

Wonalancet Out Door Club Newsletter

December



2020

Caring for the Sandwich Range since 1892 - *or so*

THE PASSACONAWAY MOUNTAIN CLUB

Of all the groups that have built and maintained trails in the White Mountains over the years, few are as little-known as the short-lived Passaconaway Mountain Club (PMC).

Based at the Swift River Inn in the Albany Intervale in the 1920s and 1930s, this group was responsible for a number of trails that are still in use today off the middle section of the Kancamagus Highway. Hikers heading from the Kanc up to Hedgehog Mountain, Potash Mountain, Mt. Passaconaway, Mt. Tripyramid or Owl's Cliff/ Mt. Tremont can thank the PMC trail stewards for opening or reopening routes to these scenic peaks.

As a trail adopter on two of the footpaths once managed by the PMC, I've long been interested in finding out more about the club. Even with the wonders of Google, little information is readily available save for brief mentions in *AMC White Mountain Guide* editions of that vintage.

Luckily Matt von Wahlde, who owns a cottage at the base of Hedgehog Mountain and has extensively researched the history of the area, was able to provide some good information on the PMC. Especially

interesting is a copy of a brochure from the Swift River Inn listing the trails maintained by the club.

As early as the 1860s the Albany Intervale – also known in a general sense as “Passaconaway” - began welcoming trampers, with boarding available at the house of local farmer James M. Shackford. The modest hostelry was known as “Shackford’s” and later was called the “Passaconaway House.” Shackford expanded the building as the area became more popular with hikers, hunters and fishermen.



Swift River Inn

Regular visitors included Walter and Ida Rachel James, grandparents of Ben English, Jr. of Jackson, NH, who are featured in the books *Our Mountain Trips: Part I – 1899-1908* and *Our Mountain Trips, Part II – 1909-1926*. (These books are highly

recommended for a fascinating look back at the hiker's world of a century ago.)

In 1907 the Shackfords sold their property to Alfred Povall, who operated the Passaconaway House until it was destroyed by a chimney fire in February 1916.

After the fire the farm was purchased by Rev. Arthur P. Hunt, a professor at the Episcopal Theological

Seminary in New York and a summer resident of the Albany Intervale. In 1917 Hunt had a new hostelry built and named it the Swift River Inn. Newspaper ads proclaimed it “a wonderful center for mountain climbing.” For nearly two decades it was a popular base for hikers climbing the surrounding peaks.

It was Hunt, according to von Wahlde, who most likely founded the Passaconaway Mountain Club. This was in the tradition of other White Mountain innkeepers, such as Nathaniel Greeley of Waterville Valley and Kate Sleeper of Wonalancet, who developed and maintained local trails for the pleasure of their guests.

New trail-building activity in the Albany Intervale was noted in the September 25, 1920 issue of *the White Mountain Echo and Tourists' Register*, a summer newspaper serving the region's hotels. “NEW PATHS AT PASSACONWAY” read the headline. “Trail opening has been the pleasant occupation of a group of enthusiastic mountaineers at the Swift River Inn at Passaconaway this summer... Diverging from the old trail up Passaconaway slide, a new path has been opened to the summit of Passaconaway, affording finer outlooks than those from the old path.” The story also reported that “an excellent trail up Mt. Potash has been made.”

The budding group of trail-builders at Passaconaway was welcomed by its trail club neighbors to the south. In the minutes from the September 1922 Annual Meeting of WODC, Elizabeth Child wrote, “It was suggested that the climbers at Passaconaway be asked to form an active organization to attend to the trails and that they, Chocorua and Waterville be asked to form an organization with Wonalancet for mutual co-operation.”

The Chocorua Mountain Club's report for 1923 noted that among the more than one hundred people who attended the club's annual reunion was “a substantial delegation from the new-born Passaconaway Mountain Club, in Albany Intervale, whose trail system approaches ours. To this club we extend our greetings and best wishes for its future prosperity.”

These reports suggest that the PMC was formally organized sometime in 1922 or 1923.

Apparently an early version of today's White Mountain Trail Collective never coalesced, though the minutes of the 1926 WODC Annual Meeting mentioned a plan to organize a series of Sandwich Range hikes for the summer of 1927, in cooperation with CMC and PMC. And all four of the trail clubs then working in the Sandwich Range – WODC, CMC, PMC and WAIA - were members of the umbrella organization known as the New England Trail Conference.

The Swift River Inn brochure, which presumably dates from the late 1920s or early 1930s, notes that “twenty different peaks are visible from the piazza; seven of these are near enough to climb in a single day's trip.” The views were wider in those days, as much of the land around the inn was open field. The inn was sited at the one brushy open area that remains today, just east of Passaconaway Campground, a location called “hotel field.”

The brochure touts the inn's location as “...an ideal center for climbers and trampers, as trails radiate from Passaconaway in every direction.” It goes on to provide a list of suggested walks on trails maintained by the Passaconaway Mountain Club and beginning at the inn.

Among the destinations noted are a path along the Swift River, Church Pond, Birch Hill, Sabbaday Falls, Potash Mountain, Hedgehog Mountain, Square Ledge, Owl's Cliff, Mt. Tremont, Mt. Passaconaway and Mt. Tripyramid. As noted above, most of these routes are still in use today.

According to old Appalachian Mountain Club guidebooks, the PMC trails to Hedgehog and Potash were restorations of earlier paths destroyed by logging when the Conway Lumber Company cut over much of the valley from 1906-1916.

Von Wahlde pointed out a tidbit about the Hedgehog trail that I would have passed off as a typo. Today the loop path over Hedgehog is known as the “UNH

Trails maintained by the Passaconaway Mountain Club and Beginning at Swift River Inn

River Path	1.5.mile
Ledges	1 mile
Church Pond	1.5 miles
Birch Hill	2.5 miles
Sabba Day Falls	2 miles
Mt Potash	2 Miles
Mt Hedgehog via Una Path to Summit	1.8 miles
Mt Hedgehog via Cliffs to Summit	2.6 miles
Square Ledge	5 miles
Owl's Cliff	4.5 miles
Mt Passaconaway via slide	4 miles
Mt Tremont	6 miles
Mt Tri-Pyramid	7 miles
Mt Hedgehog via Una to Summit and return via Cliffs	4.4 miles
Square Ledge via Oliverian Brook return via Passaconaway Cut-off	10.1 miles
Mt Passaconaway via Slide return via Passaconaway Cut-off	9.25 miles

Trail.” That’s because when the Swift River Inn was closed in the late 1930s the property was donated to the University of New Hampshire, which used it for a forestry summer camp until the 1960s.

The earlier PMC trail to Hedgehog was called the “Una Trail,” named in honor of Arthur P. Hunt’s wife. Una Hunt was a well-known author whose 1914 book, *Una Mary: The Inner Life of a Child*, was a groundbreaking autobiographic study of childhood.

In the vicinity of Square Ledge and Mt. Passaconaway, the PMC maintained what are today known as the Square Ledge Branch Trail and the Passaconaway Cutoff. They also looked after the now-abandoned Downes Brook Slide Trail up the steep north flank of Passaconaway. On the “between the wars” WODC map (displayed in *Trail Maps of the Wonalancet Out Door Club: A History, 1901-1995*, by John R. Boettiger), the Cutoff and Slide Trail are shown heading off to Albany with the initials “P.M.C.”

The club also improved and maintained a trail through the Sabbaday Brook valley and up a slide on the east side of Mt. Tripyramid to the ridgecrest. In the late 1920s they put through the Brunel Trail to Owl’s Cliff and Mt. Tremont (“planned and blazed by the late Roger F. Brunel”) and a side trail to the cliffs of little Birch Hill. Birch Hill is trailless today, but bushwhackers will still find good views of the Rob Brook area from its ledges.

One path that the PMC started in 1927-1928 but never finished was a route to Green’s Cliff on the northwest side of the Albany Intervale. This imposing rock face is prominent in northern views along the Sandwich Range and from the Sugar Hill overlook along the Kanc. The club marked a 5-mile long route from the Sawyer Pond Trail to an outlook atop the west end of the main cliff, with a branch leading to the base of the cliff’s east end. Apparently these paths were never fully cleared and were soon abandoned.

The Green’s Cliff path was used in 1928 by an AMC rock climbing party led by Lincoln O’Brien. The

group ascended 100 feet up the face but “were unable to find a route to the top of this magnificent cliff. No other route could be found; the smooth, massive slabs seem impregnable.” Not until 1975 was the first ascent of Green’s Cliff made, by Jim Dunn and Michael Macklin.

In addition to their trailwork, according to AMC guidebooks, the PMC maintained “a hut in Albany Intervale, N of the highway and E of the Inn, where trappers may cache supplies and secure maps and information.” Perhaps the WODC map of that era – priced at twenty-five cents in 1931 - was available for perusal or purchase at the PMC hut.

The PMC’s tenure ended with the closing of the Swift River Inn in the late 1930s. The property was passed on to the University of New Hampshire for summer use by its Forestry School, and in 1969 it was purchased by the U.S. Forest Service. The 1940 edition of the *AMC White Mountain Guide* noted that the club had disbanded, and that “the future of the trails still designated PMC in this text depends upon agreement between the WMNF and the University of New Hampshire Forestry School.” Ultimately, most of the trails that had been maintained by the PMC became the responsibility of the USFS. Though it’s been eight decades since the club faded from the scene, I still think of those maintainers of old every time I go out to the Albany Intervale for trail work or a hike.

NOTE: The classic history of the Albany Intervale is *Passaconaway in the White Mountains*, by Charles Edward Beals, Jr., published in 1916 and available as a reprint from the Albany Historical Society.

Thanks to Matt von Wahlde and Doug McVicar for sharing their research on the Albany Intervale and the PMC.

~ *Steve Smith*

Steve Smith is the owner of The Mountain Wanderer Map and Book Store in Lincoln NH, the Editor of the AMC White Mountain Guide, and a WODC member.

In Memory of Joe Semmes

Joe was a resident of both Wonalancet, N.H., and New Orleans, La., and previously of Portland, Maine. He was a lover of history, travel, the great outdoors, yoga, good food, his dogs, dancing and, most of all, his family. Joe considered himself a citizen of the world and spiritual seeker.



He was born on Oct. 20, 1949, in post-war, Bremerhaven, Germany. He learned to love Gregorian chant while a student at the Portsmouth Abbey School. Joe’s time completing his bachelors in biological sciences at Dartmouth College was punctuated by a stint serving the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1971, including one tour in Vietnam.

After returning to Dartmouth to finish his undergraduate training, he then received a medical degree at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at St. Luke’s Roosevelt Hospital and a fellowship in Critical Care Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh.

Joe loved practicing emergency medicine at Arlington Hospital in Virginia and Mercy Hospital in Portland, Maine. However, his involvement with and outlook on medicine shifted following his 1997 diagnosis and

subsequent lifelong battle with neuroendocrine pancreatic cancer.

Later in his career, he practiced palliative care medicine and was a Founding Incorporator of the Hospice of Southern Maine and served on the Maine Health Palliative Care Working Group. He also promoted holistic medicine as Director of Research at True North in Falmouth, Maine.

As a cancer survivor, Joe was interested in how state-of-the-art medical care could be integrated with better nutrition, spiritual practices, exercise and eastern medical traditions.

He loved walking in the woods of New Hampshire as well as playing chess and squash. He had virtual chess games going 24/7 with friends and family across the country. Joe had a wonderful sense of humor and playfulness paired with a lively, inquisitive mind.

His family will miss his encyclopedic recall about history and love of language. Joe also loved a good game of charades and reading Shakespeare out loud with friends. The highlight of the last two years was spending time singing to and playing with his grandson, Van.

He found spiritual peace at his beloved Wonalancet Chapel, where he occasionally gave sermons integrating his thoughts about history, literature and God.

Joe was a descendant of Kate Sleeper. Joe and his wife Elonide maintained a seasonal residence at the Wonalancet Farm, Kate Sleeper's Inn.

Parking Pains at Ferncroft

“My favorite place in New England is a parking lot,” declared author and journalist Alex Beam in the *Boston Globe*. “It is the narrow, grassy Ferncroft parking area, operated by the Wonalancet Out Door Club,” where the lonely trails “open the back door to the southernmost ridge of the White Mountains.”

But that was twenty-five years ago, and in spite of Mr. Beam's final advice – “Please . . . stay away” – Wonalancet has been discovered. Big time.

The number of cars arriving on busy days – and the number of busy days in all four seasons – are steadily increasing. The Ferncroft parking lot was built in 1975 to hold 20 cars, an adequate number back then. But in recent years, on nearly every fair-weather weekend day and on many weekdays as well, vehicles are overflowing from the lot by early morning and spilling down Ferncroft Road.

In 2020 numbers spiked. COVID is driving a huge increase in outdoor activities nationwide. Here in Wonalancet car counts doubled. One beautiful Saturday this fall we had 121 cars stretching down Ferncroft Road to the Chapel more than half a mile away. Twenty cars were squeezed into the Chapel Grove where WODC holds its annual potluck. (See photo.)



Hiker cars lining Ferncroft Road

This situation puts WODC in a ticklish position. We are a hikers' club, founded to improve and develop the place for hikers. But we also need to avoid despoliation of the landscape, overuse of the trails, and alienation of local property owners. The

importance of the latter becomes clear from a glance at the map: there is no access to the National Forest or the high peaks from Wonalancet except through private property, graciously opened to the hiking community by private landowners.

WODC is responding with a hiker-friendly, multipronged parking initiative. Since visitors overwhelmingly want to do the right thing, education is our top priority. Our message is simple: Parking is very tight, so avoid weekends and holidays, choose alternate routes and trailheads, and carpool if you can do it safely.

Most hikers research their trips – and they do it using electronic media. Fortunately, WODC Parking Task Force member Philip Walsh is a social media professional. His parking advisories get our message to a huge audience – one recent post to a Facebook group reached 14,600 hikers.

Most of Ferncroft Road lies in Albany. Our discussion of the problem with the Albany Selectboard and Road Agent has led to an official No Parking zone on both sides of Ferncroft Road. Albany took this action not for conservation reasons, but as a safety measure. Tickets can be – and have been – issued to violators.

At the same time as we are pushing to get visitors out of inappropriate parking places we are building them new legal parking spaces. Construction has already begun to double the size of the current Ferncroft lot. Working with the WMNF Saco District and the landowner, we have designed the expanded parking lot to minimize the visual impact while increasing convenience and safety.

We don't agree with Alex Beam. We do not want to say "Please stay away," but something more like: Please come, respectfully. And please spread the word, so that (to adapt the wisdom of Lao Tzu) the journey to four thousand feet begins in a place of quiet inspiration.

~Doug McVicar

In Memory of Ted Sidley

Dr. Nathan Theodore (Ted) Sidley passed away on Friday, June 12, 2020, at the age of 91. He is survived by his wife Barbara, his children Karen, Thomas and his wife Jessie, and Ann and her husband Tom. Ted also has five grandchildren, Patrick, Melissa, Sam, Sylvia, and Lena.

Ted grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, and attended the University of Minnesota and subsequently the University of Minnesota Medical School. After medical school he entered a residency program in



Ted(center) heading out on a winter excursion to Lost Pass with fellow WODC members.

psychiatry at Yale University. When he was drafted, he served as a psychiatrist at Chanute Air Force base in Illinois. Upon receiving his honorable discharge from the military, he completed his psychiatric training at Harvard University. Ted had a voracious curiosity about the world. He had a love of knowledge, science and language. Any question that came up, he was not satisfied with a brief or partial answer—he really wanted to deeply understand any subject. A new word would invariably send him to his one foot thick dictionary in its place of honor on the nearby bookshelf. From family to friends, he loved to

welcome people of all ages and walks of life into his home for food and conversation. He was truly interested in everyone, asking questions and listening intently.

Ted also had a passion for the outdoors and for nature. He loved to hike and ski near the family house in Albany, NH. His love for the mountains was evident in his tireless work in conservation which included several multi-year projects to protect them from development. Exceptionally active in the WODC, he also spent multiple years as the president of the WPA (both organizations' mission was to conserve the natural order and beauty of their little corner of New Hampshire, as well as maintain trails enjoyed by thousands of folks who loved the outdoors like him). Committing countless hours of research, organizing and lobbying, Ted's dedication and effort proved integral to many successes. As a result of his and others' work, the Sandwich Range Wilderness area was created by an act of Congress.

Ted's curiosity and passion for understanding and improving the world were truly inspiring. A devoted and patient husband, father, and friend, he will be greatly missed by those who knew and loved him.

Black Bear Cubs

Cubs are born completely furred but blind during the winter, mainly in January, while the mother is overwintering in a deep torpor. The size and number of neonate cubs are dependent on the weight of the mother. A useful rule of thumb is each cub will weigh one two-hundredth of the mothers weight. The average is a little over a half pound. The cubs may or may not have the same father. During estrous, a female bear will mate with more than one male. It has been suggested that this can ensure safety for the cubs because the local males will be less likely to kill the cubs if the cubs might be their own offspring.

For the first couple of months, the cubs dine exclusively on mother's milk, which is a particularly rich soup of fat and protein. The cubs grow quickly. By the time the family emerges from the winter den, the cubs are about the size of a medium-large house

cat. At this point their "how to be a bear" education begins. For the next fourteen to fifteen months mom teaches them what's good to eat, how and where to find it, how to avoid those pesky humans (let's hope they're not getting accustomed to handouts) and other useful bear hacks. Bears make excellent moms and the cubs usually have a survival rate of up to 80%.

Along about May or June of the following year, mom realizes it's time to start the cycle all over again. She gets a hankering for going out on the town and the cubs have become a hindrance. She chases the cubs off. The male cubs wander far and wide to start their life as an independent bear. The females stay closer to home and the lucky ones get a piece of their mother's territory to set up housekeeping. This is the most



Photo by Andy Thompson

challenging time of a bear's life. The survival rate of sub-adults can be less than 67%; in the far north it can be as little as 30%. Those who make it to their third or fourth year have a good chance of living for another 15 to 20 years and contributing to the bear population.

~Chris Conrod

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