Chapter Chair’s Corner

By Elizabeth Ryan

Boston Chapter Annual Meeting

Thank you to everyone who attended last November’s Boston Chapter Annual Meeting!

For those who weren’t able to attend the remote session, I’d like to take this opportunity to reiterate my thanks to our out-going officers and introduce our new officers.

First, thank you to Cindy Crosby for three years as Chapter Chair. Among Cindy’s many contributions is a more disciplined process of setting goals—aligning the AMC’s mission and vision—across the Chapter. These goals enable each activity committee, and the Chapter as a whole, to work toward larger initiatives, such as AMC 150, in a meaningful and measurable way. Although the pandemic threw wrenches in our plans at every turn, these goals create a point for volunteers to rally around as we bring back in-person activities. Cindy reinforced the need to recruit new officers on a regular basis, to ensure the long-term health of our organization and introduce new voices.

Vice Chair Rami Haddad also stepped down after several years of service. Rami developed the new Boston Chapter website, critical to our goal of strengthening the recreational network to provide a source of information for both members and volunteers. Looking ahead, the Chapter will continue Rami’s work to build the Chapter’s

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“I look forward to working with the new and returning officers as well as all our volunteers.”

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digital resources and support more activity committees as they migrate to the shared website.

As Treasurer, long-serving volunteer Jeff Carlson steadily guided the development of more robust budgeting processes. Jeff’s tireless efforts helped the activity committees pinpoint cost reductions, highlight overlapping efforts, and better target their financial efforts to align with our annual goals.

My deepest ongoing thanks go to Marjorie O’Malley, as she begins her third term as Secretary. Her diligent notetaking at our monthly Executive Committee meetings, and regular communication with the team, keeps us all informed.

Our three Members at Large—Julia Davis, Katrina Judicke, and Brooks Sherman—are all continuing from last year. Special thanks to Brooks for his efforts pulling together the 2021 Annual Meeting.

Our new officers include:

- Jesse Waites, Vice Chair, who is stepping up from his role as the Chair of the 20s & 30s Committee. Jesse, a software developer, will lead the ongoing efforts to improve our website and communications.

- Bill Sample, Treasurer, comes from a corporate accounting background and is well positioned to carry on this work.

Thank you again to all our outgoing Chapter officers. I look forward to working with the new and returning officers as well as all our volunteers.

Many people associate hiking and backpacking with the AMC, and they are correct. These two activities are the cornerstone upon which the AMC was founded, and today enthusiasts find many adventures to enjoy with experienced leaders. What a delight to discover a vibrant and active Ski Committee leading downhill and cross-country ski trips in back- and front-country, that welcomes both experienced skiers and those eager to improve their skills.

I was pleased to join a cross-country ski trip to the Waterville Valley, NH Nordic Center on Saturday, January 29, a day that blessed Boston with more than a foot of snow. Luckily, my crew arrived on Friday evening, before the storm hit, and enjoyed perfect skiing conditions on Saturday.

Led by Mike Barry, Mary MacDonald, and Sheila Spitzak, along with Ruth Langh of the Worcester Chapter, our group of seven traversed well-groomed trails for more than 5 hours, traveling 13 miles. Due to the heavy snowfall, there were far fewer visitors than expected so we enjoyed lightly populated trails. It was a perfect day for skiing, punctuated by a strong camaraderie that developed throughout the day. The conditions were superb and the trails well maintained, but what I valued most was the ability of our group to welcome new members by embracing varying levels of experience. AMC works best when we are truly inclusive and all participants—those who are super experienced and those honing their skills—learn from each other, enjoy shared experiences, and extend a hand in friendship.

This was my first experience skiing with the AMC, and I came away proud to be a part of this group. I look forward to enjoying more trips with the Ski Group, and encourage all interested parties to check out their many and varied trips before the winter slips away.
Finding Trips and Activities Online

Trip listings are now exclusively online!

**Boston Chapter trips:**
- Visit the Trip Listings Digest at [www.amcboston.org](http://www.amcboston.org), where you’ll always find two months’ worth of trips.

**All AMC trips** (including Boston Chapter-led trips):
- Log in to [https://activities.outdoors.org/login](http://activities.outdoors.org/login) with your AMC account (your AMC Member Center account or AMC Online store login).

If you have not yet created an AMC account, go to the above link and fill in the information in the box on the screen’s left side to create one.

If you have an account but have forgotten your username or password, scroll down and click the I forgot my username or password link at the bottom of the screen.

After signing up for a trip, you will receive a registration confirmation via email, which can help coordinate carpooling with other participants. You can also use your account dashboard to keep track of your upcoming trips.

Have a Story or Photos to Share?

*We’re always interested in hearing about your AMC adventures, experiences, and outdoor tips.*

For submission guidelines, visit [https://amcboston.org/eMUD/MUD_Guidelines.pdf](http://https://amcboston.org/eMUD/MUD_Guidelines.pdf). For more information or to submit an article, contact the Mud editor at edex.edit@verizon.net.

Attend an Executive Committee Meeting

*Boston Chapter Executive Committee meetings are open to all AMC members.*

Come meet the chapter leaders and share your ideas. Meetings are held September through June on the first Monday of the month. Due to Covid, chapter meetings are currently held remotely.

For more information, contact the Chapter Chair at chair@amcboston.org.
Nordic Skiing in Paradise

West Branch Pond Camps in AMC’s Maine 100-Mile Wilderness

By Mike Barry

Occasionally, the weather and snow lines up to deliver a perfect weekend of Nordic touring; a few times a decade it also lines up when you are with a great group, and a perfect place and terrain. Such was the chapter trip that nine of us lucky skiers had in February at privately run West Branch Pond Camps (WBPC) deep inside AMC’s 70,000+ acre Maine forest preserve in the 100-mile wilderness near Greenville, in between Moosehead Lake and Baxter State Park.

What made this trip so special is the hospitality of third-generation family-run WBPC, headed by Eric Stirling with support from his family and staff. WBPC has been a sporting camp in the Maine tradition since 1910. Eric is a skier, and since he took over operations 15 years ago, has been marking a world-class network of trails and grooming them, or not, depending on his clients’ desires.

He now has a trail network of about 35 miles (almost 60 miles if you include all the variations, plus the AMC’s full 125 miles) that he will either cut tracks, just pack out, or leave alone for your novice to advanced back-country touring.

WBPC is the best of both worlds: remote, rustic and off the grid, yet with showers/bathrooms in a central bath house, electric power from 5 pm to 9 pm, and new outhouses close to the cabins for quick comfort at night. Plus, you can drive there!

Better yet is the camaraderie in the dining area where we rehash the day while enjoying superb and hearty homemade meals.

I’d been running trips out of WBPC since 2010; first lodge-to-lodge tours then moving on to exploring the back-country opportunities on the old logging roads on the ridge facing the camp. President’s Society member and trip leader Jim Hutchinson joined us last year to continue the “hard core” back-country touring while I offered a front-country experience now that Eric can groom the trails....

We arrived with a deep snow base on the one warm day in a month (37°F). As I was taking the front-country group on our shakedown ski around the pond in my micro-skin Fischer Superlights (48mm tip), I was worried that the predicted plunging temperatures that night would make the snow hard as a rock. Sometimes plunging temperatures bring snow, and we got 36 hours and another 18 to 24 inches of it!

After bundling up, our group loved it and surprised me by wanting to do more of a back-country than front-country experience. On the last day, the front-country group completed a back-country ravine traverse that had been packed out only by the other group the day before.

We’ve already booked our next trip for February 2023, but will re-brand it as all Nordic back-country, some intermediate and some advanced.

For more information: https://westbranchpondcamps.com.
Ski to the B-52!

A Nordic Ski from AMC’s Lyford Pond Camp to the B-52 Tail Section and Main Crash Site

By Mike Barry

On a cold, clear morning on January 24, 1963, a B-52 bomber with nine crew members took off for a low-altitude training flight from Westover Air Force Base, MA. The flight would take them across Northern Maine to test the new ground-following radar technology that would enable B-52’s to penetrate the Soviet Union at low level to avoid improving radar defenses (the Cold War was on).

While flying northwest at 500 feet and 280 knots, and approaching Elephant Mountain near Greenville (over what is now part of the AMC’s 70,000+ acres in Maine), the aircraft encountered turbulence. As the pilot started to climb, increasing turbulence and stress caused the bolts securing the vertical tail fin to shear off, and the plane rolled.

The pilot was unable to regain control and ordered the crew to eject and bail out. Due to the low altitude, six crew members were unable to eject and died in the crash. Three people ejected; one hit a tree and suffered fatal injuries. Two survived, but were immobilized with severe injuries and 5 feet of snow. Despite the -30°F temperatures that night, they survived until rescuers reached them the next day.

The crash site has since been made into a poignant memorial, visited by many tourists—via snowmobile in winter and car via dirt roads in the warm months.

My Excursion to the Crash Site

Since 2008, I’ve been skiing in the AMC’s Maine Woods and heard about the B-52 crash story, and it became a quest of mine to lead a trip there. The tail and main crash site are both within ski-able distances from Lyford Pond Lodge, depending on conditions—if you know where you’re going!

The vertical tail fin is on AMC’s land on the southeast shoulder of Elephant Mountain, only 4 miles from Lyford and a mile off the marked Baker Pond loop trail. But it isn’t well marked. The main crash site on the northwest shoulder of Elephant Mountain is easier to find, but the distance is a little daunting at 16 miles, especially if conditions are bad.

In 2020, on a solo trip, I found the tail fin site. Conditions were optimal, there was good snow, but not too much, and the trail had been tracked out and easy to follow. But the main crash site was unattainable alone.

This year, leader Peter Logan and I decided to host a 5-day trip for both the tail and main crash sites. This would allow for the 7-mile ski into and out of Lyford, one day for the tail section and two for the main crash site attempts (there are routes from the north and south). We didn’t expect many takers for this unique trip, so booked just a 4-bed cabin.

How do you screen for such a trip? Much of the skiing would be on packed out, tracked, and even groomed trails with some distance on snowmobile routes. However, some of it could also be breaking trail

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through several feet of snow; or worse, we could encounter very hard snow after a thaw-freeze cycle.

We wound up with a full crew of four strong skiers. Our first day was to be the day after a big Nor'easter, so it was a good thing we planned on a 5-day trip because we had to delay 24 hours. The snow was fantastic, almost too fantastic—18 inches of fresh snow on top of a good base on the ground already! The club had also recently lost two groomers, so grooming or even packing out the trail to Lyford was minimal (but preferred by our group).

Our first full day was a nice and cold “green wax” day as we headed to the much-closer tail section. Luckily, a strong couple had tracked out the Baker Pond loop trail the day before to make our going much easier, leaving only about 1.5 miles of cutting track through 2 to 3 feet of snow. The hardest part was the last ¼-mile, up the lower slope of Elephant Mountain. Luckily, two of us had kicker skins to help break things as we traversed up the trail. We reached the tail section by 1 pm, had a nice lunch, and were back in camp by 4 pm.

Next was our attempt at the main crash site via the longer, but easier and better marked, route from the south via Horseshoe Pond. We made good progress to the pond, only having to cut trail for about a mile on flat terrain past the Pearl Pond campsites then crossing the wind-swept pond. After again breaking trail in 2 to 3 feet of snow on a difficult half-mile upslope, we reached little-used Scammon Road, which we weregambling to be packed out by the occasional snowmobile. It was!

The rest was a long, but uneventful 4 miles on snowmobile trails with quite a bit of climbing. It started to get warm in the bright sun, and I had to put a little violet wax on the middle of my kick zone to get grip on the climb. We pulled into the main crash site at 1:30 pm, took the perquisite photos, and were on our way back down to camp by 2 pm (my absolute latest turnaround time!). We glided into Lyford at 4:45 pm, beating dusk by 30 minutes and feeling very satisfied. It was mostly downhill back to Lyford, and with following our cut tracks, much faster on the way back.

I’m not sure if there will be a future trip, but there’s the shorter northern route following old logging roads around Baker Pond, which I may need to check out one day. The good news: probably no snowmobile roads. The bad news: more miles of cutting trail!

For more information:
https://visitmaine.com/things-to-do/hiking-climbing/b52-crash-site
https://themainehighlands.com/story/b-52-crash-site
https://www.outdoors.org/destinations/registry/mainelittle-lyford/
New Programs and Opportunities for Local Walks & Hikes

By Judith Watson

The Local Walks and Hikes (LWH) group has recently introduced several new and exciting trips and events.

Just before the holidays, Mary MacDonald—an alumnus of the Boston Chapter Fall 2021 leadership program and new LWH leader—led our first Accessible Local Walk.

First Accessible Walk & Wheel: Holiday 2021 at Rest-Stop-Ranch

Mary writes:

“Growing a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Boston Chapter means, in part, having trip leaders that sponsor Accessible Trips. After I joined Boston’s Local Walks & Hikes Committee, I asked about becoming an Accessible Leader. Every trip I lead will have, at minimum, a nearby parking area and restroom. These elements help ensure that those of us with differing abilities can feel a greater sense of comfort and inclusion.

“Our first Accessible Trip, led by LWH Committee Chair Judith Watson and me, was held on Saturday, December 4, at Topsfield’s Rest-Stop-Ranch Respite Retreat Center & Accessible Gardens. We enjoyed a one-hour educational presentation, followed by a one-hour exploration of the wheelchair-accessible garden trails. Our group of 10 included one wheelchair user and nine ambulatory participants. The group enjoyed the sunshine, late autumn garden tour, and learning more about each other.

“We plan to host more Accessible Trips at Rest-Stop-Ranch again this spring, summer, fall, and during the holidays. Any participants, leaders, or co-leaders who wish to join or discuss Accessible Trips, please contact us at localwalks@amcboston.org.”

Absolute Beginner Backpack

In mid-November, two of our newest leaders—Joanne Newton and Bob Vogel—led an Absolute Beginner Backpack at Ponkapoag Pond in the Blue Hills. This trip introduced local hikers to the fun of overnight camping without having to leave Greater Boston. After a short hike in, carrying all their gear, the intrepid group set up tents, cooked supper, and settled into their sleeping bags. Happily, all survived the experience and several left the next morning, asking “When can we go again?”

Winter Hiking Workshop

Our Winter Hiking Workshop, held on a wet Saturday in December, helped local hikers feel more comfortable and confident getting on the trails in winter conditions. We started with a “show and tell” of winter gear—everything from snowshoes to winter boots to headgear. We then hiked 5 miles through the woodland trails of Sudbury’s Nobscot Hill and Tippling Rock, stopping along the way to discuss other important aspects of winter hiking such as layering, food, hydration and what to carry in your pack. It’s exciting to see many workshop participants on the trails this winter, putting their learnings into practice.

We look forward to offering more programs and events in the coming months, including an Introduction to Hiking for new AMC members. If you’re interested in becoming a leader or just learning more about our group, please contact Judith Watson, localwalks@amcboston.org.
The Outdoors as a Spiritual Practice
by Laura Cerier

I grew up in Maine at a time when we didn’t know that being outdoors was good for us. The need for a prescription for outdoor experiences, known as Outdoors RX, wasn’t envisioned yet. But by simply shooing me out of the house to play, my parents planted the seed for what would become my spiritual practice: seeking the outdoors.

My parents instilled in me a great love of the outdoors. My mother would take me on walks through the woods, and point out the small growing things she saw: Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Creeping Jenny, Queen Anne’s Lace, Lady Slippers. When the lake was frozen in the winter, my mother would sit me in a cardboard box with a rope attached and drag me behind her—exhilarated—as she skated around the cove.

My father took my three older sisters and me skiing every Sunday from the time I was five years old. We played “follow-the-leader” down the mountain and compared how many times we fell and how many runs we got in. When my sisters grew up and moved away, and it was just me and my dad, he would point out the things he noticed while riding up on the chairlift: Witch’s Broom, a bird’s nest, even far-away Mount Washington if the air was just right.

My father also took me sailing when I was little, and rowing in his red rowboat. My parents and I would take day-long canoe trips along the Saco River. Later, we took many bicycle rides together, along familiar country roads and on the Cape Cod and Rhode Island rail trails. When I was older, I took up snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. And still later, kayaking. And all along there was hiking. Always hiking. No matter the weather, no matter the season, I could just open the door, get outside, and hike.

The Outdoors Grounds Me

Being outdoors and doing some kind of physical activity is where and when I feel the most at home and most spiritual—grounded, calm, quiet in mind and body. When the world gets to be too much, I seek the outside. There, whether hiking, biking, kayaking, skiing, snowshoeing, or cross-country skiing, I find release, respite, and peace.

Some people perform yoga or meditate or pray or attend a religious service as their spiritual practice. Being outside and moving my body is mine. I call part of my spiritual practice noticing. I see what might be revealed to me: beavers’ lodges that I kayaked past in spring and summer but did not see for the brush and

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leaves and vines. Turtle eggs that hatched by the side of a pond. A snake sunning itself on a rock ledge. A snake swimming alongside my kayak in the Charles River.

Hiking the Warner Trail

One hike that I have found very spiritual is the Warner Trail, which stretches 33 miles from Sharon, MA to Diamond Hill State Park in Cumberland, RI. Establishing a woodland trail connecting the southern edge of the Boston area with the trail system in Rhode Island was first envisioned by AMC members Charles Warner and John Hudson prior to World War II. Work maintaining and caring for the trail, and sometimes relocating it as development encroaches, continues today, with help from friends of the Warner Trail.

I first started hiking the Warner Trail with the AMC in 2010. I knew no one when I showed up that first Sunday; I only knew that I wanted to hike this trail, which meandered so much I’d likely get lost if attempted on my own.

Having hiked the Warner Trail for more than a decade now, I feel as though I’ve become part of its history. It’s astounding that I’m hiking a trail established 75 years ago. I get the same sense when I visit the old cathedrals in England and France.

I also like to think about what the countryside looked like when the Trail was being built. A place called Bluff Head has a wonderful view to the south. What did that view look like back then? Those houses and sheds and shops weren’t there. The trees weren’t as tall. Surely you couldn’t hear so many cars on the highway.

A core group hikes the Trail year after year. These people have become my friends and, in a sense, family. I fill different parts of my life with different communities and that, to me, is what makes living so rich.

Something happens when you spend time outdoors doing physical activity and share it with others. The ties are stronger. The relationships are deeper. When I’m in the woods or mountains or by a river with a friend, or the Warner Trail group, we don’t have to speak much, or at all. We experience something special, together. For me, it is spiritual—a deep connection with people who, like me, consider spending time outside vital to our well-being, mental health, soul, and spirit. I count as my best friends those with whom I share outdoor time.

If you can’t find me—if I’m not answering your email, if I’m not answering your text, if I’m not answering your call—you can be pretty sure that I’m somewhere outdoors, moving my body, by myself or with a friend or group of friends, feeding my spirit. What a gift my parents gave to me all those years ago.
Brief History of AMC Ponkapoag Camp

The “Folsom Cabin,” one of the historic buildings at the Ponkapoag Camp

Aafter World War I, AMC members sought new sites on which to pitch their tents. A camp, accessible to the entire membership, was needed near Boston.

Various sites, including South Shore beaches and a wooded spot on the Ipswich River, were considered, but were all found unsuitable.

In 1921, AMC President Kelsey suggested that the camp should be in the wilds, on water, and provide boating, fishing, snowshoeing and all similar outdoor recreation. He appointed a camp committee, including members William Rodgers and Arthur Tucker.

One day, Rodgers was driving just south of Ponkapoag Pond. He gazed at Great Blue Hill with its observatory tower, and at its image mirrored in the water, and thought to himself, “This is the place.”

Will Rodgers contacted his friend Arthur Tucker, whose family had lived in Milton for generations and had given their name to Tucker Hill.

Having agreed that Ponkapoag was the most suitable locality, Rodgers and Tucker began prospecting for a campsite. They selected the high knolls at the eastern end of the pond. This land, even then, was part of the Blue Hills Reservation, and negotiations began with the Metropolitan District Commission for the privilege of establishing an AMC camp there.

The camp originally consisted of the main building and 29 tents, and the resident caretakers served meals on the main building’s porch. Two rowboats were available, along with a pier and sandy beach for bathing.
Volunteer with AMC!

The AMC, and all of the trips and activities it offers, is run entirely by volunteers. Have you considered giving back to the Boston chapter?

Trip leaders are always needed, as well as a variety of other volunteers. Opportunities include volunteering with our chapter’s Trails Committee, planning events with the Membership Committee, or helping an activity committee with behind-the-scenes work.

For more information about volunteering with the Boston chapter, please contact the chapter chair of the committee you’re interested in (see top box on right).