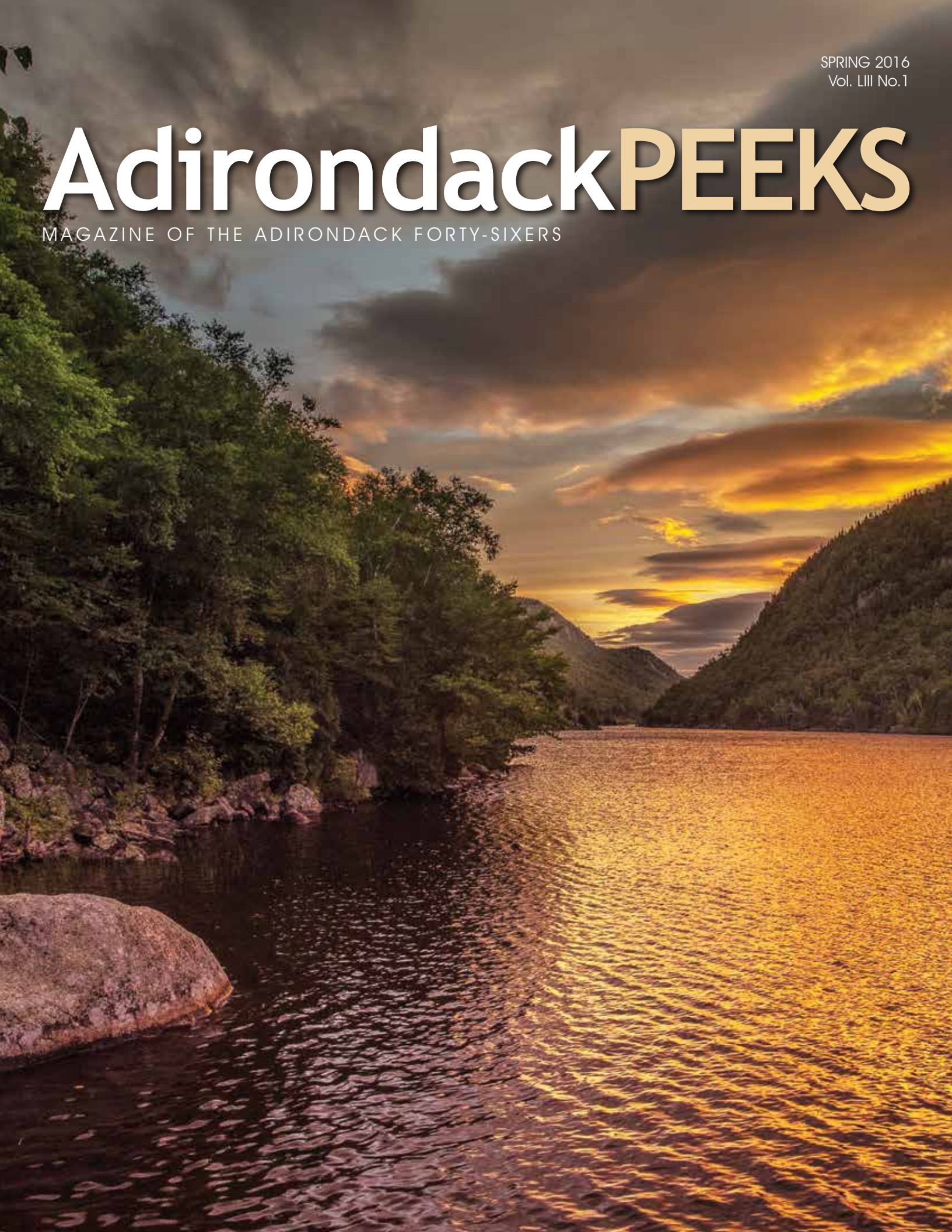


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AdirondackPEEKS

MAGAZINE OF THE ADIRONDACK FORTY-SIXERS



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AdirondackPEEKs

Semi-Annual Magazine of the Adirondack Forty-Sixers, Inc.

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President's Report

The great 46er E. H. Ketchledge, 46er #507 once stated, "I hold as a matter of personal philosophy the belief that each individual CAN influence in some way and to some degree the flow of events that make up our daily lives." I think that this quote helps to sum up the volunteer spirit of the Adirondack 46ers.

I'd like to take this occasion to publicly thank all the volunteers, past and present, that have helped make this club so special. From the Officers, Directors and Appointed Directors, to the Outdoor Skills Workshop, Office of the Historian (and Correspondents), Editors of PEEKS and Archivist, as well as the Trail Masters, all of the folks who have done behind-the-scenes work and to the many folks over the years who have put some time in on the trail crew—you have all given up your free time to help keep the club going and to make a difference.

I don't have space to publicly thank everyone but you know who you are! From the smallest of office tasks, to the moving of an entire lean-to—it all adds up. I'd also like to thank everyone who sends in ideas, comments, suggestions, critiques and other correspondence. While we might not always get back to everyone in a timely fashion, we do appreciate your efforts to help us make the Adirondack 46ers the most effective of advocates for the region we revere so much.

Having written this out, it makes me realize that the 46ers aren't just a bunch of peak baggers, but something so much more. As I mentioned in my last missive we are becoming an ever-larger club, so if you'd like to get involved, let us know—there's work to be done and you never know where your talents could be put to use!

Brian Hoody #4410W

The Mountains Will Wait For You

By Fred Schwoebel

Elk Lake Pink Aurora Borealis. Photo credit: Johnathan Esper #3187W, www.WildernessPhotographs.com

Once in a blue moon things line up, come together in an unexplainable way that brings lasting and meaningful results. Such is the case when I stumbled upon an Associated Press article from 1993 about one of the last of a generation of wilderness prophets, the late Grace Hudowalski #9 (1906-2004).

I reside in Portland, Oregon and am a backpacker at heart. I produced and directed the documentary film entitled *The Mountains Will Wait For You*, a project that resulted in the unlikely pairing of Grace with a music legend, my father-in-law, Johnny Cash.

In May of 1993, after meeting Grace over the phone, she invited me to her summer camp, The Boulders, at Schroom Lake, giving me the opportunity to seek her advice as to whom I should interview for my proposed documentary film about the Adirondack High Peaks. While in the region for the first time, I climbed Wright Peak on a blustery, manic spring day, replete with sun, wind, hail and rain. I was also able to participate in Dr. Edwin "Ketch" Ketchledge's (#507) summit reseeded project that day.

The most valuable time I spent with Grace was by her hearth, listening to her recount endless stories of peaks and people through her many decades of Adirondack life. What really struck me about being with Grace was how frequently she broke into laughter due to her unbridled joy that her climbing family brought her. It was overwhelmingly apparent how Grace felt about what she referred to as "my mountains." She had written a poem entitled "My Mountains!" that was published in the *Cloud Splitter* in 1939, (If you don't

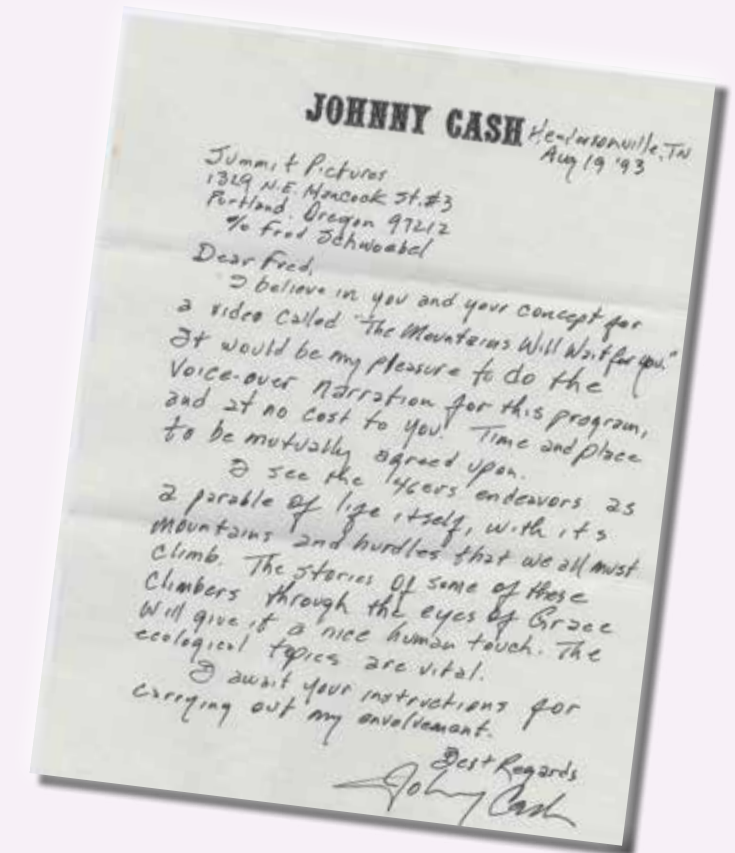
know about the *Cloud Splitter* then, as Grace would say, "Go look it up!") and the last two lines of the poem are:

*I claim these mountains for my own
I'm happy here—I am at home!*

I had clearly met a woman who felt deeply at home and was willing to share that sense of home with everyone.

Returning to Portland after my first meeting with Grace, I knew I had my work

cut out for me to capture the spirit of who Grace was and to portray that spirit in the relationship with her climbing family, the 46ers. I felt a closeness to Grace, to the folks Grace instructed me to interview, and to the stunning High Peaks themselves. After meeting Grace I knew I was facing a considerable challenge to unravel the story of an unbelievable person. It would take all I had to ensure my first film would do justice



Property of Fred Schwoebel. Reprinted with permission

to Grace, who built a life and a movement of stewardship of the Adirondack wilderness through which she guided countless aspiring 46ers, nurtured single-handedly via decades of her personal correspondence.

As the summer of 1993 unfolded I began preproduction for my film with my aim to begin shooting that autumn. The preparation moved quickly. I needed to line up a cameraman, rent a broadcast quality camera, and then coordinate interviews with 46ers Fred Johnson #1788, Mary Dittmar #29, Ditt Dittmar #31, Dr. Ketchledge, and Jim Goodwin #24. Of course, I also needed as much time as possible to interview Grace. My goal, too, was to capture the height of fall color and paint a broad picture of the majesty of the Adirondacks without revealing the mystery of the views from any of the 46 High Peaks.

With a shooting schedule of only five days I knew each day would be long. The more I discovered about Grace, the climbers' stories, and the mountains, the more difficult it was to imagine how I would begin to capture what I needed in so little time.

After the logistical aspects had been taken care of, I began to wonder about the other parts of preproduction: photography, music, and the voice-over narration. I could not yet "hear" the music that would eventually accompany the film but I did know that I needed a voice to narrate the film that would command the audience's attention, connect the viewer to the spirit of who Grace was, and even lend a voice to the mountains themselves. My decision to ask my father-in-law, Johnny Cash, was a no-brainer. But I knew I would have to present my idea to John in a way that would convey the weight and depth of the story. After having met Grace, I was confident that John would agree to do the narration if I could do my part in giving him an idea of who Grace was and how I envisioned the nature and spirit of the documentary.

My next task was to figure out when and how I would present my idea to John for the film. I prepared a presentation that included a film treatment, storyboards for shooting and as much background information as I could find. Even though he was my father-in-law, I knew he would only agree to do the voice-over if he could make his own connection to the project.

John and June (Carter Cash) were on a leg of their Northwest tour in August 1993, performing in Portland and Seattle. John

wanted to see his daughter—my wife, Tara—so I knew I would have time to present my project to him. After the Portland show, Tara



Grace—a quiet moment, circa 1945. Photo provided by L. John Van Norden #2110W.



Grace Hudowalski on her 46th peak, Esther. Photo provided by L. John Van Norden #2110W.

and I hopped on the tour bus with John and June for the drive up to Seattle.

I took advantage of the bus ride together

to introduce my film idea to him, to have a conversation about Grace, the 46ers, and the Adirondack mountains. I gave John the materials I had prepared and discussed my ideas concerning stewardship, conservation, history, and of course, the unique relationship Grace had with her climbers. I wanted John to understand Grace's legacy, how she touched the lives of so many, eager for someone with whom to share their climbing experiences.

As Adirondack folklore teaches us, "What use is it to stand on the brink of heaven if you haven't a friendly hand to hold?" I knew if John understood who Grace was and what she meant to the climbers he would most certainly connect to the project. In speaking with John, I could tell he was interested. As one who was well-versed in history, he wanted to know more about the term "bark eaters;" he wanted to know about the Adirondack mountains and the history of the 46ers.

As the bus rolled on towards Seattle, we had a lively conversation about the prospects of my film. After concluding our visit John put all the materials I provided him into his briefcase and told me, "I will take a look at it and let you know what I think." He needed time to digest our conversation. I appreciated the fact that he did not agree to become involved just because I was his son-in-law. With fingers crossed I waited for John's response.

On August 19, 1993 I opened a letter that he had written me from his home in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Needless to say, I was overjoyed to read he had agreed to narrate my documentary; his endorsement gave me newfound excitement for the film. Even though he was "family," the letter came from one of the most iconic musicians and artists in the 20th century and I cannot express how elated I was to receive his backing. He wrote, "I believe in you and your concept for a video called *The Mountains Will Wait for You*." His vote of confidence for my concept brought validation to the project. John understood the relationship Grace developed with her climbers, the importance of stewardship, and the spirit of climbing the 46 High Peaks. "The ecological topics are vital," he wrote. "I see the 46ers as a parable of life itself, with its mountains and hurdles that we all must climb." Clearly, he had made the necessary connection to be comfortable doing the narration. I knew that this letter would be one I would keep and treasure and it is my pleasure to share it with you.

Less than a month after receiving John's endorsement I found myself in the Adirondacks at the peak of fall color, filming Grace at her camp, being welcomed into the Dittmar's home, walking through Ketch's property, and boating on a lake with Fred Johnson. I began to get a sense of how beautifully profound it was for so many to be so touched by one woman—"The Lady"—as some would call her.

Returning from New York, I began to digest all I had captured by looking through the roughly fourteen hours of tape I had shot. It was time to write the voice-over narration for John to record. Without knowing yet where the narration would be used, I began to write the script in a general way so that it would have the flexibility to "set up" a certain scene or to potentially conclude an interview

that I had not yet selected. I began to write, simply, with heart and to the point, all the while knowing that Johnny Cash would be the voice on the other end of my writing. As they say, the rest is history.

I sent my voice-over narration script to John, he and his engineer went into a studio in Nashville and the narration was recorded. Before I knew it I had a digital audio tape of my script, my rough footage, and what seemed like all I needed to get to the post production aspect of my film—except one major component—the essential funding to finish the film.

As it turned out, the footage and the voice-over narration would have to wait about twenty years to be edited! With no success raising funds to finish the film and a new family on the way, I had to shelve the project but I could remember what Grace

would tell folks, "Can't never did anything." I knew that giving up was not really an option for me. As the years rolled by I never let go the idea of finishing the film. I kept the footage in safekeeping, knowing that I had captured stories that would someday see the light of day and have value.



Photo credit: © Jim Marshall Photography LLC <http://www.jimmarshallphotographyllc.com/>

Finally, in 2011, with encouragement from my wife, Tara, I dusted off the old footage and began to edit, to tell the story that had been waiting in the back of my mind for the past two decades. Until I began the editing process I had never actually listened to John's narration. He had passed away in 2003, so when I first edited John's voice-over narration to the film and heard his powerful, baritone voice introducing Grace it was quite an emotional experience.

It was tremendously satisfying to hear his unmistakable voice calling out 46 High Peaks. What power there was when his voice was paired with the opening footage of the sun, low in the sky, breaking through a wooded scene. John's feelings about family, spirit, and the American landscape became a guiding force in the film and it fit perfectly with how Grace felt about those same aspects

of life. John's artistry perfectly complemented Grace's humility, generosity, and incredible dedication to the people with whom she communicated.

The common ground between Grace and John was writing—Grace with her tens of thousands of letters to climbers and John with

his countless number of songs. Both wrote with similar intent—to make all they touched feel at home.

As I reflect upon this journey that I have been on with this film I feel such gratitude for the richness of the personal relationships that I encountered. The most obvious was getting to know Grace and spending a couple of weeks with her at the Boulders which I will always cherish. I came to understand how this "connectedness" we all have to one another and the

mountains that we share was something I experienced deeply. Along the way, I had the good fortune to make lasting friendships with L. John Van Norden #2110W and Doug Arnold #4693W. Doug, L. John and I, and many others, hold an undying place in our hearts for Grace and we celebrated this on the morning of June 21, 2014 when we climbed together to the summit of newly-named Grace Peak. At the trailhead, before we ascended, L. John, with daughter Macie at his side, gathered our climbing group together as family and shared a prayer that Grace used to recite before she would climb. Needless to say, our climb that fine day will be one of those cherished days life offers us. Upon summiting Grace Peak I reflected on the blessings of having great friendships, mentors, heroines and heroes, like Grace Hudowalski and Johnny Cash. ■

For more information on the film visit <http://www.themountainswillwaitforyou.com>

Ski-to-Die in the Adirondacks

A Brief History



Pat Munn taking a Magic Carpet Ride, Marcy summit bowl, 1982. Photo credit: Dave Hough

By Mike Hough

The early seventies was a time abundant with snowfall, an age of exploration for me and some friends that became a lifelong bond through the sport of backcountry skiing in the Adirondacks. We named our group Ski-to-Die.

I started hiking the forty-six high peaks in 1971, awed by the views and the woods in winter. I had done a couple of winter hikes and campouts on rented plastic snowshoes before my older brother, Dave, introduced me to cross-country skis. He had been skiing with Geoff Smith and some of the older folks of our generation and was talking of skiing Marcy and Wright Peak. I was instantly fascinated about it.

At that time there were few standards for skiing equipment on hiking trails. The next couple of decades would see a revolution in

skis, boots, and bindings for the backcountry skier. I had no previous skiing experience and didn't consider myself a talented athlete. One thing I did have, and all of us in our group had, was the attitude and mental will to ski the High Peaks. We would soon find out through experience what worked, what kept us warm, and what was totally useless in this mode of winter travel.

To get started I mail-ordered a ski set which included a pair of wooden Bonna 2400s, Alpha boots, 3-pin bindings, and bamboo poles. I quickly learned some of the basics of kick glide, herringbone climbing, waxing, and how difficult it was to turn and keep these skis under control on the downhills. My rock climbing group of friends had been spending a lot of time at Poke-o-Moonshine Mountain and had also been busy

cutting a series of ski trails on the southern wooded slopes. We spent many days in those early years packing the trails from top to bottom, building jumps, and learning to handle skis in the woods on the downhill.

Many a ski tip adorned the trees where they had broken under the stress of our learning curve. It wouldn't be unusual to be standing in a group, waiting for the others to come down, only to hear a loud snap of wood breaking and a few minutes later, to see someone come walking down with a broken ski. Ski shops quickly stopped honoring warranties once they found out how we were treating their equipment.

As to the subject of trail cutting, we didn't "cut" trails so much as we "enhanced" existing natural open woods, glades and corridors. This was often done by remov-

ing lower branches on trees rather than cutting whole trees. The trail off the backside of Phelps Mountain to the fire truck road is one example. Now everyone uses it. We did have some worries about the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) but we were more concerned with other skiers discovering our routes and exploiting them. We looked forward to having those runs exclusively for ourselves in good snowfall. There were a couple of times, I recall, that the DEC expressed concern about a few names in our group, but no prosecutions ever resulted.

Our mentor and inspiration for all this was a neighbor by the name of Geoff Smith. He always talked of new descents that should be explored, open woods to be investigated, and slide tracks to be checked out. I enjoyed his company, even when he embarrassed me about my equipment or my ambition. I enjoyed skiing behind him, trying to match his turns on the trails. In the winter of '74-'75 a group of us rented Winter Camp (originally known as Thistle-Dhu) near Johns Brook Lodge, one of two cabins which had been purchased by the Adirondack Mountain Club in 1929. The other, Grace Camp, was originally earmarked for volunteers. We would stay in the camp during the week and move to a lean-to when the camp wasn't available. We learned the fundamentals of travel on skis, packed out most of the trails, skied open woods, descended streambeds and eventually bagged Marcy and some of the surrounding peaks.

We soon found the gear we were using was completely inadequate. Boots were especially problematic; we needed much better support. I turned to military surplus for alternatives. I found better boots but forcing them into a three-pin binding that was the norm at that time (and keeping them secured) was challenging. Often, evenings would find us in the basement, drilling and screwing on metal plates to get binding security. Equipped with good boots, our skiing went to a whole new level.

I initially skied on 200-centimeter skis but the length proved problematic in the woods. I found an old pair of surplus downhill skis that were 160s and soon I was paralleling and carving. Wood skis continued to be a weak point; carrying a plastic emergency tip was common. Pat Munn arrived on the scene one



Randy Hough. Photo credit: Mark Murray

day with a pair of new synthetic skies. We all went up Hurricane Mountain one cold, powder day and skied off the summit. I remember seeing Pat coming down, totally carving and bobbing between trees. Synthetics were here to stay!

Pat did pay the price for his bold leap forward in the equipment evolution when he took a header further down the trail and pasted a tree. This required a full scale rescue. A couple of us skied out for help while the rest cobbled together a makeshift sled



Mike Hough going for Haystack. Photo credit: Dave Hough

from skis, straps and poles to evacuate him off the peak. We ended up dragging him brutally down through the woods as best we could. It was very cold, the snow was deep, and the sled had to be rebuilt several times during the ordeal. Pat spent a few days in the hospital with a neck injury but made a full recovery and has become one of the High Peaks' strongest skiers. Despite his accident we all eventually made the switch to synthetic skis.

The next equipment problem we tackled was the 3-pin binding. Though an engineering marvel, it did have its drawbacks in the backcountry. Snow tended to build up on the binding pins which required us to scrape them off by hand. The receiving holes in the boots would often need cleaning as well; pins were sometimes hard to locate in the boot, especially difficult to deal with in freezing conditions. Many people carried spare bails, which often blew out under stress. Everything changed for the better when we adopted cable bindings. Suddenly, almost any boot could be used.

Clothing was evolving as well. Cotton underwear gave way to synthetics, the 60/40 parka yielded to Gortex, wool pants gave way to the new drip/dry combos, and Dachstein mitts were replaced by new ski glove material.

Throughout the 1970s many new routes were skied. The Johns Brook valley was fully exploited. We skied the Wolf Jaws, Ore Bed, Gothics, Saddleback, Big Slide, Slant Rock, Marcy and, eventually, Haystack. All areas of open woods and stream beds were explored. We soon went to work on the Lake Placid side, skiing Algonquin, Wright, Phelps, Colden and many other appealing peaks and descents. We started doing sunrise ascents of Marcy.

One of my favorite routes to this day is Geoff Smith's discovery, and bold descent, of the west ramp of Colden in 1976. The west ramp has it all, one of the shortest ascents of any of the High Peaks via Lake Arnold; you are blessed with spectacular views both up the climb and down the ramp itself until you are in the lower woods just above Lake Colden. The exit off the bottom of the slide can be tricky as there is a cliff band at the bottom of the slide proper. Once down, you can enjoy a classic ski



Chris Munn and Randy Hough on the North Face of Gothics. Photo credit: Dave Hough

back out across Avalanche Lake followed by the Misery Mile downhill to the lean-tos at Avalanche Camps. I once skied off the summit back in the late '70s, down the east face on one of the finger slides. This was before the large east face slide came down in 1999 and blocked the trail to Avalanche Pass. It was dark by the time we got to Uphill Lean-to so we had to ski down the Opalescent trail in the dark. Very scary. This was my first circumnavigation of Colden. I went off trail above Avalanche Lake in the dark and fell in a spruce tree hole. It took some time and energy to get out, in total exhaustion—another 11 p.m. arrival at the Adirondack Loj parking lot.

At that time, all of our ascents were accomplished using wax and technique; it was not until the early '80s that we started using climbing skins. Waxing is an art, used in both the ascent as well as the descent. Many of the guys actually used white paraffin to increase speed on the downhill. I must confess I often “down waxed” to decrease my speed and stay in control.

Throughout this period there were other groups also exploring the High Peaks for extreme ski routes. A group from Tupper Lake, including Michael and Robbie Frenette, sought the same thrills as the Ski-to-Die group; Lake Placid's backcountry skiers were known as the “Chicken heads.” Skiing to die was never something we pursued, we simply thought the name was cool. Ron Konowitz #487 of Keene was skiing all the forty-six peaks at this time, though I don't recall skiing with him until the mid-eighties on the True

North Slide on Gothics.

I remember once skiing into Johns Brook Lodge and following some ski tracks laid down on a few inches of fresh powder. The tracks were paralleling, side-slipping and herring-boning the uphill. I thought, *this must be an experienced skier from one of the groups*, then was amazed to pull up to the ranger station and see C. Peter Fish #1396, the renowned forest ranger, in a pair of synthetic skis and Rams Horn bindings. He appeared to be wearing his standard patrol hiking boots. It was refreshing to talk to him about ski equipment instead of receiving a lecture on the perils of wearing cotton in the backcountry or gathering only dead and

downed wood for fires. In the 1980s the Ski-to-Die group sought new adventures in the High Peaks. Extreme ascents seemed to be happening all over the world. Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler were bagging 8,000 meter peaks without oxygen, hardman speed climbers were doing extreme routes in Yosemite and other big walls of the world, K2 had been done with lawn chairs, all these became things of envy.

In the winter of '81-'82 my brother Dave, along with Mark Meschenelli, contemplated our own extreme route. We set off one extremely cold January day, aiming to climb the North Face of Gothics, traverse the Lower Range to the top of the Wolf Jaw stream bed, ski this down to Ore Bed lean-to, then go out to the Garden, all on one of the shortest days of the year. I had skied to Ore Bed lean-to and been in the big slide woods the day before and found the ski conditions to be ex-

cellent, at least where other hikers had not destroyed the trail. I came upon several of those “post-holers” (hikers without skis or snowshoes) and lectured them on the ethics of ski trail maintenance. As I later learned, this group was staying at Grace Camp for a couple of nights.

The temperature was around ten degrees Fahrenheit and the sky was crystal clear. The approach went well. We passed a group from North Country Community College on a winter mountaineering class who encouraged us to check out some igloos they had built in the Gothics col in case we needed them in an emergency. The ski ascent to the base of the face

went without incident. We had brought stiff mountaineering boots to front-point up the face, though this added 25-to-30 pounds to the load and wasted precious energy which we would later need. I had a pair of Dave's old Galibier “Super Guides.” Looking back, I could have easily cramponed in my ski boots, a pair of Asolo Extremes. I was not an experienced ice climber, as were Dave and Mesch, and soon found Dave leading me on the steeper sections while Mesch was some distance above. We made the summit at about 2:30 p.m. after a spectacular climb. We contemplated the easier descent via the cable route followed by an exciting ski down one of the Ore Bed slides. I also thought of the igloos the college group had built and a nice warm break we could enjoy inside one of them.

However, we decided to press on over Armstrong and Upper Wolf Jaw to the streambed beyond. We soon found ourselves in a desperate post-holing situation and finally made it to the summit of Armstrong in time to watch the sunset. We hurried across the Wolfjaw and down to the start of the streambed, stomping about in the freezing twilight while changing into ski boots. By this time it was near darkness. I had a headlamp but thought I could see well enough to ski. Dave disappeared through the trees and we could hear Mesch hooting somewhere below, though he seemed to be in a different drainage. We had all become separated.

I plowed through the brush at the top of the streambed and burst into an opening, snowplowed, cut a couple of turns and took

a header off the first headwall. I got up, dusted myself off, exhausted, and tried again to ski. A couple of token turns and then another face plant. I had skied this route many times and thought I knew the terrain but in the darkness everything looked the same. I resigned myself to post-holing but the snow was chest deep in spots. I put my ski bindings on my hands and resorted to a combination of slow crawl and surfing. I rolled off the headwalls, dug myself out of holes and finally made it to Ore Bed lean-to.

I gathered my thoughts, saw no sign of my mates and decided I could at least ski out on the packed trail. I strapped my skis back on and was off. The first few turns went fine but soon I was ripping through the woods trying to shave off my increasing speed with some quick turns and snowplows. I catapulted off the trail looking for a bailout zone and crashed in a heap. Deciding skiing in the pitch darkness wasn't a wise idea, I walked the trail down to Winter and Grace Camp. I could see lights on at Grace but knew these were the fellows I had lectured the previous day and did not want a confrontation so I slowly passed them by and made it to the ranger station. Thinking Dave and Mesch would be waiting at the car worrying about me, I started a forced march up the hill and on towards the Garden. I would later learn they had both been inside Grace Camp, boots off, warming with hot fluids.

Once I got to the top of the hill I thought I might be able to ski and strapped them on again. I proceeded across some flat sections and up some of the first hills fairly easily. At the first major downhill I started double-poling. I could feel the hardpack and could tell I was on the trail. However, I was quickly picking up speed and snowplowing was becoming more frequently needed. Out of control again, looking to bail out, I hit a log and shot off the trail into the woods, face first. At this point, I resigned myself to the long walk out to the Garden. Thoughts of a warm car, a hot meal with lots of beer, and a hot shower kept me going.

As I approached the Garden parking lot I found it odd that no car lights were visible. Mesch's car was unmoved from where we had left it. Instead of them worrying about



Mike Hough and Dave Hough on the North Face of Gothics. Photo credit: Mark Meschinelli

me, it was me who was now concerned for their safety, as the temperature was now well below zero. I stomped about the parking lot trying to stay warm, contemplating the long walk down the hill to the Spread Eagle Inn, which I wasn't sure was even open. After what seemed like an hour, I saw a light in the woods coming down the trail; it was Dave and Mesch. Finally the whole ordeal was over.

The three of us have relived this adventure many times in the ensuing years. We had broken many cardinal rules of backcountry and winter travel on that trip and, luckily, had gotten away with it. We were one serious injury from a very bad situation. Not very good judgment on our part; I do not encourage such recklessness.

That trip began a new phase of exploration in the High Peaks using two cars to enable long loop trips. Ski-to-Diers were all over the map doing long tours, which typically involved bagging a peak followed by a long descent into a different valley. We skied the pipeline off the south side of Marcy from Adirondack Loj and out via Upper Ausable Lakes; we did the Garden-to-St. Huberts via the Wolf Jaws, a circumnavigation of Colden, the slides of Dix, the bear claws of Algonquin, over Giant and out the North trail, Marcy-to-Gray, and down Feldspar to Lake Colden.

Throughout the next two decades other players would arrive on the scene with heavier equipment and an abundance of energy and talent. Soon there would be competition. Dominic Eisinger won the Colden Cup by skiing, I think, seven different descents in

a season. Geoff Smith pulled off the Triple Crown by skiing Marcy, Colden and Algonquin in a single day. I remember one of my brothers and I were climbing the Lake Arnold trail to Colden to do the west ramp and saw Geoff coming down from Indian Falls. We climbed together to the summit, talking about family and skiing. He was dressed in wool, as he always was, with '70s-era gaiters. Geoff had given our group so much inspiration and friendship and introduced us to so many things when it came to Adirondack skiing—wool pants, Dachstein mittens, the balaclava helmet, and so much more. I will never forget watching him descend, solo, into the Trap Dike.

Skiing nowadays is much easier than it was back when we started. Flimsy, leather boots have given way to large plastic downhill-style boots, skis are shaped for easy turning, waxing for glide seems to be less and less practiced. Heels are locked on downhills and guides are hired to get people up Marcy and to the premier slide skiing that has become all the rage.

I recently went on a ski to a small slide track near Whiteface. I was still on older '90s equipment and seemed to be the only one who actually had to ski with technique while others slopped and barreled down the slope, turning at will as if on a downhill trail. Not to take anything away from these skiers, things change, we can't live in the past. For me, the Ski-to-Die group enabled me to explore the Adirondack mountains in a special season and develop friendships that have lasted for decades. ■