



Northeast Kingdom Ramblings



NEK Section Leadership

President: John Predom (gmcnek@gmail.com)
 Section Director: Cathi Brooks (nektrecker@gmail.com)
 Vice President: Paul Trojano (paul.r.trojano@gmail.com)
 Secretary: Michael Chernick (chernick5@comcast.net)
 Treasurer: Angela Smith (angelamariesmith2011@gmail.com)
 Membership Coordinator: Beth Barnes (gotwaveslb@ymail.com)
 Ramblings Editor: Ed Guest (enkguest@gmail.com)

Featured Hike:

Unknown Pond/Middle Mountain

by John Predom

I adopted this trail when I first moved to the Northeast Kingdom and joined the NEK Section. Recently retired, it was a dream of mine to be a trail adopter.

The trail is 3.7 miles to the summit. The terrain varies, starting in a maple grove, then climbing to the junction with the Kingdom Heritage Trail. A short ascent to some open land yields views of Bald Mountain and glimpses of Unknown Pond. In the spring there's a wildflower carpet.

Things level out and then go downhill for a while passing a boggy area where I always scan for moose until reaching a small stream crossing. From here it's a gradual ascent to what I call a false summit (On my first snowshoe I stopped here). You really feel you're in deep woods, with no sounds but the forest.

One final dip through thick forest and a final mild ascent brings you to the Middle Mountain North Trail. From here, a quick left gets you to the forested summit where there is a view of Gore Mountain through the trees.

There are four stream crossings and the first one can be tricky, especially in winter and spring. The others are small enough to cross easily, but slippery.

As for an adopter's tasks, I divide my work days. In early spring I hike to the summit clearing debris along the way and assess blowdowns. On the way down I clear what I can with a handsaw. On another day I clear water-bars with a hoe. Luckily, I only have to do this for about 1.5 miles. In July, I return to cutback briars and hobblebush. A final sweep in the Fall to clear water-bars and check for blowdowns.

The President's Corner

by John Predom

I attended the Partners Team Meeting on December 4th with Weyerhaeuser, Peter Piper, Northwoods Stewardship, GMC, Sweet Tree Holdings, Vermont FPR, US Fish & Wildlife, Brighton Recreation, and others. This was supposed to be a hike-meeting, but Covid protocols required us to go virtual. Luke O'Brien hosted. One development from the meeting is that we are actively looking into the possibility of creating overnight campsites on the Kingdom Heritage Trail.

The Section hosted two group hikes this past quarter before the Covid rules tightened. Michael Chernick led one to Headwaters Camp and Paul Trojano hosted a hike in Victory. For me, it was exciting to have these two hikes to get people together and lighten spirits in these trying times. I have also gotten out with individuals to hike Moose Mountain, Burke Mountain, and to South America Pond.

A few of our members participated in Andrea Kane's Wilderness First Aid training offer. It will be nice to have these folks on future group hikes.

We've gained some new volunteers and members this quarter. I want to thank everyone for all that they do, and remember, we are a club. If you need help with trail work, do not hesitate to ask others. Other members are interested and willing to learn and help.

See you on the trail.



NEK Ramblings . . .

October 12. The Northeast Kingdom Snowshoe Expeditionary Force (NKSEF, Solvitur Ambulando) went out scouting likely winter snowshoeing trails. Our walkabout left from Rte 114 in Norton to Halfway Pond, so named as it's halfway to Lenny's camp on Holland Pond. Temp 27°F. Getting closer to snow season —Chris Rice

October 18. An early snow made it a wet hike up Middle Mountain to Headwaters Camp with Michael Chernick, Bart Selle, Hope Crifo, Paul Trojano, and Fred Raymond. —Cathi Brooks

October 22. Another great day in the NEK! I chose Moose Bog Trail as I had my two-year old grandson and his Mom with me. We didn't see moose nor any evidence of any recent presence, but we were very sweetly accompanied by a lovely variety of birds—chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and a Canada jay (whiskey jack). —Joanne Federle

October 22. A great new-to-me hike (Gore Mountain Trail-Middle Mountain Trail-Unknown Pond Trail) with NEK Section President John Predom. I stopped at Sentinel Rock State Park on my way home, checked out the 13,000-year-old glacially deposited Sentinel Rock, and hiked the lovely, gentle, trails there. #hikeNEK! —Jocelyn Hebert

November 5. I took a 5.6 mile loop hike in Elmore State Park. The hike starts on a road and eventually becomes a trail to the first vista. From the vista, the trail is steep and can be icy up to the fire tower and I needed to put on micro spikes. Continuing on, the loop led to more vistas and Balance Rock. —John Predom

November 6. Awesome hiking day. We had lots of wind at the top, but found a sunny spot on a ski trail in the sun for our lunch while admiring the inspiring views. We are surely blessed to live here and have days like this to enjoy and appreciate. —Joanne Federle

November 8. I couldn't resist a little stroll at Moose Bog east of Island Pond on such a beautiful afternoon. It takes me a lot longer to drive there than to walk the trail, but always well worth it. Such peacefulness. —Joanne Federle

November 9. My daughter and I hiked the Devil's Hill Trail in Groton State Forest today. It's a 1.9 mile loop starting in Peacham and is a moderate climb all the way to the summit. —John Predom

November 11. We ventured many gravel miles into the Nulhegan Basin in Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife refuge to visit our adopted hiking trail and perform fall maintenance. Didn't see another soul. We discovered some impressive brand new accessible boardwalks at Molly Beattie Bog, Lewis Pond, Black Branch, and Moose Bog. —Susan Johnston and Chris Scott



November 13. I spent a beautiful quiet day at Moose Bog and was able to watch an otter for about 20 minutes. Lots of wildlife visitors, but didn't see the elusive spruce grouse. I also got some great pictures. —John Predom

November 14. I opted for a solo hike on Tuesday. It was the last day of an unseasonably warm and sunny streak. It was also my final chance to get outside before the start of rifle season. —Kevin Williamson

November 19. I went to Brighton State Park and hiked to Indian Point. The woods were quiet. I did see a Canada jay and a pileated redheaded woodpecker. I also learned some Abenaki history about the original inhabitants of this area from the several informative signs scattered about the park. —John Predom

November 22. The Willoughby South Shore Loop Trail on is ready for snowshoeing season! I worked on it yesterday and today, cutting out fall downs, removing fire pits from the trail, and clearing leaves for better drainage. It's a beautiful place without a lot of people, quite peaceful working in the forest, along the lake, and in "Jurassic Park" where I gave up on the bootleg trail. It is what it is! I'm always seeing new things—like "x" marks the spot! —Sue Winsor

November 27. I hiked the Black Branch Trail to a new boardwalk in the Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. —John Predom

November 29. Susan Winsor and I hiked Burke Mountain's Red Trail. There a little early snow at the top and a beautiful view. —John Predom

November 29. My 7 year old granddaughter and I hiked Bald Mountain today. A little snowy and icy towards the top, but she did great and it was a great day. As an added bonus we got a beautiful sunset on our way down. —Julie Keith

December 1. I had totally forgotten about that lovely Shore Trail in Brighton State Park, so couldn't resist it on this beautiful mild December day. It was delightful! Well worth my drive. And I hope to take my grandson on it in the spring. I noted ice along the edge of the pond in some places—despite yesterday's hard rain and today's warm temp. —Joanne Federle

December 4. I try to hike weekly with a friend (or more often if I find time and a partner)! This week it was with Cathi Brooks at Perry Holbrook State Park! And we even had some sunshine! —Jill Lillis

December 5. My third hike this week! Jill Lillis and I did Pisgah South, after indecision on where to hike! No hunters on this trail, just a few other hikers. Great day! —Sue Winsor. Jill adds: A slightly wet, somewhat slippery, and absolutely fantastic hike. (Editor's Note: I wish you two could show a little more enthusiasm for hiking!)

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Ramblings . . .

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December 11. First snowshoe this season! Bluff Mountain Community Trail. —John Predom

December 16. Today I did the Haystack Mountain Loop. It was -4 degrees when I left home this morning. This hike starts in hardwoods and is a gradual climb until you reach the conifers. Then it ascends steeply to the summit. I wore micro-spikes the whole hike. It was mostly packed snow with some ice, mostly on the south side. The loop is about 3.5 miles long. —John Predom

December 19. Today Susan and I had not one, but TWO socially distanced hikes! First we did the North Branch Trail Loop, and then we scooted down to the Moose Bog Trail. WHAT A GREAT DAY! —Jill Lillis

December 29. It was great to hike with a group again, so satisfying physically and mentally! Up the CCC Road to the Herbert Hawkes Trail, then on to the Summit and the lookouts of Mt. Hor. Beautiful day and not too cold! —Sue Winsor

January 1. Sometimes the best hikes and views are right in your backyard. I took the old logging road near my house. The view is greater than 180 degrees. I can clearly see across the lake into Canada and then west at Jay Peak. (I thought the lake was frozen over, but now I see several big open areas.) It looked like the Jay Cloud was leaving some snow for the skiers and in between all that was Bald, Haystack, Willoughby Gap with Burke beyond, then Norris, Belvedere, Jay, and that whole range. It was not as clear as I had hoped for, but still a peaceful impressive view on this New Year's Day. Happy New Year all. —Joanne Federle

On the Long Trail in the Time of Covid

by App Man and Slow n' Steady

This is the second in a series of articles recounting the experiences and challenges Janet Steinert and Jeff Morris faced while thru-hiking the Long Trail in the summer of 2020, during the Covid-19 outbreak. Of course, Covid changed the game—the face of the trail and the hikers who hike it, but despite the pandemic and its unique obstacles, Janet and Jeff were still awed by the simple joys and breathtaking beauty that will always be the Green Mountains and its “footpath in the wilderness.”

Day 1 Williamstown to Seth Warner shelter—6.8 miles

The day began with a quick ride to the trail by Paul, owner of Willows Motel. When we discovered that the “included” breakfast was no longer included (because of COVID), Jeff ran to Cumberland Farms and bought us each a muffin which we quickly devoured.

The day was overcast but cool, unlike the sweltering days we'd had over the past few weeks. A good sign. The climb up the AT was tough with our newly loaded packs. We were both nervous, but soon fell into a hiking rhythm. After an hour or so, we reached the rocks of Pine Cobble. Picking our way up the rocks was a challenge as there didn't seem to be a trail—just rocks. But we found our way to the top, and before we knew it, we were at Ephs Landing, an outcrop of rocks that once had a view but was grown in. It was a good place for a break so I could check for any blisters and do some preventative bandaging. The trail became smooth and easy and we sped up. When we reached the terminus of the Long Trail, we had a little celebration. Jeff could barely contain himself. He was so happy to finally be hiking the Long Trail after months of preparation.

We continued along the trail and met two young kids, Noah and Tom, who were also hiking the LT. They were young and fast so we knew we'd never see them after today. As we ambled along the trail, Jeff and I felt a presence behind us. We turned to see, to our great surprise, a full-breasted young woman with no shirt. Nada! As she breezed by us, she chirped merrily, “Have a lovely day!” Jeff's face was priceless. Say no more.

We laughed our way up the trail until we ran into Noah and Tom again. I announced, “Just boring me wearing a full top.” They turned beet red and laughed. I said, “so you saw the little wood nymph?” To which they replied, “No, we looked the other way and got off the trail—COVID, you know.” Sure. That entertained us until we reached a very large boulder that seemed to be balanced on one corner, looking like it could topple at any moment. Throwing caution to the wind, we sat under it and ate our lunch.

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Long Trail in the Time of Covid

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The remaining mile and a half went quickly, and we reached Seth Warner shelter by 1:45. We debated going further but decided to stay as this was our first day, and I knew we'd need the time to figure out our routine. Jeff began setting up his tent. I left to get water and to see if I could get a bath. I wasn't hopeful about the bath as all the streams were just a trickle. I found the water source—a mud hole with a good pool formed by rocks up above. I decided to look further to see if I could find a place to bathe. I followed the dried streambed with my eyes and saw that it continued down through the woods. I cut through the brush and discovered to my surprise a magnificent pool with clean deep water. Since it was far below where others would gather water, I knew it was okay for bathing. I stripped and slid into the coolness up to my neck. After gleefully splashing around, rinsing off the day's sweat, I climbed out, dried off and got dressed. I came back to camp and told Jeff about the pool. He had never bathed in the woods and was a little apprehensive.

"I have to take off my clothes in the middle of the forest?" he asked. I just laughed and led him to the pool, leaving him to figure things out. When he returned, he was all smiles. A woody bath is all a hiker needs at the end of a hot day.

That evening, we sat in the shelter, eating the casserole that I had dehydrated in the months of preparation. Three hikers joined us, keeping their distance out of respect for our advanced age and COVID. It was the first night on the trail for all of us. One of the hikers had decided to attempt the Long Trail because he had to give up his Appalachian Trail journey when all supports evaporated due to the pandemic. We shared stories, compared gear, and laughed at the day's foibles. Just for a moment, the pandemic seemed a distant thought, and the world around us felt normal. As "hiker midnight" approached, we retired to our tents. It had been a full day and a good one. Life is good!

App Man is Jeff Morris and Slow n' Steady is Janet Steinert. Janet thru-hiked the Long Trail in 2005 and 2017 and is the author of "Slow Boots n' Steady Limbs" about her 2013 trek along the Appalachian Trail.



FPR Report by Luke O'Brien

As we turn the page on what has been a tumultuous year, Forest, Parks, and Recreation staff and partners are looking forward to better outcomes in 2021. We continue to see very high use levels on our trail and park systems and anticipate this to continue through winter and into next summer. We may in fact be looking at the new normal as trail users seek and discover new areas to explore. With a plethora of maps, guidebooks, and now apps to guide visitors, our public lands and trails are more visible than ever.

It is with this in mind that I want to thank the many dedicated GMC trail adopters and volunteers who have put "boots on the ground" to maintain their adopted trails and report issues of blowdowns, erosion, trail damage, campfires, and trash. It takes a village and we couldn't achieve our mission to provide sustainable public recreation access with your help. If you are a trail volunteer—thank you. If you aren't, and are considering volunteering, please reach out.

In 2020, FPR worked with NorthWoods Stewardship Center crews to make important trail improvements at Brighton State Park, Victory Basin WMA, and the Mount Hor North Trails. Our State Trail Crew helped maintain trails in Groton State Forest and at Maidstone, Holbrook, and Brighton State Parks. In addition, both NorthWoods and State Trail Crew staff completed a wide range of early season trail roving to address routine maintenance on trails throughout the NEK.

With federal Cares Act funding, we are able to re-surface the CCC Road in Willoughby State Forest and complete some late-season trailhead improvements at Wheeler Mountain, Mount Hor, Pisgah South Trail, and Burke Mountain. This also included the construction and installation of new trailhead kiosks, which will have new, attractive interpretive signage installed over the winter.

While funding allocations aren't yet finalized for 2021, we hope to continue our roving maintenance and invest more substantial efforts to maintain the North Pisgah Trail, replace the Bald Mountain fire tower roof, and shore up some of our backcountry shelters. More definitive plans will be available in time for spring.

If you have questions or would like to volunteer, reach out at any time- luke.obrien@vermont.gov or 802-622-4258.

Luke O'Brien is a Forest Recreation Specialist with the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation.

NEK Flora, Fauna, and Foraging

Chaga (*Inonotus obliquus*), A Parasitic Fungus

by Paul Trojano

This article is based on folklore and is not intended as professional medical advice. While most wild collectibles have no negative side effects, heavy use of chaga has been linked with kidney stones. Always consult a doctor before adding any foraging substance to your diet and never ingest anything if you are not 100% sure of its identity.

With winter hiking season upon us and the trails and woods covered with snow, you might think there was nothing worth finding in the forest until spring, but you would be wrong. This time of year, foragers and wildcrafters look UP into the trees, specifically white and yellow birch trees. Fruiting on those trees, and causing a slow death to its host, is chaga (*Inonotus obliquus*), a parasitic fungus prized by some for its wellness benefits. Known colloquially as the “mushroom of immortality,” cultures around the world have sought this fungus for thousands of years, notably in China and Siberian Russia where it thrives in large birch forests. In fact, the Otzi man, discovered frozen in the Alps for 5,000 years, carried two mushrooms in his pack and one was chaga, possibly for its fire starting properties.

The immortality moniker comes from the many minerals and antioxidants contained in chaga, including high amounts of zinc, iron, magnesium, potassium, and calcium, among others. Chaga users value the combination of its antioxidants like the superoxide dismutase and betulinic acid for their purported healing powers, although further scientific studies are needed to verify its medicinal value and address any side effects.



Chaga fungus (*Inonotus obliquus*)

The most common way to use chaga is in a tea. Fresh or dried, simmer the chaga for an hour in spring or distilled water, 4 ounces of chaga to 1 gallon of water. The same chaga may be used several times to make additional batches of tea. An alcohol tincture may also be made by steeping chaga, in chunks or powder form, in high proof alcohol (grain or vodka). Chaga “experts” tout a *double induced* tincture as the best. This requires combining an equal amount of a water-based tea and alcohol.

Harvesting may be done at any time of year, though there is considerable debate whether or not winter is the best time to harvest. When harvesting be careful not to cut into the wood or bark of the tree. A sharp saw or axe is needed to remove the fungus. The chaga will grow back eventually, but slowly, so take only what you need and enjoy safely.

This is an occasional series on wildlife, plants, and edibles in the Northeast Kingdom. Please send your wildlife and foraging experiences to the Ramblings editor at <enkguest@gmail.com>.

Chaga fungus (*Inonotus obliquus*)

NEK Section Holds Winter Meeting; Sets Annual Meeting for April 11, 2021

Highlights

The NEK Section held its Quarterly Winter Meeting on January 11th with about 16 members gathering via Zoom. The complete draft minutes of the meeting, plus the report of the December Kingdom Heritage Trail partners meeting can be found on our website at <http://www.nekgmc.org/nekgmc-minutes-and-news/>.

Section President John Predom called the meeting to order at 1 pm on January 11th.

Cathi Brooks reported on the GMC Directors' meeting of December 19th. She discussed finances, the status of grant monies, the continuation of remote working by staff, and the decision to hold the 2021 Annual Meeting online instead of at Sterling College. Beaver Dam Camp at Wheeler Pond will be delayed until 2022, while Hadsel-Mares Camp was at 63% usage. Cathi also reported on trail use and overuse, maintenance crews, and several joint ventures between GMC and area businesses.

John Predom reported on the latest state Covid guidelines and their impact on hiking. He introduced Beth Barnes, our new Membership Coordinator and Beth raised a number of ideas for outreach and communication with local individuals and organizations.

Paul Trojano gave a short Camps Committee report, saying the wood supply at Wheeler is in good shape and he advised that Lakes Region High School community service program might be a source of volunteers for various Section projects.

Kevin Williamson reported that he has all of last year's trail adopters returning and that coverage should be set before the summer hiking season begins.

Luke O'Brien's report on FPR access and winter plowing engendered a lot of discussion. He emphasized the time-consuming difficulties of negotiating with various stakeholders over access to state and private lands. Luke also attended the Kingdom Heritage Trails Partnership meeting and reported briefly on it. A full report of that meeting is available on the NEK Section website.

In new business, Cathi Brooks praised Andrea Kane's Wilderness First Aid class and recommended it highly.

A Taylor Series presentation on Nulhegan Abenaki history is in the works, which Tom Candon endorsed. Luke mentioned a new state requirement that Abenaki place names be included on all state signage wherever possible.

And as always, there was lots of talk about upcoming snowshoeing. Anyone interested should check our website for up-to-the-minutes information.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 pm.

NEKers Receive First Aid Certification

By Cathi Brooks

In November, Susan Winsor and I took the Wilderness First Aid (WFA) Certification course with Andrea Kane to be better prepared for emergencies when leading or participating in hikes. The course was outside to comply with Covid distancing procedures and the weather could not have been better. Andrea had thought of everything: tarps, chairs, and a great outdoors location on the Peacham soccer field. She covered topics from initial injury assessment, to necessary supplies, to how to treat a multitude of different injuries. It helped a lot to have good friends take the course together so we could feel more comfortable practicing and were able to laugh at ourselves in our attempted treatments.

Andrea did an excellent job of holding our interest throughout two days of training. She even had her family participate and they seemed to enjoy her presentation as much as we did. Participants varied from adventure guides and first responders renewing their certification to newbies such as Susan and me. The two days went by quickly as we covered a lot of material. We spent a lot of practice time on treating common injuries and CPR. In the end, we all passed the final test and received our WFA certification.



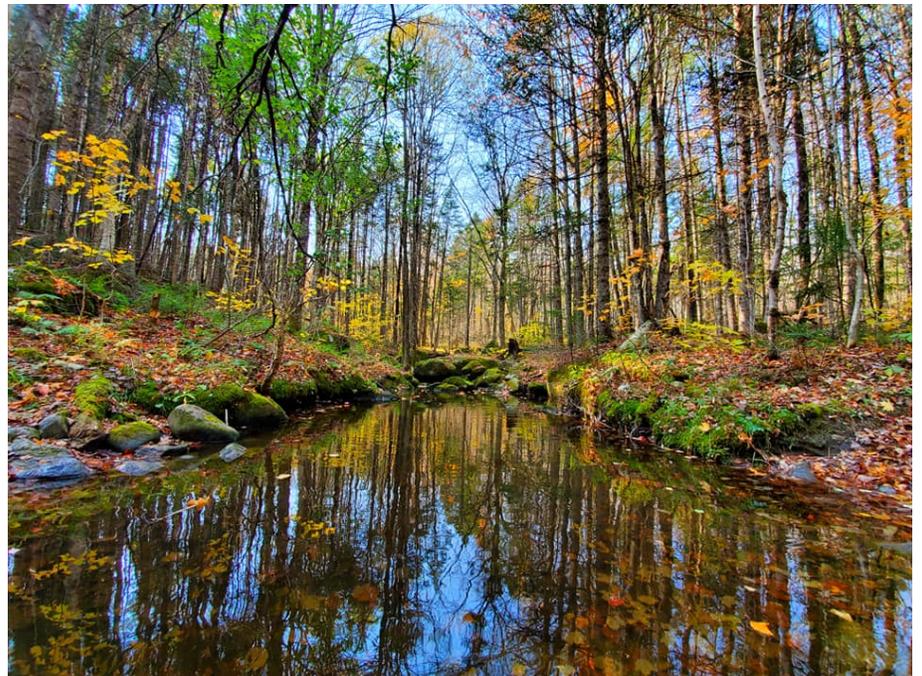
Northeast Kingdom Gallery



Little Averill Pond from Brousseau Mountain

Late Fall

Along Victory Bog Trail





Old Logging Road near Norton



Spruce Grouse

Late Fall

**Lake Willoughby
from Sentinel Rock**





The View from Black Mountain



Sue Winsor at the Edge, Black Mountain



(Almost) Night on Bald Mountain

Canada Jay (Whiskey Jack)



The View from Burke Mountain Red Trail



Sunrise over Lake Willoughby from Mount Hor



A Distant Burke Mountain from Bluff Ridge



Island Pond from the Brighton Community Trail



Herbert Hawkes Trail, Mount Hor



**Lake Willoughby
Before Freezing Over**



Beth Barnes and John Predom on the Trail to Split Rock

Editor's Note: Thanks to all for the pretty pictures. Vistas are always welcome, but we need more pix of our PEOPLE, just like these beautiful mugs above! Please post your vistas and your people pictures on our Facebook page or email them directly to <enkquest@gmail.com>. And please add a few words about where you are and identify the folks in the picture. It's gotten even harder to see who's who with everyone wearing Covid masks! EJG