

Moosilauke Alpine Stewardship Guide

By Jeff Woodward

Introduction

This guide is not meant to teach you how to be an alpine steward, but merely to augment the other training that you will go through with some Moosilauke-specific items. Basically, this is a list of things you should know about Moosilauke, and some of what I know about them. Feel free to blitz me at any time with any questions. I hope that this helps you get started, and I wish you a wonderful summer. You've got a great job.

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First – one book that you need to read

Backwoods Ethics, by Guy and Laura Waterman. This is an excellent book (although the first 50 pages are kinda corny) that gives a tremendous amount of background and justification that you need for this job. It also includes a thorough discussion of current hiking ethical issues that you will be both teaching and encountering every day. Finally, it gives you a bit of insight into the mind and psyche of the hiker, which in turn helps you figure out the best ways to approach and educate them (it's different for every one). The companion book, Wilderness Ethics, is also quite good, although not essential for this job.

History, foundations, the Lodge and such

You need to know the basic history of the Tip-Top House, Dartmouth's time on Moosilauke, and the Lodge much more detail is available from the displays in the Lodge, and Hooke's book (Reaching that Peak). You should also figure out a couple of fun anecdotes about the Tip-Top house and the Lodge.

The Tip-Top House was built in 1860, given to Dartmouth in 1920, and burned down during a three-day storm in October of 1942 (the summit plaque gives the wrong date). There are several displays in the lodge that tell more about it. It is the main foundation about 15 feet W-NW of the summit sign. There's an annex about 20 feet to the West of it (the chimney is still discernable as the spot with all the cement). I'm not sure what the foundation just to the N of the main foundation is, but sometimes I told people it was a barn.

The cement foundation about 200 yards SE of the summit is the old Winter Cabin II. It was built in 1957, and torn down in 1979, mostly due to snowmobiler vandalism. (The summit of Moosilauke has historically had a problem with snowmobilers. They are allowed up the Carriage Road until just short of the South Peak, where there is now a physical barrier.) Vandals had been trashing the cabin repeatedly, and around 1978 they stole the woodstove out of the cabin, which was the last straw for the college. There is a spring about 25 feet W of the cabin, although we don't publicize it due to the fact that it's

really hard to get there without stepping on the vegetation. Don't rely on it, because it goes dry after about 2 weeks without rain.

The summit tract of Moosilauke was given to Dartmouth in 1920, and Dartmouth has been acquiring land on it through gifts and purchases ever since. The college now owns about 4,500 acres on the mountain. There's a good display in the library with more information. I usually mention both Sherman Adams and Pennington Haile when asked about that.

The Lodge was built in 1938-1939 by Ross McKenney with the last old-growth spruce on the mountain. You should know (roughly) how much it costs to stay there for a night, including breakfast and dinner. You'll learn a bunch more history at dinner talk.

Finally, if this position is still funded by the Waterman Fund, you should know a bit about Guy and Laura Waterman, and be able to speak about the Fund itself.

Plants

This job is about protecting plants, so here's some of the most important. If you're up in early to mid June, you'll see a lot more flowers than just those mentioned here. Consult the AMC's *A Field Guide to Treeline, A Field Guide to Mountain Flowers*, and *Patterns and processes of alpine plant communities on Mt. Moosilauke, New Hampshire*, a senior thesis from several years ago for more information. Other resources include Rick Paradis, (rparadis@uvm.edu) who helps the GMC with training, and Charlie Cogbill (802 454-8619 or cogbill@sover.net), and independent ecologist who probably knows the most about Moosilauke's alpine plants. I never contacted Charlie, so make sure to introduce yourself.

1. Mountain Sandwort *Arenaria groenlandica*



This tough species is one of the more common, and most commonly asked about species of the alpine zone. It has a perennial moss-like base, and grows stems and white flowers each year. The flowers go for most of the summer, until about mid-august.

Mountain sandwort can best be described as the alpine zone's first colonizer. It's one of the first plants to grow back in disturbed areas, often growing in very little soil and coming in just after mosses. Other plants take much longer to colonize an area than this one. You'll find it all over the alpine zone, especially in areas where people have

impacted – the sides of trails, and the foundation areas. This is perhaps the only alpine plant that has benefited from the introduction of humans to alpine summits.

2. Bunchberry

Cornus Canadensis



Not a true alpine plant, but one of the most commonly asked about plants. Bunchberry grows on almost the entire mountain, up into the lower alpine zone. It has 4-petaled (often described as “like a dogwood blossom”) flowers, and flowers through most of July and early to mid-August. In late August and September, it grows a bunch of red berries. Bunchberry lines the areas just on the side of the trail before the trees in the subalpine zone.

3. Three-Toothed Cinquefoil

Potentilla tridentata



This alpine plant is the third of the three plants that flower through most of the summer. It's got small, 5-petaled white flower, and leaves that come in groups of three. Some of the leaves turn reddish as the summer goes on, although I have no idea as to why. There's not much to be said about this one, other than it's related to the dwarf cinquefoil,

one of the rarest plants in the state (it's pretty much only found in one spot near lake of the clouds).

4. Highland Rush

Juncus trifidus



This picture doesn't really do this plant justice, or make it easy to identify it. However highland rush is the most common plant in the alpine zone on Moosilauke, and gives the mountain its distinctive red-hued summit meadows (especially in late summer). It's pretty easy to identify – just look for the grass type thing growing in clumps all around the summit area, especially North, West and South of the summit, and on Gorge Brook just after it pops above treeline. The tops turn brown/red later in the summer as the seeds come out.

6. Mountain Cranberry

Vaccinium vitis-idaea



This is a cool little plant that people often like to know about (sorry, but doing this job will turn you into a bit of a plant dork). It's got small waxy leaves and grows very small to the ground all over the alpine zone. In the early summer (late June and early July) it has small pinkish flowers, and grows red berries in late August. These berries are pretty important – they're harvested commercially in Scandinavia (called lingonberries there), and were historically harvested for an end of the season dinner at the Tip Top house. If

you're up in September, watch for people picking them in mass (I didn't encounter any, but have heard stories).

8. Bigelow Sedge

Carex bigelowii



Again, a not very helpful image. Bigelow sedge is one of two species on the mountain that's on the state threatened species list, and the only one found near the summit. It also has the misfortune of being one of the more frequently trampled plants on the summit, so it's one that you'll have to work a bit to protect. It is another grass type plant, with flat blades, and a crabgrass-like appearance. It's found in the immediate summit area, especially around the foundations, as well as across the alpine zone. It's also found on the East Peak, although that population is quite small and might be in danger of disappearing.

9. Diapensia

Diapensia lapponica



Diapensia is another plant that plant dorks will ask about. It's the alpine zone's toughest plant, growing only in the most exposed and coldest places (it creates a little microclimate within its mat of leaves). It has a mat of tiny, waxy leaves, and flowers in late May just after the snow leaves. Conventional wisdom has it that there is no Diapensia on Moosilauke, but I believe that I found one patch. I'm not completely sure of my identification, however (it could be Alpine Azalea). The patch is about 30 yards east of the Benton trail about 200 yards north of the summit, but it's really hard to find, and harder to get to stepping only on rocks. I'll try and get out there when they flower to figure it out.

Other plant notes:

There are several alpine plants (most notably Labrador Tea and possibly Diapensia) that are conspicuously absent from Moosilauke's summit. I haven't heard any great explanations for this, but the most plausible was from a biologist who was contracting with the USFS. He thought that perhaps during a brief warming period (the hypsothermal) roughly 5,000 years ago, the summit of Moosilauke became forested. After the region cooled off again, the forests receded, and the summit turned back into an alpine zone. However, during the warm period, Moosilauke may have lost some of its alpine seed diversity, and these plants just haven't gotten any seeds back to Moosilauke. It's an interesting explanation.

Animals

I won't include pictures or anything, because these guys are pretty easy to identify. Again, if you can figure out a short little anecdote tidbit about each animal/plant, it makes it easier to tell people about them.

Animals of Moosilauke's Alpine Zone:

One pack of ravens – say hi to the one that squawks all the time.

Snowshoe hares – often show up on days when the top is stuck in the clouds. If one is out, then a bunch are.

Assorted mice, shrews, chipmunks and red squirrels – live all up and down the mountain. A few live off of people's crumbs, etc. at the summit.

Long-tailed weasel – I wondered for a month why there weren't more rodents dependent on people's food at the summit, until I saw this guy. He only showed up three times, but he probably eats some of the assorted rodents. He's really cute too.

Assorted little birds – I'm not an ornithologist, so I can't tell most of these apart. You'll hear a lot of white-throated sparrows, especially in the morning. People involved in the Green Mountain Club will sometimes ask about the Bicknell's Thrush, which we do have on Moosilauke.

Other Notable Animals on the lowers slopes of Moosilauke:

Moose – There are a bunch of these on the lower slopes of the mountain, and people will ask about them pretty often. Legend has it that a moose wanders up to the summit every 10 years (we have a picture of one in 1993, and a thru-hiker saw one in the summer of 2003), but they probably come up more often than that.

Black bear – People will also ask about these a lot. There are some on Moosilauke, but they stay away from people.

Geology

My weak point. Consult materials in the lodge, or the inevitable rocks major on lodge crew.

Conclusion

Have a great summer, and remember that you can learn from other people as much as they can learn from you. Enjoy!

Sources (for pictures)

<http://www.wellesley.edu/Activities/homepage/web/Species/Images/psandwortm1.jpg>

<http://www.ontariowildflower.com/images/bunchberry.jpg>

<http://www.cycop.org/images/bunchberry.jpg>

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<http://linnaeus.nrm.se/flora/mono/junca/juncu/junctri.html>

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<http://www.hbhs.k12.nh.us/kittredgej/2002pics/diapensia.jpg>