

Moosilauke Alpine Steward 2005

Josh Hurd
Final Report
19 September 2005

Expectations

At the beginning of the summer I knew very little about the job. I talked to people about what it is about - about basic means of conveying the message of alpine stewardship, and about the alpine environment itself - but I didn't know exactly what the position entails before I arrived at the summit. What is done with the position is fairly personal, as the interpretation of what alpine stewardship is varies greatly. Therefore, what I planned on doing and what I actually did ended up at times not being the same, and I differed as well from what Jeff and Laura did. But that is not a bad thing. From what I had talked to Jeff, Laura, and Julie about, I planned on greeting each and every group to come to the top of the mountain, talking with all of these groups about the alpine environment, and doing basic trailwork on top of the mountain. I planned on being on the summit for an extended period of time each day, trying to greet and talk to each group that reached the top while I was there.

As the summer season began, I started doing just that. But as I learned about the mountain and the type of people that hike the mountain, I realized that I would have to modify my original plan. First of all, not everyone wanted to be talked to. Many people hiked the mountain to get away from society and their normal lives. When they came to the summit and saw 20 other people on top, they became irked, especially if there was no view. Then when the alpine steward came over to them, no matter how politely and in what manner, they became even more irked. Some people just did not want to be talked to. Also, the majority of people to come to the top of the mountain already knew in some way, shape, or form about low-impacted hiking and staying off the alpine vegetation. However, how they interpreted this message differed greatly between people. Some people, after saying they knew about the importance of staying off the vegetation, would go around and walk on it nonetheless. Some people took the message so seriously that, even on the trail, they would walk on the rocks only. I had to learn what to talk to each group about – how to cater the message of alpine stewardship individual conditions. This is not something that I could plan for or study up on in advance. Only by spending time on top of the mountain and talking with many people did I get a grasp on the individual groups and how to customize the message. Eventually, however, I realized that just talking with people was not enough to get the message out. I had to employ active steps on the summit to help the alpine ecosystem.

Projects:

Three patches of damaged tundra exist on the northern and northwestern sides of the old summit camp foundation. They are revegetating naturally – making a comeback – but many people see these areas, which are somewhat devoid of topsoil and are fairly rocky, as areas that are okay to walk on. Jeff and Laura treated these places as “grey” or “overflow” areas – areas that we want to keep people off of, but people want to go on. But when people hear the message “stay on the rocks on the summit,” they think that these damaged areas, containing small pebbles, count as places they can walk. I became extremely frustrated when people would repeatedly go into these areas after my spiel on alpine stewardship. I had to go get them, explain to them that we are actually trying to revegetate these areas, and that they should not be there. After having this happen many times, I decided to take active measures to prevent this from further happening. In my past experiences, when the forest service has an overused campsite or a damaged area, they put up signs saying “revegetation area” or “restoration area” to keep people off that area. I took this idea and applied it to the top of Moosilauke. I created three signs saying “revegetation area,” painted them, and put them in the areas of the summit where the confusion about vegetation happened. I did this three weeks into the summer, and after the signs went up, I saw a significant reduction in the traffic to those areas. Also, since the signs rested on the ground, they did not contribute to the cluttering signage of the summit.

Another area of confusion for many people on the summit was in locating trails. The summit had many signs pointing to various trails, and people would repeatedly ask me which trail was which. In order to

remedy this situation, I consolidated the old summit signs and made a new one, which is more succinct and clear. I replaced the three old signs with the new one, which also greatly reduced the clutter of signs on the top of the mountain. Because of conflict with the forest service, however, I do not know how long it will last, as the sign is painted in the traditional Dartmouth Outing Club colors of orange and black.

Another area of confusion for hikers was in trail definition of the carriage road, about 300 yards from the summit. In this location, a broad swath of damaged vegetation exists with the trail directly in the center. I did not realize why people deviated from the trail so much in this section. After walking up and down many times, I realized that it was in the shape of the trail and the form of the trail that caused people to deviate from the standard path. Heading south, at the top of the damaged section, there is a large rock in the trail which drops off rather steeply, about a 1.5 foot drop. To stay on the trail, you must go over this drop. However, to the left, and onto the vegetation, you can avoid this drop. Hence the much damaged vegetation in that section of the trail, as people took the easiest way off the rock. To remedy this, I gathered a couple large rocks and created a solid rock step. This made staying on the trail much easier by having a less difficult way off the large rock onto the trail. This section of the trail is also a fairly winding section. At a few critical sections, however, the trail definition was very poor, hence people would unwittingly go off the trail. In order to fix this, I did a significant amount of trail definition work, primarily in the form of scree walls. Through talking with hikers who frequent the mountain in the winter, I also learned that in this same section many winter sporters get off trail because the lack of winter cairns on the section. They would head to the north, around the krumholz, and get lost, rather than staying to the east and going through the krumholz where the trail goes. In order to remedy this situation, I built two large and solid winter cairns, about 6 feet tall each, which I hope will survive the winter and guide winter sporters to the proper path.

I also started a photo monitoring operation this summer, which I completed later in the season, after I figured out the areas most in need of monitoring. I picked eleven locations and documented each. This will be covered in a separate part of my report.

Because of all of these extra projects on the mountain, I was extremely pressed for time. At the beginning of the summer I tried to do the side projects either before or after the standard stewarding day on the summit, but I quickly realized that I would drive myself insane and would not have enough energy to continue working this way. Therefore I took some days off from stewarding on the mountain, and instead worked on my projects either around the summit or at the workshop at the lodge. In addition to these days not stewarding, the VTC requested my help on multiple occasions, and on those days I could not be on the summit as well. All of my work days, both my own projects and VTC help, were on weekdays, so that I could steward on the weekend when the majority of people were visiting the mountain.

Narrative:

Winds and Sheltered Areas: Interesting to note the winds on top of Moosilauke. The majority of the time the winds come from the Northwest. Most of the big walls on the foundation remains, as well as the general layout of the summit, give best protection to winds from the northwest. However, every now and then, the winds come from the Southeast. In those situations, the curvature of the summit itself provides very little protection, and the only general area of protection is the revegetation areas (what Jeff called "grey areas"). People must step into this area in order to get there, but if they take care they can avoid stepping on vegetation in getting to these areas. The only troublesome area is the chimney (the large pile of rocks to the northwest of the main foundation). Most people step on the vegetation in getting there. It is not usually a problem when the wind are from the Northwest, but when they are going strong from the Southeast, and the other protected areas are in use, the chimney is used, which has a detrimental affect on the alpine vegetation.

Dogs: The vast majority of dogs have been good up top. They are under control of their owners and do not cause any problems. There are two exceptions to this, however. One was up there with a man in his 50's in the morning. The man did not have a leash and the dog was roaming aoll around. It was bothering people and other dogs: trying toe at people's lunches and harassing other dogs. I told the man politely to get control of his dog. He verbally tried to call it in, but did not physically go after it.

The dog continued to irritate people. Eventually the dog actually ran away and the man spent half an hour trying to call and find it. The dog eventually came to him from Benton right as the man was to give up. The other problem dog was a big mean Doberman Pincer. He was collared and leashed, but he snarled at quite a few dogs. The owner had him pretty close and pretty tight, but then out of nowhere he jumped at and bit a Springer Spaniel pretty hard on the tail. The owners eventually separated them, and the Doberman owner had the dog under rigid control after that. The other question I got often about dogs is how much they impact the alpine environment. I have thought quite a bit about it myself as well. My theory is that they do not have a large impact. They are lighter than humans and have four points of contact with the ground. Furthermore, their paws are padded pretty well, so there is not as much impact as big lug sole boots. The typical boots that humans wear do the most damage not by compression, but rather from digging into the ground and moving and crunching around soils and plants. Dogs' feet don't do this nearly as much. There is the possible problem of dogs defecating in the alpine environment, but I have only seen one do so and it was in the krumholz.

2006 Alpine Steward:

In terms of my what next year's alpine steward should know, I would say make a marked effort to inform yourself about the mountain and the surrounding landscape. People want to know what the mountains, bodies of water, and towns are. I made a 360 labeled panorama of the views from the top of Moosilauke, which currently resides in a file on my computer and printed in the basement of the lodge. Jeff Woodward's guide to the alpine vegetation is a good resource. Furthermore, I would also suggest educating yourself about the complete mountain ecosystem. Many people ask questions about fir waves, boreal forests, and transitions, etc. I would learn about differences between Red Spruce and Balsam Fir and their respective characteristics, as well as the general logging history of the mountain. By no means should you do this all before the job starts. You can't truly know about the various forest ecosystems without spending a good time in them first. So work a couple of weeks, and as you get a feel for the mountain, start educating yourself about the various aspects of it. With a greater knowledge of the forest, it also makes hiking around the mountain (and anywhere for that matter) quite a bit more interesting. The library at the lodge has many good books on mountains and forests, but I would recommend Marchland's book on the North Woods in particular.

In terms of how I talked with people, generally I would approach the group, introduce myself, giving my name and position. I then welcomed them to the mountain, told them that I was up there to answer their questions on trails, shelters, history, and the like on the top. I then said that my primary purpose on top was to talk about the alpine type ecosystem on top of the mountain. Throughout the introductory conversation, and mannerisms of the groups in particular, I could get a basic idea of the outdoor experience of the groups. I would also question them about their experience, and based on my observations and my questioning them, I would give the group an appropriate explanation of the alpine environment and importance of low-impact hiking.

Groups Contacts:

I saw no new groups that either Laura or Jeff, or the various Volunteer Trails Coordinators did not see in previous years.

Statistics:

My statistics were recorded Wednesday through Sunday, from 12-3pm. I would usually be on the mountain for at least two hours in addition to the data collecting time. I estimate that the data collected from 12-3 accounts for 80% of the people coming to the top of the mountain. I saw a total of 2245 people on top of the mountain. The least busy day I saw 9 people, and the most busy day I saw 128 between 12 and 3. The most popular trail up the mountain was Gorge Brook, with 52%. Then come Beaver Brook (16%), Glencliff (12%), Benton (7%), Snapper (5%), Ridge (4%), and then Other (1%). These trail statistics are only the trails that people took up the mountain. The majority of people who took Gorge Brook up made a loop and took Snapper down (same with Snapper up and Gorge Brook down). About half of the Glencliff hikers were overnights, and took Beaver Brook down. Also, most people coming up Ridge took either Gorge Brook or Snapper down. Beaver Brookers almost

always went down Beaver Brook as well. The same with Benton. Speaking of Benton, only one encounter with Thomas Benton occurred. That was in Tunnel Brook Ravine by the sight of the old Tunnel Brook Shelter. I managed to escape unscratched.

Important to take into account when analyzing these statistics is the fact that a few of my workdays were not stewarding on top of the mountain. One Friday I trained with the Green Mountain Academy in Vermont on Mt. Mansfield. I spent five Wednesdays helping the Volunteer Trails Coordinator or building signs, three Thursdays helping the VTC, building signs, or building cairns and screen walls, and one Friday building a cairn and scree walls. This is a total of ten days spent training, helping the VTC, or working on projects. With an average of 41 visitors per weekday, this would be an additional 410 people on top of the mountain that I did not talk to, for a total of 2655 on top of the mountain estimated.