lodge**. Thanks go to the Sterling Section for their help on the project.

Dylan Norris worked with Project Coordinator Justin Towers to build a new deck, stairs, and ramp for **Minerva Hinckley Shelter** to make it accessible, and to build a new woodshed at **Bryant Camp**.

TRAIL WORK

We had two professional trail crews again in 2025. Returner Owen Maille and newcomer Jivana Esposito led the southern crew, and returner Molly Belvo led the northern crew. Both made progress on complex, multi-year projects, spending three-quarters of their seasons at one site.

First, the crew leaders spent a week finishing the south approach to the 2024-built **Rootville Road Bridge**, adding stone armor and drainage structures.

The northern crew completed a turnpike begun on the **Sucker Brook Trail** in 2024. They then finished stabilizing **Lost Pond Shelter**, jacking up the shelter, removing its listing concrete piers, and setting the shelter on pressure-treated timber cribwork on pads of crushed stone, all done with hand tools in compliance with wilderness area regulations.

They spent 14 weeks relocating the Long Trail north of Route 118 on **Belvidere Mountain**. This was our first test of mechanized equipment to supplement hand tools. We bought a mini-excavator, and plan to train a few seasonal staff members each year so the excavator can work where it can reach the trail and it fits the character of the Long Trail System.

This is an important change in how we approach trail work. Machines are not practical everywhere, but they can reduce labor costs, save time, and reduce the repetitive physical and mental burnout of building bench-cut trails by hand. The Belvidere reroute will be completed next year, with an anticipated opening by the end of the season.



Pinning a rock in place on the new LT route on Belvidere.



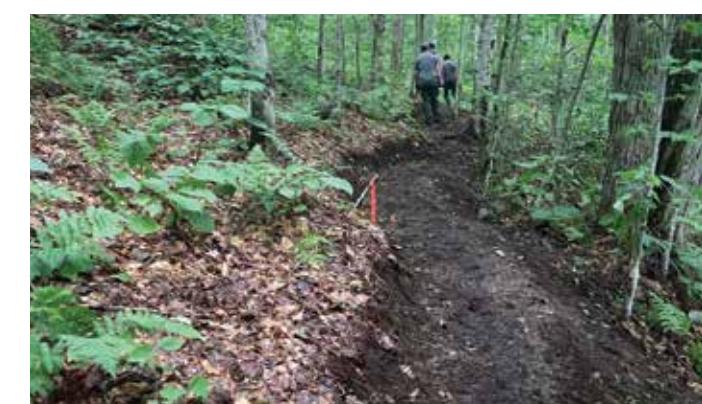
GMC used a mini excavator to cut new tread on Belvidere Mountain.



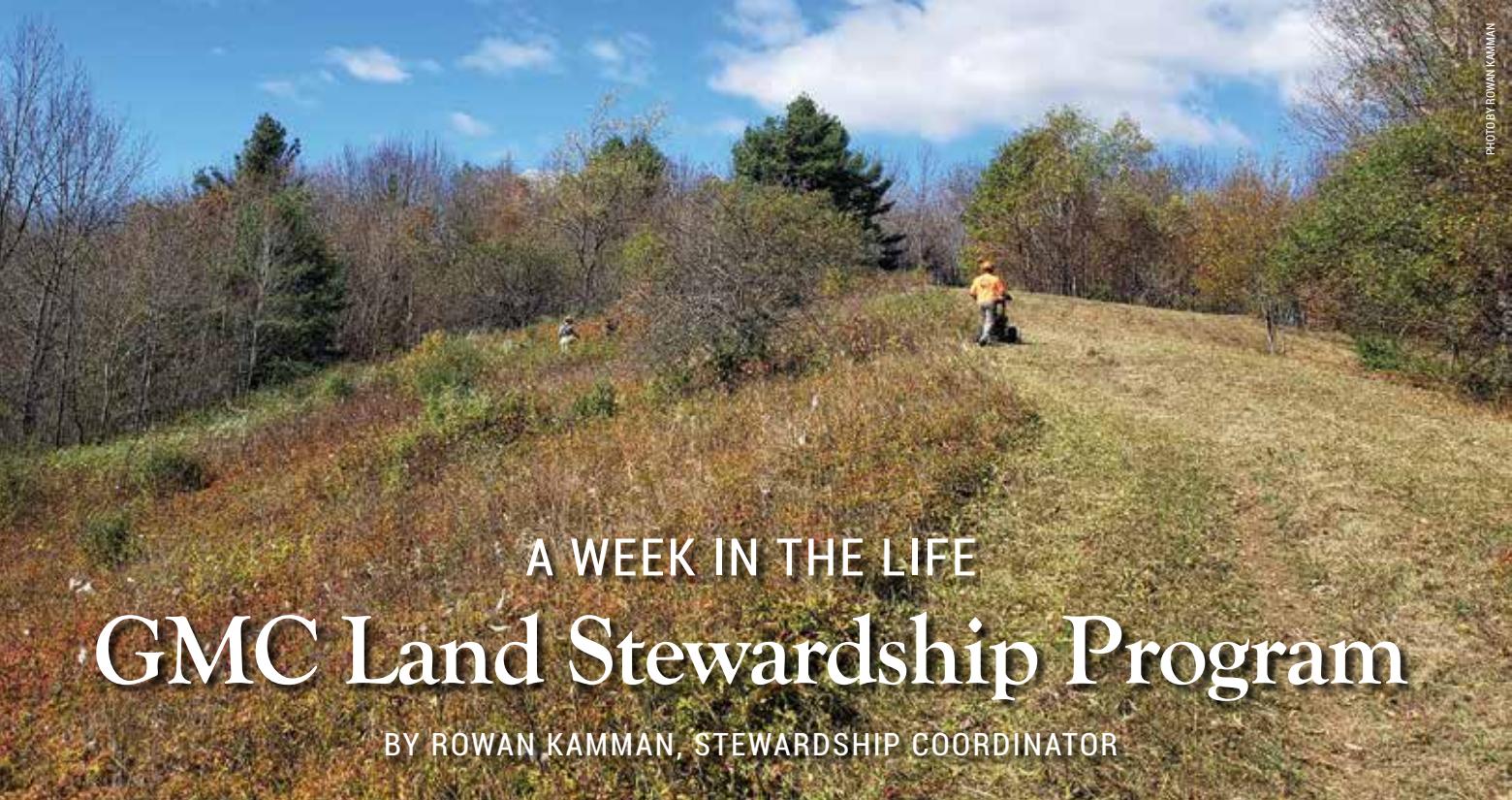
New turnpike on a short relocation on the LT/AT south of Risky Ranch Road.

Led by Lydia Yuhas and Eric Bakken, VLTP crews cleared brush, cut tread, and built stone structures on the relocation. The relocation will replace the notoriously muddy southernmost stretch of the LT – a long-term goal – by moving the trail to higher and drier soil on a sidehill, with proper drainage and a more sustainable layout. It also moves about 1,000 feet of trail from private land to the Green Mountain National Forest, furthering our land conservation goals.

Thanks to the support of members and donors like you, it was a productive and busy season of work on the Long Trail, despite uncertainty and challenge. 



Volunteer Trail Crew cut new tread for the trail reroute at the Massachusetts line.



A WEEK IN THE LIFE

GMC Land Stewardship Program

BY ROWAN KAMMAN, STEWARDSHIP COORDINATOR

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER LAND IS CONSERVED? Between conservation easements, outright ownership, and responsibilities as the local maintaining club for the Appalachian Trail (AT) in Vermont, GMC helps to protect over 30,000 conserved acres along the Long Trail (LT) and AT. Those acres all need annual work, such as boundary maintenance, monitoring, invasive species management, or field mowing, to stay protected. We call this work **land stewardship**.

Fall is a busy time for GMC's land stewardship program. Much of the work is accomplished by our Corridor Monitor volunteers who adopt a section of conserved property. My job as Land Stewardship Coordinator is to train new volunteers, support current monitors, and together ensure that every conserved property gets monitored every year – not to mention the behind-the-scenes work to document and coordinate it all. During one week this fall I enjoyed a particularly varied set of field days.

Interested in Becoming a Corridor Monitor?

Get a taste of stewardship field work by adopting a GMC-managed land parcel and checking its boundaries twice per year. Email Rowan for available parcels at rkamman@greenmountainclub.org.

MONDAY

I went swimming in a beaver pond on GMC's headquarters property (also under our stewardship purview). There's a beaver dam that's a little too close for comfort to a driveway and large culvert. To mitigate flood risk but still retain the ecological benefits that beavers create, we installed a "beaver baffle." We cut a small notch in the dam, connected sixty feet of 12-inch diameter culvert pipe to a large homemade metal cage, sunk the cage in the pond, and lay the pipe through the cut notch and out into the culvert. The underwater cage protects the pipe entrance from beaver activity and creates water suction up and over the top of the dam. The device limits the pond level due to the constant flow through the pipe, lessening the risk of damaging washout to the culvert and nearby road. Because the pipe inflow begins underwater forty feet from the dam, and the outflow is beyond the other side, the beavers can't detect a visible breach. The beavers quickly repaired the notch in the dam around the pipe, and the baffle is functioning as expected. We're eager to see how this device works long term, and I'll be documenting this work in the grant report to those who supported this project.

TUESDAY/THURSDAY

Tuesday and Thursday are computer days, typically a mix of volunteer support, data management, and project documentation or reporting. I process all monitoring reports from volunteers, following up on action items like reported encroachments and

◀ Mowing Arms Hill as part of the A. T. Open Areas Initiative.

updating information in our GIS database. I maintain this and other conservation databases at GMC to keep an archival record of our conserved lands, from legal acquisition documents to recent monitoring reports and everything in between.

WEDNESDAY

I spent the day operating a brush cutter, clearing a former farm field of saplings and invasive plant species. Each fall, GMC partners with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to maintain meadows and fields along the AT. We call this work the AT Open Areas Initiative. These are historic farm fields that the partners have chosen to maintain for their scenic, ecological, and cultural significance. Arms Hill, our name for a 3.1-acre clearing just west of Joe Ranger Road in Pomfret, was on the docket for today. After hauling up two brush cutters, two walk-behind mowers, and attendant fuel and gear, we got to work. The mowers focused on the flatter area, while the two brush cutters went across the steep hillside to cut all woody vegetation in the field within 1-2" of the ground. Left alone, native tree saplings and invasive plants would overgrow the field, obscure the view from the AT, degrade the wildlife habitat and eventually revert to forest. By mowing these Open Areas every two years, the fields remain open and provide a

locally unique trail experience. We plan this work five years in advance, noting how our efforts are progressing year-to-year and adjusting accordingly.

FRIDAY

I wrapped up the week in the hardwood uplands of the northern Green Mountains. When new volunteer Corridor Monitors sign up, we spend a whole day training together on their future adopted property. The training covers reading property surveys, setting and following compass bearings, and how to properly maintain boundary markings. It's detail-oriented and slow-moving work, but also an excellent way to intimately get to know a place and spend time in the woods off trail.

We were working on the boundary of the "Meltzer" property, the largest GMC-owned parcel, which hosts several miles of LT, Tillotson Camp, and two side trails. This volunteer will now help protect several miles of remote conserved property boundary in the big woods of northern Vermont.

Land conservation doesn't end when paperwork is signed. Protecting conserved lands in perpetuity requires consistent work, one week at a time. This is just one week of the work made possible from donors and members like you who financially support the Green Mountain Club. 



Rowan and Mollie Flanigan, Director of Land Conservation, float the baffle cage into place.



Painting a boundary blaze.

BE WELL: How Hiking Can Improve Our Mental Health

BY SAMARA B. ANDERSON, ESQ.

AS A CHILD ON THE FAMILY FARM IN MINNESOTA, I loved spending time in nature, but lost my connection as I grew up, took on a demanding legal career, and worked in New York City. But city living was not sustainable for this country mouse, so after a decade there I moved to Vermont in 2013.

In 2024, I experienced burnout, a state of emotional and physical exhaustion brought on by chronic stress. My nervous system was stuck in sympathetic response, unable to return to a calm homeostasis caused by the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. Something had to change, and it did in a big way. I took time away from work and spent more time being active outdoors. Hiking became my medicine, and slowly, I was able to heal.

Why did it work? Being active outdoors can provide numerous benefits to our physical and mental well-being. Many of us know this intrinsically and feel better after a walk in the woods. But have you ever been curious about the science behind it? Here, we break down some of the research on the connection between the outdoors, the brain, and social-emotional health.

The Biophilia Effect

The biophilia effect states that humans have a genetic tendency to affiliate with other forms of life and are drawn to experiences in nature in order to increase their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Improve Brain Health

Cardio activity (hello, walking or hiking) increases respiration and blood flow to the brain, especially the prefrontal cortex – the part responsible for focus, decision-making, and memory. Researchers at Stanford University found that walking can boost creative thinking by up to 60%. Walking can literally promote both the growth and survival of brain cells, through the simulation of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, to enhance many of our cognitive functions and reduce risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

Reduce Stress and Anxiety

Movement has two powerful healing qualities: (1) it completes the stress cycle, telling our minds that we are safe and can shift into our parasympathetic nervous systems; and (2) it releases “feel-good” neurotransmitters like endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, which

directly reduce stress hormones, improve overall mood, and promote a sense of well-being.

Try an Awe Walk

Adding an element of **mindfulness** to your movement powers up these healing benefits. Mindfulness is the awareness of being present and fully engaged in the moment – free from distraction or judgment. To incorporate mindfulness, there are three elements to bring you into the present moment: (1) choose what you put your attention on; (2) place your awareness in the present moment; and (3) observe and be curious about the small wonders unfolding all around you instead of judging your experiences.

In a recent study, researchers coined this mindful moment outdoors an “awe walk.” Feeling a sense of awe improves feelings of happiness and can increase your overall mood. It can lessen negative emotions and decrease the overall amount of stress hormones in the body, which can lead to body-wide inflammation.

There is a reason why so many people feel a pull to being active in nature: we feel more positive and happier during and after these experiences. As little as five minutes can be enough to increase your executive functioning, processing speed and working memory.

I have found that the key to my increased and sustainable well-being is to engage in activities that I enjoy with others. Hiking is the perfect balance of effort and effortlessness, so it doesn't stress me out. There is so much awe to behold all around Vermont – I am grateful for the opportunity to get outside and experience it.

For more on the research behind mental health and outdoor recreation, visit greenmountainclub.org/hiking-and-mental-health.

Samara Anderson, Esq., is an attorney and yoga teacher based in North Ferrisburgh.

Mindfulness Workshops at GMC

HIKE + GUIDED RESTORATIVE YOGA with Samara Anderson, January 3 and February 28

MINDFULNESS HIKE with Visitor Center Staff Abi Charlebois, December 20

REGISTER: greenmountainclub.org/events-workshops

Hiking OVER 60 THE TRAIL AWAITS



PHOTO BY PHILIP WERNER

This fall, Philip, a new GMC board member, led three group hikes geared at older adults: Haystack Mountain in Wilmington; Mt. Pisgah in the Northeast Kingdom; and Silver Lake in Salisbury.

Trekking Poles

These are especially helpful for those over 60 because they:

- Provide balance on uneven terrain.
- Reduce strain on knees and hips during descents.
- Improve posture and upper body engagement.

Adapt to Changing Abilities

Knees aching? Shorter hikes, gentler inclines, and poles help.

Vision issues? Choose well-marked, wider paths. **Balance**

concerns? Trekking poles, flat trails, and hiking with a buddy add confidence. **Arthritis or joint pain?** Talk to your doctor. Hiking can often help manage arthritis, especially with proper footwear, poles, and gentle terrain.

Know Your Limits

Your endurance and pace may differ from others, or from your younger self. That's okay. Take breaks, don't rush, and turn back if you're feeling unwell or overtired.

Avoid Slippery or Steep Trails

Stick to trails appropriate for your skill level. Many trail apps and guidebooks state difficulty and conditions. Use them to plan accordingly. Consider recent weather and seasonal conditions as well.

COMING UP: Hiking Over 60 Workshop at the GMC Visitor Center. Check greenmountainclub.org/events-workshops for details. 

Two Paths, One Trail

TORI'S STORY – Unsupported Grit

Tori, a full-time nurse at the University of Vermont Medical Center, first set foot on the LT in 2020. A New Hampshire native, she was no stranger to the Green Mountains, but thru-hiking was new territory. With a background in cross-country and marathons, she had long pushed her limits, often asking, "Can I do this?" Time and again, the answer was yes.

The mud, rain, and falls on the Long Trail revealed the resilience she'd been searching for. That was when the fire was lit. Back-to-back, she knocked out the Appalachian Trail in 2021 and the Pacific Crest Trail in 2022. With 5,000 miles behind her, she circled back to the question of speed versus distance and the trail where it all began.

Tori carved out time between shifts to train for an unsupported FKT attempt. Even on the coldest winter days, she showed up with frozen water bottles, a smile, and a relentless drive.

An unsupported attempt strips hiking to its rawest form. There are no resupplies, no crew waiting at trailheads, and no one to lean on but yourself. Decisions are made through a fog of

fatigue, hunger, and isolation.

When she finally hit the trail in July, Tori headed southbound, anxious the night before but calm when her feet started moving. "As soon as I started hiking, I finally felt calm again," she said. "I was like—okay, now all I have to do is this." The calm didn't last long. "After that first day, it got really dry," she said. It was the early end of what would become Vermont's ongoing drought. "I made the mistake of depending on water sources that had always been reliable. I went the extra mile to chase water—or gamble that the next shelter would have some. Luckily, the rain basin at Stark's Nest saved me."

Blisters arrived in her first 24 hours. "I wasn't expecting that," she said. "I'd switched to a new version of my usual shoes, and my feet just didn't love them. I hadn't packed much for foot care, so I was a little worried—but I didn't let myself dwell on it."

Her simple setup was a gift. "I could just throw down my polycro [ground cloth] and quilt and sleep," she said. "It made things easy, but not too cozy. I'd get cold enough to wake up and keep moving."

continued on page 15



PHOTO BY JOCELYN SMITH



The night before, Tori packs her backpack with everything she'll need for her entire journey.

THIS SUMMER, Tori "Chewy" Constantine and Tara "Candy Mama" Dower each set a Fastest Known Time (FKT) record on the Long Trail (LT), in different categories. Their stories show how the Long Trail challenges—and rewards—all who step onto it.

BY JOCELYN SMITH



PHOTO BY ROWAN CANNON



I have a team I trust making decisions for me. People underestimate the weight of the mental load."

The supported vibe is electric. Headlights bob through the dark as pacers trade shifts. Imagine quick transitions at trailheads, shoes swapped, calories downed, hugs exchanged before she's shoved back onto the trail. Every second matters, but so does morale. Supported attempts rely as much on logistics and teamwork as they do on individual grit.

Tara faced the same mud, roots, and sleep deprivation as Tori. She had to trust her crew, trust her training, and trust that her legs would hold up mile after mile. The pressure of a record attempt can be heavy, and with people counting on you, quitting isn't easy.

That trust carried her all the way to the southern terminus in 3 days, 18 hours, 30 minutes, and 7 seconds—a

continued on page 15

TARA'S STORY – Supported Speed

Tara set the supported FKT in August—an attempt fueled by crowds, community, and public support. With a background in ultrarunning, she was no stranger to long miles or grueling days, but the Long Trail posed a challenge all its own. Unlike her 40-day Appalachian Trail FKT, where she focused on creating a sustainable routine until the final moments, the comparatively short Long Trail meant she had to push her body to its absolute limits from the very first moment.

Tara's dedicated crew (a few dozen, led by coach Rascal) paced her every step of the way and waited at road crossings with food, gear, and encouragement. While carrying her snacks and water was a physical help, Tara says the greatest contribution of the crew is managing the mental load of the attempt. They gave her updates on her pace and suggested times to take a nap or change approach. "These records are in no way an individual sport—to optimize my performance,

BEYOND the Stopwatch

FKTs might sound extreme—stopwatches, sleep deprivation, and records measured in days instead of weeks. But in many ways, they're still just thru-hikes: one step after another across Vermont's rugged spine. The same mud, rain, and rocks that trip up a weekend backpacker will test even the fastest runner.

"Hike your own hike" is a reminder that stepping onto the Long Trail is an accomplishment worth celebrating, whether you're

savoring every mile, chasing a personal goal, or stringing together 272 miles in a blur. FKTs are one version of that story, but so is every backpacker who shoulders a pack, takes a breath at a summit, and chooses to keep going. Thank you for being a part of every hiker's hike through your support of our work on the trail.



TRAIL TALK

Accessible Trails

GMC SENIOR TRAIL TECHNICIANS FINISHED UP SITE WORK AT JEAN HAIGH CABIN ON WHEELER POND THIS SEASON, and the cabin is now accessed by a trail that meets the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Increased trail accessibility throughout the Long Trail System is a key focus of GMC's current strategic plan, and meeting this benchmark gets us closer to achieving this goal.

But what do we mean when we say "accessible trails" and how can a narrow, rugged footpath become more accessible to users regardless of ability?

Terms Used in Outdoor Recreation Accessibility

ADA: The often referenced Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990, is a federal civil rights law that bans discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. The act includes design standards for public spaces including durable surfaces, very gentle grades and cross slopes, and trails of at least 36 inches wide (see below) to accommodate

wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

ABA: The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), passed in 1968, predates the ADA. More comprehensive than the ADA, this act regulates federal buildings and physical spaces, which includes shelters and privies on the Long Trail System in the Green Mountain National Forest.

Universally Accessible: Universal design is a concept in which products and environments are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized equipment. Universally accessible trails typically meet or exceed the standards in the ADA or ABA, including features that improve access for people with low vision, neurodivergence, or other access considerations. Camel's Hump View Trail, with its gentle grades, wide surface, and numerous benches, is a Universally Accessible Trail.

Adaptive: This term is used frequently in the outdoor recreation world and generally refers to trails and equipment that make it possible for folks with disabilities to participate in a

specific activity, like mountain biking, skiing, or hiking. Adaptive trails may meet certain width and grade requirements that make it possible for folks using mobility devices like adaptive mountain bikes, hiking-specific wheelchairs, or sit skis to access the trail.

Adaptive equipment and programming is constantly evolving, and these advances are helping more folks access the Long Trail.

Accessibility on the Long Trail System

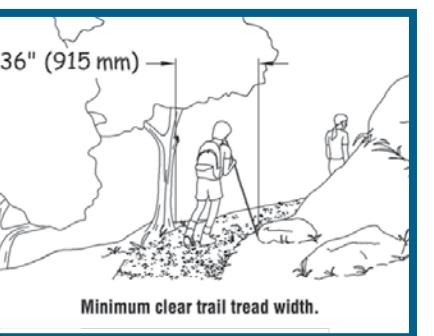
GMC typically adheres to the guidelines and standards issued in the FSTAG. The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation use these federal guidelines as well, so it's a good reference for the entire Long Trail System.

The FSTAG meets or exceeds guidelines in the ABA, but it does not strive to make every trail accessible. It provides clear exemptions with sound criteria and reasoning, and recognizes that changing the nature of a trail, in the backcountry for example, can have an impact on the hiker experience. It focuses on meeting accessibility guidelines

where a clear opportunity exists, like front country parks and nature areas, and certain backcountry infrastructure facilities, like GMC-managed shelters and privies. In general, the FSTAG applies to "any new or altered hiking/walking trails that currently intersect with a trailhead or trail that substantially complies."

Most hiking trails that adhere to the FSTAG employ exceptions of some kind to due to the technical and environmental elements of the trail, so they are usually not "accessible trails" based on publicly understood definitions of such.

Detailed accessibility standards around trail width, grade, passing areas, and obstacles are available from the federal Access Board.



Building and maintaining trails and facilities that are as accessible to as many people as reasonably possible is one of GMC's priorities. Our organization recognizes that accessibility exists on a spectrum, and while fully ADA or ABA-compliant trails are not possible on much of the Long Trail System, we can make improvements to make our trails available to more people.

First, we will need to engage partners and accessible trail users to ensure we are pursuing projects that will truly serve the intended community of users. Vermont Adaptive and the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council are leading advances in accessible and adaptive recreation statewide. VTGC's Trail Accessibility Hub is helping



The accessible trail to Jean Haigh Cabin. GMC trail techs dug the trail down to mineral soil at an accessible grade, then added a layer of sure-pack, a fine stone aggregate that creates a compact and durable surface.

to advance trail accessibility statewide by providing resources to help trail managers build new and adapt existing trails.

We are committed to identifying locations that lend themselves to accessible upgrades and use, like shelters and visitor centers near a road, the Short Trail at GMC headquarters, and relatively flat sections of the trail like the LT from FR10 to Little Rock Pond.

After forging partnerships and listening to users to gain better understanding of how to serve the adaptive community, we need to get assessments of what upgrade work will entail, then evaluate costs and finally find funding. We aim to complete our assessment by 2028.

Estimates GMC has gotten for building accessible trails range from \$50 to \$125 per linear foot, or \$250,000 to \$660,000 per mile. While this may sound expensive, it's only 50% more costly than what we put into the Burrows Trail to make it sustainable. Not a bad price when you consider that more people will be able to access areas of the Long Trail System and enjoy Vermont's beautiful outdoor spaces. 

By Chloe Miller with support from Keegan Tierney and Sharon Plumb of Vermont Trails and Greenways Council.

Currently Accessible Parts of the LT System

Most moldering privies GMC has built since 2010 are fully ABA accessible, in accordance with Forest Service standards. While some may question why we build accessible structures in remote areas that currently lack accessible trails, it's a good reminder that greater accessibility benefits the community as a whole, and many folks may find the larger space and built-in handrails of our current accessible design helpful. Plus, these structures are designed to last several decades, and adaptive equipment or accessible trails will have come a long way by then.

Thundering Falls Boardwalk, Barnes Camp Boardwalk

See iconic views of Vermont on these two wheelchair-accessible boardwalks. Thundering Falls Boardwalk, near Killington, is part of the Vermont Appalachian Trail and extends 900 feet to a viewing platform of Thundering Falls. Barnes Camp Boardwalk is part of the Long Trail through Smugglers' Notch, with 660 feet of accessible boardwalk through a wetland.

Jean Haigh Cabin

Thanks to support from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, Jean Haigh Cabin now has an accessible access trail, wheelchair-accessible ramps to enter of the cabin, and an accessible woodshed and privy.

More accessible trails statewide ►





PHOTO BY CHRIS WOODSIDE

◀ From left, Mr. Ion, Mrs. Ion, Candelight, and Velveeta on the summit of Camel's Hump, 2016.

strength, and some luck. He even wonders sometimes why trails have to always go up ridges.

Nat is usually the one who says, "Are you sure? Do we have the money? Have you thought it through?" And I'm the one who says, "It will be okay. Let's try this! Let's do it!" I've talked him into doing things that he later enjoyed or said were the right thing, and he has talked me out of spending more money than we have or doing something ridiculous, like getting a cow. (Yes, I once suggested we get a cow for the backyard.)

It's this difference between the two of us—my tendency to look at the bright side and his to look at what's hard—that led to a ten-year-old hiker giving us our trail names. Let me tell that story.

Nat and I had hiked the LT as far as Route 4 in 1987, the year we thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail (AT). The AT diverges east of the LT at that spot. Finally in 2015, we went back to hike the rest of the LT. We started north from Route 4 on the afternoon of Thursday, July 2, for the first of three section hikes.

On our second day out, we camped at the David Logan Shelter along with a father and daughter. I do not recall their names now, but I remember them very well. She was 10 years old and keeping up admirably with her dad on their end-to-end hike.

She watched Nat and me setting up camp and talking about our trips. I was probably saying our day had been wonderful and he was chiming in on parts that had been awful.

Out of the blue, she said, "I'm going to give you the trail names Mr. and Mrs. Ion." Now she had our attention.

"Because you," she said, pointing to me, "are the positive force, and you," pointing to Nat, "are the negative force."

We laughed. And she was right. One of the traditions of long-distance hiking is that those who cross paths get to know each other very quickly. They see traits in each other that, on their own, they might not identify.

There is such vulnerability and trust out on the trail. Going back to do the LT was a leap for us. We had not been hiking long distance for a while. I was in my mid-50s, and Nat was edging closer to his 60th birthday. Everything felt harder than it used to, especially carrying full packs and covering long miles. (Of course, I would not admit that, being the positive force!) We were also learning again how to just trust each other which, frankly, was a great relief. We'd been through some hard things the previous few years. I was pushing to write a book and he was in the process of changing careers, and there were some scary, uncertain times for us.

And here came the wise sage in the form of a young hiker. In what other setting in life could a 10-year-old say to people in their 50s, "I'm giving you new names"?

When we had hiked the AT, our trail name had been linked to two other people. We were called the Eight-Legged Thing because we did the distance with our friends Phil and Cay, and we moved like a long creature with eight legs. It was our friend Jim who gave us that name, announcing one evening at camp to someone: "You need to meet these guys; they're an eight-legged thing."

Now on the LT we didn't have our other four legs, so we needed trail names that were all our own.

In 2015, we covered about 47 miles over a few days. In 2016, we hiked 95 miles, and in 2017, we finished the last stretch—all of it as Mr. and Mrs. Ion. All that time, Nat would be the one who could issue warnings about difficult stretches while I would be the one saying, "Of course we can do that."

I believe our positive and negative forces helped us navigate the trail and life in general.

Our ten-year-old end-to-ender saw that in us. If she is reading this, thank you. Completing our LT miles with those names helped me see the importance of our differences making our partnership strong. I once overheard my negative Mr. Ion telling someone, "We're at our best on the trail." ☺

Christine Woodside is a writer and the editor of Appalachia, the Appalachian Mountain Club's mountain journal. She and her husband, Nat Eddy, live in Deep River, Connecticut. They thru-hiked the AT in 1987, have climbed New Hampshire's 4,000-footers, and are the parents of two grown daughters.

TORI'S STORY

Continued from page 10

By the southern half, pain had replaced nerves. "I expected the northern section to be the hardest—those technical miles around Mansfield and Camel's Hump—but that was my home turf," she said. "By Killington, the foot pain was brutal. When I realized I still had ninety miles left, that number hit me like a wall." Sleep became survival. "At first, I planned on two to three hours a night," she said. "Towards the end, I was so sleep-deprived I was taking dirt naps—fifteen, thirty minutes here and there, sometimes an hour if I was lucky. It was just enough to reset."

And then came the loneliness. "When I hit the AT section, I was desperate to talk to someone," she said. "On that last day through Glastonbury, I saw people, but still felt so alone. I was ready to see my friends—to stop being my own crew."

Chasing the unsupported record, last set by Mikaela Osler in 2021, was the challenge Tori wanted. "I come from thru-hiking, not ultrarunning," she said. "Unsupported felt like my niche—it let me lean on my backpacking strengths."

After nearly six days of grinding forward, that stubborn drive paid off: **Tori stopped the clock at 5 days, 19 hours, and 29 minutes**—a mark that proves what's possible when you bet entirely on yourself. ☺

TARA'S STORY

Continued from page 11

blistering time that showed what's possible when one runner and an entire crew move as one.

Tara's motivation is fueled by community, too. "I love spending time on the trails and just seeing what my body can do. As women, we're not often encouraged to go for these crazy speed records or really break limits. Men have been encouraged to chase speed and success forever. I want to prove that women can be just as successful and can break these overall records."

With Tara's visibility and platform also came the opportunity to fundraise for a cause, and Tara chose GMC's Long Trail Day fundraiser. Tara's community collectively donated over \$17,000, which will go back into the trails and summits she traversed. ☺

Mr. and Mrs. Ion

BY CHRISTINE WOODSIDE

IN ONE OF MY FAVORITE PHOTOS OF MY HUSBAND'S AND MY THREE HIKES TO COMPLETE THE LONG TRAIL (LT), we are standing with two other hikers on the summit of Camel's Hump. We squint in the sun. Behind us, the rocks, trees, and clouds fall away to infinity.

I always say that this was a great day. What a beautiful mountain.

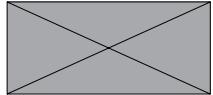
My husband, Nat, says of that day: "I hated that mountain."

That's the way it is with us. I tend to look at the world with wild optimism. I see an incredible hunk of rock, Camel's Hump, and I don't remember in that moment how hard it was to climb it. He looks at that mountain and the first thing he thinks about is that climbing mountains demands focus,



GREEN MOUNTAIN CLUB
4711 Waterbury-Stowe Road
Waterbury Center, VT 05677

Periodicals Postage
PAID
Waterbury Center
and Additional Offices



Long Trail News is printed using 0% VOC, Soy Based Inks, 100% Certified Renewable Energy and paper that is certified by Bureau Veritas to the FSC standards.

Embrace Winter at the GMC Visitor Center

From gentle adventures to workshops to level up your skills

- ✿ **Guided Hike and Yoga:** January 2 and February 28
- ✿ **Family Storytime and Short Trail Hikes:** First Saturdays of the month
- ✿ **Guided Short Trail Hikes:** Third Saturdays of the month
- ✿ **Backpacking Skills Workshops:** January 24, March 28
Dive deeper into backcountry cooking and food prep, gear specifics, and itinerary planning
- ✿ **Hiking Over 60** with hiking expert Philip Werner (*date TBD*)
- ✿ **Wilderness First Aid** (*date TBD*)
- ✿ **Watercolor Workshop** with Kati Christoffel (*date TBD*)

Annual Outdoor Adventure Speaker Series

Thursday evenings, late January – March. Full lineup coming soon

- ✿ State Climatologist Dr. Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux
- ✿ Fish and Wildlife Small Mammals Biologist Alyssa Bennett
- ✿ Adventures on the North Country National Scenic Trail

FULL DETAILS, registration, and more programs online at
greenmountainclub.org/events-workshops

