

Waterman Fund Donors 2008-2009

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Thank You From Page Hollow Nominations Sought

Laura Waterman, Secretary

Garrett Allen: for his able and generous work on our website; **Laurie Demrow:** for dedicated work on our newsletter, and designing all our print materials; **Kent Kyle:** for his much appreciated assistance on financial matters; **Doug Mayer:** a past board member, for his generous life-time support to the Fund; **Hugh Montgomery:** for his wise council on how to jump-start a program of planned giving; **Rebecca Oreskes:** a past board member, for her expert assistance in helping us think through some of the thornier issues; **Christine Woodside:** editor of *Appalachia*, for publishing the winner's essay in the December 2009 issue, and for being a good friend to the Fund.

To nominate someone for the Alpine Stewardship Award, please send a letter to the Waterman Fund, cite specific examples of the nominee's stewardship of the Northeast wilderness, along with other relevant personal or professional experience. The deadline for nominations each year is December 15th.

The award is presented in April at the Fund's annual dinner.

For more information, visit: www.watermanfund.org or mail your nominations to:

The Waterman Fund
PO Box 1064
East Corinth, VT 05040

Past Award Winners: 2009 Pete Fish, 2008 Dr. Hub Vogelmann, 2007 Dick Fortin, 2006 Rick Paradis 2005 Lester Kenway 2004 Ed Ketchledge, 2003 Roger Collins

The Alpine Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE WATERMAN FUND

SUPPORTING EDUCATION & STEWARDSHIP TO PRESERVE THE ALPINE AREAS OF THE NORTHEAST

President's Report

Mary Margaret Sloan

I've been a part of the Waterman Fund board of directors for half its lifetime. I'm just the third board president in the Fund's almost 10 years, which is striking for a couple reasons: one, in this economic climate, most nonprofit organizations don't live longer than five years, and two, those five years are usually marked by a lot of transition in the board. The Fund has avoided these two pitfalls, I think, because of its very clear focus on its mission: to strengthen the human stewardship of the open summits, exposed ridgelines, and alpine areas of the Northeast.

We do this through our annual grants, which range from alpine trail work to alpine research and our Waterman Fund Alpine Essay contest to encourage writing about our iconic northeastern mountains in the vein of Guy and Laura Waterman.



The Waterman Fund Board 2009/2010
From left to right, Rick Paradise, Annie Bellerose, Laura Waterman, Val Stori, Julia Goren, Mary Margaret Sloan. Not present: Matt Cox, Jeff Lougee, Rick Sayles.

November 2009

No. 8

The Waterman Fund

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Annie Bellerose
Matt Cox
Julia Goren
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Rick Paradise

WWW.WATERMANFUND.ORG

If you attended our annual dinner in March in Burlington, you would have had the good fortune to hear a presentation by one of the Fund's grantees, Kent McFarland of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, about the research he was able to do because of a grant from the Fund. There are two subspecies of butterflies that only exist in the Presidential Range of the White Mountains. They never go below the alpine (on a beautiful warm fall day, many of us may have wished that we could stay on the top of Mt. Adams forever, but these fragile creatures actually do it). They've been there since the last glaciation, and while they've survived an awful lot since then, Kent wanted to monitor them to evaluate the effects of climate change not only on these two butterfly species, but also on other wildlife and the alpine zone (check out www.vtecostudies.org for more on the project).

The grants the Waterman Fund distributes each year are not enormous, but they're essential to the projects. Without them, the Alpine Gathering wouldn't happen every two years, the Dartmouth Outing Club may not have been able to start its steward program on Mt. Moosilauke, and Kent may not have had enough support to launch his butterfly monitoring program.

As a board, the Waterman Fund is proud of our role in helping to protect alpine areas in the northeast. And individually, we all have personal stakes in it. For me, my love of alpine areas began when I was 10. I spent almost every weekend hiking the Appalachian Trail in West Virginia – beautiful and rolling but with few views, so our perspective was close and small. Then one summer, my parents took us – four kids

The Alpine Steward

ages 5, 6, 9 and 10 – for a week hiking through the AMC huts. The views were suddenly big, expansive and wild in a way that West Virginia didn't even suggest. In later years, we would explore Maine, Vermont and New York and I would react the same way: Wow, these places are extraordinary. I am proud to be part of an organization that feels the same way I do about these special places that so symbolize the Northeast.



Spotlight on Rick Paradis, Our Newest Board Member

Rick Paradis lives in Middlesex, Vermont in the shadows of Hunger Mountain with his wife Susan and daughter Emma Rose. He works at the University of Vermont where he directs the Natural Areas Center and is a member of the faculty in the Environmental Program. Rick's research focus is on comparative mountain landscapes with recent work comparing the history and conservation of the mountains here in New England with the Highlands of Scotland. Rick received the Guy Waterman Alpine Steward Award in 2006. He has trained dozens of Green Mountain Club alpine stewards, and was instrumental in the expansion of the Summit Caretaker Program from Mt. Mansfield to Camel's Hump and Mount Abraham. His interests before include wandering remote mountain landscapes, kayaking, skiing, photography and eating pies.



Pete Fish receives Award

Annie Bellerose

The Waterman Fund presented the 2009 Guy Waterman Alpine Steward Award on Saturday, March 28th, to C. Peter M. Fish. The award is given each year to a person or organization that has demonstrated a long-term commitment to protecting the physical and spiritual qualities of the northeast's mountain wilderness.

Pete Fish, a New York State Forest Ranger for 23 years, is this year's award recipient. As a ranger in both the Catskills and the Adirondacks, and as an active member of the Adirondack 46ers and Catskill 3500 Club, Fish has interacted with thousands of hikers on summits and in valleys. Through these organizations, as well as on his own initiative and time, Fish has educated the public about Leave No Trace, backcountry safety, mountain stewardship, and alpine hiking etiquette. He has assisted in training summit stewards since the early days of the High Peaks Summit Steward Program (a partnership of The Nature Conservancy, Adirondack Mountain Club, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation). Fish has also worked on Ed Ketchledge's (who received the alpine steward award in 2004) summit restoration efforts in the High Peaks Region.

After retiring as a ranger in 1998, Fish has been sought after as a speaker by a variety of outdoor groups. He continues to actively engage and educate hikers, especially on his beloved Mt. Marcy, a mountain he has climbed, as of the end of 2008, 707 times. Fish is an active trail steward, clearing and maintaining trails in Keene, Keene Valley, and elsewhere. Few individuals have shared as much or reached as many in service of these mountains, and especially these alpine areas.

Brendan Wiltse, former Chief Steward of the High Peaks Summit Steward Program, nominated him for the award. In his nominating letter, Wiltse wrote, “ There is no doubt in my mind that Pete Fish’s stewardship activities have had a substantial positive impact on the Adirondack mountains. When someone meets Pete Fish on the trail they remember what he has to say, and keep it with them for the rest of their lives.”

Julia Goren, Waterman Fund board member and Adirondack Mountain Club’s Summit Steward Coordinator, presented Pete Fish with a framed photograph of the view looking northwest from the summit of Mt. Marcy by noted photographer Carl Heilman II.

Friends of the Waterman Fund attended the annual dinner on Saturday, March 28th, at the Echo Lake Aquarium and Science Center in Burlington, VT. The dinner featured Kent McFarland of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) in addition to the presentation of the alpine steward award. McFarland, a biologist with nearly 20 years experience working with New England wildlife, spoke about VCE’s alpine butterfly monitoring project in New Hampshire’s Presidential Range. The Waterman Fund supported this project in 2008. Fund President Mary Margaret Sloan also spoke, noting the Fund’s continued efforts in alpine stewardship, despite the current economic climate, and welcoming last year’s essay contest winner, Kimberley S. K. Beal, who joined the Fund for the dinner.

Treasurer’s Report

Rick Sayles

This year’s report is decidedly easier to write as compared to last year’s. That’s because I don’t have to report a decline in the Fund, but rather I have the pleasure of reporting that the Fund has had a nice rebound. This is most significantly the result of the broad market advance since earlier this year. Our fund balance as of this writing is just over \$250,000, a significant advance from our 2008 year-end balance of \$216,740.

For those that are interested in numbers, here are two other figures cumulative since the Fund’s inception in 2000. Total contributions that have been received now exceed \$310,000 and total grants that have been approved exceed \$70,000! Awesome!

As I note in each year’s report, the Waterman Fund is volunteer driven and as a result enjoys extremely low-cost operating expenses. Total expenses to-date this year are

less than \$1,500; most of the work is done by our talented group of volunteers (thanks to each of you!). Our total expenses for a typical year (not counting the grants that we give) add up to only about 1% of the investment balance. Thus, you can be quite assured that your donations are being put to use as you would hope and are not being wasted by unnecessary expenses. In fact, with any appreciation in the market, your contributions are even likely to grow as they are part of the grants.

Which brings me to the topic of how we determine our level of grants to make in any year. Like other non-profit organizations, we utilize a guideline based on our fund balance. In our case, we take 5% of the rolling prior 3-year average to come up with our guideline grants budget. Since this is just a guideline and not a required level, we may in some years exceed or fall short of this amount based on the relative attractiveness of the grant requests. We feel this approach gives us important flexibility but also a basis for a prudent level of grantmaking.

For 2009, this computation yielded a guideline of \$13,000 for our grants budget and that is exactly what we granted, including the award for the Alpine Essay contest.

I know all of our grant recipients, as well as all of us on the Board, would like to thank you for your generous donations. We work hard to see that your contributions are utilized as effectively as possible.

Annual Fall Retreat

Jeff Lougee

For this year’s fall retreat, the Waterman Fund board headed east toward the Atlantic Ocean and Camden, Maine. The Fund supported a project of the Coastal Mountains Land Trust this past year to develop and erect an educational sign on Bald Mountain, and we wanted to have a look. On a beautiful and sunny November day, we met up with Ian Stewart, the Conservation Lands Manager of the Trust, for a guided trip up Bald Mountain.

At just over 1,200 feet, Bald Mountain is not an alpine peak, but a combination of factors, including the harsh environmental conditions of the coast, has resulted in an open rocky summit area. Up on the mountain there are Fall

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The Second Annual Waterman Fund Alpine Essay Contest

Annie Bellerose

The Waterman Fund wrapped up its second annual Alpine Essay Contest in May with a total of twenty-eight submissions. This year's prize went to Jeremy Loeb, for his essay "A Ritual Descent."

Loeb has worked for the Randolph Mountain Club in New Hampshire's White Mountains and his essay focuses on issues of wilderness, wildness, and personal challenge in Tuckerman Ravine. It will be published in the December issue of *Appalachia*, the Appalachian Mountain Club's biannual journal of mountaineering and conservation. In addition, Loeb will be awarded a \$2,000 prize to help him continue to pursue his writing and to recognize the importance of a new voice addressing northeastern environmental issues.

Rick Ouimet's essay "The Northeast's True One Hundred Mile Wilderness?" received honorable mention. His piece centers on linking one hundred miles of trails through the White Mountains' officially designated wilderness areas, and compares it to a trip in Maine's famed, but not officially designated, Hundred Mile Wilderness. Ouimet received copies of the Watermans' two Ethics books. Both essays will be available in full at www.watermanfund.org, as of December 1st.

The Alpine Essay Contest fulfills a long-term goal of the Waterman Fund — encouraging new voices speaking about northeastern environmental issues, much as Guy and Laura Waterman did in the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

All are encouraged to submit essays for the 2010 contest. Please note that the deadline for next year's submissions has changed from May to March. Essays are now due March 15, 2010.

Please also check out changes in the contest's details and official rules at

www.watermanfund.org

or contact Annie Bellerose by mail or email.

To submit an entry, email a Word document (or compatible format) and accompanying cover letter to:

info@watermanfund.org
attn: Annie Bellerose

or mail to:

The Waterman Fund - Attn: Annie Bellerose
P.O. Box 1064
East Corinth, VT 05040

Waterman Fund 2010 Alpine Essay Contest

The Waterman Fund seeks the submission of essays about life in the mountains of the northeastern U.S. for its annual Waterman Fund Alpine Essay Contest.

Wildness! Are you finding it where you least expect? Did you go in search and it wasn't there?

The Waterman Fund is seeking personal essays about stewardship of wild places, whether through a scientific lens or an encounter with wildness.

What do we mean by "the spirit of wildness?" Why is it so important to our lives? Or, is it? Guy and Laura Waterman spent a lifetime reflecting and writing on the Northeast's mountains. The Waterman Fund seeks to further their legacy through essays that celebrate this spirit.

The winning piece will be published in

Appalachia Journal,

the winning essayist will be

awarded \$1,500

Honorable Mention will receive \$500.

For more information
and submission details, visit
www.watermanfund.org



The Waterman Fund

A Ritual Descent

The winning essay of the Waterman Fund Alpine Essay Contest

Jeremy Loeb

“There was a lot of excitement up on the mountain yesterday. The summit broke their record temperature for the day with a high of 56 [degrees] F (13 C), thousands of people flocked to Tuckerman Ravine, three human triggered avalanches occurred in the Bowl, people endured countless spectacular falls and several people were injured requiring lots of volunteers to evacuate their fellow mountain travelers. It was a classic day in Tuckerman Ravine.”

—U.S. Forest Service, Avalanche Advisory for Tuckerman and Huntington Ravines, Mount Washington, New Hampshire, April 26, 2009



Near the top of Mount Washington headwall, a near traffic-jam of skiers steps up a 50-degree incline on the route known as the Chute. No sane mountaineer would try this without a rope, crampons, and ice picks.

— Jeremy Loeb

HALFWAY UP THE SIDE OF TUCKERMAN RAVINE, ON THE EASTERN slope of Mount Washington, New Hampshire, I'm crouched in the lee of a cliff, sweating and shivering. My location, at the thin neck of an hourglass-shaped run named the Chute, affords a vertical view of the headwall. Blinding spring snow covers most of the broad cirque, interrupted only by dark cliffs and bands of ice, a waterfall bursting out from the snowpack and plunging into a crevasse near a center headwall run called The Lip, and the ant-like columns of skiers and snowboarders ascending the gullies. The exertion of booting up the steep face of the ravine soaks my face with sweat mingled with sunscreen, which seeps into my eyes. I shiver, not from the temperature drop in this shady spot, but from a gathering sense of danger. Tucks is rife with skiing accidents today, and I'm about to witness another.

A few days before, Mount Washington had caught a storm system that brought rain to the valley and over a full foot of snow at the summit. Winds at over 100 miles per hour churned through the ravine, loading gullies with snow and returning the mountain to full-on winter conditions. The blizzard departed as quickly as it had come, and this weekend beckons skiers with bluebird skies and balmy weather. By Saturday, the rangers have downgraded the avalanche forecast to "low" for all but the headwall, which they rate as "moderate."

I did not begin today anticipating avalanches, but from my perch, I have witnessed two major skier-initiated slab avalanches that rumbled down the headwall with deadly earnest. The second avalanche caught my breath, as a river of snow engulfed the snowboarder who set off the slide. He struggled to stay atop the churning rapids as they swept him 500 vertical feet, where he arrived at the floor of the ravine alive, unburied, pumping his fists in the air triumphantly to the roar of the crowd.

Avalanches aside, the slopes today are a mess of hazards and accidents. Novice skiers and riders follow each other over the edge like lemmings. Accustomed to neither the corn and mashed-potatoes conditions of spring snow nor techniques for descending steep terrain, they lose their balance, tumbling and bouncing like rag dolls down the steps. Somehow, with disregard to physics and human anatomy, no skiers have seemed to seriously injure themselves. Across the headwall, tremendous blocks of ice that adorn the cliffs are melting imperceptibly, ready at any moment to set loose and crash into the crowds below. Deepening crevasses lurk around the center of the headwall, hidden beneath the fresh snowfall and waiting to swallow reckless skiers. Woe to the incautious.

That morning we had skied down the summit cone and dropped into the run called Right Gully, a 35-degree pitch. He skillfully carved the run, while I followed with adolescent audacity, my jump turns barely retaining control. Halfway up the Chute,

the incline of the slope rises from approximately 35 to 50 degrees, and I cave to my fear and urge for self-preservation. For reference, expert runs at ski areas top out in the low 30-degree range. Kick-step your way up a 50-degree slope, and you're climbing a ladder of snow. Climbing such precipitous faces belongs in the realm of technical mountaineering—except for the fact that no sane mountaineer would try this without a rope, crampons, and ice picks. At



50 degrees—the maximum pitch for approximately half the runs at Tucks—you become airborne between your jump turns, and if you lose your balance, you have virtually no chance of arresting your slide. Such extreme skiing requires a polished, aggressive stance. For the skiers tumbling down the Chute, there's little to do but cover your head and pray that you don't bounce into the band of cliffs to your right or tumble off the ledges to your left. Heights and exposure do not usually bother me, but on the

steps of Tuckerman Ravine, I feel an acute sense of vertigo. Skiing here feels like willfully plunging into the maw of some malicious mountain god that waits to swallow its victims alive.

Daunted by the increasing pitch, and having run out of water besides, I choose to stop at this halfway point to film my buddy's descent. He's a much more agile, aggressive skier than I, and we're comfortable with this arrangement. I squint upslope through my camera, filming a succession of skiers, any of which might be my friend. The majority of them maintain control of their edges, cutting the snow with skill and quickness. Every third or fourth skier, however, tumbles and slides through the notch of the Chute like a race car spinning out of control, their skis, poles, goggles, gloves, clothing, tearing off and scattering. With every display of rag-doll acrobatics, a roar comes up from the crowd lounging the rocks below, offering much kudos and empathy. After the skiers' tumbles finally halt, they pick themselves up, assess their wounds and squint upward to where their gear lays scattered hundreds of feet above.

At that auspicious moment, my camera shuts off and I start fussing with the batteries, so I only half-notice my buddy tumble past me, no longer attached to his skis. From the corner of my eye, I see a snowball of blue Gore-Tex streaking downhill, uselessly trying to grab onto the slope. He reaches the bottom, and I wait for him to stand up and give the camera a victory wave. Instead, he lies on his side a crumpled fetal position, moaning. Moments like these feel surreal, where a wave of possible dilemmas and unforeseen consequences are suddenly manifest. I feel as if the wind has been knocked out of me; I can feel my adrenaline surge and my blood pound. "Just ski down there and check on him," I tell myself. "Don't panic until you have to."

As I strap on my bindings, somebody below cries

“Medic!” Of the thousands of people who have hiked Tucks today, and the hundreds who have crashed their way down the slopes, this is the first real injury I have witnessed. By the time I ski down, U.S. Forest Service rangers and volunteers have arrived at his side and are examining his left leg. We first note the dislocated patella on his bruised and swelling knee, but it takes a few moments for us to realize that his quadriceps muscle has twisted grotesquely, suggesting a fractured femur. The femur happens to lie dangerously close to the femoral artery, the main supplier of blood for the lower body. If the jagged edge of a fracture ruptures that line, massive internal bleeding ensues. If fatty tissue seeps into the bloodstream, it risks forming a blood clot that could lodge itself fatally in the brain or the heart. I forget about my dehydration and my clammy clothes. My fear and nausea disappear. I now devote all my attention to helping my friend get down alive.

Somewhere in those stretched-out seconds, two thoughts resound through my mind. First, that we are idiots who underestimate this mountain. It’s been said often that there are two types of people who ski Tucks: those who are foolish and injure themselves, and those who are foolish and have the time of their lives. Which brings me to my second thought: Why on earth is skiing Tucks worth risking our lives?

Tucks as Wilderness Experience

That question gnaws on me long after rescuers carry my buddy on a sled down to the valley and load him into the ambulance. What is so precious that draws us to join in this madness, this blatant peril and excitement that is Tuckerman Ravine?

It’s tempting to reduce this type of extreme sport to an adrenaline rush, the sensation of being totally alive in the face of danger. But skiing at Tucks also partakes of a much grander tradition of high adventure in wild places. In a century where most of the world’s frontiers have been mapped, traveled, settled, or paved, we have come to seek adventure in those places that can never be domesticated by man, the far corners of the earth that still hold us in their power. The more perilous these places, the more seductive their allure. Like high altitude mountaineering or big wave surfing, skiing Tucks offers a taste of wild nature at its most extreme, beautiful, and deadly.

If you ask skiers why they ski at Tuckerman Ravine, you’ll likely hear echoes from across the past few centuries of wilderness philosophy. The concept of wilderness and its evolution in American history has been vividly documented in Roderick Nash’s seminal classic, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Yale University Press, 2001). The wilderness once held negative connotations in the minds of early Americans, who saw it as a place of chaos and darkness beyond the order of civilization. As the American frontier began to close in the 19th century, that sense of fear gave way to appreciation and nostalgia. Romantic and transcendentalist thinkers like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir led the way in persuading the public to see an American asset in the wilderness, its monuments symbols of our nation and its unspoiled condition as a natural cathedral. In

the 20th century, writers like Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson popularized for Americans the principles of ecology, which demonstrate that man lives not above nature but within its web. In the 1960s and 1970s, seeking wilderness became a countercultural pursuit, a way to escape undesirable civilization and find a greater reality. Today, wilderness recreation has become widely woven into the complex tapestry of American culture.

When I asked fellow skiers about what drew them to Tuckerman’s Ravine, their responses echoed the classic tenets of wilderness philosophy. Many come to the mountains for that sense of rugged individualism that allegedly disappeared along with the frontier. Others are here to find the divine that has been lost in the confines of civilization, or to gain connectedness with the land, to shake off that sense of alienation that comes with a modern, consumerist lifestyle. At Tucks, surely they invoke, experience, and appreciate many of these classic wilderness values. To carve a graceful arc down the side of a rugged backcountry slope is perhaps to touch the very essence of individualism, divinity, and connection to the earth. Yet Tucks is not a pristine wilderness area but the site of a long, colorful history of human recreation.

Skiers have traveled to Tucks in hordes since as long ago as the 1930s, when the introduction of a transportation infrastructure and trail building made access possible for weekend jaunts from as far away as Boston. Since then, on sunny spring days the ravine has invited a constant crowd, what looks like a conga line from Pinkham Notch up to the top of the ravine. Skiers, snowboarders, and climbers mill around Hermit Lake, where the U. S. Forest Service posts daily assessments of the ravine’s conditions. These postings describe in intricate detail the dynamics of snow conditions in the ravine. They always include strong notes of caution but stop short of expressly forbidding travel. This warning system seems to be a laissez-faire style of risk management when compared to earlier decades, when the Forest Service would shoot down dangerous avalanches and ice formations or close the ravine whenever they found conditions too dangerous. Nevertheless, it’s a heavily patrolled area with multiple rangers on hand to educate visitors and to coordinate medical situations. For all of Tuckerman’s natural beauty, the ambiance during the spring ski season feels less like wilderness and more like a bustling arena.

Wilderness, as the classic formulation goes, ought to be a place in the natural world where man is but a visitor. Not a place where man can buy a Snickers bar and some sunscreen, use the public restroom, or check his Blackberry, all of which skiers can do easily at Hermit Lake near the floor of the ravine. The Northeast has its contingent of writers and activists who feel the impinging crush of humanity sapping the wildness of these hills. Whether it’s the system of backcountry huts, the overreliance on search-and-rescue, the crowded summer summits with hikers yapping on their cell phones, or insensitive visitors trampling delicate alpine plants, wilderness and wildness are under siege in the White Mountains. Tuckerman Ravine, the most traveled part of the most developed mountain in New England, could be the

poster child for this debate over wilderness ethics. By most classic measures, Tucks represents not the epitome but the degeneration of the wilderness experience.

Yet in the past few decades, a new vein of environmentalist thought has emerged. It seeks to relocate the experience of wilderness as an inner attitude, not an outer environment. In his persuasive essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness,"* William Cronon argues that by creating a duality between civilization and wilderness, Americans define the latter as a place that spoils with any human contact. The American imagination thereby allows for no middle ground where humans might live within wilderness, using its resources but respecting and preserving its integrity. Cronon suggests that with a reorientation of our concept of wilderness we can find it in the most unlikely places, even in our backyards. The poet Gary Snyder goes even further, positing that the power of wilderness is an intrinsic quality of being, not an extrinsic landscape: "A person with a clear heart and open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth. It is a quality of one's own consciousness."

If we believe Cronon and Snyder, Tucks remains an effective wilderness because its challenge and danger allow us to access the wildness in our hearts, to confront the unknown inside ourselves, and to develop our own inner strength in the face of chaos and confusion. Viewed this way, mass incursions of humanity do not tarnish the wildness of Tuckerman Ravine. In some ways, humanity augments its natural wildness by introducing a wildness of our own. This is not an easy concept to swallow—we tend to see nature and human culture as opposites. Cronon and Snyder suggest, however, that the fecund, animating, creative, and destructive forces that we call wildness are the matrix for all creation, humanity included. Such a concept of wilderness breaks down the divide between humans and nature—rocks, plants, animals, and *Homo sapiens* make up a single pattern, expressing a common, wild essence.

Aside from the dazzling spectacles on the slopes, part of what makes the Tuckerman culture feel wild is the party attitude of many of its users. Where else in the backcountry do you hear a crowd sending up cheers that could rival Fenway Park? Skiers have even been known to hike up to the ravine with beer kegs strapped to their packs. This style of wildness thrills at casting off conservative social mores, at living large and indulgently. It bears more than a passing resemblance to other rituals where the cultural order retreats, like Mardi Gras. Is this bacchanalian form of wildness really in keeping with that imagined by Cronon and Snyder? It's difficult to equate the wild of the backcountry slopes with the wild of a frat party. Perhaps the two concepts are irreconcilable. Yet both types of wildness at Tucks—whether in the form of extreme skiing or extreme revelry—find room to coexist within an evolving outdoor ritual.

Tucks as a Challenge Ritual

America's understanding of wilderness is largely a history of how we have valued and symbolized wild places, but in its latest evolution of extreme sports and high adventures it serves increasingly as a foil for seeing ourselves. We pit ourselves against the elements not so much to see them, but to test our own mettle. This ritual of self-imposed challenge uses danger as a tool, as a way of guaranteeing that the challenge is real. Without danger, we would have nothing to lose, and therefore nothing to gain.

It's true that everyone arrives at Tucks with a different set of motivations, which could be grouped broadly as serious or playful. For the serious faction of Tucks skiers, the ravine is their chance to test their judgment and skill. As weather and snow conditions shift rapidly, they continually reassess whether runs are feasible. They might pull out their snow saws and shovels to test the strength of a snow column. They scout their runs with care, and when they make a flashy run, you can be certain that they've analyzed the safest route. The serious skiers have seen enough accidents to hold a healthy respect for the mountain. They pick their challenges carefully and do not take stupid risks.

The other, perhaps larger, faction of skiers acts more or less oblivious to the ravine's dangers and are here to play. Generally, they are the ones you notice bouncing and flailing their way down the face. They take unusual risks at Tucks in part because they know they can be rescued. They accept the challenge on different terms: not to test their abilities but to test their limits. When judged through the criterion of safety, these skiers' playfulness is reckless at best. But perhaps it is this very quality of being ill prepared that lends power to this ritual.

Several summers ago, while I was serving as a caretaker at Crag Camp for the Randolph Mountain Club on the northern ridge of Mount Adams, a group of hikers failed to return from a day hike up Mount Washington. The blue skies of morning had vanished with that classic lack of warning. Soon after, thick fog and chill drizzle inundated the peaks. Disoriented, the hikers followed the wrong set of cairns over the headwall of King Ravine, a wild and boulder-strewn wilderness several thousand feet below Crag Camp. Realizing their mistake as the sun set, they chose to spend the night in the ravine in the drenching rain, with neither sleeping gear nor shelter, rather than attempt to recover their path. I, meanwhile, spent most of the night searching adjacent trails for them and initiating preliminary search and rescue protocol. They returned to Crag Camp the next morning, soaked to the bone and decidedly hypothermic. From the perspective of a caretaker and medical first responder, I was tempted to upbraid them for their mistake. Yet they hiked out alive, with an indelible impression of the mountain's wildness. For all their misadventure, they received a keener taste of the danger and challenge than most hikers.

Later that summer, I attempted a similar day hike. I left the floor of King Ravine and began bushwhacking up its steep slope toward Crag Camp a thousand feet above. On a lark, I was

* The essay appears in an anthology Cronon edited, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).

* Roderick Nash quotes Snyder in *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

hoping to find the remnants of a disused hiking trail printed in some ancient AMC topographic map. I never did find that trail, but I did discover a secluded gully with a pretty waterfall. Then the rain arrived. I almost took a long fall while scrabbling up a slick arête, and next I found myself in the lower bands of krummholz where the ground disappeared beneath a tangle of tree limbs. I made my way from limb to limb up the slope, feet slipping on the wet bark and hands grasping at boughs for support. As I ascended, the trees grew dense and murky with shadows. No longer able to slip between them, I proceeded on hands and knees, tunneling through a primeval forest of stunted spruce. After a full afternoon in the bush, I finally intersected a trail on the ridge. My knees were thoroughly bruised, my rain gear soaked and shredded, my hair a mess of needles, and my hands bleeding, gummy with tree resin and caked in soil. I crawled out of the krummholz onto the trail like some creature emerging from a primordial womb. The short hike back to the cabin had never felt so easy by comparison. As I stepped inside Crag Camp, fellow hikers taking shelter from the storm shot me looks of “What the hell happened to you?” But all I could do was smile back. I had encountered true wilderness in the mountain and felt happy and alive.

Perhaps these days we seek danger in wilderness precisely because we have come so far in adapting to, and thereby domesticating, its challenges. We no longer beat ourselves up in the backcountry unless we are wholly unprepared. When our detailed topographic maps, high tech fabrics, and ample food supplies offer easy solutions to the problems of navigation, comfort, and sustenance, it’s difficult to experience the sensations of true trepidation and awe that earlier Americans sometimes felt. The antidote to this taming of wilderness lies in tackling the big challenges—big mountains, big cliffs, big waves, big treks, big depths, big heights, big exposure. To venture into wilderness is no longer enough; now we throw ourselves into it, sometimes with skill, sometimes with abandon. If so, American wilderness philosophy has come full circle. At first, our ancestors feared the dangerous wilderness and extolled civilization. Later we began to fear civilization and admire wilderness. Now, having driven much of the danger out of both society and the wilderness experience, we fear domestication, and we head off in search off danger. Danger becomes a tool for removing our acquired mental constructs; demanding our full attention, it allows us to devote our undivided attention to our immediate experience, the essence of the present moment, and perhaps the essence of our own being. Paradoxically, it is at crowded places like Tuckerman Ravine that experts and idiots alike find a suitable degree of danger to reveal their inner wildness.

It’s instructive that the most heralded ritual each spring at Tucks is the modern incarnation of a classic race called the Inferno, a modern pentathlon that’s big in every sense. Racers run, kayak or canoe, bike, hike to the summit of Washington, and finally ski Tuckerman Ravine. In its original form during the 1930s, the Inferno was solely a grand slalom race from the summit of Washington to its base. Of all Mount Washington’s storied history, perhaps none is more famous than the race of 1939, when a

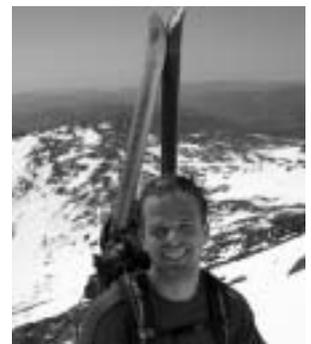
young Austrian contender named Toni Matt misjudged the location of his run and schussed the headwall, beelining it to the bottom at death-defying speeds of over 80 mph and finishing in 6 minutes and 29.2 seconds, more than halving the previous record. The legend of Toni Matt has become the proverbial sword in the stone for subsequent generations of headwall skiers who vie to rival his courage or stupidity. Although few athletes today attempt to schuss the headwall like Toni Matt, or boast the endurance to compete in all five events, the ritual of challenge hangs like a veil over the ravine.

ON THE SLOPE, A TEAM OF MEDICS AND VOLUNTEERS set to work on my friend. One volunteer stabilizes the leg while I support his torso. A USFS medic slips a splint around the injury and fastens it in place, providing immense relief to his pain. We measure his vital signs, offer him a fistful of Advil, and make preparations for the two-hour evacuation to the valley. At this moment, I’m wholly relieved that Tucks is not your classic wilderness area. I’ll happily trade skiing isolated, pristine peaks for an uncomplicated and life-saving rescue. I think my buddy would agree.

As the sun sets behind the rim of the cirque and the snow begins to harden, I boot to the top of the Chute to retrieve my friend’s skis. Seven hundred feet up, I gingerly kick my way out into the middle of the run, and pull the blades from their sheaths of frozen snow. The sky is taking on hues of purple and the sun bathes the summit of Washington in yellows and golds. Looking over my shoulder into the darkening abyss below, I get a whiff of one reason we love the danger and the challenge. It is wildly beautiful.

Wilderness isn’t simply a place on the map, but also our attitude toward that place. We can find it equally by refusing to domesticate the backcountry and by refusing to domesticate ourselves in the backcountry, by choosing the routes that challenge our skills and test our limits. Hopefully, we approach its dangers as calculated risk while retaining competence and sound judgment. But it is that wild edge of adventure, fraught with danger, that best reveals to us modern Americans the truth of wilderness. In that edge is an alchemy that brings us our senses and seals our ritual with danger’s beautiful kiss.

Since graduating from Marlboro College with a major in Asian Studies, JEREMY LOEB has worked a variety of jobs, from ski bum to trail crew to carpenter to bartender, in order to fund his outdoor adventures. He aspires to become a successful writer and perhaps even embark on a respectable career, so long as it doesn’t interfere with his serious hiking, cycling, and skiing obsessions. He can be reached at firewindwaterearth@gmail.com.



2009 Grant Recipients

Annie Bellerose

The Waterman Fund was pleased to announce its 2009 alpine stewardship grant recipients in February. This year's grants represent a broad geographic range, a diversity of projects, and a total of \$11,000 in funding.

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), based in Lake Placid, New York, received funding for the sixth Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering, scheduled for May 29-30th, 2009. This was the first time the ADK had hosted the event, which focused on sharing research, management experience, and ideas through presentations and local field trips relating to alpine stewardship efforts in the northeast US and Canada. Read Julia Goren's article on page 7 for more details about the gathering.

The Dartmouth Outing Club (DOC), located in Hanover, New Hampshire, was awarded funds for trail remediation on Mt. Moosilauke. The grant helped the DOC trail crew work on an area of the Beaver Brook Trail (also the Appalachian Trail), above treeline near the heavily trafficked summit. The remediation included drainage, stepping stones, and crib steps, all using materials native to the alpine zone. The student trail crew conducted research into the best practices for alpine trail work, and participated in teaching seminars through the Dartmouth Outdoor Programs Office and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Coastal Mountains Land Trust in Camden, Maine, works to protect natural and scenic resources in the western Penobscot Bay region. CMLT received funds for its Bald Mountain Habitat Protection Project. Bald Mountain, the fifth highest mountain on the eastern US seaboard, is home to subalpine plant communities, and the grant helped create interpretive signage about the area's unique ecology and sensitivities. This is the first time the Fund has awarded funding to CMLT. The Fund also held their November board meeting in Camden, and visited the CMLT project. *(Please see Jeff Lougee's article on page 3).*

Antioch University New England's Monadnock Ecological Research and Education Project received funding for its inaugural Mt. Monadnock Summit Stewardship Program. Monadnock hosts 95,000 visitors each year. The stewardship program, working in conjunction with ongoing research being conducted by students at Keene High School and Antioch University New England, will work to increase public awareness of human impact on summits, particularly the unique plant communities present there,



Fall Gathering - *continued from page 3*

sweeping views of the Atlantic, and you can make out the mountains of Acadia National Park to the northeast. The great views bring many hikers to the top of Bald Mountain.

On the summit Ian showed us many of the same plants found on the higher alpine peaks, including three-toothed cinquefoil, and a close relative of mountain sandwort called smooth sandwort. Smooth sandwort is a protected species in Maine, and entire summit area of Bald Mountain is considered an exemplary natural community known as a three-toothed cinquefoil - blueberry low summit bald.

The educational sign that the Fund supported will inform hikers of the uniqueness of Bald Mountain, and the fragile nature of the plant communities found on the summit. It will help to spread a stewardship message of walking on the rocks that is just as important on Bald Mountain as it is on the summits of Mount Washington or Mount Mansfield. After the hike, Laura Waterman reflected: "We were excited to see the care and thought that the Coastal Mountains Land Trust is putting into protecting the unique rocky summit plant community found on Bald Mountain."

After a great excursion up Bald Mountain, we met up with our partners from the Maine Appalachian Trail Conference for dinner in Camden. Lester Kenway, and his wife Elsa Sanborn, represented MATC at the dinner, and updated the board on the important work they are doing to protect other unique areas like Bald Mountain in Maine.

increase the size of those plant communities, and educate hikers on the predicted effects of climate change on regional mountain ecosystems. Trail stewards will hike the trails of Mt. Monadnock, as well as focus on the summit area during peak user times to share information about the summit plant communities and current related research, as well as posting educational signage.

Sixth Northeastern Gathering

Julia Goren

The sixth Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering took place May 29th and 30th, 2009, in Lake Placid, New York. Over 75 alpine stewards, land managers, researchers, and interested parties met for two days of presentations, workshops, brainstorming, field trips, and good conversation. The event was hosted by the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Steward Program, the Adirondack Mountain Club, the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York Natural Heritage Program, Paul Smith's College, the Wild Center, the Center for Adirondack Biodiversity, and the Adirondack Park Agency Visitor's Interpretive Center. The Waterman Fund and the Adirondack 46ers provided additional funding for the event.

The Gathering began Thursday evening with a reception, and special multimedia presentation by photographer Carl Heilman II, entitled "I am the Adirondacks." His beautiful images, combined with poetry, and music helped to set the stage for the weekend ahead.

Friday was devoted to speakers and presentations. The day began with a panel discussion on alpine stewardship programs, with representatives from Vermont, New York, and New Hampshire. Speakers discussed past and present accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities. Presentations ranged from the effects of climate change on Northeastern alpine areas to management strategies for visitor use to updates on alpine flora and fauna. Several recent Waterman Fund grant recipients were among the presenters, including Antioch New England's Mt. Monadnock Stewardship program and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies Alpine Butterfly project. Kimberley Beal, winner of the first annual Waterman Fund Alpine Essay Contest, presented her research on the effects of climate change on Mt. Katadhin.

Friday morning's session on the effects of climate change in our alpine areas provided a great deal of food for



*Top: Gathering attendees on the Cascade Mountain field trip.
Bottom: Gathering participants listening to photographer Carl Heilman II.*

thought. Dr. Ken Kimball shared recent research from Mt. Washington, indicating that Northeastern alpine areas may see some buffering from climate change, particularly as compared with ecosystems just below the alpine. Findings presented by Kimberley Beal show that, in other areas, tree line may be advancing upslope.

Annie Bellerose and Val Stori facilitated the Waterman Fund's brainstorming session and conversation around digital media and the Fund.

Author and environmental activist Bill McKibben provided an inspiring keynote address on the climate change group 350.org and their October 24th day of global climate change action. He highlighted the power of iconic places, such as alpine areas, to encourage behavior change, on both personal and political levels.

On Saturday, Gathering attendees headed out for hikes or visits to a number of different locations, including Algonquin, Wright, Cascade, Whiteface, and The Wild Center. Field trips focused on past re-vegetation efforts, management concerns, partnerships to preserve habitat for the Bicknell's Thrush, education, and rare alpine plant species.

This year's Gathering had the largest attendance of any to date and left all of us feeling inspired to continue our work supporting the stewardship of alpine areas. We at the Fund have found this opportunity to exchange ideas, ask questions, and learn from each other invaluable. We look forward to the 2011 Gathering at the Green Mountain Club's