

RAMAPO-ADK THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

Chapter History 1971 - 1991

by Mary Robinson Sive

1991 marks the 20th anniversary of the Ramapo chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club, so a look back seems appropriate. It was fortunate that Ann Plessinger, our Secretary, had backfiles of minutes, and that Frank Bouton, unofficial archivist, could supplement this with near complete files of hike schedules and newsletters. I am indebted to their records and the pleasure they provided on some rainy afternoons. Here, for new members who would like to know and old ones who would like to reminisce, are some highlights of our chapter's history.

In 1970, the year of the first Earth Day, Rockland County had no hiking club, and the nearest Adirondack Mountain Club chapter was North Jersey, founded a few years earlier. The following year Bill Endicott, a 46er and longtime ADK member, moved to Pearl River to accept a position with the Pearl River School District. He and North Jersey's then president Manfred d'Elia obtained a charter for a chapter serving Rockland County, and 60 people answered their call for an initial meeting. The Ramapo chapter was on its way, with hikes scheduled for the next five weekends.

The durability of our membership is impressive. There is a core group that was present at the organizational meeting on Nov. 19, 1971, and has maintained membership for almost 20 years and continues to hike regularly. Some have been members of the Chapters Executive Board for almost that long.

We still have as members almost all who were our first set of officers: Fred d'Elia, the Chapter's first president, and Bill Endicott, the first treasurer. Frank Bouton became secretary and continued in that capacity until 1983. Rita Boyd was the first program chair and Eliot Gorman took responsibility for trails. Ike Siskind first joined the Executive Committee as hike chair in November 1972, advancing to Vice President in 1974 and President in 1975. He again served as hike committee chair in 1986. Aaron Schoenberg took over when Ike moved up to being Club President in 1975 and served with a year's interruption until 1980. Other early officers in some cases moved away, a few left the club, others still maintain membership though they don't participate actively.

Our hikes and other activities have been consistent. Since Aaron kept careful records we know that average attendance in the spring of 1975 was 10 to 15, 9 in 1977, 10 in March 1978, 13 in Summer 1984, 8 in winter 1984-85. Non-members have always made up a significant proportion of hike participants. That we don't have enough C-hikes has been a recurring theme, and another: that more hike leaders are needed.

Since 1977 we have had four hike schedules a year. The endurance test, the one day 24 mile Suffern-Bear Mountain hike, has appeared on the hike schedules since the 70s, attracting six people in October 1978. In 1975 Aaron instituted a series of hikes on the long Path and designed a patch, achieved by only one person, John Giuffrida. John Golenski completed the LP, now extended to Windham, but what happened to those patches?

Hike destinations haven't changed much except that the chapter went to the Adirondacks regularly in the early years, with 28 people participating in a Memorial Day

weekend at John's Brook Lodge in 1976. Labor Day weekend in 1983, cabins and leantos at Heart Lake, may have been the last scheduled chapter event there, not counting trips by individual members in Small groups. February Weekends at the Frost Valley YMCA in the Catskills with accommodations of greater comfort, have been popular since the first one in 1979. Day and weekend canoe trips, too, seemed to have lost their appeal to the membership. And who can forget the winter survival weekends led by an early member; Shirley Williams?

That we are getting a gratifying influx of new members, but not keeping all the old ones has been a constant refrain. Our membership has held steady at between 220 and 250 since 1976 about half of them non-voting. Though we received over 100 inquiries after the Journal News ran a feature story with pictures in October 1963, only a few of those resulted in permanent additions to our roster. For at least the past ten years the Executive board has struggled for an answer to how to keep the 30-40 members yearly who do not renew. As the number of members from Orange County has grown, there are recurring suggestions that we try holding meetings in Orange County. There, apparently is no easy solution to this problem. and it is clear we will never be a mass organization.

Conservation and environmental issues have had our support from the very beginning. That this would be a major concern for the chapter was signaled by a talk on the topic at the very first meeting, given by Fred Schmelzer. Some of our efforts unfortunately had little effect. We began protesting enlargement of Stewart Airport in early 1972; it is now an international airport. We had more success with Black Rock Forest, about which the chapter expressed concern as early as March, 1973. its future as open space is assured under the stewardship of a consortium that took over management of the area from Harvard University in 1989. Minnewaska, too, is a success story. May 1975 is the earliest record of the chapter's protest against proposed development there, and we began contributing to organizations dedicated to fighting such development soon after. As of 1988 most of the significant areas of that unique mountaintop environment are protected as a state park. And though we, along with many others, protested the building of the huge Canada-New York power transmission line, that too is now a reality. And the cut backs in the State Ranger force that we have been protesting since 1983 still continue.

In April 1975 We had a display at the Nanuet Mall in connection with Rockland County's Environmental Conference, Recycling, congressional appropriations for land purchases to protect the Appalachian Trail, disposition of Federal Lands in Alaska, acid rain, acquisitions of land for parks by Rockland County, dumping in the Hudson River and taking of its water by Exxon, proposed trail construction in the Catskills and toxic wastes all demanded our attention.

The chapter joined the New York-New Jersey Trails Conference, at the earliest possible opportunity, in December, 1971 after hearing a presentation by Elizabeth Levees. Elizabeth had been a Trails Conference President and had originated annual Litter Day in the mid 1960s. Our chapter has participated in every Litter Day since April, 1972. Trail maintenance hikes were, for many years, a feature of spring and fall hike schedules. In 1981 we participated in construction of the relocated Appalachian trail in Dutchess County. As the years have gone by, more and more of our members have

assumed responsibility for individual trails, or portions of them, both in Harriman Park, in the Shawangunks, and on the Appalachian Trail. Some have served as leaders through the NY-NJ Trails Conference.

In March 1976 we heard that the Long path Would be completed the following Spring; it still isn't. Many of us checked and measured trails for the 1982 edition of the New York Walk Book. Ramapo Chapter members have consistently made up the bulk of the participants at annual and later semi-annual, work weekends at Adirondack Loj under the leadership of Ted Asch. Earlier, Ted had enlisted many of us in a conservation patrol serving Harriman Park with public information and education. We answered the call to help clear the area of hikers and campers during a fire in February 1978 and again the following year. More recently, individual members have answered the Park administration's calls for volunteer fire fighters, with Susan Gerbardt racking up a record number of hours. .

Our chapters initial meetings were at the Pearl River Public Library, later at the Lakeside Nature Center in Spring Valley. That meeting room had a certain charm if one considers birds and animals in cages, congenial companions at meetings.

We switched to the New City Library beginning with the 1981-82 following the recommendations of a committee chaired by David Sack. Meetings were monthly from September to May for over 10 years. Picnics took the place of the June meeting and were held at the Endicott's home in Nanuet and later, for several years, at Roy and Carolyn Sengstacken's summer home at Greenwood Lake.

Dr. Al Rosen was an early speaker at one of our meetings, he more recently addressed the group in 1989. Other programs during the first few years featured hikes and trips in Switzerland, western national parks, and Africa. We saw member's slides, a film about Palisades Interstate Park, heard about caving and canoe trips, about the Hudson Highlands and the Adirondacks, and about the ecology of Pascack Brook. Cross-country skiing gained adherents following programs in 1976 by Bert May and Ed Fanslau. During the winter of 1978-79, Bert promised to be at Mohonk each weekend to instruct members who were novice skiers.

Our chapter was an early proponent of detente when it called a special meeting in November, 1978 to hear a talk by M. Monastyrski of the USSR Alpine club, about hiking, mountaineering and skiing in the Soviet Union. This opportunity was provided through Andrea Sengstacken, a staff member of the Citizen Exchange Corps.

Chapter anniversaries were observed with a birthday cake at the 5-year mark in 1976 and a 10 year anniversary dinner at the Holiday Inn, attended by 66. Our 15th anniversary dinner drew a crowd of 80. Ramapo Chapter did not wait long to begin serving the state-wide Club. We hosted the annual meeting in November 1975 under the direction of Bill Endicott and Shirley Williams. Ted Asch joined the Loj Operating Committee the next year, later becoming its chair. Paul Leikin was chair of the club-wide nominating Committee in 1977. In May 1980 the chapter served as hosts for the Club's Spring Outing at Frost Valley and again, the following year, when the Spring Outing was held at Mohonk. Your author serves on the club-wide Conservation Committee.

We have used some of our dues monies to contribute additional funds to ADK and to help environmental organizations such as the New York Environmental Lobby and

the trail work of the Appalachian Mountain Club. We contribute to the New York-New Jersey Trails Conference and many of us maintain memberships in the Trails Conference also.

Sadly, we have lost two of our most dedicated members. Marty Kosofsky fell victim to cancer at age 34 in April, 1979. He had served as conservation chair and as editor of the Ramapough, then issued separately, and typically contributed refreshments as enthusiastically as he hiked the trails. He and a fellow member, Nancy Irwin, became engaged and moved to Illinois. His health seemed to improve, but just 10 days before the date set for their wedding, he collapsed and died almost instantly. The chapter contributed, in his memory, to the Fresh Air, Fund, and for a number of years, scheduled a memorial hike at the end of July, his birthday month. Ironically, Bert May frequently led those hikes. Bert, who was our oldest member, suffered a stroke in December of 1984, recovered, and again enjoyed shorter hikes when someone could drive him to the trail. In July, 1988 he succumbed to a combination of ailments. The following Memorial Day, chapter members performed a last service to a valued companion on the trail; in accordance with his wishes, we scattered his and his wife's ashes in one of their favorite hiking areas.

As best I can reconstruct the record, these are the people who have served as chapter officers:

President: Fred d'Elia, Ike Siskind, Graham Yarborough, Mary Sive, Ken Garrison, Roy Sengstacken, John Giuffrida, Dick Warner, Lou Thibault and Ron Javer.

Vice President: all the above, also Jim Dunnett, Tom Sanders, Ed Walsh

Secretary: Frank Bouton, Tom Sanders, Lillian Jewett, Lou Thibault, Ann Plessinger, Pat Hubbard

Treasurer: G. Yarborough, Nancy Irwin, John Giuffrida, Mary Sive, Kip Patnode Smith, Aaron Schoenberg, Frank Bouton

Governor: Jim Dunnett, Paul Leiken, Ike Siskind, Ted Asch, Jim Older, Pat Hubbard
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Hiking: I. Siskind, A. Schoenberg, Barbera Moracki Yarborough, Frank Bouton, John Giuffrida, Paul Leikin, Nick Viggiano

Trails: Eliot Gorman, Dick Warner, Ruth Livant, Mary Sive, Fred Engels

Conservation: Marty Kosofsky, Paul Leikin, E. Gorman, R. Javer, Ray Botto