

The Huts Journal



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Print by Avery Miller

We needed the northern hardwoods: maple, ash, oak, beech, and tall graceful birches—trees that leafed out in summer, then raised bare arms against the sky in winter. We needed a rural countryside of alternating pastures and woods revealing a farmstead cupped in the folds of the land. We needed small villages where the houses clustered around a green or along a riverbank. We were looking for a landscape where humans could fit in.

In short, we learned that we were already there.

Laura Waterman, p. 75, Losing the Garden

The Best Raid Ever

Bethany Taylor

To paraphrase Ed Abbey, this was the best raid on earth. There have been many such raids. And this was mine:

It was the general opinion of most people working in the summer of 2003 that the Lakes of the Clouds croo was acting even more egocentric than usual. I have since learned that their isolation and/or shunning was part of the complex politics played out between Hutmasters, but to the wide innocent eyes of the first year Naturalist at Lonesome Lake, it just seemed mean.

Naturally, everyone operates under the assumption that his or her hut is the best, but the rumors churning out of Lakes seemed a bit extreme. Even far over on the West Side we heard terrible stories. “They prons by saying ‘Best!’” and “They yell ‘Best!’ at random intervals during dinner...” and every morning and one o’clock radio call Lakes would answer or clear with some derivation of “This is Unit Four, Best, and I copy you fine.” Not only that, but the croo seemed loath to socialize with anyone else, and was made up of predominantly freshly minted hut kids. Since hating the guts of everyone at Lakes in 2003, I have become good friends with most of the people who worked there. Ana Roy, Jon Cotton, Lynne Zummo, Iona Woolmington, Tom Seidel, and Dan St. Jean—it was a bumper crop of good folks, as it turns out. I’ve learned from them that this isolationist policy was that Hutmaster’s strategy for effective, efficient solidarity among his young croo, but at the time, it seemed rude and unnecessary. Joe Dodge may have been a cantankerous bastard, but at least, his form of rudeness seemed to have a certain rough kindness at heart. To all outward appearances, Lakes did not.

The final straw came towards the end of the summer. Because hutkids only spawn from a small pool of acceptable liberal arts colleges, friends of someone at Lakes went to visit another classmate at Greenleaf. I think that it was mutual Oberlin friends of Ana Roy at Lakes and Maya Ray-Schoenfeld at Greenleaf, but no matter. The point is that the rest of the hut system learned about t-shirts that Lakes had made that read on the front “Lakes of the Clouds Hut, elevation 5,050” and on the back “everything else is just the valley and, well,

f* the valley.” It has since been explained to me that this was not intended in any way as an insult and threat to other huts, but rather, that anything but huts was the valley.

It was not interpreted in this manner by the rest of us. It translated as “If you’re not Lakes, go f** yourself.” I believe that most of the plotting for vengeance was done mostly by the assistant Hutmasters of the West Side. Being at Lonesome, we were able to share melodramatic outrage and scheming with Greenleaf quite easily. Not only did we have the packhouse, but there was always F-2 that could be used for secret messages at odd hours of the day and night. As I remember it, and I welcome alternate versions, we sent out notes on truck explaining to all huts but Lakes that something needed to be done. When the time seemed ripe, Lonesome would social call everyone to meet at the Galehead parking lot for a wiffle-ball game. This was the code to power raid Lakes and show them all that they were, in fact, not best. The valley was going to f** Lakes. It was another sore point that Lakes in fact, had EVERYTHING at this point—the good signs, the oar, the snake, the bell, and the prop.

I don’t know what the determination of the ripe time was. I am pretty sure that the whole thing went down when our lovely and levelheaded Hutmaster, Beth Eisenhower, was on days off. It was Lonesome, so I guess that more than anything else, we had gotten sick of swimming around the lake. The weather report even looked as if the weather at Lakes might be pleasant for a change. I hear that people can die up there everyday, even in the summer; it’s perilous. After conferring on F-2 with Mac Cook and Justin McEdwards at Greenleaf, our AHM Kyle James radioed out from Lonesome inviting everyone to the Galehead parking lot. Leaving the reluctant Mary Kuhn behind to cook, Kyle, Cricket Arrison and I headed out from Lonesome and met up with Mac and Justin at the packhouse. No one from Galehead or Mizpah left their fortresses of solitude, but we picked up Meika Hashimoto at the Zealand Road and proceeded, with full speed and Celtic techno music, to Base Road and the Ammy.

I would like to say that we swarmed up the trail in record time, but the Ammy has always kicked my ass, and I lagged behind. Cricket kept me company, but I had that most terrible of first-year feelings—weakness. It turns out that no one but me cared, and eventually, I met

up with everyone else huddled in the last patch of krummholtz below the hut. Jess Milne, Aaron Sagan, and Dan Aadahl had moseyed over from Madison and were about as ready for blood as hut kids get. More than anything, the Madison kids seemed happy to have the chance to see anyone from another croo—the Valley Way seems to deter sociability like no other. Also, I’ve heard since that there was some particularly weird prop-politics between Number 2 and Number 4 that summer. It’s amazing how these things seemed like life and death at the time.

The Madison kids had snuck around the hut and noticed that there didn’t seem to be a whole lot of the croo there. It was a nice day; after all, they could have been off hiking. Or maybe they went to go play wiffle-ball at Galehead. It still didn’t make much sense to go in with all guns blazing without knowing what we were up against, so the plan was that Cricket and I, being rather sweet and innocent looking first-years, would march in as decoys with big tools and start loudly taking signs off the ceiling of the dining room. This would attract the attention of whatever hut croo were around and we would be able to get a good count of exactly how many of the “Best” we were dealing with. Everyone else waited in the first bunkroom and burst in once there was a count of the opposition.

Cricket and I waltzed in. It was a little before noon and people were gathered in the dining room as we hopped up on the tables and started fiddling with the signs. “Uh-oh...you’ve got company,” one guy yelled to the kitchen. The cook and bull cook, Julia Larouche and Catherine Graciano, came running out.

“You can’t *do* that! You’re caught now...” they both started to splutter out. Of all the Lakes croo, these were probably the two that Lonesome was friendliest with. But friend loyalty is not the point of a power raid. Utter domination, humiliation in front of guests, and theft is.

“TWO!!!! There are TWO of them!!!” we yelled, gleefully.

“NOT BEST!” I will, hopefully, retain the image of a very large Mac Cook barreling into the Lakes dining room and bellowing at the top of his lungs for the rest of my life. Close behind him, everyone else looked just as red-faced and angry and delighted. Cricket and I jumped down and began helping to tie Julia and Catherine up while

they both squirmed around and yelled about how it wasn’t fair. This may be true, but as raiding is both love and war; fairness is sort of a moot point. Mac Cook says that he remembers guests chanting “Other huts! Other huts!” in support of the beat-down but admits that this may be more imagination than memory.

Jess Milne took over in the kitchen, fetching bowls of soup for the day traffic who seemed to enjoy the added entertainment. And the rest of us fanned out to gather raid items and wreak havoc in the nest of the “Best.” Awkwardly, I ran into my old boss, from (church-affiliated) summer camp, who was also friends with Catherine and hustled him outside to catch-up and explain why he absolutely couldn’t help untie her or Julia.

When I came inside again, Mac and Dan had discovered Jon Cotton asleep in his bed and hauled him out to hog-tie him in his sleeping bag. We had been scrawling “not best” on everything in sight, and while they—neither of them a small man—held him still, I wrote NOT BEST in big, blue, permanent marker letters on his forehead. When, just before we all left, I tried to be helpful by telling Jon that rubbing alcohol removes permanent marker from skin, I got the foulest Death Glare I’ve ever personally received. We thought, based in the look on his face, that when Jon ran out of the hut in a silent rage, he had run down the Ammy and slit our tires. It should be noted that 1) Jon was fighting off a death virus at the time, 2) would have slept through the whole thing, 3) had woken up while being straddled by the guys, and, 4) he was my Hutmaster at Mizpah the next summer, where Cricket was also the AHM.

The actual theft part of raids is second only to the hike away, where every detail is replayed and embellished. Legends in our own minds, indeed. I believe that we took the bell and big wooden silverware back to Lonesome, Mac and Justin took the snake and signs to Greenleaf, Meika trotted the oar into Zealand, and the Madison trio trotted the prop back across the ridge. (A few nights later, the Zealand croo took the prop, and it shortly disappeared anonymously and has yet to surface.)

Surprisingly, this didn’t improve relations between Lakes and the rest of us. There’s no after-school special ending here. Take what you can, give nothing back. The piratical nature of raiding appeals to me,

and this was the best raid I ever went on. It had that added *je ne sais quoi* of moral outrage and revenge that no other raid I've been on has offered. And as much as I've come to love the class of Lakes '03, they were still the utter enemy that summer, too big for their Limmers and Carhartts, and certainly not best. And I know that most of those damn Latchstring-awarded Lakes kids still have those t-shirts in their closets.

Pockets, and Memory

Nathaniel Blauss

The mountains, in and of themselves, mean nothing. They are simply piles of rock. Before discovery they are thrust upwards and eroded away for millions of years. Nothing more than a geologist's term, they are the subjects of the invisible and unimaginable forces of plate tectonics and the vicious assaults of wind and water. They are uncaring and uncared for. They are no more than rock piles, no more than silent trees waiting to fall in an uninhabited wood.

For us, as with anything else, undiscovered mountains are waiting for a human sort of arrival, a chance for time to leave its marks upon them. The landscape is a series of nameless valleys and ridges until a thought or presence crosses them. They wait for some memory to be etched onto their surfaces by ice or chisel or by the indelible markings of the story that says, '*something happened here.*' Like a yard newly covered in snow, there is a pristine quality to a mountain range's beauty, but it is only a pretty scene out the picture window. Until the moment that someone's thoughts have crossed into it, the landscape lacks love.

It is something that I am always forgetting, and in forgetting, something dear slips away. Loving the mountains is a lip service I pay to places that have meant a great deal to me in the past, and which I hope will mean a great deal to me in the future, but simply looking at mountains, no matter how wonderfully the light plays across their skin, is not enough. Before a feeling enters, before there is some more intimate knowledge of the place, before it comes to develop a personality of its own, a mountain is only a passing pretty face.

Appearances are deceiving, but not in the normal sense. Often the appearance of the mountains is what we concentrate on, and are so fooled. A mountain's appearance is cosmetic. To look at mountains is to say: 'from Pinkham Notch, Adams looks like a steep pyramid;' 'from any direction Cannon looks like a malformed lump of clay.' It is to describe the mountains by saying: 'Bondcliff has green eyes.' It doesn't matter in the least. It's no more than a list of observations, clinical and unfeeling. It is not why we hike, or how to build love.

When I concentrate on these things rather than the belief that there is something more there to probe, I forget to *care*.

The mountains only begin to take on meaning for us when we start to see something more of them, blemishes and irregularities, not just on their surfaces, but on their characters as well. We all climb mountains, or continue to climb mountains, to find their well-hidden secrets. Otherwise, why would we keep coming back to the same places over and over again? We are looking for something, even if we may not know what it is. We look for a certain familiarity, a truer friendship through thick and thin.

A few weeks ago I climbed the Valley Way up to Star Lake with two friends. The col was still filled with ice and wind and snow. The wind, though from the south, blew cold out of Madison Gulf, and the cloud ceiling was perhaps a hundred feet over our heads. Looking down towards Pinkham and the Wildcats, it felt as though we needed to crouch down to look through a low window between the sill of the Parapet and the clouds above. Sometimes, as the clouds moved down on us, the window closed. Sometimes it opened again. In closing, however, it left the three of us very alone amidst stones covered in rime ice, on a small alpine lake frozen straight through to bedrock.

Star Lake is an incredible place to be alone. It is hidden from the world. In winter the only evidences of humanity are a few lost signposts looking forlorn, and decaying cairns slowly being reclaimed by the Northern Presidentials' stone strewn ground. It is a secret pocket that can sometimes hold a few people.

To be there is an act of discovery. The col is trailless in three feet of ice and snow, but, for some reason, a hiker knows that there is something over the rise from the closed and shuttered hut. It is bushwhacking, but the krumholtz oblige and hunker down beneath the snow to allow for safe passage. The lake is discovered with its cracked and thrusting ice, its edges blur into the equally covered ground, and all that's left is to wonder who it is that left the strange cairns; what they saw when they first found the place. Between the slopes of Madison, Adams and the thrust of the Parapet, the whole area of Star Lake is a mystery of tiny proportions.

The hike reminded me that I love hiking; that it is something I can never give up even if at times I lose my way. I cannot put a name to my reason. It is, like Star Lake, a tiny mystery. All friendships, I think, are. The greater mystery is that we don't grow tired of a good friendship. There is no resolution. For years and years we cultivate our relationships, slowly discovering a person or place's many moods, their reactions, the well-guarded secrets they hold close to their hearts. Over time what starts as a pencil's sketch, an outline, begins to fill in. In time color is added, smaller and smaller details. Perhaps if enough time and care is taken, if enough commitment is shown, a skilled painter can begin to see the mountains with a certain type of love, not just for their shape, but for their specific colors and moods. The hills acquire a certain personality. They form relationships with the people around them. They are giants, but as time goes on, details shrink their mass and scale and they become more manageable. We come to understand their types of heights and distances. Soon, we begin to see our small effects on them and change our habits to act accordingly. Finally, as an understanding is glimpsed, we begin to explore them as the individuals they are.

It was a beautiful fall afternoon when I hiked out of Lakes of the Clouds just before dinner was to begin, and went off in search of the Old Crawford Path, which follows the height of land rather than descending, as the current trail does, to the lakes. I don't know when the path was relocated, though I assume from the difficulty of following it in a few places, it was some time ago. The path wasn't, however, overly difficult to find. From the patch of dwarf cinquefoil at the base of Monroe all the way to the Davis Path above Tuckerman Ravine, I followed it, more or less, for three quarters of a mile along the crest of the broad ridge that descends from Washington to support the small masses of Monroe and Franklin.

The area is littered with the same rough stone that is found throughout the Presidentials, and between the rocks, Bigelow Sedge covers the ground. *Diapensia* and Alpine Azalea, at this time of year flowerless and nearly indistinguishable, creep from between the stones or spread where the hard pack of the old path precludes the sedge. It is beautiful country. Late on a clear afternoon the tired

sunlight is the same honey color as the browning sedge, sweeping across the meadows, let in through gaps in the low flying clouds. The wind moves the sedge in waves. As at Star Lake, loneliness inhabits the place. Walking through it, one has the feeling of being high up in a watchtower; even the Lakes of the Clouds seem far below.

The path itself lives up to its appellation. Unlike trails cut now, which go over anything and everything in something resembling the shortest route, the Old Crawford Path follows the sensibilities of the horses that originally walked it. It meanders. It follows the grass, and pushes through gaps in the strings of tumbled rock. The path has a certain *feel* to it. Often times, in spite of being grown over, the path is easy to follow just by looking at the landscape. The rocks and inclines suggest a route, and looking closely, the smoothed and polished stones reveal that the path, long abandoned, led on in that direction.

At one point, not far along, the way winds up between two slabs of rock, slanting towards each other in a narrow, shallow chute. Moving up towards Washington, there is a large cairn and two iron pins where a plaque has been removed on the right, while on the left two sets of initials are carved into the rock. Just ahead on the left is a semi-circular windbreak built of rough, lichen-covered stones. This is where Father Bill Curtis' body, slightly protected by the chute, was found in July 1900. I assume the windbreak was built quietly out of respect for the dead. I wonder, now, if it has ever been used.

Father Bill died trying to hike Washington in a horrible, screaming storm of snow and ice along with his friend, Allan Ormsby. Two of the strongest hikers of the time, they faced into the cold and raging wind, and continued on. The mountains were careless, or else indifferent. Peaks have many moods, and the Presidentials are more notorious than most. It is unimaginable on a clear, cool fall day to imagine the Hell of flying snow and stinging ice shards that greeted the two, even standing precisely where they stood.

After their deaths, a shelter was built farther along the Crawford Path. It has since been removed, though traces of it are still visible from the Camel Trail. The hut was built not long afterwards. This is all a part of their legacy. Another part is only a partial remembrance.

That remembrance is also contained by the path itself as it is consumed by the slow creeping *Diapensia*, Alpine Azalea, and the

indifferent encroachment of the Bigelow Sedge. Eventually all that will mark the passage will be a few oddly worn rocks covered in lichen. The collective memory of the place, formed partially by the scars in the rock and the compacted ground, is part of that legacy. And the legacy is part of it. The stones are marked not just by the chisels of two sets of initials, marked 1900 if I remember properly, but by the thoughts of all those who have been there. The mountains are forever changed. Even as I walked onwards, the chute disappeared back into their story, only to reappear when the next person arrives to wonder at the place.

I still wonder about the place now. I wonder how it has changed my view of the whole surrounding area. Certainly my view has changed since I first looked out of the dining room at Lakes of the Clouds at Washington, a monstrous creature, rearing up out of Ammonoosuc Ravine, head held high into a storm. First, I went to this place, then I began to become familiar with it. I learned something of its history, about the reason for its location. I found where the shelter had been, I discovered the small nameless chute out on the open shoulder of the ridge. The collective memory is the mystery for which I hike. I would like to become some tiny part of it.

I think, just by looking, I have.

Years ago my mother asked me, not being inclined to the outdoors herself, why I liked hiking so much. I had several answers. I liked the majesty of the views, I liked the peace of the waters, I liked the smell of the balsam firs, I liked the physical challenge of the climbs. None of them, though, even collectively, seemed sufficient. I ended up saying something about how incredible it was to stand on a place like Franconia Ridge in the brightest sunlight, and to be totally insignificant. There's something incredibly reassuring about being so incredibly small. I think now that being so small is the only thing that allows someone to fit into the pocket of Star Lake, to see the hidden places that are scattered throughout the forest.

Perhaps because we have no power in the mountains, they allow us to see their warts and moles. Also the things they hold dear. The

mountains are home to the clouds and winds and skies. We are earthbound, playing in a landscape that does not rightfully belong to us. We try to create control by labor and vigilance, by any means we can grasp. Trails are fingers of civilization pushing into the forest as far as its resistance will allow. The sedges' reclamation of the Old Crawford Path is a testament to their ultimate endurance. The landscape retains the power to crush us with the slightest wayward thought, and so, each moment which we experience there in turn is dear to us, each one is stolen from something so strong that it bears parting with that tiny secret. The place knows, in a way, that we are still slowly adding to its mysteries anyway.

Still, it is no place of half measures. A place where the challenges of the wind and the rain, the ice and snow, the bright sunlight of noon and tired, golden afternoon rays, are more difficult to carry with us than the packs on our backs. We must live them as we live them because they are not portable. The challenge that the mountains put to us is sometimes only to notice the tiny pocket between clouds and rock, trees and earth and wind and sky that we have been allowed into. The challenge is to give a bit of love in return.

In the Northern Presidentials there is a small hollow, a rock from which a spring flows. Years ago, someone took a piece of chain, an attached tin cup, and pinned them there so that hikers could drink from the spring or fill bottles. The chain and cup are gone, I've found no evidence of them. I've thought about replacing them, but it does not feel appropriate. I have no idea how many people, over the course of a year, walk within ten feet of the place, stepping over the little trickle of its water without ever noticing the little hollow. Thousands, no doubt. Some have undoubtedly hiked past the place many, many times; others will only ever walk past once. Still the rock is there, barely off the trail, a mystery of tiny proportions to be found largely in forgotten stories or small explorations. Though the tin cup and the little chain are gone, their sentiment remains as a line of Psalm. In these wild places the sheer mass of the mysteries, the challenges and the fullness of a quiet love is incalculable, and the rock bears this testament in a carved line of verse. There in the rock, long ago, someone never to be named has carved '*my cup runneth over*'.

Untitled

Bethann A. Weick

The flames dance to life inside the woodstove, large and strong at the outset as they quickly crackle through the birch bark kindling. Then just as suddenly, the colorful, hot heat is gone, replaced by smoldering wood and pungent smoke. Punky, wet, cold wood. My hands relish warmth as I willingly, patiently, nurse the nascent fire: arranging coals, maintaining airflow, concentrating heat pockets. When the wood finally begins to burn, I sit back on my haunches and watch for a moment, the bare skin of my hands and face appreciative. Outside it is four degrees, the landscape dressed in winter's myriad hues of white. The fire will likely bring the indoor temperature to forty degrees, maybe forty-five. Outside it is beautiful, perhaps because I have the inside to protect me?

As I write these words, I am inside. Inside the AMC's Zealand Falls Hut, alongside the Pemigewasset Wilderness, in New Hampshire's White Mountains. I sit atop a wooden bench, in the hut's small dining area. After five seasons as croo at various AMC huts, I am spending the winter as a backcountry caretaker. A native of Pennsylvania, the challenge of a "real" winter in the mountains was my original impetus for wanting the caretaker position. Now that I'm here, I understand that the challenge lies not merely in the cold and the winter conditions but in confronting my conception of White Mountain "wildness." I find my thoughts evolving and my notion of self and place re-forming as I interpret the landscape around me and wrestle with the interplay of superficiality and profundity that has so characterized my time in these mountains.

Until this fall, my experiences in the White Mountains had been exclusively summer and fall endeavors. While that by no means guaranteed fair weather or easy conditions, it was true that with strong legs and some practical know-how, I kept myself out of trouble and flirting with overconfidence. Summer in the mountains was easy to romanticize and idealize; a comfortable vantage point from which to exalt wildness and criticize frontcountry living. A backcountry lifestyle is simpler, more basic, closer to proverbial Nature. Day-to-day provisions and desired luxuries must be hiked in on the backs of croo

members. Power comes from solar, wind, and propane, and gadgets like TV and internet are non-existent. Life is lived on a smaller scale in this fashion, approximating a picturesque ideal; it is difficult to find the drawbacks. For me, summer in the White Mountains had meant experiencing natural beauty and simple living with a minimum of risk.

Upon meeting the mountains in winter, however, my own safety and comfort became much more challenging. Strength, confidence, familiarity—these were no longer enough to eliminate the risks of backcountry adventures. A misstep, a lost trail, a sudden wind; that's all it would take to become precariously perched between life and a wintry death. On a routine "hut-check" up to Lakes of the Clouds Hut in mid-January this winter, my hiking partner and I were reminded of the gripping chill of wind and cold temperatures. Each weekend, two caretakers hike up to Lakes and Madison Huts to see that shutters and boards are still attached to the winterized buildings. On this particular Sunday, Sean and I knew we'd be hiking in considerable cold. Once above treeline, the elevation and wind conspired to produce increasingly biting temperatures. Both strong hikers, we weren't about to turn around without pushing ourselves. We also didn't want to push life, the fragility of which was fresh in our minds—an ice climber had died two days before in Washington's Huntington Ravine. As the trees shrunk in stature behind us, and snowfields consumed our vision, our egos and our safety subtly dueled. "Are you cold?" we asked one another, "How are you feeling?" The northwest wind, relentless on the back of our legs, was becoming painful, Sean admitted. My toes were quite cold, I allowed. Yes I was feeling nervous. Yet we were less than a quarter mile from the hut! In the summer, we could have dashed up in mere minutes. But the terrain was more ice than snow, and we were going slowly. Safety won out, and we turned around. Now however, our faces were looking directly into the wind. Despite hats and balaclavas, our eyes, noses, and upper lips were frosty within seconds. Despite layers of winter gear, I felt as if I were experiencing an ice cream-induced brain-freeze, times ten, all over my body. Later that day, we found out it had been -15 degrees Fahrenheit on the summit of Washington, with a wind chill between -55 and -65 degrees. Winter had put us in our place, easily.

Winter's formidable character was evident at lower elevations, too. Living at Zealand Hut, I found myself wanting to leave a record of my hiking plans, something I had never done before. On a hike out to Mt. Guyot, I opted to bring the larger rather than smaller backpack, and carried extra everything. A jaunt that could be done in two hours in the summer with nothing but water on my back became a four-hour round trip. I stopped to eat and drink and to change my layers and slowed to keep from sweating much. This was not summer hiking. When I was hiking in less than comfortable conditions this winter, it was only because I was conscious of the sheltered hut to which I could return, and if I was confident about the quantity of food and water I had packed, it was largely because there was always more available upon return to Zealand Falls. The winter season put me face to face with my out-of-place-ness in wildness. Not only was I dominated by winter's whims, I was protecting myself with a simpler—but undeniable—form of frontcountry living. As Richard Adams writes in Watership Down, "Many human beings say that they enjoy the winter, but what they really enjoy is feeling proof against it."

And so two realizations were simultaneously taking shape. Winter was ruining my ability to romanticize all difficulty of the mountains away, just as it starkly highlighted my reliance on "civilization" to make wildness enjoyable and survivable. To both these topics I will return in short order.

First, though, I want to revisit those experiences of superficiality and profundity that I mentioned earlier. It was the tension between these two realities that drew me to work in the AMC huts summer after summer for four years. Being a member of a hut croo is an experience difficult to capture. Certainly it is superficiality and profundity writ large: the close quarters, the picturesque surroundings, the blend of great responsibility and great liberty, the long-distance shenanigans made possible by acquired hiking prowess, the orchestration of searches and rescues juxtaposed with an atmosphere of perpetual hilarity, electricity, and obstreperous cocksure-ness.

Tradition and iconic imagery abound in the huts, and despite the current predilection for ultra-light hiking, hut croos continue to take pride in heavy weights carried on wooden packboards. My own

personal best was packing 124 pounds from the Washington summit down to Lakes of the Clouds. Though a "century club" is rarely talked of, carrying a 100-plus pound pack does become a tag to a reputation, an affirmation and ability across the hut system. As for our "free time," a fourteen-mile round-trip across exposed ridge in the dark of night, with the sole purpose of "raiding" prized wall decorations from a neighboring hut, consumes conversation and radio time as if such an excursion told the real story of what life in the mountains is like. From alpine scootering and wheelchair races, to sledding in mixing bowls and picnicking on Monticello Lawn (with glitter glasses and a pink flamingo), our amusements are varied and hardly profound. For a few days at a time, or a few weeks, each of these tidbits contribute to our bravado, our assured-ness; feel-good tales to be repeated to visitors and friends alike. Yet each of these scenarios is almost entirely about us—the hut croo. Mountains, weather, flora, fauna are at most details to embellish our self-centric tales.

There is, however, another aspect of hut-life. The quiet moments shared at sunset, the whispered invitation to come outside and see a meteor shower late at night, the days when all plans are foregone in the face of gusts and slashing rain that no-one dares to challenge. I recall a sunset at Lakes where, roiling up the Ammonoosuc Ravine, were clouds so thick I could barely see my own outstretched hand. Yet stepping ten feet to my right, all was clear. Oranges, purples, pinks streaked across the western horizon. It was like experiencing the point of contact between two Siamese worlds. Indeed, one the raids alluded to above was highlighted by my sole glimpse of the northern lights. Three of us, suddenly small and quiet on the western shoulder of Mt. Clay, set aside all silly concerns of hammers and twine and coveted road signs to let our insignificance grow exponentially. Greens and purples, brilliant across the pre-midnight sky, were what really mattered.

Also worth telling is the night—and day—in August 2005 when I traversed from Carter Notch Hut to Lonesome Lake, hiking the fifty miles between the two huts and passing through the other six, all in nineteen hours. Doing so is a personal feat, a test of mind and body. It is also a great endorphin rush, and a rewarding social event—imagine seeing your closest friends all in one day. You're talked of on

the radio, gifts of food await at each hut; upon completing the 15,000 feet of elevation change, your ego is huge and your muscles sore. Yet you've also passed through the peaks and valleys—literally—of an incredible, stunning area. The sunrise I saw on the Presidential Ridge on this occasion still stays with me. Across Adams, Jefferson, Clay, and Washington—not one minute or perspective was the same. It was an awakening and brightening of my world that was impossible to measure and yet impossible not to experience. Hiking—for the pride, for the accomplishment, for the experience—was childishly fleeting alongside the ancient, unfolding story of the rising sun.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the point is not that one type of experience is better or more worthwhile than the other. I want it to be—I hope it is so—that recognition of the interplay between divergent experiences offers a medium where a new and elevated sense of place, community, and self can be nurtured. The superficial ridiculousness that is often the chief characterization of a hut croo is in many ways the fabric of our community. A premise of extraordinary behavior and endeavors unites us and creates roots, bonds, and connections to one another that are difficult to unravel for those who have not been croo themselves. Woven so closely to apparent superficiality are, inexplicably, those moments of profundity, moments when an understanding of place and belonging extend well beyond the self, the croo, and the hut. Our place within a fragile ecosystem—amidst idealism I foist upon them. Recognizing my place in the centuries of nameless individuals who have turned to the mountains as their intellectual, ideological, or spiritual justification nurtures the seeds of humility. The beauty of the mountains in winter rivals and perhaps surpasses their summer glory. Yet it is a harsher beauty. Jack London, describing a winter landscape, wrote:

“A vast silence reigned over the land...There was hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness—a laughter than was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity...”

Winter does not permit idyllic romanticism; it is boldly austere, indifferent, and irreverent toward the human ego.

Winter has focused my thoughts on the relationship between civilization at large and White Mountain wildness. Civilization is, of course, unwelcome in a romantic image of the elemental life I have been creating in the backcountry. “Civilization” is as hard for me to consider without bias as my admission to superficiality was in a previous summer season. But the farce is up—I can wax eloquent about wildness and these White Mountains but must recognize their enabler: civilization.

What am I trying to pursue with the ideal of an elemental, simplified backcountry life? Am I not trying to pursue a way of being that is a manifestation of the symbiosis of superficiality and profundity? The direction to take, then, is not a negation of the presence of civilization, but a pursuit of living conscious of both civilization and wildness. Each concept is dependent on the other—for definition and for a dialectical appreciation of both. With time spent in wildness, the fleeting nature of humanity next to the natural power represented by the mountains is emphasized; with time spent in civilization the extent of my self-reliance on frontcountry amenities is better understood.

Recognizing the extent of this duality, I choose to live as appropriately as I can, aligning myself to a civilization that is simplistic, elemental, and sustainable; attempting to live alongside wildness, not outside it. Living—with the superficiality and the profundity, with the thrills of the ego and the wonder of human smallness—as a member of a civilization that encourages the celebration of the infinite unknown around us. So much of wildness is that: an ache for boundlessness and the space to shape reality which broadens and deepens one's self, one's community, and one's perspective beyond each of those singular concepts to a scale equal to that of wildness.

The outcome of a winter in the White Mountains: a challenged and an altered perspective; a new conception of the perpetual polarity of superficiality and profundity—and my joy in pursuing both in tandem. Grasping of my own life's vibrancy, and succumbing to the grandeur of the non-human world. Embracing the outside—in its beauty and its risks—and nuancing the inside—in its possibilities and its comforts; allowing each to be shaped by silliness and majesty

alike. No experience in isolation, all as contributions to a grander picture and a more colorful mural of mountains and self.

And so I return to my hands, still warmed by the fire's flames. Flames appreciated as a comfort, but also manifesting the exchange between resources, environment, humans, and habit, and yes between wildness and civilization. Fire: a celebration of superficiality and profundity, indeed.

Holding Here

Bethany Taylor

Look at your feet. There is a better than average chance that your tootsies are happily encased in a pair of Wigwam socks that you “borrowed” from OTC at some point in the not too distant past. The bossmen can’t get upset on this point; they did it, we do it, the little kid who slopped his 32-Bean Soup with leftover ham chunks all over the table will be doing the same thing in ten years (Note to the Chacos people: pretend that it is that coldest day in February when you actually deign to put your feet in socks). I heard, in the oral tradition of the huts, that the legendary Mike Jones claimed that the real purpose of raiding was to steal from another hut’s OTC stores. Of course, and here I start to sound like the fogies, this was when OTC inventories were more, um, creative. I’ve heard a story of one Ass Master who did her counts while taking shots and eyeballing how many t-shirts were on the shelf upstairs. And I have probably 7 pairs of socks, which is less than one per season.

I have mood swings and bad days. I used to have more bad days before I worked in the huts and lapped up the adoration of the guests every night. There seems to be an extraordinary preponderance in the huts for the slightly odd kids who excel at individual sports, who found some sort of affirmation in the woods that was lacking in ordinary social situations in high school and college. Which is the nice way of saying that we are an odd lot, many of whom grew up far more at the huts than we would have otherwise. Naturally, I can only speak with anything even approaching absolute certainty for myself, but there is a confidence that blossomed when I marched out to a full house on a summer Saturday night and introduced myself as the Hutmaster, occasionally to thunderous applause, admiration and appreciation. Of course I spent the next morning scraping their dried shit off of Clivus, but for a few minutes, my fears and insecurities were relieved.

Despite the higher opinion of myself I gleaned from being on hut croo, there is a certain earthy humility that should go hand in hand. Possibly while caretaking, I heard an NPR interview in which Terry Gross was interviewing Mark “Mark E Mark” Wahlberg about “The

Departed.” To get into his role, he channeled his mother’s attitude towards his celebrity: “You’re a movie star, you think you’re so f*ing special...you’re not.” It’s better if you can sound like a middle-aged woman from South Boston, but you get the idea. You’re a hut kid, you think you’re so f*ing special...you’re not. And you are.

King of the Whites and Shitworker Extraordinaire. I don’t have a lot of other parts of my life where I feel both vitally necessary and utterly ethereal as I do in the huts. There is a great Calvin and Hobbes cartoon of Calvin standing under the starry sky and yelling, “I am significant!” The next panel, a resigned looking Calvin says, “Screamed the dust speck.” I’ve given astronomy programs at Lakes and felt the same way: “Pay attention, people, I’m the Naturalist, those are the Northern Lights...”

It took a few seasons of glorious self-affirming selfishness, but gradually, it began to dawn on me that as full and capable as hut life made me feel, that wasn’t the point of it all. Sure I went back and back for my eight seasons for a lot of reasons, but probably around season four, I began to get the full breadth of my significance and insignificance. During dinner talk, the most common question—after “Where’s the prop?”—was “What is your favorite part about working here?” My standard answer was that the best part is the people. I started out meaning that the friends I made on various croos were the best part. Most of my best and dearest friends are hut kids. But then I began to think about the eternal march of the huts. There have been people who spoke “Hut” wandering through the Whites for, what, the last 120 years? To be part of a chain of people who have all lived close in those mountains, to be a link in something so much larger than myself, *that* is the best part about having worked in those places.

I sound like an old OH. “Damn kids, they don’t realize how great they have it...no cares and worries, just have to make sure the sunset is as gorgeous today as it was yesterday...Back in *my* day, we worked hard, we were worthy of being there...” I always get the impression talking to OH that nothing I ever did will measure up to what they did. No raid will ever top theirs, no pack will ever be more burly than one of theirs, no croo will ever have more fun than theirs, and so on. This is as it should be. I’m in the strange place of being out of the huts, but

close enough that some of the current croos still recognize me. And no matter what I hear or what the current kids say they are up to, I don't think that anything they are doing is as good as it was when I did it. What's amazing is how beautifully selfish and perfect that is. Each of our memories is superlative. If they weren't, something would be amiss. It's not a competition. Packing more weight, or raiding more items on fewer hours of sleep or having a better-organized rat proof or beating TFC on a Hut Traverse, none of this is really worth losing sleep over. What is important is that the huts go on every season, and we all go in a little nervous and dewy-eyed, and leave having been fawned over and challenged and allowed to mature.

The human life scale is a little harder to watch in the moment than the metamorphosis of a hut kid is. We are born, we grow, we pass stories along, and we go. My first Hutmaster, Beth Eisenhower, used to talk about how people are "born" at various huts. It's weird, certainly, but it's apt. I was "born" at Lonesome, and I went out swinging three years and eight seasons later after having a fall where I was thrown every challenge in the book, and found that I could solve whatever came at me; seizures, water pipes, sporadic staffing, and so on. Fall 2006 at Greenleaf was like my final exam. And I passed. I didn't need to test myself, I didn't need the rush of confidence I got from saying, "I am the Hutmaster," and seeing my name on the board.

It's when you stop needing that affirmation and can recognize that the greatest piece of hut life is the unbroken chain between information passed down and down through it all, that it is time to leave the comfortable place. And this isn't to say that I don't miss the quiet of Carter, or the conviviality of Lakes on a Saturday night, or that spot on Mt. Pierce where Bicknell's Thrush always sing, or the sunsets from the Galehead roof, or the creak of "Willard" my packboard. I do. Every day. But it's not my turn any more. So I just have to hope that enough of the Junior Natties I graduated in pomp and circumstance grow up and keep the huts going for another few generations. That, and keep my hut friends close. It wouldn't be any fun, or worth much of anything at all if I couldn't have their companionship in remembering the sunset over Lafayette or Monroe or Madfest or any of the rest of it. Before the huts, I thought that solitude in the mountains was the greatest thing since the diamond

hitch. I was wrong. What is better is having good people there with you, even if you are just silently geeking out on a tundra stomp.

I worked at Horton Center on Pine Mountain before the huts. I've spent over half my life at this point trying to figure out how to hold on the rush I get from being in the mountains. This helps a bit: "You cannot stay on the summit forever, you have to come down again... So why bother in the first place? Just this: what is above knows what is below, but what is below does not know what is above. One climbs, one sees. One descends, one sees no longer. There is an art of conducting oneself in the lower regions by the memory of what one has seen higher up. When one can no longer see, one can at least still know," wrote Rene Daumal. And, part of that art, for me at least, involves looking at my feet and knowing that a small slice of the world wears those ill-gotten socks. For better or for worse, I know and am knitted into that history.

Foundations of Community in the Huts

Andrew Riely

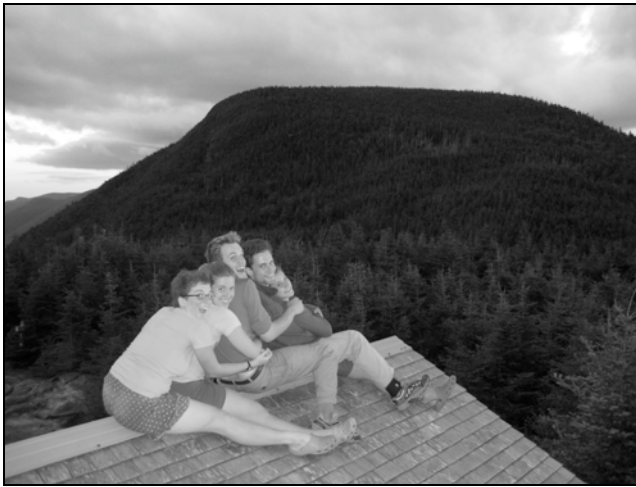


photo by Ari Ofsevit

Culturally, the huts are fascinating places. Despite only working together for several months during the summer or fall, the hut croos, individually and collectively, form as cohesive a group as I have ever been a part of.

Applicants to the huts are largely self-selecting. Most hut croo are from rural New England, though there is a sizable contingent, including myself, which hails from the Boston area. In fact, this summer I knew of only one girl, from Kansas, who came from outside the northeast. This is unusual for an environmental job with free room and board—I have worked at several since graduating college and find that they often attract a remarkably dispersed group of workers. Many hut croo become acquainted with the huts during family summer vacations—families provide the bulk of our clientele, so prior exposure seems to be an important inducement for application.

Hut croo this summer, of whom there were about 50, were entirely white, and they tended to come from upper-middle class backgrounds. Pay is minimum wage or slightly higher. Outdoor sports, especially in the northeast, tend to attract mostly affluent whites from cities or rural whites. I can count the number of black and Hispanic adults I saw hiking this summer on one hand (though plenty of non-white children do arrive as part of the AMC's outreach programs). Almost all of northern New England is ethnically

homogenous, and black and Hispanic minorities from the coastal cities seem to favor (or are restricted financially to) urban pastimes. The one minority community that does frequent the mountains is Asian, which has at times been reflected by the composition of the hut croos.

In sum, hut croo are often ethnically and socio-economically homogenous. This summer, they were all between the ages of 18 and 25, due to the demanding nature of the work (eleven days on, three days off, with intense activity around breakfast and dinner time, as well as two packdays a week, which involves carrying up to 70 pounds of “freshies”—fresh vegetables and “ham bombs”—frozen meat—up the trail). Hut croo are all either college graduates or in the midst of their studies, with typical colleges being small New England liberal arts schools such as Bates or Middlebury.

A peculiar phenomenon in the huts regards the shift in gender dominance. Until the late 60s, hut croo were all male. Women, it was thought, could not handle the physical aspects of the work. WWII and its shortage of male labor proved such attitudes wrong, however, and once women began to enter the huts, they thrived, despite the prevailing machismo of the day. Presently, there are more women than men working in the huts. I suspect this has to do with low pay—women are more willing to put up with it for the job's terrific intangible benefits.

Hut croo also share a strong environmental ethic. Since pay is so low, enthusiasm for mountains and hiking and a desire for simplicity are the strongest motivators. “Leave no trace” ethics; pack-in, pack-out, and composting are the rule (otherwise hut croo would have to carry refuse down the mountain). Electricity comes mostly from renewable sources, and meals are communal. One side effect of the anti-consumptive attitude is the attempt by many to conceal their affluent background—the more patches on one's Carharts (a fashionable and durable type of pants), the better. In practice, hut croo often act as guardians of the fragile ecosystems they inhabit, particularly among the huts situated in alpine tundra. Fervent debate about which hut possesses the best sunset occurs, in addition to distress over visible land degradation.

Thus in addition to extremely tight living quarters and the intensely cooperative tasks of caring for 40 to 100 guests every night,

communal identity comes easily because hut croo rarely need to adjust their cultural expectations of their peers when they arrive at the job in late May. Similar interests and experiences growing up make them compatible. They can immediately begin assimilating into the highly practical, proud hut system, which is consciously distinct from northeastern hiking culture in general.

The huts have a vocabulary all their own, which can only be learned orally from veteran croo. “Moo” is dried milk, the “poop” the attic, and the “valley” anywhere accessible by road and thus in the lowlands (each hut also has a “ridge,” the crest of a nearby mountain range). Each morning, huts communicate on the radio during “social call,” a ten-minute segment when hut croo can make plans to meet on a mountaintop or for lunch in town. Guests are fascinated with “raiding,” a nocturnal game which involves hiking to another hut, confiscating old road signs hung on their dining room walls, and bringing them back by breakfast time (another reason why hut croo tend to be so young!). A ritual coming-of-age test involves a hut traverse: an extremely lengthy hike from one end of the hut system to the other, that must be completed within 24 hours. And once a summer, the hut croos convene for Madfest, the social high point of the summer season.

Hut croo remain fiercely separate from guests and even thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail, of whom there are many. The term “goofer” is a pejorative they use to describe an ignorant or foolish guest, as in, “Some goofer left orange peels all over that rock.” It is often privately assumed that all hikers are goofers, thus allowing croo to maintain a distinct identity. Another tactic is to reserve certain prime sunset viewing areas for private croo use; these include the hut roof or “croo rocks”—a spot close to the hut but hidden from public view.

The huts became known for their service and spirit during the 20s, 30s, and 40s, when Joe Dodge was Huts Manager. A hard-driving, ebullient, and charismatic man who expanded the system from 4 to 7 huts, Dodge tolerated, even encouraged, pranks and jokes, but never at the expense of service. Hut croo, then as now, also tend to be first responders to accidents in the Whites, so a measure of sobriety is of the utmost importance. Dodge is known as “the father of the hut

system,” and the gist of his personality and contributions is well-known to hut croo. Croo possess a common history, supplemented by stories, real and embellished, which are passed orally and through croo logs, journals which never leave the hut.

While a small-scale example, hut croo demonstrate how a shared affinity for the landscape, ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity, communal living, and boundary maintenance allow the evolution of a distinct identity and sense of belonging.

Hut Breakfast

Ben Lewis

The sun hits your eyes before the alarm hits your ears when you sleep under the skylight in the Zealand hutmaster bed. Rub your red eyes, pull on some pants, slip into shoes and stumble for the kitchen. 5:30 AM feels early no matter what. Find your toothbrush and the faucet handle with sleep-filled eyes. Splash some 40 degree well water on your face and gasp. Awake. The cook day begins.

Cakers. Bacon. Oatmeal. Three seemingly simple tasks. At 5:42 nothing is simple. Mix the powdered milk, turn on the stove, fire up the griddle. Tray the bacon, two pieces per guest? Check. Oatmeal water boiling. 5:49. Try to remember if you mixed the flour and sugar for the recipe for 28 or 36 the night before. Add oil, milk, eggs. Stir until the lumps disappear. 5:57. Put a few testers on the griddle, the back is always cooler. Ready the tables for setting, check the oatmeal water, get the basket of coffee grounds ready, the drip soothes 36 sleepy voices. Fire up the percolator to quiet the early risers, flip the cakers and go wake the croo. Choose a quiet song, but one that encourages action, plug in the IPod, adjust volume and run back downstairs. 6:17. The next 43 minutes are an intense flurry of activity. Set 36 places, flip dozens of pancakes, drip coffee, soothe surly guests. 7:00. Ring the gong, oatmeal is served. We get all the news we need from the weather report, the Mount Washington Observatory is on the radio. One records the weather, two hustle in the kitchen. Scrub the used dishes, ready three heaping trays of pancakes and bacon. 7:13. Weather read, oatmeal bowls in. Scrub, scrub, scrub. 36 clean bowls, time for a Blanket Folding Demonstration. International climbers, Birdwatchers, Mafia, what skit to perform? Grab a costume, act your heart out and scramble to collect plates and serving platters. 7:27. Scrub, scrub, scrub. 36 plates, 100 utensils. Dozens of miscellaneous monkey dishes, stew-pots, bacon trays and mixing bowls. Almost done, wipe the counters, rinse the sinks, sweep the floor. 7:48. Hurry, any minute now. 1-2-3 'PRONS! Pull off your apron and hurry upstairs in time for the 7:50

radio call. Right down the night's counts and messages and head back to the kitchen. Grab a bagel and a seat on the counter and sigh. 8:12. Time to start dinner.

Natty Cook Day

Margaret Graciano

The little black alarm clock began beeping at 5:15am that Saturday morning as the alpine glow filtered into the croo room. I arose, as I did on every cook day, groggy eyed and sleepy, donned my corduroys and wool sweater, climbed to the Galehead CC poop to turn on the inverter, and entered the kitchen. Though well into my second summer in the huts, I had yet to master the early morning calm that permits a leisurely coffee on the back porch before the guests awake. On a cook day I'm never calm. But not really frantic, either; just burdened by the impending doom of what might happen, should I screw up.

I am a naturalist, often bestowed with the title of "bad cook." Maybe not bad so much as incapable. Visiting croo, upon arriving in the kitchen and seeing the flour frosting my arm hairs, say with knowing recognition, "Ah...natty cook day." And despite my protests that the stereotype is ill founded, the tale of my worst cook day still persists. I am a naturalist, but if something is going to go wrong, it will happen to me—naturalist or not—guaranteed.

If a family of mice wanted to live in the croo room, chances are they'd chose my bunk. If a rabid wildebeest appeared in the Pemigewassett, I would be the first to discover it. If ant eggs were suddenly discovered in a box of dried apricots, I would be well along on my third. Yet that Saturday morning I awoke determined, yet again, to have my best cook day yet. I didn't even make it through breakfast.

When the croo awoke at 6:30am, things were going well. I was sweating from leaning over the griddle scrambling eggs, but the oatmeal went out— rich and hearty with a delicate sprinkling of cinnamon on the top. It was delicious, and the empty serving dishes returned to the kitchen as the guests eagerly awaited the main course. Scrambled eggs, check. Cornbread, check. Bacon, on its way. As I said, things *were* going well.

In Galehead's kitchen, the cast iron skillet, pots and saucepans hang from a rack bolted to the ceiling over the center island. The

stoves and dish sinks run parallel to the center island and the rack is just large enough so that the pots hang directly over the walking spaces adjacent to the stoves and sinks.

Right before serving the eggs that morning, the assistant hut master Caroline took one of the largest pots in the hut from the dish drying rack and hung it on a hook above the oven. I moved out of her way before tending to my bacon, and then, reached down to pull the navy tray loaded with bacon out of the oven. By some cruel twist of fate, at precisely the same moment that I pulled the tray from the oven, the large pot fell from the ceiling and crashed into it with such force that both the tray and the bacon flew to the floor. My firm grip on the tray had not been enough to stop the collision.

Caroline looked up from the dish sink with a look of horror matching my own: I was mortified. I stood there, unable to react, silently calculating how long it would take to warm a new batch of bacon. Certainly not in time to go out with the eggs and cornbread—it was the end of my cooking world. Caroline came rushing over, as all good assmasters should, to support me in my time of need.

"There was never bacon..." she said, with the look of someone who has just buried a dead body in their backyard. "...There was never bacon on egg day."

I smiled only slightly. I was heartbroken to be wasting so much food and ashamed to be serving the well known "yellow breakfast." And yet, despite my horror at what had just occurred, I was ever so relieved to pick the bacon off the floor, put it in the trash, and pretend that such a tragedy never happened.

Once the bacon grease had been thoroughly scrubbed off the floor and my hands returned to their normal scent, I managed to laugh. We served eggs and cornbread, the guests had no idea they missed out on bacon, and I sat and had my cup of coffee immediately after "prons." I was back on track.

The first thing I tackled after breakfast was mixing my bread dough. I always chose Anadama bread; in fact, by the end of the summer I had the art of making Anadama down to a science. Proof the yeast, heat molasses, oatmeal and hot water together in a saucepan, add them to the yeast, and slowly mix in the flour. Well, after heating

the saucepan of molasses, oatmeal, and hot water on the stove and letting it cool to what I *thought* was room temperature, I added it to the yeast. Upon seeing the enormous amounts of steam released from the mixture in the bowl, I panicked for a moment because I was afraid the hot water had killed the yeast. After some deliberation, I decided it would probably be fine, deemed the dough still usable, and set it in a bowl to rise.

Despite my own perceived time efficiency, one of my long-standing cook day challenges is completing my cook chore. Some cooks finish with time for an afternoon nap, and yet 4:30 rolls around for me and I'm still finishing dishes. Because it was a Saturday, I needed to ream the fridge; to make it shine and sparkle by the time the rest of the crew returned with the goods. After the bacon fiasco, I was determined to have a smooth day. At Caroline's suggestion, I decided to ream the fridge first, before guests began trickling in; so, after starting the bread and waving farewell to my crew packing down the GRT, I turned to the refrigerator.

After removing all of the contents from the upper shelf, I decided to remove the shelf itself so that I had a clear view of the back wall and could scrape off all of the frozen ice. I took out the glass shelf and turned to set it down on the center island. But, once again, fate intervened and the thermodynamics of the metal counter that morning did not cooperate. The instant I set the shelf down on the counter, the glass shattered into thousands of pieces that went flying across the kitchen. "Holy shit," was all I could manage to think. "What in the hell have I done now?"

There I was standing in a sea of glass and, because it wasn't enough for the shelf to simply shatter, even after they landed on the floor, the shards of glass continued to pop up at me from beneath like Mexican jumping beans. I felt like Forest Gump when he's running through the rain forest in Vietnam and gets shot in the ass. His exclamation, "Somethin' bit me!" was running through my head as I stood there being pelted by tiny glass pieces, frozen, waiting for the popping to cease, unsure of how to proceed. When the glass finally settled, I backed up, only to discover that tiny shards had become lodged in my corduroys. With every step I felt pricks all up and down my legs. It was like walking through a thorn bush with no pants.

Mortification swept over me. I glanced up quickly to ensure that no guests had seen the unbelievable mess, then tried to determine the most efficient way to remove the pounds of glass. I grabbed the broom and swept with a vengeance, silently praying that no one would walk in at that moment to see this disaster. The sound the glass made as it scratched across the wooden floorboards was almost musical—like tinkling China—but the knowledge that we no longer had a refrigerator shelf prevented me from enjoying the concerto. "Tristan's going to kill me," I thought to myself.

After sweeping up several dust pans full of glass, I knew that I couldn't simply throw the glass in the trash can because it would cut open the plastic garbage bag and make for a very unpleasant pack down. So I gathered several yogurt containers from the recycling, filled them all up with the broken glass, and then taped the lids securely on top.

It would have been enough if the glass had simply covered the floor, but as any klutz knows, it goes everywhere. There was glass on the stove, in each one of the burners, in the shelf with the cutting boards, under the oven, under Sammy, everywhere. Literally everywhere. So I had to take apart the entire stove top, pick out all the chunks of glass, and pray that I would get it all so that no one would step on a piece, or worse, consume an undetected shard months later. Thank goodness my rising bread dough was covered so that the glass didn't fall in.

After clearing the glass and finishing the fridge, I resolved not to feel sorry for myself for being behind and to make the best of things. I turned back to my Anadama.

Despite the extra time my bread had to rise during the glass fiasco, when I went to punch it down into loaves, it was certainly not anywhere close to double in size. I began to panic. "Shit," I thought to myself, and then, realizing what had happened, "That water *was* too hot." I then began cursing myself for not scrapping the molasses, oats and hot water in the first place. Why did I add the fifteen cups of flour, two cups of cornmeal, and then wait two hours just to find out I had killed the yeast?

Here was my dilemma: serve bricks of bread, still edible but as dense as stones, or start over again entirely, already behind schedule. Unable to accept my disgrace, I decided to give it another go, even knowing that my croo would think I was a total nutcase for making six loaves of bread. Six, for Galehead's thirty-eight guests. Well, I reasoned, I could always hide the three brick loaves and pack them out with me on days off.

With my new dough rising successfully, the bricks in the oven, and all other aspects of my cook day seemingly under control, I took a breath and began to wash the dishes. However, the stream of guests beginning to arrive at the hut soon interrupted my musical singing dishwashing time. I turned around to check in the leader of a large hiking group.

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"Hi, how are you?" I asked him.

"Fine, thanks."

"Well welcome to Galehead." I proceeded to give him my spiel on the hut—bunkrooms, dinner, potable drinking water, etc.

When I had finished, the man looked me straight in the eyes and said, "So who can I get the marijuana from?" After bacon, shattered glass and an army of bread loaves, I wasn't in the mood to handle guests, let alone a question like that.

"What?" I asked the man.

He stood there, like someone very clearly waiting for a delivery and said again, "I was told we could get pot up here." He said it so matter of factly, as if there was a greenhouse out back to which I would lead him and wrap up his plant.

"Is he joking?" I thought to myself.

"Ummmm..." I tried to think of how in the hell I should respond. "I don't think you can get it up here. At least not from me. We don't have any."

"Hmm," he said with a puzzled look on his face—still staring at me as if there was a magic word to get him his weed.

"Sorry," I said, returning to my dish sink. What else could I say?

"Well sir, I can't give you drugs but would you like some hot potato dill soup?"

The afternoon continued with a blur of dishwashing, bread bottom tapping, and checking in guests. The rest of my croo slowly returned and I hung my head in shame as I recounted all the other incidents post-bacon fiasco and explained what had happened to the refrigerator shelf. I think they laughed at me, though now all I can remember is my own feelings of horror and disgrace.

Five o'clock go-time rolled around and everything went off fine. I'm pretty sure I had a drink to ease my frazzled nerves, but turkey juice flowed like a river and the mashed potatoes were oh so creamy. As a matter of fact, my non-rising bread bricks came out fine in the end—perhaps even better than the second set of loaves—and I believe almost all six were eaten that night.

Although full of trials and tribulations, this is a story of triumph. For that night I fell asleep, finally free of bacon grease, glass shards, sticky bread dough, and marijuana sales. Despite the numerous disasters of the day, everyone ate, no one died, and we even managed to fit all the fresh produce in the fridge—sans shelf. The ever-resourceful Tristan crafted a new wooden shelf—perfectly sized of course—that might even still be in Galehead's refrigerator. It remains, shatter proof for the next unsuspecting victim, as a memorial for all cook-day disasters that have been overcome.

I may be a naturalist, but as such I know that sometimes you have to check the Clintonia for Mountain Watch fifteen times in the pouring rain before the season's first bud finally appears. So on my next cook day, I arose yet again with high hopes of grandeur and efficiency. Even if a rabid wildebeest invaded the Pemigewasset, this is one naturalist who—despite the claim that she belongs in the woods looking for Clintonia buds—would harness that beast, tape it up in empty yogurt containers, and pack it out with her the next morning as she left for her days off—hiding the evidence. It's all in a day's work, after all.

# Thoughts on Christopher McCandless

Matt Didisheim

The cold air streaked like a hand across my face as I bicycled down the road. Yesterday afternoon I decided to do something out of character and eat at a fast food restaurant, for the first time in longer than I can remember. Having reread *Into the Wild* and watched the film adaptation recently, I wanted to share a vestige of Chris McCandless's experience. To hike a mountain or cross a fast-flowing stream would not have been out of the ordinary for me, and I wanted to bring myself closer to the part of his life that was most foreign to him. While working at McDonald's in Bullhead City, his interactions with his coworkers, whom he considered "plastic people," must have revealed a part of him seen by few others. I wanted to eat what he carefully took the time to prepare and to look past the counter to the kind of windowless compartment where he worked to get a sense of that part of his life. Soon I arrived at the golden arches, a yellow and red sign that brought immoderation to mind, and I ordered a hamburger.

As I ate, I tried to picture Chris McCandless placing the meat on top of the bottom bun, then with his thoughtful, sockless care, I could see him place the lettuce, onion, and tomato, followed by the top half of the bun. I imagined his musings about the rules of his job, as one whose movements were determined not in accordance with his immediate surroundings but by the inspiration given him by the natural landscape where he belonged. He belonged in a place where the meat he ate and the berries he picked were taken from the land by him alone. As I slowly chewed, I thought not of the disagreeable flavor of industrial feedlot beef, but of this young man's plight to bring purpose to the moose's death, a death which he orchestrated. With an urgent awareness of time, he stripped from the bones the dead, lifeless meat, but his efforts to preserve and prepare it failed. He realized that nature was an unforgiving place for humans because it lacked the very complexities of society he had become used to and was striving to leave behind. The notion that only the creatures of the wild have the ability to interpret the strange and enduring patterns

found in wilderness is an immensely powerful realization. His quandary with the moose was visceral, as real as the maggots that invaded and reclaimed the meat he thought he had earned the right to take. Not everything that enters nature is meant to be there, which Chris must have realized in his final days of agony.

There is something about the cold air of a winter afternoon that brings about contemplation. As I traveled home the taste of the burger lingered, not altogether unpleasantly, and I began to understand the unbalanced amount of time Chris gave to everything and everyone he encountered on his way to Alaska. My thoughts about him made me want to forget the numbers and dials on my wristwatch and use the weather as my guide. Time is of the essence, some say, but time is not essential. Instincts fuel the mind and infuse the body with more willingness to advance than a glance at a clock can yield. If you let the snow drift by your open hands or the rain fall between your outspread fingers, you feel a whole new sense of time. Every facet of nature spoke to Chris McCandless in a way even his treasured books could not, and his amazing story contains the notion that the most monumental accomplishments lie within. He is the young man who faced the Alaskan wilderness in an attempt to abandon the burdens society had spent some 23 years placing on his shoulders; he is also the modest visionary who simply desired to make his lifestyle pure and his true home that of the moose and the wolf and the raging river.

# Tales of the Presence

Alex MacPhail

These are some ghost stories to tell to a hut audience, preferably in the evening when it is dark in the dining room and the wind is blowing.

## Chief Passaconaway and the Pennacooks

“Chief Passaconaway's Ride To Heaven came when at the age of one hundred and twenty he retired from his tribe and lived in a lonely wigwam among the Pennacooks. One winter night the howling of wolves was heard, and a pack came dashing through the village, harnessed by threes to a sledge of hickory saplings that bore a tall throne spread with furs (dog sled). The wolves paused at Passaconaway's door. The old chief came forth, climbed upon the sledge, and was borne away with a triumph apostrophe that sounded above the yelping and snarling of his train. Across Winnepesaukee's frozen surface they sped like the wind, and the belated hunter shrank aside as he saw the giant towering against the northern lights and heard his death-song echo from the cliffs. Through pathless woods, across ravines, the wolves sped on, with never slackened speed, the mazes of the Agiochooks to the highest peak we now call Washington. Up its steep wilderness of snow the ride went furiously; the summit was neared, the sledge burst into flame, still there was no pause; the height was gained, the wolves went howling into the darkness, but the car, wrapped in sheaves of fire, shot like a meteor toward the sky and was lost amid the stars of the winter night. So passed the Indian king into Heaven.” - *Myths And Legends Of Our Own Land*, by Charles M. Skinner, 1896

Passaconaway was the chief of the Pennacook band of Abenakis. The Pennacooks lived mostly in what is present day New Hampshire. Passaconaway died in the early 1700s, possibly in 1706, and some historians say he died on New Year's Day, in a Pennacook village near where Manchester is situated.

There is a much longer story, also, of Passaconaway's illustrious life. He had an enormous knowledge of medicinal plants, and medicine

in general, and possessed great skill (or luck) as a healer. His reputation reached so far that European doctors visiting America sought him out. He also was known to be a magician. One story tells of a hot summer day when Passaconaway was entertaining some visitors from Europe in his wigwam. He passed around a wooden bowl partially filled with water, which he then covered briefly with a piece of soft deerskin. An instant later, he removed it with a dramatic flourish to reveal the same vessel filled with ice. The ice probably came from caves on Mt. Whiteface.

The Pennacook often wintered along the Merrimack River (“Amoskeag” of Manchester's *Amoskeag Falls* on the Merrimack River is the Abenaki/Algonquian word for "weirs" or fish "traps"). The Pennacook summered in Wonalancet (the name of Passaconaway's son) at the foot of what are now Mts. Wonalancet, Passaconaway, and Whiteface and also around Lake Winnepesaukee, particularly at The Weirs, near Laconia, named for the fish weirs erected by the Abenaki. These summer camps were visited by many bands of Abenaki who came from what are now Quebec, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine to socialize and to dry fish and make pemmican for the winter months. The Pennacook considered the entire region they traversed between Amoskeag and Wonalancet and north to Mt. Washington to be held in common by the tribe. Passaconaway had, for most of his life, been generous to the European settlers arriving in New England between 1620 and the 1680s, but as they moved north like a tide into his tribal lands, Passaconaway came to despise them for their greed and broken promises. Just before he died, it is said that he uttered a grim promise to come back to the mountains after his death and “make havoc on the white people” to avenge their crimes against his people.

## The Presence Settles at Lakes of the Clouds

A hundred years after Passaconaway's death, Ethan Allen Crawford and his wife, Lucy, were trying to scratch out a living in Crawford Notch as innkeepers (just a stone's throw from the AMC's Highland Center), while Ethan moonlighted as a guide and farmer. It was a spartan existence. Over the years Ethan Crawford was asked to guide travelers to the summit of Mt. Washington so often that he

decided to blaze a trail from his inn to the summit that could be used for horse travel. This trail, cut in 1818 and 1819, became the Crawford Path.

The most difficult part of the trail to cut was the four or five miles up Mt. Clinton and beyond to Mt. Pleasant, now known as Mt. Eisenhower. The men camped out rather than return to Crawford's each night, and during that time, the men working on the trail complained of being watched by something they referred to as The Presence.

They described a kind of prickly feeling along their necks, running a little way down their spines, sometimes making the hairs on their necks tingle or stand up straight. The men became jittery when anyone mentioned the feeling; it filled them with a sense of impending doom. Within a month of the first reports of The Presence, two men quit in terror.

Little more is known about The Presence until the 1930s, another hundred years later. By that time Lakes of the Clouds Hut had been in existence for over twenty years, already far larger than when it was built beside the Crawford Path as an emergency shelter for hikers heading from Crawford Notch to the summit.

In the summer of 1900, two such hikers, Bill Curtis and Allan Ormsbee, both young men from New York City, died from hypothermia on the ridge just above the Lakes of the Clouds. They were on their way to an AMC annual meeting at the Summit House and were caught in a terrible snowstorm, expiring a few feet from each other on June 30<sup>th</sup>—the middle of the summer! They were not the first, nor the last, hikers to perish from hubris on Mt. Washington.

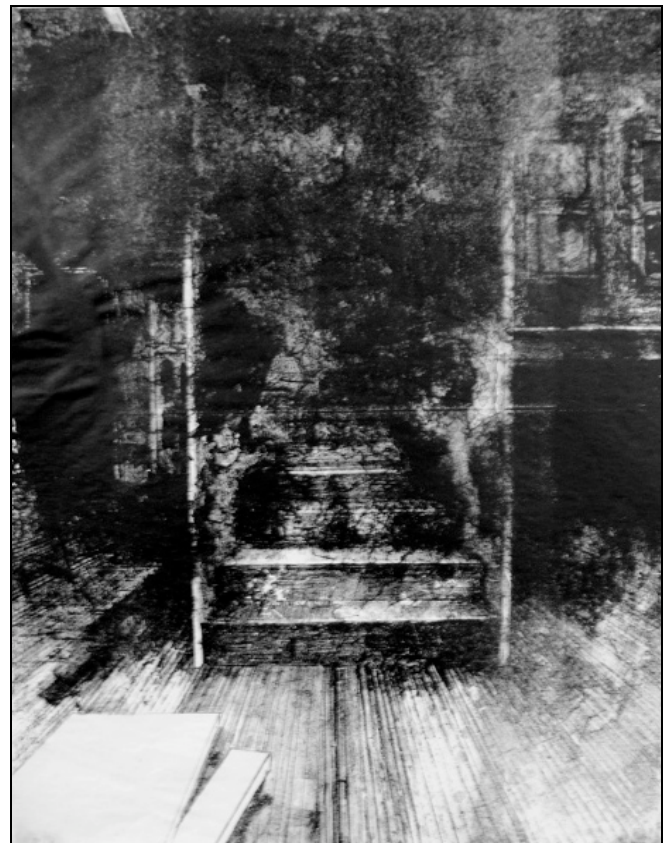
Lakes of the Clouds Hut grew year-by-year from a small emergency shelter to a larger building that could accommodate overnight guests making the loop across the Presidential Range to or from Madison Spring Hut. By the 1930, the huts were serving hundreds of people during the summer months, and it was during this time that The Presence reappeared.

Guests at Lakes of the Clouds began complaining about the long, dark corridor that led to the bathrooms. At night, they sometimes "felt someone was staring at them through a row of windows." Some said they saw a face in the windows, while others claimed that when they

crossed the threshold into the bathroom, an icy cold hand gripped their shoulder.

During some summers reports of The Presence were more frequent. Some years there were none. Then, in the 1960s, there were more events than ever. Reports of the face in the window and the cold hand on the shoulder were suddenly coupled with the sound of footsteps on the staircase to the Lakes basement. Doors were heard to open and close, even when they had been securely locked.

On one occasion, the Lakes Hutmaster was sitting in the kitchen one Sunday night to finish the hut report. Given the lateness of the hour, his only company was the hut cat, lying by his foot and listening quietly to the wind and the gas lamp hissing quietly. Suddenly, they both heard the downstairs basement door open and close. Someone began to come up the stairs. The Hutmaster turned to look, but no one appeared. Then the cat's eyes bulged. Its hair stood straight up, and its back arched. With a fierce and intent expression, it stared exactly at the spot where the sound had been. The Hutmaster jumped over the table and ran into the croo room, slamming and barricading the door behind him. The cat was left to its own devices.



Lithograph by Iona Woolmington

## The Meticulous Intruder

On September 17, 1967, the last cog railway train of the day jumped the track as it descended from the summit. It fell off the trestle and slid down the rocky mountainside for a ways before coming to a stop. Several people were killed. Emergency personnel including state police, game wardens, doctors, and other rescuers, rushed to the scene. At night, the hotel on the summit was still open but since everyone was helping out at the scene of the wreck, the hotel was empty.

Chris Kreilkamp was the hotel manager that summer, and he was alone in the hotel the night of the accident. He did the usual things to close up for the evening, making sure to turn off the stoves in the big kitchen and close and lock the windows. Then he put all the day's money in the big hotel safe and locked it. Chris, as the manager, was the only one on the mountain with the combination. After turning off the lights, he retired to his bedroom in the old part of the hotel.

A few hours into his sleep someone banged loudly on his bedroom door. He woke with a start, heart thumping. He thought it was someone with news of the train accident, so he jumped out of bed, turned on the light, and opened the door. No one was there. He looked down the corridor. No one. "Impossible," he thought to himself, and he got back in bed. A few minutes later, he heard footsteps in the hall and the banging on the door, even louder this time. He ran to the door. No one! He panicked and hid under the covers.

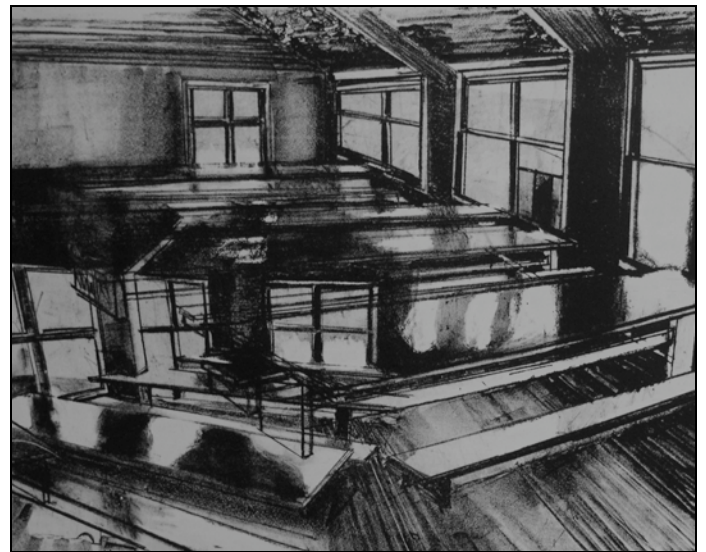
The next morning, he went into main room of the hotel and found the safe door wide open. On the counter by the snack bar all the money that had been in the safe was stacked up in denominations. All the pennies were stacked together, all the nickels were stacked, the dimes, quarters, and all the dollar bill, too, were stacked by ones, fives, tens, twenties, and hundreds.

The same thing happened the next night. The accident was still drawing investigators and reporters, but there were few people around the hotel. It was late in the season for tourists. Chris went to bed, and again he heard the loud footsteps and the banging on the door, yet still no one was there. The next morning the safe was open again and the money stacked on the snack bar counter. He immediately called the hotel owner on the phone and told him one of

his favorite aunts had died in Bayonne, New Jersey. He left immediately.

Roughly a year later, an AMC construction croo was completing some renovations at Lakes of the Clouds. It was early September, and as it is a North Country tradition to attend the Lancaster Fair, the construction croo took it upon themselves to slip away for a night and run down the Ammy to attend it. One of the croo wanted to stay behind, however. The croo joked with him, teasing him that anyone who stays a night alone at Lakes goes insane. He said he didn't believe them, didn't care, and didn't want to go with them.

The Construction Croo bunked at Pinkham that night and didn't return to the hut until ten the next morning. They yelled George's name (the guy who stayed behind) quite a few times but got no answer. They thought maybe he really had gotten scared being there all alone. Perhaps he had gone up to the observatory to spend the night. They worked for a while and then one of them went into the croo room for something. There was George crouched down in the corner with two butcher knives, one in either hand, trembling like a leaf and mute as a stone. They helped him up to the summit later in the day, where a car came to fetch him home. Several years later he agreed to be interviewed. He refused to relate the details but said staying alone at the hut that night was the most terrifying thing he could imagine.



Lithograph by Iona Woolmington

### A Quick Night Swim in Lakes of The Clouds

One hot summer night in 1970, several of the Lakes crew decided to go for a quick swim in the larger of the two Lakes of the Clouds. The moon was almost full, and it was a calm night with no wind. The trio swam to a large rock near the center of the lake and sat talking. Then one of them jumped in and swam around a bit, then climbed back on the rock. Then another dove in. He stayed under for some time, long enough to make the others wonder if he was okay. The lake is only about 10 feet deep in the middle, but they grew concerned. Suddenly he erupted upwards exploding above the surface, thrashed his way back to the rock and climbed out quickly. "The weirdest thing just happened," he said. He explained that after he dove, he was about to kick upwards to return to the surface, but an icy cold hand grabbed him by the ankle and held him under the surface until he thought he would drown. Then it released him.

Throughout the 1970s, reports of footsteps coming up from the basement and walking down the length of the corridor in the west wing of the hut continued. But as the hut gradually grew to accommodate the growing numbers of hikers needing space, tales of ghost-like phenomena subsided. There are hardly any anymore, which is sad. If it was Passaconaway's ghost, then he has given up and feels defeat.