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## Plymouth museum 'Connecting People with the Mountains'

Apr 24, 2015



Approaching the summit of Welch Mountain on the Welch/Dickey Loop. (ED PARSONS PHOTO)

On Thursday, April 16, I drove west and combined a hike near Waterville Valley with a visit to the Museum of the White Mountains in Plymouth. I hiked the 4.4 mile Welch/Dickey loop and then went to the museum to see the new exhibit.

I did this last year, too. It is a good way to return annually to the same wonderful hike, combined with using your visual senses indoors to experience the White Mountains in this new museum setting. Exhibits at the museum last a full year, and begin in the spring. The new one is called "Trail Clubs — Connecting People with the Mountains."

Last year's exhibit was called "Beyond Granite —The Geology of Adventure." Museum director Catherine Amidon was pleased then that I wrote about combining a hike with visiting her museum.



"We encourage people to get out in the mountains as well as coming here," she said.

Thursday morning, my hike on Welch/Dickey was fun and also challenging. Intermittent hard snow on the ground and ice required that I put on and take off my foot traction frequently. Still, it was a beautiful hike.

I went up the steeper Welch Mountain first. I encountered meltwater on the steep upper ledges, but the wet rock was not slippery, and I was able to walk carefully across it.

Still, each point on the trail had to be evaluated on its own. At one point while descending Welch Mountain to a saddle, I didn't see some transparent water ice on a rock and took a butt-bashing fall. In the wooded saddle, the snow was deep and hard and MICROspike heaven.



Later, on the way down Dickey Mountain, I kept my foot traction in hand because I had to keep taking them off and putting them on again as I walked in and out of shady conifer groves onto smooth ledge.

I nursed a cup of post-hike coffee on the short drive back to Plymouth. I entered the attractive brick museum building, entered the large main room and began my self-tour on the wall to my immediate right.

What a spectacular start it was. The first offering was a colorful oil painting of Mahoosuc Notch by George Frederick Morse. It was completed from sketches made on the spot. He was a member of Portland, Maine's White Mountain Club, the area's first trail club, founded in 1873. In June of 1880, he and other club members were the first to explore inaccessible Mahoosuc Notch.

I moved along to the left, to a long paper profile of the peaks seen from the summit of Mount Chocorua, made by a member of the early Chocorua Mountain Club. Then I encountered an old saw used by the Chocorua Mountain Club for many years to clear blowdowns on Mount Chocorua and Mount Paugus.

At the end of the room was an exhibit highlight. It was a full-scale handcrafted log shelter assembled on the spot in the museum. In its immaculate interior were boots, a sleeping bag and backpack, as if left by an overnight visitor.



In the corner of the hall was a small film room. A movie was continually playing that brought me back to my days working on construction crew for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

The film was about the use of helicopters in the AMC Hut System and AMC trail crew, featuring a present-day construction project where materials were flown up.

At that point, as I moved along the far wall looking at photos and artifacts, I was feeling a strong connection with people in the mountains, going back to when I first started working for the Appalachian Mountain Club in 1966.

This helped me perceive an important thrust of the exhibit. The importance of trail clubs in the White Mountains — past, present, and future, can't be over emphasized. Of primary importance is people meeting people, and, as groups, to effect change. One important activity of the clubs has evolved over the years from trail building to trail maintenance.

Present active trail clubs include the Appalachian Mountain Club, Chatham Trail Association, Chocorua Mountain Club, Cohos Trail Association, Dartmouth Outing Club, Randolph Mountain Club, Shelbourne Trails Association, Squam Lakes Association, Trailwrights, Waterville Valley Athletic and Improvement Association, and Wonalancet Outdoor Club.

Catherine Amidon pointed out that many mature mountain folks will feel some nostalgia and a strong sense of place at the exhibit. But she is also concerned about people connecting with people in the mountains of a changing future. To that end, the museum is working on connecting young people with trail clubs.

This will likely soon include club officials coming to the museum to give talks and demonstrations of what they do. From an effective past, we can create a path to the future.

A comprehensive online version of the exhibit "Trail Clubs — Connecting People to the Mountains" can be found online at [www.plymouth.edu/museum-of-the-white-mountains](http://www.plymouth.edu/museum-of-the-white-mountains), including great essays by exhibit curators Steve Smith and Mike Dickerman, and also by writer Doug Mayer.

Keep an eye on this Website and the museum Facebook page as well for upcoming activities with trail clubs.

