

# Appalachia

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## News and Notes

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# News and Notes

## **The Feds Vote: Mount Reagan Is Out, Mount Clay Is In**

MOUNT CLAY, THE 5,533-FOOT SUMMIT IN THE PRESIDENTIAL RANGE of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, will not be renamed Mount Reagan after former President Ronald Reagan, at least not on federal maps. The decision from the U.S. Board of Geographic Names came on May 13, 2010, in a vote of eleven to keep Mount Clay with one abstention.

The change has been in the air since June 2003, when the state of New Hampshire voted to change the name in response to a campaign promoted by the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project. But a name change cannot become permanent on U.S. Geographic Survey maps until five years after the named person's death, and after a vote by the federal names board, the board said. Reagan died on June 5, 2004.

The Appalachian Mountain Club had petitioned the names board to consider all of the difficulties of changing a name in a remote location. Susan Arnold, the AMC director of conservation, wrote in a letter, "We urge the Board to weigh the possible costs, primarily in safety, but also more prosaically in the costs of signage and other changes that would need to occur to implement such a name change."

AMC Cartographer Larry Garland, also in a letter to the names board, reported that he knew of no local use of the name Mount Reagan, which is one criterion the board requires before it changes a name on federal maps. "To date, there is no local identification of this peak as Mount Reagan," he wrote. "To our knowledge, there is not a single sign, kiosk, map, or other instrument using the name Mount Reagan rather than Mount Clay. Other than in the context of a proposed name change, we have not heard of anyone referring to this peak as Mount Reagan."

*Sources: New Hampshire Public Radio, U.S. Geographic Names Board, AMC*

## **Mountain Culture Explodes on the Gaspé Peninsula**

I'm clipped into an anchor built of ice screws, hanging high on an ice-climbing route overlooking the St. Lawrence Seaway on the coast of Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula, a region known as Gaspésie. Farther south in the Appalachian Mountains, outdoor adventure seekers joyfully head into the mountains in



*With no evidence of local usage for "Mount Reagan," this peak is still Mount Clay.* JERRY AND MARCY MONKMAN

great numbers. Not here. On a classic route such as Corneille—which might have a queue a mile long in a place such as New Hampshire or Vermont—my climbing partner and I are alone. That’s because in the Gaspésie, mountain recreation is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Historically, residents looked to the mountains, forests, and sea for their livelihood and sustenance through fishing, hunting, and logging. They don’t consider the mountains a place for recreation. The native Micmac name for these mountains, *Chic-Chocs*, means “impenetrable wall.” They were not a place people ventured. Climbers from beyond the region have, until recently, overlooked this vast, mountainous peninsula, but the Gaspésie has some of the best backcountry skiing and ice climbing in all of eastern North America.

The centerpiece of this mountain landscape is a series of three contiguous protected areas: Matane Wildlife Reserve, Parc National de la Gaspésie, commonly known as Gaspésie Provincial Park, and Chic-Chocs Wildlife Reserve. They are stunning. Through them runs the international extension of the Appalachian Trail. It is a wild, alpine environment, home to the highest concentration of moose in Quebec, as well as a small resident caribou herd that is the only remaining herd in eastern North America south of the St. Lawrence, and the last surviving remnant of a once-larger herd that ranged as far south as northern New England.

Just within the last decade or so, the Gaspésie has undergone a mountain culture revolution. Compared with New Hampshire’s White Mountains or

Vermont's Green Mountains, which have had a robust mountain culture for the better part of a century or more, some might say it's about time.

**Skiing:** Capped by Monts Logan, Albert, and Jacques-Cartier (plus a long list of other peaks), the Gaspésie is home to abundant snowfall (including Rocky Mountain–like powder), glacially carved cirques and bowls, and glorious glades. The Gîte du Mont Albert, a mountain lodge run by SEPAQ, Quebec's provincial park system, has been around for more than 60 years. That apparently wasn't enough to attract the crowds. The 1980s saw Heli Ski Gaspésie, a heli-skiing operation that tried to get off the ground, literally and figuratively. However, the region's average 208 days of precipitation and 121 days of snowfall kept the chopper grounded, and HSG failed.

Then, in the late 1990s, a succession of events unfolded to finally put the Gaspésie on the map, starting with a slowly growing base of die-hard backcountry skiers who'd heard rumors of the ski conditions. (When Meathead Films, a Vermont-based adventure ski film company that shoots exclusively in the East, wants to get big mountain shots, it often comes to the Gaspésie.)

In 1999, the Center d'Avalanche de la Haute Gaspésie formed in response to a growing need for backcountry avalanche safety, understanding, weather forecasts, and conditions reports. One year later, the region's first two



*The Ski Chic-Chocs operation deposits skiers on a ridge overlooking the adjacent Gaspésie Provincial Park.* PETER BRONSKI

recreational avalanche fatalities occurred within the span of a single week. Director Dominic Boucher saw it as a tragic sign of the need for his new center. In 2005, the center hosted its first avalanche awareness weekend. In 2006, 100 people attended. By 2010, that number grew to more than 400.

Just as the avalanche center was getting off the ground, in fall 2001, SEPAQ wanted to create a four-season destination ecolodge in the mountains. By Spring 2002, it had chosen a site, set within a designated 60-square-kilometer corner of the Matane Wildlife Reserve. Construction on the multimillion-dollar facility began in summer 2004, and in December 2005, the first guests arrived. During winter, guided backcountry skiing is the most popular attraction.

Then, 2006 saw the advent of Ski Chic-Chocs, which offers guided Snow Cat skiing. Two years later, Montreal native Giovanni Mancini launched Vallee Taconique, with snowmobile-assisted backcountry skiing outside of Mont Saint-Pierre. Murdochville, in the heart of the Gaspésie, is home to Club de Ski Mont Miller, the sole lift-served skiing of note in the region.

**Ice climbing:** Ice climbing in the Gaspésie has undergone a similarly recent renaissance. Most of the new routes went up in the 1980s, and especially the 1990s, long after other mountain ranges in North America had experienced their own mountain recreation revolutions. “Old-timers” in the Gaspésie include guys such as Stephane Lapierre, a physics instructor in his early 40s at a local college in Matane. He literally wrote the book on ice climbing in the Gaspésie. Francois Roy is another area pioneer and the founder of Vertigo Adventures, which is the region’s only ice climbing guide service.

These climbers aren’t getting any younger. As they age, the Gaspésie risks losing its collective knowledge and experience, which would be tragic, considering the sheer number of stellar climbs here. “We have both a quantity and quality of ice climbing routes,” Julie Ruest, a local climber, told me, “but no people.”

Again, that is changing. Daniel Brillant, a young, twenty-something climber and guide (who also holds a degree in adventure tourism from the college in Gaspé), is the son of Yvan, who climbed alongside Lapierre, Roy, and others. Brillant is the face of Rimouski-based Les Grimpeurs de l’Est (The Climbers of the East), a cadre of young climbers inheriting the torch from the “old guard.”

**Summer:** A network of high-country huts caters to hikers. There’s not much rock climbing, mostly because of the poor rock quality in many places. But canyoneering and sea kayaking are popular, with Eskamer Aventure,

a guide service, offering excursions in both activities. Meanwhile, places such as the Sea Shack/Auberg Festive in St. Anne-des-Montes and Au Chic-Chac in Murdochville offer hostel-like accommodations to young, adventurous travelers.

And of course, the International AT weaves its way through the mountains and valleys and along the coastline en route to Cap Gaspe, the end of the peninsula. For most long-distance hikers, the northern terminus of the 2,175-mile AT, which stretches from Georgia to Maine, is the summit of Katahdin in Baxter State Park. Since 1937, when the trail was first completed, more than 10,000 people have reportedly completed the thru-hike.

The International AT arose in the mid-1990s. Stretching some 1,400 additional miles from Maine through New Brunswick and Quebec, it finally reaches its end in Newfoundland. But as it threads a route through the Gaspésie, perched between the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Atlantic Ocean, it follows the spine of the Chic-Chocs and McGerrigle Mountains. Since 1997, when the International AT was first thru-hiked, 86 known people have made the trip from Katahdin to Cap Gaspe.

In short, the Gaspésie's summer evolution runs parallel to the winter season. Mountain culture and recreation are young and unfolding as I write this.

Not that the Gaspésie is without its growing pains. For example, as Francois Boulanger, the general manager of the Gite du Mont Albert, told me, the region still has a disorganized system for mountain search and rescue. Despite a growth in local lodging options, there are still no local gear shops. The rule of thumb remains "bring what you need," plus spares or the tools and parts to fix things, a broken ski binding, maybe, or the pick on a technical ice tool.

Even so, Quebec as a province, and Gaspésiens as a people, see tourism—and especially mountain recreation—as the region's economic future. The Quebec government is keen on attracting non-Quebecois to the mountains of the Gaspésie. Quebec tries to attract outdoor explorers active in the spots prominent in the Gaspésie, who live far enough away for the Gaspésie to feel exotic, but who live close enough to make a trip north reasonably easy to undertake. In this way, you and I have a chance not just to ski, climb, and hike in the Gaspésie, but to become a part of the unfolding mountain culture there.

—*Peter Bronski*

### **AMC Receives Grant from Waterman Fund**

The Appalachian Mountain Club was awarded a grant from the Waterman Alpine Research Fund for an Alpine PlantCam Network. The project's first season seeks to supplement existing citizen science projects of the Mountain Watch program through close monitoring of phenological plant development of targeted alpine and forest species. The project will station cameras at existing permanent phenology monitoring plots through the White Mountains. The cameras are designed to take images of plants incrementally over time, generating movies of alpine plant flowering and berry development, providing a quality-control check of simultaneous citizen data collection, and improving the consistency and accuracy of data collection during key flower development transition times. The program ties into the larger goals of the AMC Mountain Watch and Adopt-A-Peak component in using, educating, and furthering stewardship with local communities and volunteers, and increasing knowledge of mountain ecosystems, particularly given global climate change issues.

The fund gave out a total of \$14,000 in project funding to four nonprofit organizations. The other recipients were the Wildlife Conservation Society Adirondack Program of Saranac Lake, New York, for an alpine moss map; the Beyond Ktaadn Project (sponsored by Walden Woods Project) of Concord, Massachusetts, which is exploring, studying, and conserving the alpine summits and wilderness of eastern North America; and the Green Mountain Club of Waterbury Center, Vermont, for new informational signs on Mount Mansfield, Camel's Hump, Mount Abraham, and Mount Hunger.

*Source: Waterman Fund Press Release*

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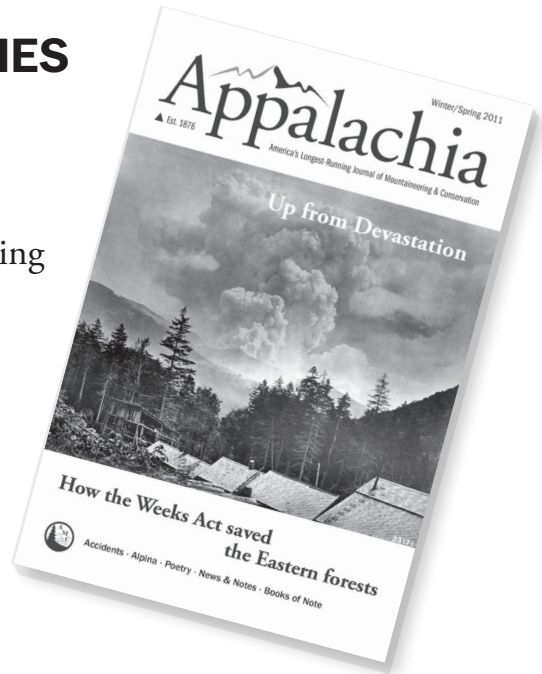
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