

April 7, 2014 at 3pm (12pm Pacific) via Skype (Plymouth, NH/ San Francisco, CA

Interview with Barbara Wagner – First female Hut Manager at AMC

After introducing ourselves and asking, “how are you”, I had a chance to hit the record button and begin the 35 minute long interview. I had sent Barbara the interview questions in advance and she had taken notes on each question.

Kelsey Luttrell (**KL**): I mean, you have the questions so, you have the notes you can just start talking and yeah...

Barbara Wagner (**BW**): OK.

KL: Yeah

BW: Just dive in, huh?

KL: Yeah, let's just dive into it (laughs).

BW: Ok, well, I'm looking at the questions that were for me specifically, starting with where I grew up.

I grew up in Delaware and um, I was the youngest of three and I grew up in the 60s and 70s, in suburbia kind of area. I attended college in 1974 to 1978 so I was at the tail end of what's called the baby boom.

KL: Yep (laughs).

BW: Um and so, it was really my older brother and older sister plus my friend's older siblings who were the hippies.

KL: (Laughs)

BW: And the ones we looked up to for all our political activism so while I was sort of young relative to what was going on in, uh, in terms of that movement. Certainly, lots of things like Women's Rights, Civil Rights, and environmental justice, and ecology were very important themes during that period.

KL: Of course.

BW: So I think I was in seventh grade the first birthday, the inaugural birthday (first Earth Day). And I remember it being pretty interesting in that at least one parent, we had a small demonstration and at least one parent took his kid home early, for being apart of the Earth Day demonstration, so it was controversial at the time.

KL: Awesome

BW: Yeah

KL: So

KL: Continue, I'm sorry

BW: No, I'd rather you jump in.

KL: Oh, so with all of that, with all of those movements going on during the time you grew up, did it influence you in anyway with the career path you decided to take in when you went college or even in high school?

BW: I would say it must of. I did not have a real interest to be in corporate America or in business. I think that in my family there was a strong community service ethic and also I think a strong work ethic. And so I start working when I was 14. I was a nature director at a YMCA camp for kids.

And so it was really that early in my career that I had that interest in nature and the outdoors and environmental issues so it's been a theme really for 40 years.

KL: Oh wow.

BW: Quite a while.

KL: That's awesome.

BW: And so I went to Syracuse University and they shared, they're co-located, they share a campus with the State University of New York, the College of Environmental Science and Forestry and while I was enrolled at Syracuse and elected to be a Biology major, I was taking a lot of coursework at the College of Environment Science and Forestry. *

***Graduated from Syracuse University in 1978**

KL: Oh wow.

BW: And it was, it was that plus, as my summer job after being, after my sophomore year was with Appalachian Mountain Club. So that was my introduction to the White Mountains.

I applied to the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) having never been to the White Mountains and not knowing anything about AMC. *

***It was a new experience for her.**

I interviewed in Boston, got the position and my first trip to the White Mountains was for orientation and I just feel in love with it. And so, I was going for Science and Forestry, I got the summer job with AMC (started working at AMC in 1976), continued that interest in environment and environmental education and those two things, I think, just kept reinforcing the interest.

KL: Awesome. So once you interviewed in Boston and came to the White Mountains that was initially your first trip to the White Mountains?

BW: That was my first trip and I didn't have the right boots, and I didn't really know where I was but I kind of caught on quickly, um, and I think the orientation must have been in March, April, or May and then I came back to get started in my summer job that June and it was just a great experience. I worked every summer until I graduated, then I returned to AMC after I had graduated and slowly worked myself into year round employment there.

KL: Oh wow. So, um, so which region of the White Mountains did you manage the Huts? Because I've had people ask me when I've talked about the interview to my peers, because it stretches up to Maine, down to Virginia, of course (laughs).

BW: Right. So the Appalachian Trail, as you know, goes from Georgia to Maine. And it goes along the White Mountain, uh, it goes along the hut system of the AMC. So they're really two different things. The Appalachian Trail Conference is the organization that manages the trail from Georgia to Maine and AMC is focused in the White Mountains and has huts from Mount Lafayette to Carter.

KL: Oh wow.

BW: So there's eight huts there and so, their headquarters are in Pinkham Notch, that's where my office was and I had a summer job, 2 summers, in Zealand Falls hut and then as I worked into full time work, was working out of Pinkham Notch camp. (She was promoted to Hut Manager after a couple years of seasonal work)

As mentioned before, Barbara became the Huts Manager in 1983 and she managed the entire hut system (all eight huts).

KL: Very nice.

BW: Have you been in that area at all?

KL: Uh yes, I have a house in Franconia, New Hampshire so I'm familiar with Mount Lafayette and Cannon Mountain and Lonesome Lake and it's very lovely up there.

BW: Yep. So, um, that was where we were focused was Pinkham Notch camp.

KL: Very nice. Did you, um, were any of your ancestors connected to the White Mountains? Did you have anyone living up here previously? Or did you just head on in?

BW: I was the trailblazer; I didn't have family who were associated with the White Mountains. I did have family who were in Connecticut and Vermont so we had a little bit of New England roots and my mother grew up in the Boston area and she loved New England.

And so, as a family, most of our summer vacations were either car camping or sailing and so, we had spent a little bit of time in southern New Hampshire, a lot of time on the coast of Maine, sometime time in Canada in the Maritime provinces. So we had past through New Hampshire but we'd never really a great deal of time there.

KL: Very lovely.

BW: Yeah. Yep, so.

KL: What are some things that you like about the White Mountains? And what are some other things that you may not like so much about the White Mountains?

BW: Well, I think the topography is spectacular and the fact that it has Alpine areas and it's so unique in that, I guess it's one of the few or only Alpine areas outside of the Arctic circle and so, just the beauty of the landscape and how unique it is.

I also am very much a rural person. Um, I spent 10 years in New Hampshire, 20 years in Vermont. Both in the northern parts of the state in rural settings. And I think that mountains are just very beautiful. Um, rural parts of this country, of course, are just very beautiful to me and so, I think I love the landscape.

And then I think culturally, I like the rural lifestyle. I like the casualness of it. It feels very authentic to me. I'm not really a city person even though now, I've found myself in San Francisco. I'm really very much a rural person and just like the idea that you live in an area that you're very connected to nature all the time. There's not cement around you, there's not skyscrapers around you. And it feels very authentic or genuine to me.

KL: I definitely like the authentic feel of the White Mountains as well.

BW: Yeah.

KL: So you mentioned that you spent 10 years in the White Mountains and then found yourself in Vermont, how did you make that transition? How did that happen for you?

BW: Um, I had worked for AMC for a 10 year period; a couple of summers and then followed by full time work and was progressively promoted, as you know, to Huts Manager (become Huts Manager in 1983). And so, I think I reached a point where I was getting increasingly interested in what made great non-profits, non-profit organizations, work well, what made them tick.

How did the one that were considered really successful or a great place to work, what set them apart? And so, that lead me to the idea of going to graduate school. I really wanted to go to a program that was, um, focused on non-profit leadership and was a place where I could just learn more about great organizations.

And I didn't go to business school (Yale School of Organization and Management with a masters in Business Administration) because I wanted to start my own business or I had a passion for finance or marketing or one of those classic business school disciplines. It was primarily an interest in organizational development and what made organizations run well.

And I felt that I wanted to advance my career and that to do that I needed an advance degree. That, you know, as much I love the White Mountains, being tucked away in Pinkham Notch, NH, there weren't lots of employment opportunities there. Outside the Appalachian Mountain Club.

KL: And so, from there, from your Masters at Yale you find yourself at Trust for Public Land (TPL), am I correct?

BW: Yeah. I looked at lots of different, um, lots of different job paths. And in fact, I did a summer internship between my first and second year at the Yale School of Management, at L.L. Bean.

And I spent the summer in Freeport, Maine and I was an intern for the director of Strategic Planning and Marketing. And so, I was sort of wanting to look at what does it look like to work in a corporate setting, although L.L. Bean is as casual as it can be.

I continued to feel the primary passion for environmental work and I felt that land conservation was the logical next step, um, and so I applied to Trust for Public Land (TPL)* and couple of other national organizations and got the job in New York with TPL and it's a great organization but the adjustment from, going from New Hampshire to New York City was huge.

***Barbara was Director of Finance and Administration at Trust for Public Land (TPL) where she was responsible for the operation of TPL's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office. She directed the activities of the Finance, Accounting, and Human Resources departments. She oversaw financial management, banking**

relationships, information systems, staff recruitment, and training within the organization.

KL: Oh I bet.

BW: Really big. And so, I spent a year and half, two years with TPL. I really did love the organization and land conservation but I really did want to return to my New England roots.

And so, I started looking around and at that point, applied to a couple of things in Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont and it was the Vermont Land Trust job that came together for me.

And I had initially thought that I would spend 3 to 5 years there and then, as you saw on my resume, I stayed a total of 18 years with Vermont Land Trust. And it was a great experience. I love Vermont. It, of course, I had lots of access to the White Mountains.

KL: Yes

BW: Which continued, um, my opportunity to be over there and see people I knew. And Vermont is different from New Hampshire in that it's a little bit more agricultural, um, but it's also very similar in that it's got that rural quality. And I stayed with the Vermont Land Trust in part for so long because the work was so interesting.

The organization, about 5 years after I joined, got significant additional funding and so, we were able to triple the amount of land conservation work that we were doing. And it was that organizational growth that kept me there. It's really for me a kind of fascinating challenge to help organizations grow in size, increase their productivity, and do it a way that keeps their culture fresh and vibrant and do it in a way that everyone feels like this is a great place to work.

And so, my work has always been on the operations side (responsible for staff and board development, short and long-term planning, human resources, and financial management) and has really be based on the belief that if can find the right people, and you can create a culture where they can thrive, you can do and achieve great things.

And I think that was true at Appalachian Mountain Club, I think it was true at the Vermont Land Trust.

KL: Very nice. So you were there for 18 years and did you do anything in between, like Vermont Land Trust and where you are now?

BW: From Vermont Land Trust, I stayed with them through their growth and then their funding situation was changing. I was ready for a kind of new challenge and I felt that

one of the increasingly, one of the most important environmental issues was related to energy. And particularly, retiring coal, bring clean energy in, shifting the way this country ran, in terms of its energy consumption.

And so, I had the opportunity to join this organization called the Regulatory Assistance Project, which helped energy regulators make good choices. And it really focused on all 50 states and all of the legislative and regulatory bodies that made energy choices for their states.

And interestingly, they had just gotten a significant increasing in funding and they were really interesting in grow their organization. And they had launched a program in China, their new funding allowed them to launch a new program in Europe and one in India. So they growing from a U.S. based organization with a small (China) satellite into a truly global organization, working in India, China, U.S. and Europe.

KL: Oh wow.

BW: And, yeah, they needed to add staff. They really needed to do a lot of basic things like improve their communication materials, upgrade their website, expand their offices physically. They just had an enormous amount of operational work to do to manage their growth.

And so, I helped them through their ramp up stage, where they went from about, I would say, 18 employees to about 36. And helped that growth occur over a very short, compressive amount of time. And as I was finishing that ramp up, their primary funding was looking for a Chief Operations officer and that was the Energy Foundation.

***Barbara is married with 2 dogs.**

So, the Energy Foundation was a funder of the Regulatory Assistance Project, they had an opening for Chief Operations officer, that had been a lot of the kind of work that I had done and you know, I saw the job, I went home, I asked my husband*, "What do you think of moving to California?" and he's like "Lets pack our bags".

So it was really a chance to do something that was a bit of an adventure. We had spent 20 years total in New England and loved it, had a beautiful home; really comfortable great group of friends, solid job but the idea that there was a chance to do something completely different in a brand new place was really appealing.

And so, three years ago we moved to California and I started the job I have here. And I would say if I had to condense the whole story, certainly it was the White Mountains that solidified my interest in environmental issues and a great love of the outdoors. And it carried me through from a career in environmental education to land conservation, to now energy, clean energy and the transition to, um, a clean energy economy.

And so my work here at the Energy Foundation is to manage the U.S. operations and our office in Beijing in the work that we do with China.

So I've kind of gone from the White Mountains to China and the United States.

KL: Oh wow. And how, how does your life and your jobs and everything you experienced in New England compare to where you are in San Francisco? How is it similar? How is it different? (laughs)

BW: Well now I'm in an urban setting and its very different. The move from East Coast to West Coast, that was fine. The move from a rural to an urban setting was the largest adjustment for us. Um, and you know its just there's lots more people, it's more crowded, there's more cars on the highway. Everywhere you go there are people. Whether we go for a hike or we go shopping or commuting, its, you know, crowded.

The Bay Area is, uh, fantastic weather. That's why people live here. You know, it's very culturally vibrant, fabulous universities nearby. But we really had to rethink how we spent our free time because we couldn't be as spontaneous. So, learning sort of where to go and when to go has been part of our learning curve. But you've gotten to know our new home; we go to Tahoe and Yosemite. Um try to visit all the wonderful places California has to offer.

We're planning a trip to hike a part of the John Muir trail this summer. And so, that theme of being in the outdoors and focused on mountains and hiking as our primary hobby has continued.

KL: That's awesome. Um, how does...I'm just curious because I've never been to San Francisco or Yosemite or anything, I've only had a taste of Mountains like Yosemite?

BW: It's equally as beautiful and breathtaking and stunning. I mean, I think the Whites are very special and I would say as is Yosemite. There is something about, you know, snowcapped mountains. You know, crystal clear blue sky, plunging waterfalls, beautiful green evergreens, I mean you know, who could argue?

Um, and I think what's true in California and in the White Mountains is people really do cherish those special places. Um and its good to see.

KL: (laughs) Kind of going back to AMC and I guess this question could apply to your journey, have you ran into any problems during your career path because you were female? Or anything. Was it harder to find these positions or get into these positions because you were female? Or maybe not?

BW: Well you know, it's a great question. I was the first woman to manage the hut system. I periodically check, they still haven't hired another woman (as Huts Manager) since I was there.

KL: Oh wow.

BW: I keep hoping that someday I'll see a female name pop up so I can write a nice congratulatory note. There was a small amount of controversy, I will say that. A little bit among the membership of the Appalachian Mountain Club who thought it was unconventional. A little bit with some of the partner organizations that we worked with but I would say it was very minor.

The organization, AMC, was proud of the role that women were playing in the huts. All of the huts had been managed by women; there had been women on the crew (hut crew) for quite awhile. So it was really a pretty well intergraded operation by the time I was promoted. Um and I think that novelty was kind of interesting, internally and externally, the local newspaper did a little thing about me, some of the AMC publications have written about it.

And I think it was like a lot of firsts, it was novel. But it was, I don't think it was particularly difficult. I had already worked for the Appalachian Mountain Club for 6 or 7 years when I got promoted.

They knew me and I knew them well. And so, I would say for the most part, being a woman has not been a particular challenge. Um, starting with the AMC when you are working in partnership with organizations like the forest service, obviously very male dominated organizations. Um, you know, again I will say I was a novelty but it was not difficult.

I would say more often than not, early in my career, often being the youngest person in a room turned out to be a bigger challenge than being the only woman in the room.

So that was a learning experience for me.

KL: Interesting. At your current job now have you, I mean you have a more higher up position, have you found any trouble, um, since you've been working at Energy Foundation?

BW: No, I would say, I will offer that I think that women do have a different approach to leadership and I think that everyone organization benefits from the balance of diversity, men and women, and their different styles.

And I think that, I feel that I've been able to demonstrate the strengths of a women's leadership approach in a way that has been appreciated and has created a lot of support. Um, I think the interesting thing is now that I'm working more often

internationally, it's not as true in, say China or India that women are, that people are as accustomed to seeing women in leadership roles.

And so, I can see in the U.S. the progress that women have made is further along than it is in other part of the world.

KL: What do you think woman's role to leadership entailed? How does it differ than a male's approach?

BW: I think some of this is probably not terribly insightful but I think that speaking for myself, um, I have a more collaborative approach. I tend to focus more on sustainable solutions instead of quick solutions. And I tend to push power to those closest to doing the work as opposed to holding it close. And I can't this is a particular female approach to leadership but its my approach to leadership.

And so I think its collaborative, its really looking at sustainability over speed, and its being really sensitive to how power is used in the organization and how can my contribution increase other people's decision making and authority.

KL: That's definitely interesting to think about.

BW: Yeah, you know, I'd have to say that I think if everybody approached leadership that way, organizations would run better.

KL: (laughs) I would definitely have to agree with you there.

Do you prefer one coast over the other, um, now that you have lived on both?

BW: I think I love them both. Um, the thing about the West coast is the Mediterranean climate and you're really comfortably outdoors 12 months a year. And you can have winter when you want it. And the diversity, I mean, you could swim in the Pacific Ocean and in 3 hours be in Lake Tahoe skiing so it really is spectacular.

The East coast I think, for me, New England that the seasons are so lovely and I think the sort of elbow room that we had in New Hampshire or in Vermont, it is, I think, looking back is something I really cherish and prize. And I think for us long term, for my husband and myself, Vermont and New Hampshire will remain home bases for us. That when we reach retirement, we'll be New Englanders again.

That probably says I prefer the East coast.

KL: Do you, um, have a favorite sections or mountain or area of the White Mountains at all? Or even Vermont.

BW: Well, you know, I spent two summers working at Zealand Falls hut and I have to say I think that valley is very, very nice. But there is something very spectacular about the Franconia and the Presidential ranges. That, um, I just love and we do it every couple of years, the opportunity to just traverse the summits. Either the Lafayette range or Presidential range. There's really sort of no place else in the U.S. that we've been that we like as much.

KL: Oh wow.

BW: I guess being high in those Alpine ridges are great.

KL: That's awesome. Do you prefer to hike or climb or ski or anything? Do you have a preferred activity outdoors?

BW: I think we're mostly hikers. We snow shoe in the winter, a little bit of cross country skiing, used to downhill ski. Not so much anymore. It's kind of a little bit too crazy (laughs).

When I'm outside I like the solitude and the peacefulness of snow shoeing and cross country skiing as opposed to downhill skiing.

So I would say we are hikers, snow shoe-ers, and cross country skiers in that order.

Any thing with our two dogs.

KL: What kind of dogs do you have?

BW: Oh, they're from the pound (laughs). Just two dogs, yep. Yep. Nothing special about them. They're a Labradors and whole lot of other stuff.

KL: Mutts.

BW: Yep, they're mutts.

KL: I think we touched on everything that I asked plus a couple of things that I was interested in.

Is there anything else that you would like to put out there or curious about?

BW: Well, tell me...I'd like to know a little bit about you, if you don't mind, and about this course and this project.

KL: This course has been...well I am studying Gender and Women's Studies here. So much so that they don't have it as a much and I am creating it through our Interdisciplinary Studies program.

So it's been very interesting to see how this course, which is American Women's History, just learning the history of women and they have evolved over time has connected to the different other courses today, or that I'm taking. For example, the history part has played a role in the Psych of Women course that I'm taking and I just find that very interesting.

So that's what I'm doing here.

BW: Yeah.

KL: When it comes to the outdoors, I definitely love to hike. Cannon Mountain being one of my favorites, Lonesome Lake. That Lonesome Lake hike being one of my favorites since I was very little.

BW: Yeah, it's a great one.

KL: Yeah, um.

BW: Well I think you've chosen an interesting topic in terms of Women in the White Mountains. It just seems that there's such rich history in the White Mountains and there have always been unique stories and vignettes about women in their place. So it's a very interesting project you have chosen and I'm glad to be apart of it.

I can't think of anything else I could tell you about me or my life that we haven't already covered.

But good luck in your studies and in this project.

KL: Thank you very much.

BW: Alright. And if you work on the transcript and you have any follow up questions, don't hesitate to e-mail me or anything else I can do to help you in your course, I'd be delighted to do that.

KL: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure talking to you.

BW: Likewise, best of luck.

KL: Thank you, take care.

BW: Bye-bye.

Now I have to figure out how to shut this off.
KL: (laughs) As do I.

BW: Bye-bye.