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Mountain Voices

Bill Arnold

A life exploring and rescuing in the White Mountains

Doug Mayer and Rebecca Oreskes



Introduction

Nestled between the rugged Northern Presidentials and the wild Killkenny Range to the north, perhaps no town better represents the spirit and landscape of the White Mountains than Randolph. High alpine cabins and shelters are within walking distance, and in the valley lies what is said to be the densest network of trails anywhere in the United States.

Bill Arnold spent his summers in this unique setting, wandering the trails around town, in an era when allowing your child to take risks and experience independence was more acceptable than it is today. “It was great. We just walked everywhere. You’d go right where you wanted on the trails,” says Arnold. “We had friends in the valley and we’d just shoot down the EZ Way or Bee Line and come home at the end of the day. And our parents—I don’t know if they knew where we were or not. We didn’t get in trouble, and certainly we were in good shape.”

Those childhood walks on the trails were just the beginning. Arnold became the youngest caretaker ever for the Randolph Mountain Club. That, in turn, led to seasons with the Appalachian Mountain Club, at Pinkham Notch—including the great winter of 1968-69, when the snow never seemed to stop. There was so much snow, avalanches were a common occurrence, and the crew at Pinkham resorted to running a snow blower on top of the lodge roof. From there, it was on to backcountry patrol for the U.S. Forest Service and seasons spent fighting forest fires out west. “Being a Forest Service ridge-runner was right up there on the list of great jobs,” says Arnold.

Through his many years in the backcountry, Arnold maintained a lifelong commitment to search and rescue in the White Mountains, while also working to foster a sense of self-reliance among hikers.

What follows is in his own words.

I WAS BORN IN MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS, IN 1946, BUT WE MOVED to Cincinnati, Ohio, when I was 3 years old, and I have a lot more memories of there. I went to various schools in Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, and even Niagara Falls, New York, and I went to college at Paul Smith’s in the Adirondacks for a semester. I studied forestry.

Bill Arnold at the Randolph, New Hampshire, Fire Department. NED THERRIEN

We had been coming to Randolph to this house since the summer before I was born. My father was an Episcopal minister. When he was in seminary, my father had bad hay fever and he had a professor who said, “Oh, you ought to go up to the White Mountains. They don’t have any allergies up there. I go to this little town called Randolph and I have a house there. You ought to go up.”

So my parents came up here and they stayed at what’s now the Grand View Lodge and ended up buying this house in 1939. That was the end of the Depression and I know they got it cheap.

So I’ve been coming up here summers all my life. I became really good summer friends with another kid up here, Peter Bowers, and we spent a lot of time hiking and a lot of time fishing. Jack Boothman would send us to these secret fishing holes—we were maybe 11, 12 years old—and we were allowed to go up to Castleview Rock alone. This was in the late 1950s. *[Editor’s note: Boothman was a resident of Randolph, a North Country fixture, and a friend to all in the community.]*

It was great. Especially as we got to be teenagers, we basically just had the run of the town. Before we could drive, we just walked everywhere. You’d go right where you wanted on the trails. We had friends in the valley and we’d just shoot down the EZ Way or Bee Line, and come home at the end of the day. And our parents—I don’t know if they knew where we were or not. They didn’t really seem to care much. We didn’t get in trouble, and certainly we were in good shape from being out on the trails. We’d go hiking a lot, go fishing.

The hotels were around when I was a kid—the Mount Crescent House and the Ravine House were going. They were the center of things. Some of the little summer homes never even had a kitchen. They would take their meals at the Mount Crescent House. We’d get our mail there. The post office was in the valley and the Boothmans would pick up the mail from there and bring it up to them. We’d eat meals at the Mount Crescent House occasionally. That was kind of a big deal. They had the buffet every Saturday night, and Jack Boothman would always save the end slice of the ham for the RMC Crag Camp caretaker, who used to be down on a Saturday night.

My mother and my sister and I would come for the whole summer. My father didn’t have his whole summer off, so he would fly—back then you could fly right into Berlin—or he would take the train because the train would stop right here at Randolph station.

Becoming a Caretaker

When Peter Bowers and I were 15, we spent a big part of the summer up at Crag Camp. It was a great, great place to be in the summer. Ash Campbell, Jr., was the caretaker there, and we were up there a lot of the time. We helped cut the firewood for the stoves, painted, and did a lot of work. We put some money in the kitty, but we did a lot of work, too.

There were no radios then. We used flashlights. We'd all go out on the porch at 9 o'clock, put all the flashlights together and flash down to the valley. Our parents would be down in a car and we'd see the headlights blink back and forth and then they'd know we were up there safe and we'd know that they were down here.

Ash was supposed to come back as the caretaker of Crag Camp in the summer of '63, but at the last minute, he didn't. I can remember very well the day getting a letter from Klaus Goetze saying that Ash had turned down the job and that they decided that they would offer the job to Peter and me together. *[Editor's note: Klaus was longtime RMC president. To this day, the club is run by volunteers.]* We were only 16, but somehow Klaus figured two 16-year-olds would equal a 20-year-old or something like that. We were offered the job at \$20 a piece per week.

I can remember getting the letter and just being—just wild. What more could you want when you're 16 years old back then? Being the Crag Camp caretaker was better than being the president of the United States. I mean, it was like right up there with God—you just had all the power in the world. You were away from your parents, but then close enough so if you got in trouble, they were here—and all your friends were around all of the time, and there was a lot—I don't know if status is the word but—it was just the best job in the world, and no one was nervous about us being up there.

There was no Gray Knob caretaker and that was the first time RMC had two caretakers. We kept an eye on Gray Knob and the Log Cabin and the Perch but we stayed at Crag Camp. I went up there in mid-June and stayed up through the summer. Peter and I would alternate days off so I was up there alone some of the time.

We didn't collect money. Back then, you didn't have to pay. There was a metal box bolted to the wall, and it had a sign over it with a picture of a cat that said, "Please feed the kitty." So part of it was to get people to donate money and keep it clean and neat, and there were projects that had to be done like painting and patching, putting the roofing cement on the leaky roof and cutting firewood.

Handling the crowds was probably our weakest spot because we were young. Back then, you got a lot of the camp groups. It was crowd control. I can still remember the biggest night we had was 38 people. People sleeping on the tables, under the tables, in the kitchen, on the woodstove—I mean, you'd pack 'em in everywhere.

A couple of times we had some minor rescues. The way you do now, where a group will come in late and say, "Oh, we've got two more people up there someplace and we don't know where they are." We'd go out with a Coleman lantern and we'd find them. It'd be cold and windy and wet, but even at 16, we knew our way around the mountains so well that we could find them.

Packing for RMC

After we caretook Crag Camp, I spent a couple of summers helping RMC out on the trail crew, when somebody was sick or they needed somebody extra. When RMC remodeled Crag Camp and Gray Knob, I did a lot of packing of the materials: flooring, roofing, shingles. Everything went up on your back—there were no helicopters then. This is back when AMC was still using the mules. We talked about mules. Decided it would be pretty hard getting them up the Spur Trail, and I think the higher powers decided people—teenagers—were cheaper than mules anyway. We got paid maybe 35 cents per pound.

I probably did three summers of that construction packing. I'd start out with maybe 50, 60 pounds and then get up to 80 and then go over 100 probably two or three times a week. A hundred pounds would take me probably three and a half, four hours. Then I'd rest a little bit and have lunch and then come down in 45 minutes.

We'd pack from Coldbrook Lodge, the home of [Jack and Gwen] Boothman. They had a scale at the camps and the caretakers were in charge of weighing the loads when they got in, and they'd keep track and let the powers in the valley know how much everybody packed. I was pretty much the main packer. My goal through that whole time was to carry more than my weight up there, which I eventually did. I carried up a cast iron sink and a pump and a bunch of other stuff. I weighed 115 pounds and the load was 132.

After that summer, I went to Paul Smith's College, but I had to leave, due to health issues, which I had all through school. They really flared up and I thought, "I need to get out of school and just get my act together." The school said, "You can come back any time you want, but you need to get healthy." So I found myself sort of wondering what to do next and ended up here.



Arnold leads friends up Mount Adams, winter 1971. JON FRUEH

Life at Pinkham

I went to Pinkham to work for AMC in late summer of '67, after just sitting around a bit. Of course, I had worked for the RMC and I knew the White Mountains. Bruce Sloat [AMC huts manager] hired me, saying, "When can you start? How about tomorrow?" I said, "OK." Back then they'd pretty much hire anybody anyway, and if you actually knew where you were in the mountains, well, that was a big plus.

The very first job at Pinkham was working on a dam on the Cutler River that used to be for hydropower. It was full of boulders. Sid Havelly was on construction crew and he gave me the task of going up there and sloshing around in the pool, and hauling these rocks out. It was hard work. I always remember my first day's work and thinking, "Well, is this what it's going to be like?" But this was September now, so the huts were just closing. Back then you'd do breakfast at Pinkham for the guests, then we'd close a hut and come back and work supper.

The summer hut crew thing was not for me. I learned when I started working at Pinkham in the wintertime in '67, the winter crew at Pinkham were very, very different people from the summer hut crews. To a point where there was friction. The summer hut boys would come up at vacations and want to stay in the crew quarters at Pinkham while we were living there. They'd be up partying and carrying on—I mean, I don't blame them; they were on vacation. We weren't.

The scene at Pinkham then was way, way, way different from now. We all lived together. It was all like family, which isn't to say we all got along. It was a lifestyle of just living with a lot of different kinds of people—no matter whether you got along or not, you had certain things that had to get done. Marty Child was the hutmaster at Pinkham when I started. But, after November, Marty said, "I'm leaving. I'm going to New Zealand. I'm out of here." I said, "Okey-dokey, I can be hutmaster." I'd been there only what—two or three months? But, the hutmaster's job was just to make sure everybody was doing everything.

Four or five of us did the basic meals and lodge work. There were Bruce and Mary Sloat, and two cooks, Mel McKenna and John Chadwick. A few others would come and go. The AMC had a hard time hiring then. Bruce had a deal with Antioch, and they'd get two or three or four students from there who would come in and work for three months at a time, then they'd leave and a new busload would come in. Commander Marvel would meet them out front with his gun strapped to his side—"Welcome to Pinkham."

Commander Marvel: I could go on for days about him. He was assistant manager of the hut system, under Bruce. He always insisted that he be called Commander. His name was Robert Marvel. But, after a while, I didn't think twice about it. He was Commander Marvel. He was a retired navy commander, from Bartlett, I think. He was sort of the authority figure for us kids, and that didn't always sit very well with us. He had worked down in Antarctica as a commander of a base. He was very, very, very, very conservative, which was an interesting mix, because there weren't many other conservative people working at Pinkham.

He must have started in '65 or so, and he left in the early '70s. But he made a big impression. We had "Der pans" in the huts, and "Der barrels," both named for the Commander. Der barrels were 55-gallon drums that were painted green. This was before carry in/carry out. There were huge crowds in the spring on the weekends up in Tuckermans. They were way more out of control than they are now. One job we always did every Monday was go and empty the Der barrels into the truck. The barrels were right down in the middle of the parking lot at Pinkham. They'd be emptied Friday, and by Monday morning, they'd be buried in trash. It was actually a good job because it was 99 percent beer bottles and every twentieth one would be full.

Kibbe [Glover] was there in those days, too. He was great. I feel sort of honored because I think I was one of the relatively few people that could get along with him. He had been in World War II. I guess he went through a really nasty time on some islands in the Pacific.

Kibbe loved the girls! That was back when Pinkham had a little snack bar and coffee place. People would come in, sit down and actually talk and visit and put up their maps and plan hikes. We sold coffee and sandwiches and Kibbe was always hanging around there—that was in the Trading Post. He was a good photographer and he'd find the pretty girls and come out and start taking pictures—click, click, click. The trick was that most of the time he didn't have film in the camera because why waste the film? So then there'd always be somebody that would be yelling, "Kibbe, you got any film today or not?" And he'd go off grumbling.

When I was at Pinkham the Vietnam War was going on, and there were guys who had gone off to Vietnam. I think the whole time they were gone, some of them were thinking about coming back to the White Mountains. Probably, in some respect, that sort of kept them going. A few of them would come back to Pinkham even in the middle of the winter and want a job, and we would try our very best to hire them back if we could.

We would hire them on which is pretty interesting because we were a pretty radical antiwar group then and very much opposed to the war. But then you'd get these veterans that would come back and you'd get to actually know them one on one, and it was a whole different thing. Some of them were fine, and some of them had all the classic symptoms that you read about—up all night screaming and the heavy drinking, and they obviously had seen some really, really bad things. Living in a group like that was probably as good a thing as anything for them.

Joe Dodge

Joe Dodge [who had retired in 1959] came into Pinkham when I was working there. He used to come up every Friday 'cause Mel McKenna was the cook. Mel would make donuts every Friday morning, and Joe would come up and get donuts and have a cup of coffee. Mel found out eventually that Joe was feeding the donuts to his birds, and all of a sudden, he got cut off.

Right about that time [in 1969], they rebuilt the Trading Post. When I started at Pinkham, it was the old log Trading Post, which was a classic building. Of course, it was in rough shape. The roof would leak, and I can remember on rainy days lining up buckets right on the front counter where we worked, catching the water coming through the ceiling. The basement was full of water, too. The building wasn't big enough for the needs, but it was really, really sad to see it go because it was a classic. It was a log cabin.

It was kind of dark but the new building—and I still call it the new building—certainly doesn't have the same ambience as that old one did. The old Trading Post was very, very welcoming and cozy.

There were bullet holes in the logs in the back of the dining room wall. Apparently Joe Dodge and his friends after dinner would sit back with a couple of drinks and shoot at the squirrels as they ran along the inside of the logs. Even in my time, we were pretty horrified that such a thing could happen.

Joe was retired, but he'd come up for a visit from time to time. It was great. He was just like one of us going back and visiting now. He'd tell stories. He was still Joe. Still kind of cantankerous, and he wouldn't stay that long. He'd have a cup of coffee and then head out. This was in the old log building, of course. The new building was built in '69. I remember Joe came in once when the new one was built. Came in once. Had a cup of coffee, looked around, and he never came back, as far as I knew. He probably did some time but not that I saw while I was there.

1968–1969: The Big Snow Winter

The winter of '68-'69, it just snowed and snowed and snowed. I was staying in a little house at the end of Mount Crescent Road [in Randolph] on my days off, and it was like living in a cave. The windows were buried. I had steps going down into the door and I had to duck my head under the little porch roof.

Roofs caving in was the big issue that winter. At Pinkham, we shoveled and shoveled and shoveled. We hired extra people to shovel. They hired a big front-end loader to bucket out the snow in the parking lot. It kept getting stuck, so they had to have two so one could always pull the other one out. We had a snow blower up on the roof of the lodge that we put up on blocks so we'd just shovel snow into it. This was two stories high, but it got so the banks on the side were so high the snow blower couldn't even blow off it. Eventually, it died because we were working it so hard.

There was just no place to put the snow. Wildcat [Ski Area] was shutting because the gondolas were hitting the snow. They'd have to dig them out. It just kept coming and coming. There was some kind of rescue every Sunday, and some in between. It was all hands on deck. There were some really wild rescues.

I went from early October of '68 'til mid-June in '69, working in the snow the entire time because I was up working for AMC in Tuckerman's a lot in the spring. We'd do breakfast at Pinkham, then go up. We had huge, huge crowds. This was before there were any camping regulations. There were people drunk all over the trails, camping everywhere, just piles and piles of beer bottles all the way up the trail. We'd go up mid-week with garbage bags on because it was a nice day for a walk. So you'd take your garbage bag and fill it with beer bottles. This was before carry in/carry out.

There were a lot of people, and conditions were so different from what they were used to because of the snow. I'm glad I was young because I can remember being completely exhausted at the end of every weekend between the big crowds coming up and the rescues.

Search and Rescue

I started getting into search and rescue during the winter of '68-'69 while I was working at Pinkham. I'd done a little bit with the RMC, but when you're at Pinkham, you're the only show in town—that was it except for Forest Service at Tuckerman's. Brad [Ray] and Rene [LaRoche] were up at Tucks. *[Editor's note: Brad Ray's story appears in "Mountain Voices," Appalachia, December 1999, LII no. 4.]* It was basically the two of them. So whenever anything was going on, it was AMC. You'd never think twice about not going on a rescue. We'd leave one person at the front desk to work the phones and the cook and that was it. Supper for the guests would be late, or the cook would fix the meals, and the guests would just wait on themselves. There'd be dirty dishes when we got back, but you never would consider not going on a rescue unless the conditions are just too bad, or you were sick.

There was a school group from Phillips Academy, up on Mount Adams. A poor kid just slipped and fell. Didn't slide very far but he hit his head and died. *[Editor's note: See Accidents report, Appalachia, December 1969, XXXVII no. 4, page 657.]* The group got him down. They broke into Madison Hut and sort of laid him out there. Sent somebody down for help. It was on a Sunday [February 9, 1969], during one of the many, many huge storms, just snowing feet after feet. I can remember leaving Pinkham at dusk with a new Crew Cab four-wheel drive pickup. Had it loaded to the gills with litters in the back and everything. We met Forest Service and Fish and Game at Appalachia with all this stuff. It was just snowing as hard as you can imagine.

We started up the Valley Way and Paul Doherty [*Editor's note: "Mountain Voices," Appalachia, December 2002, LIV no. 2*] was there. He was working for Fish and Game and had a deal with Polaris snow machines where they would give him a brand new Polaris snowmobile every year. It was the hot machine. But, it just went 20 feet and he buried it and that was it. He was all upset. Jack Boothman was there on one of his old snow machines, and just went putt putt putt right up the trail. Jack and Paul were good friends but there was a lot of rivalry over the snow machines. Jack got probably three-quarters of a mile up the Valley Way before he had it buried. Then we came along on snowshoes and eventually passed him.

We went up and brought this poor kid down. It was rough because there was a whole school group and they were obviously very upset. We came back to where Jack's snowmobile had been and it wasn't there. "This is the tree, this is the corner!" We know it's here. There wasn't even a bump in the snow. It was just completely buried in maybe four hours. We had to dig it out, then haul it out. But that's the way that winter was. It just kept snowing.

The biggest rescue, most tragic rescue certainly in terms of numbers that I've ever been on, was the Cog Railway, which was in the fall of 1967. Something like 75 people were hurt and 8 people were killed. I was young. There was a little kid who died that was like 3 years old and I can remember having to pick him up. He was the age of my nephew at the time. That's a lot when you're 21. That rescue was probably a life-changer for me.

We headed up the auto road with a truck full of litters, blankets, and people. The first on the scene was the observatory, along with Doctor Appleton, who was up visiting the Obs [Mount Washington Observatory] that evening. It was pretty much AMC, and Forest Service sent a bunch of people.

The truck kept overheating on the road because we had it so loaded down. By the time we got up there, it was dark. We were up there most of the night loading up injured people and then eventually bodies. They put the bodies on a flat car to come back down on the train. I ended up spending the night at the Observatory. Their phones were ringing off the hook. We went back down to the site early in the morning with coffee and donuts. Rene LaRoche and Casey Hodgdon [from the Forest Service] spent the night there at the scene because there was stuff strewn everywhere. [*Editor's note: For Hodgdon's story, see "Mountain Voices," Appalachia, June 2000, LIII no. 1.*] Governor [John] King came up the next day. I actually caught a ride down the auto road with him.

I've been on a lot of rescues since then and five plane crashes, too. They'd almost never turn out well, although one crash was over on Mount Cabot where we took up hiking boots and walked them both out just fine.

We here in New Hampshire and the White Mountains, we're very good at search and rescue. People get hurt, we get them out and I can't tell you for sure how it compares with the rest of the country or the rest of the world, but I think it's pretty favorable and unfortunately, I think that's part of the problem. You know I've heard people say to me, "Oh well, if we get hurt, we'll just call you, Bill, or call the Forest Service or we'll just pick up the phone and dial 911." They know someone's going to come. I don't know what you're going to do about it. Are you going to say, "No, we're not going to go"? It's the same old question.

Cell phones have changed things a lot. They just made it way, way too easy to call for help. I'm sure it's part of the problem. In the olden days if you got hurt, you didn't really have any choice but to get yourself out of it. The very last resort really was to send someone down for help. That's all you had. Now, the very first resort is just to pick up your phone and call for help. It happens often enough now that people just get to thinking, "Oh, geez, it's been two hours. Where the hell have you guys been?"

I think it has changed the experience. In my youth, part of being in the mountains was that you were just out there on your own, and if there was a problem, you dealt with it. That was part of the experience. That's why you went to the mountains or the woods. You were just one on one. With a cell phone, it's just all completely different. That's not just here in the mountains, it's just the way our world is.

The big thing now is who's going to pay for search and rescue. Certainly, there're more volunteer groups and more individuals than there ever have been, but it's also costing a lot more. Fish and Game certainly is more involved than they used to be for whatever reason. When I was doing it, even twenty years ago, you didn't really think about the money. Somebody had to but it was mostly all just volunteers. Of course, you've got a lot more fancier, more expensive equipment now too.

I think volunteers could be used more now, and I think there should be a mechanism to at least make it easier to reimburse them for equipment, and maybe mileage from the New Hampshire Outdoor Council. I think the state of New Hampshire, just like any other state, should be ready to ante up and pay for search and rescue. I mean, we've got the mountains. They attract bazillion tourists and tourists are bringing in a lot of money.

We're talking about \$150,000 a year for search and rescue—not really all that much in the scheme of things. Whether you take it out of meals and lodgings tax or take it out of the tolls, or take it out of your gas tax, or whatever—if we're inviting these people up and we're taking their money, one way or another, then we have to ante up a little bit. It's got to cost a little bit from the state.

I think the Forest Service needs to take a bigger role. I've said for years that certainly that would be the most fair. If your federal taxes are paying for search and rescue, then the guy from Massachusetts is paying as much as the guy from New Hampshire, and that makes it a little more fair. The Forest Service, one way or another, is in charge of the national forest, which is most of the White Mountains. They're charged with managing them. They should be doing a lot more in search and rescue, both in manpower and financially. They haven't for years and years and years. I don't think it will change, but ideally it should.

I don't think a required hiker fee is really that doable. Partly because the Forest Service already has one. So what are you going to do, require two permits, one from the state and one from the feds? I think really the state needs to cough up the money.

Going to the Forest Service

In the spring of '69, I came back to the RMC. I worked at Gray Knob that summer of '69 and I went back to Pinkham in the fall of '69. In '70, I applied for a job with the Forest Service. They knew me. I'd worked with Brad [Ray] and Rene [LaRoche] on rescues and at Tuckerman's. Back then at Pinkham we had a policy that any Forest Service, Fish and Game, State Police, highway crew—any of those guys—could come in for a coffee or a meal, anytime. I applied for the job and got on as a seasonal. John Bailey was my boss and I worked on trail crew, and we worked hard.

The first part of the summer was clearing blowdowns and brushing—a lot of brushing—on Forest Service trails. And then the second part was erosion work. We worked on the Valley Way, all the Carter trails, [Mount] Moriah, Shelburne Trail. There were about four or five of us on the crew then. John was in charge. I was sort of unofficially second in charge even though it was my first year working with the Forest Service. I knew the mountains better than any of the others.



Arnold, second from left, rests on his 1971 winter hike with, from left, Gordon Campbell, Chris Campbell, and Jon Frueh. Arnold later helped dismantle the metal Quonset hut.

JON FRUEH

I went back to AMC in the fall of '70, and in '71, I went back with the Forest Service, but now I was backcountry. They called us backcountry ridge-runners then. Next to being an RMC caretaker, being a Forest Service ridge-runner was right up there on the list of great jobs. You'd just hike around the trails all day. There was a certain amount of trail maintenance. You'd have a storm and there were trees down, then you'd take your ax with you and cut them out of the way. Put up signs. Maybe repair bridges. Cleaning water bars. Keeping track of the Quonset hut at Edmands Col [below Mount Jefferson]. Painting the yellow rocks on top of the cairns on the Gulfside Trail. The top rock was always painted yellow with highway paint. It was always a windy day, of course, when you were doing that. Anything that needed to be done out there, we did it.

By now, we had radios and repeaters that sort of worked. Sometimes [the equipment] worked, sometimes it didn't. It was a little primitive. With a little experience, you knew all the places you could talk to and from, and places you couldn't—which was most places.

Marking Timber

There were a lot of Forest Service jobs that weren't nearly as specialized as they are now. They'd bring me on earlier in the spring and try to keep me on longer in the fall. I became part of the timber-marking crew. That was great work.

I learned that fall is the great time of year to be out in the woods. All of us have been dealing with crowds in the mountains, one way or another, whether you're working in a campground, or backcountry, or whatever. So then, all of sudden, you're out in the Kilkenny with nobody around except for the rest of the crew.

I would start out tallying. We would have a crew of four, or five or six. There'd be Brad and Rene and Norm [Rheaume, the timber marking boss] and John Bailey, Bob Doyle, and there must have been a couple of others maybe. It sort of varied from day to day.

The forester would lay out a sale—a certain area that was going to be harvested—and he'd write a prescription on just what types of trees he wanted selected from that area. Whether it was going to be clear-cut—which we did a few [of] then—or selective. And if it's going to be selective, what are you selecting? Then he would give you the spiel. The first day working on that particular sale, we'd all get together and he'd tell you what he wanted. You'd pay attention to it, but eventually he would leave and you would all look at each other and say, "What did he say?" And it would either be, "Take it all," or "Take some and leave some." We didn't really dwell on it but we kind of had a sense of what he wanted.

You'd wear these tally-whackers—counters—and with the saw logs, you'd be calling them out all the time, counting the trees you're marking. "Yellow birch. Red maple. Sugar maple. Fourteen-inch."

You'd paint the tree and you call it out and the tally person would be marking it down in the book—in the cold and the snow and with cold fingers. And then every certain number of each species, the tally person calls out, "That's a sample." If that particular tree that you'd marked is a sample tree, then you'd have to measure it. You'd figure the number of saw logs in it, the number of pulp logs, any defects, and so forth, and that all got entered in. And so, you're getting an estimated value of the timber sale based on a random sample of all the different species.

We'd always have a lunch fire in the cold weather. You would toast your sandwich on the fire. We had our dogs with us. The dogs had packs on them and they carried the paint. As they'd walk around, they'd shake the paint all up—and if you needed more paint, you'd just call a dog.

You'd go across the sale in a line. There was a certain amount of pressure and a certain amount of yelling, because you're expected to keep up with the crew. Once you'd go across, you'd shift over, turn around and come back again and so on, so you're covering the whole sale, and if you got a sample, then the whole line has to stop while you're doing it. If it was cold, people would be like, "Come on!" People would start yelling at you. Brad or Norm—they could look up at a tree and click it right off. Some of us rookies, though, we had to use a clinometer and other ways to measure it and you took a little longer because you wanted it to be right. You had to be certified. You had to take an exam every fall to test your ability.

Then the crew would get in the old argument about whether it's a red maple or a sugar maple or whether that is a defect or not. But, it's really good work.

The Forest Service would keep us on until the snow got too deep because you'd have to stump mark the trees. *[Editor's note: A stump mark is a paint line below the cut level that leaves proof, after cutting, that the tree was meant for removal.]* We'd come in at the end of the day and they'd say, "Is the snow too deep yet?" Of course we'd say, "Oh, no." Because, if it was too deep, we'd get laid off. Eventually, somebody would say, "That's it." It was usually around Christmas time. I did that for years.

Young Adult Conservation Corps

Somewhere around '78, the Young Adult Conservation Corps came in, and I got hired on full-time to help run that program. I was full-time then for three years. I think the crew were 16 to 24 years old. They'd show up at the depot in Gorham every day. I think we had to average twenty people a day, so we would hire more in the summer and less in the winter. It was kind of your typical government program. It wasn't real efficient. But, what is? We'd have ten or fifteen kids right through the winter and we'd go out every day. It didn't matter how cold it was. We cut snowmobile trails. We cleared wildlife openings. Timber stand improvement.

There were a few [participants] that had moved here from away, but most of them were local kids. Some had done some snowmobiling and hunting, but most of them really had never spent much time outside, certainly not in the mountains. This was a whole new thing for them, even though it was right in their backyard. We would teach them how to use an ax, to use tools,

to run chain saws, how to dress in the cold, be able to work outside all day long in below-zero temperatures and stay warm. Be able to work and come back tomorrow and do it again. It was a good program, and it really did get them out in the woods. I was still on the young side and I was going to straighten all these kids right out and save them from all the perils out there. Eventually I was just happy to settle on saving a few and the rest will be what they be.

I still see them around. I see them in town regularly and, to a tee, they'll ask, "How are you doing?" or "Oh, you haven't changed a bit," and they've all changed and then they'll say, "Boy, those were some of the best years of my life. I know I didn't like it then. I know I was the biggest complainer."

There was some regulation that if you were supervising a certain amount of people, they had to send you off for supervisory training. They would send me off to these trainings, and I would ask, "Well, what do you do when you got a half a dozen girls who are all lined up crying when it's twenty below zero?" or, "What do you do when two of the guys are fighting it out with knives? You know, there's blood all over the snow." And "What do you do when you come in from work on Monday and you ask where Joey is, and they say, 'Well, he's in jail for three weeks but he'll be back after that.'" This is all stuff that happened regularly, so the training didn't really help much. But it was a good program, and then they eliminated it.

Fighting Fires

As part of working for the Forest Service, I got pretty involved with fire fighting, going on western fires. The first one I went on—I think it was in '76, a big, big fire on the Upper Peninsula in Michigan. With any of those fires, there's good times and bad times, but I really got hooked into that. As much as they would send me on fires, I would go.

I stopped because I turned 60. Bruce Sloat always used to say: fires and search and rescue are for young people. I figured 60 is kind of getting up there. I remember the last fire trip very well. We started in Utah and ended up in Idaho. I did fine, but I was always the last one in line.

One of the Most Memorable Days

One memorable day with the Forest Service was in 1982 when there was a great hold-up at Carter Notch Hut. This guy walked in. "This is a stick-up!"

Geoff Burke—who I knew well from when I worked at Pinkham—was up visiting one of the hut crew. Geoff decided to wrestle with this guy and Geoff got shot. I knew Geoff and I knew he'd wrestle with anybody. *[Editor's note: Burke's leg wound was not life-threatening, but it, and the stress from the event, dogged him for years. See Chris Stewart's article in The Resuscitator, newsletter of the OH Association, Spring 2005.]* Meanwhile, at the same time, there'd been a woman who walked into Wild River Campground and said, "I was in a plane crash two days ago somewhere back there in the woods and my friend, who was the pilot, is dead in the airplane." So they said, "Well, where is the plane?" She said, "Two days back there somewhere."

I came into work the next morning and was told, "Go up in the Carters. We're looking for a guy with a gun that just held up the hut, and if you see a burned-out airplane with a body in it, we need to know about that, too." And I'm thinking, "I don't really want to find either one, you know. It's a nice day. I don't need to ruin it. I don't need to get shot. I don't need to find bodies." So, I go up the Moriah Trail to the top of Mount Moriah, and there's a group up there with a woman who is celebrating [climbing] the last of her 4,000-footers. They're drinking champagne and having a great time. They offered me some, and I said, "No thanks." I asked them, "Have you seen anybody with guns or any airplanes or—you know—anything out of the ordinary?" And they answered, "No, nothing but champagne."

I eventually got a call on the radio that they'd caught the stick-up guy. I guess he had a friend at Wildcat and the police did their police hunting and caught him there.

The Forest Service found the plane. There was just a poor guy. He was burned in the plane and I had to go in the next day and help carry him out.

Frontcountry and Leaving the Forest Service

After [the Young Adult Conservation Corps], I went back to seasonal work for the Forest Service, back to backcountry and marking timber and more law enforcement. They had me working at Dolly Copp Campground two nights a week. I didn't really like that at all. In the backcountry, I did law enforcement, but it was all camping regulations. Every now and then, you'd have a group that would be causing trouble somewhere out there, but you'd deal with them.

At the campground, Friday nights were always the worst. You'd have people driving up, setting up their camp, getting drunk. . . . There was vandalism

in the bathrooms and just stuff that I didn't feel I needed to deal with. I just didn't like that kind of work. I'd rather be out on the trail.

I always used to say about my time with the Forest Service: "I'll keep doing this until it's not fun anymore." I could tell I wasn't going to get on full-time and that was always my plan from the first summer I started working on trail crew. They'd bring in people from somewhere far away and I'd often have to train them. Then, in the fall, I'd get laid off and they'd be there.

So, I left the Forest Service in the late '80s. I found a job with Dave Fuller working construction, through the winter. I was always on the [Forest Service] fire crew, though. I kept my fire qualifications up, signed on as a seasonal and then they would call me.

Becoming A Different Kind of Caretaker

In the late '80s, I started caretaking work in Randolph. A lot of the old houses I worked on were Boothman cottages. John Boothman [Jack's father] was very much a developer, and he had it nailed. He owned a lot of land in Randolph, and he would sell one or two or three lots a year only to the "right people," in his judgment. (This was around 1910 or thereabouts.) So now they've got two college professors and then you've got a minister over here. John Boothman would build the house and he would pretty much tell the people the house he was building. The owner of Mount Crescent House needed water and so did all the houses here on the hill, so he started the Mount Crescent Water Company, which he built and maintained with his crew. Then you needed something for all these people to do. He was one of the founders of the Randolph Mountain Club. His crew built a lot of these trails, or maintained them anyway.

I ended up working for the descendants of the people Boothman built houses for. These houses now have been passed down through the generations. Randolph's unique and it's because of the John Boothman factor.

They used to say we have more miles of trails per capita than any other town. I don't know. It's a good story. There's a lot of trails, any way you look at it.

RMC Camps

[In] '67, '68, somewhere in there, the RMC decided that they should have someone on the board of directors who was either a caretaker or a trail crew member. I was the one. I've been on the board off and on ever since then.

Somewhere in the early '70s, I was put in charge of the RMC camps. *[Editor's note: RMC calls its two shelters and two cabins "camps."]* By then, the use in the White Mountains was really picking up. There was more and more use and abuse. There'd been talk over the years of RMC having a winter caretaker. We were having people go up on weekends for a couple of winters. They'd sort of collect money. Sometimes they'd spend the night; sometimes not.

I had thought long and hard over the years about having a winter caretaker and had decided, in my mind, that it would have to be the right person. The person would have to be kind of crazy. He'd be the first one to spend a whole winter in a little drafty cabin on the north side of Mount Adams just below treeline. That's pretty rough. And I had gotten to know the guys in the state park on Mount Washington because I worked for the Forest Service and I was up there all the time. Mike Johnson was the manager. Mike Pelchat was the assistant manager, and at some point later in the summer of 1976, Mike Johnson said, "Geez, you guys ever thought about having a winter caretaker at Gray Knob?" And I thought, I know this guy. He's crazy. And I was right. I talked to the RMC board of directors and we came up with a salary and hired him.

Turned out he'd never been to Gray Knob. I got an Ashley woodstove. Not too, too heavy. His first trip, he started up there with a woodstove. He made the turn at Mistake Junction, turned off Lowe's Path, ended up at The Perch, with a woodstove on his back. So he took sort of the long, scenic way to get there. But he made it.

He had to be crazy, because he really had to be ready for anything. I mean, we knew there were parties going on up there. So he had to be able to handle parties, had to be able to handle the weather, had to be just ready to deal with anything that came along.

I've been doing radio call at 8 P.M. with RMC caretakers since 1976. There are a lot of stories. But there's a classic involving Albie Pokrob. He was caretaker at Gray Knob for quite a while. Albie is a great guy, so it's easy to tell stories about him. He'd gone several nice, clear spring days without seeing anyone at all. I don't remember the schedule we had him working then, but they didn't get days off as much as they do now. I talked to him once after he'd gone several days without seeing anybody. "How's it going, Albie?" "Oh, it's going pretty well." "What'd you do today?" "Well, I went out for a hike and I counted 200-and-something snow fleas in my footprint." And I was thinking, "Well, Albie, maybe it's time for a day off."

Changes

In my mind, the big change over the years is that the number of hikers really peaked in the '70s or early '80s. Back when you had heavy trail use and everyone was in Vibram-soled shoes, that caused a lot of environmental damage. If you have less people, then you just don't worry about it so much.

The biggest change I've seen is communication. And the biggest part of that is cell phones. It's not true just in the mountains—it's everywhere. The idea of just going off and not being in touch. People now, they're just horrified at that thought.

Obviously there's a lot more concern about the environment. I think some of it gets a little over the top. When I worked the first summer at Crag Camp, back into the mid-'60s, you threw your garbage over the edge of King Ravine, and most of the AMC huts did the same kind of thing. There also was the can pit, and you could go down there in the evening and you'd hear the raccoons and the porcupines musing around, and you never would consider why you would not do that. The toilet was sort of right in that general area. Sort of hung right off the side, almost. And, then the whole environmental movement came in and carry in/carry out—which is good. I mean, look at something like Tuckerman's. They didn't really have a place where you threw your trash. You just threw it. So now we're not throwing garbage into the ravine. *[Editor's note: The AMC changed its waste practices in the mountains in the same era. See "Goodbye Backcountry Dumps, Hello Tent Platforms," Appalachia, Summer/Fall 2006, LVII no. 1.]* We're packing it up and hauling it down the mountain and taking it to the dump and dumping it in the dump.

Of course, we didn't have as much plastic then. Really, how much environmental damage were we doing? It's a judgment thing. But it sort of makes me wonder. I mean, obviously the thought is right. You want to take care of the woods and the mountains. You don't want to misuse them. You don't want to have piles of beer cans on the trail, but I think sometimes it can get a little carried away. That's just our society.

Proud

I'm probably most proud of the fact that I found a way to make a living here. This is a lifestyle that, in a way, I sort of fell into. But I also chose it. Some people will say things like, "Well, this is a nice place, but I can't imagine living here and coming all the way up this hill in the snow and the cold.



Bill and Barbara Arnold stand on the back deck of their house in Randolph. NED THERRIEN

How do you ever survive?” And, of course, I’m thinking, “How do you ever survive down there in the city?” I can’t imagine it.

Things will be changing. I’ve got to start slowly cutting back on work here in town, but I know I’m not going to just cut things off. I’d probably go crazy, and people are going to keep calling me anyway.

I’m proud that I’ve been on a lot of rescues and I’ve probably helped some people out. I like to think that I helped put out a few fires. I’m glad that I met Barbara. That’s worked out great. She likes to be here now. She’s retired from the school system. We’ve been married over 20 years, and they have been the best years of my life—no doubt. My stepdaughter, Alex, has also been a great addition. She’s married and living in Washington, D.C., with her husband, David, and two children, Henry and Della. I never thought much about being a grandfather, but now that I am one, it’s wonderful!

I’m proud of just being able to live here, and I feel like I’ve contributed to the town. I’ve always felt that it’s anyone’s responsibility to somehow contribute to society, whether it’s your local town or whatever, whether it’s volunteer work or something else. You try to leave the world a little better than when you started—whatever that means.

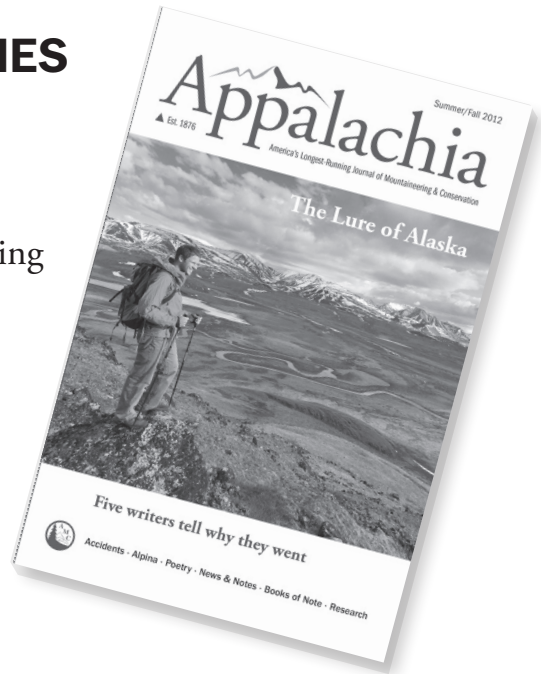
DOUG MAYER, a writer for the radio program “Car Talk” and a book author, lives in Randolph, New Hampshire. REBECCA ORESKES of Milan, New Hampshire, retired in 2011 from the U.S. Forest Service. She writes about wilderness for this and other publications. *Mountain Voices: Stories of Life and Adventure in the White Mountains and Beyond*, their book compiling the fifteen interviews in this series, will appear in fall 2012 from AMC Books.

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