Bootprints

The Bimonthly Newsletter of the Pioneer Valley Hiking Club

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President's Corner:

A 10 out of 10 PVHC Experience at the Cape

by President Erin Squires

I finally made it to the Cape Cod trip. It was amazing. I loved it so much I signed up for next year. I want to thank Deb and Cheryl for organizing the trip. The Cove Motel is perfect with a stunning sunrise to start the day. There were quite a few hike and bike leaders. Deb and Cheryl led two hikes. Karen Markham and Al Roman led a beautiful hike to Race Point. Shari Cox and Nancy Rapisardi led bike rides. John Fortune led a hike on the Cranberry Bog Trail. Ron and Eleanor Morrissette led the Great Island Trail Beach Walk. Hilary Matheson and Kay Flatten led a Nickerson State Park hike. I would also like to thank Shari Cox for organizing game night Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. It was a lot of fun and I learned that I am not great at playing Gestures.

There were just under 60 club members who attended the Cape Cod trip. It made for a lot of hikers on the hikes which means more club members that I can chat with. I will share that it was very windy most of the time. Walking on the beach was tough with the sand microderming your face. It was worth it though, I saw a lot of seals. I also saw a beached whale with scientists busy taking samples. I got two lighthouse tours. The best part was relaxing over a seafood dinner with amazing friends and then capping the night off with game night. I shared lots of laughs and adventures with my PVHC friends. The trip was a 10 out of 10 experience.

Best,

Erin

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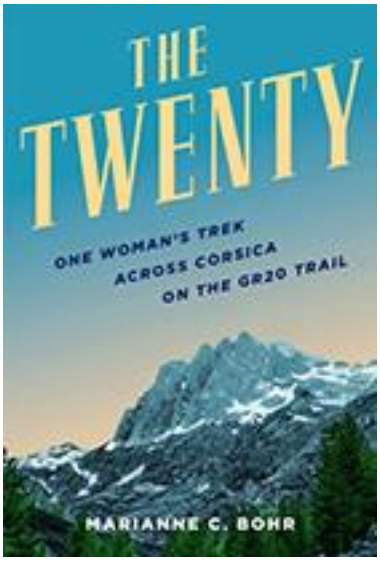
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Book Review by Shari Cox:

The Twenty: One Woman's Trek Across Corsica on the GR20 Trail

by Marianne C. Bohr



I know that Dick Forrest is usually the "book review person" for *Bootprints,* though after reading this book, I decided it was good enough to write about. I enjoyed it because I could relate to this woman, and thought others might also. Men might also like it, because it's about a challenging hike that they might not have heard about.

I recently hiked the West Highland Way and I did not carry a book because I didn't want to carry the extra weight. Though after three days of carrying everything I had with me for traveling for one month, I succumbed to having a pack service take my pack for the rest of the West Highland Way. "Why not be comfortable?" was my reasoning.

So close to the last day of my hike, I found this book in the laundry area of the hostel. I glanced at it, thinking yeah, it is big and heavy. I am going to need to carry it for my next hike that I was doing in England. I decided to pick the book up because, like most hikers, I like to read about new places to travel and hike.

I had never heard about the GR20 and I don't know anything about Corsica. I do know that there are a lot of trails in Europe with GR and a number. After looking it up online, GRs are a network of trails in Europe, mainly in France, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium. Typically, the trails are blazed with red and white markings. GR stands for Grande Randonnee, translated means "Great Route." The GR20 bisects Corsica diagonally. It is known to be a very difficult trail with lots of boulders, steep inclines, steep declines and granite slabs.

See The Twenty continued on page 3

"I had never heard about the GR20 and I don't know anything about Corsica."
~ Shari Cox

The Twenty *continued from page 2*



The female author writes about her tale of the GR20. She and her husband are both turning 60 and they are celebrating their 35th wedding anniversary. The question she asked was, "How do I celebrate the two milestones?" The GR20 is what she came up with.

Age is a funny thing. I think many of us as we age, think about how much more can we do and if we will be able to continue to do the things that we enjoy. I think we should just forget the number and just go out and do what we can. (Maybe people in this club show me how to do exactly that!) Here is a passage that was in the book:

> *How much longer you think we'll be able to get away with calling ourselves middle-aged? At what point do we cross over to elderly?*
>
> *I figure the elderly label is always out there about ten years older than where we are at any given moment. It'll always be just over the horizon somewhere.*

Marianne and her husband were retiring and were going to spend their time training for this hike. They have a training plan and start months before they go. Marianne is not feeling motivated and has been feeling aches and pains throughout her body and has noticed swelling. "Are these signs of just getting older and have I overdone something?" are questions she asks herself. It came to the point that she knew she needed to see a doctor. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), a chronic auto-immune disease. It is painful and can be debilitating.

"She (Marianne) was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), a chronic auto-immune disease. It is painful and can be debilitating."
~ Shari Cox

Marianne starts a treatment plan for the RA and notices relief. She and her husband continue with the training and their plans to go to Corsica.

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The Twenty *continued from page 3*

They use a guide and will be hiking with a group. Hiking with a group can also bring other worries. "*Are they are young and strong?" "Will I be too slow?"*

The book talks about the preparation for the hike, the hiking, Marianne's struggles, her relationship with her husband, the people she hikes with and how she deals with her RA. It is a 13-day hike where she learns so much about herself by looking at her childhood years, her struggles with accepting herself and learning to ask for help.

"It is a 13-day hike where she learns so much about herself...."
~ Shari Cox

I don't know about you, but for me, many times hiking is about the challenge. Yes, I get to see beautiful places, I can enjoy nature and talk with my fellow companions, but it is ultimately, can I do it? I was never an athlete. I am not good at sports as I am not fast, talented or coordinated. However, I can walk, which means I can hike! Marianne, the author, also had the same feelings growing up. Her father told her several times "you are no athlete."

I am sure many of us have tried things when we weren't sure we could meet the challenge. There may have been tears and swearing, but we continue. We make it. We feel good about what we just did, even if it is not exactly what the plan was. Here is a passage that Marianne writes to help her move forward:

> *Inhale, exhale, be calm. My breathing slows as I continue my self-talk. You're starting a physical challenge, but you can handle it. You can. Breathe in, breathe out, be calm. You'll be tired, but you will pull through. You'll grow new muscles and find new strength. You will do your best on every one of the thirteen days. Every. Single. One.*

This is an inspirational book of about acceptance, growth and living.

"This is an inspirational book of about acceptance, growth and living."

~ Shari Cox

"Because in the end, you won't remember the time you spent working in the office or mowing your lawn. Climb that god-damn mountain." ~ Jack Kerouac

--Shari Cox

Smurfy advice for the trail…

Dangerous Stories

by John "PaPa Smurf" Klebes

If you hike long enough you will likely encounter some dangerous situations. This spring I read an article in the May 26, 2026, issue of *The Trek* by Peg Leg. Her article features her *Top 10 Dangerous Stories from Hiking 20,000+ Miles.* I found her article both useful and enlightening since I have had my own dangerous situations and can relate to how we learn from, and become better prepared for, our own encounters through both personal experience but also hearing from others and their experiences.

"For this month's article I thought I would share my own version of the top 10 list."
~ PaPa Smurf

For this month's article I thought I would share my own version of the top 10 list. Hopefully, it will help you to be prepared for your own encounters in the wild.

PaPa Smurf's Top 10 Dangerous Stories:

1) Caught in a spruce trap on Wildcat Mountain

It was during a winter visit to Carter Notch hut in the White Mountains. Setting out on a snowshoe climb to the top of Wildcat Mountain I missed a switchback in the trail in deep snow. I knew where the trail went but figured it was easier to proceed upward than to backtrack and find where I lost the trail. As I climbed I knew I could always lean to the left and likely catch up with the main trail. What I didn't expect was to step into a spruce trap.

The branches of the spruce tree block the heavy snow from accumulating under the tree and create a void. This void becomes covered with drifting snow hiding it's presence. Sure enough, I stopped on this soft spot and sunk down a good five feet. I could feel the soft branches of the spruce under my feet so I still had farther to fall. Thinking I could just climb out I tried reaching up to the edge of the hole but the snow just crumbled into the hole. I tried kicking steps into the snow but each step just sank back down into the hole.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 6

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 5*

At first it was very scary, wondering if I could get out. Later, it was tedious and exhausting but I gained confidence that I could self-rescue as I made progress. All in all, a humbling experience.

2) Navigating deep snow on Mt. Adams

I have two snow stories from this 2nd highest peak of the White Mountains.

Years ago two of my older brothers took me up Mt. Adams to the Gray Knob Cabin. It was my first time up the mountain and we had lots of ice and snow. The trail to the cabin was well-packed down and we didn't have snowshoes or traction/crampons. We came to the junction with the trail that goes out to the Perch Lean-to. I had never been to the Perch so my brother suggested we head over there and we could take a ridge trail from there to the Gray Knob Cabin.

When we got the Perch it became obvious that the trail between the Perch and Gray Knob had not been hiked since the last snowfall. The path was covered in a few feet of fresh snow. I was sure the right answer was to down climb a long way back to the trail junction and take the trail we knew was packed down by other hikers. But my brothers insisted that we push on through the heavy snow, and of course, they made me lead.

I started out post-holing through the deep snow. Every step and agonizing struggle to pull my foot up and forward out of the snow to take one small step forward. I had not gone 50 meters before declaring it impossible and that we were risking our lives over-exhausting ourselves and might not have the energy to continue forward or backward if we didn't turn around now. My brothers insisted on going forward and after a few more dozen meters the snow eased. My brothers knew what I didn't know. The trail was sheltered from the accumulated snow just a little farther along the trail and the remainder of our hike was on windswept rocks that had very little snow. It was an uneventful, yet beautiful, alpine hike after only about a tenth of a mile. But boy was I scared that we would have had to post-hole the whole way in exhaustion.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 7

"I started out post-holing through the deep snow. Every step and agonizing struggle to pull my foot up and forward out of the snow to take one small step forward."
~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 6*

My second tale involves almost the same spot. I took my daughter up in winter with snowshoes this time. Leaving after a night at Gray Knob Cabin we took the same route in reverse. It was a beautiful sunny alpine day. We got to the Perch and the trail down was unbroken. But it was a wonderfully sunny and the snow glistened in the sunlight. We had plenty of time and a good GPS so we headed down making our own trail, since it was nearly impossible to find the blazed trail in the deep snow.

"We had plenty of time and a good GPS so we headed down making our own trail, since it was nearly impossible to find the blazed trail in the deep snow."
~ PaPa Smurf

At first it was just fun but as we hit sheltered patches where the snow was deeper that even our snowshoes couldn't keep us from sinking down several feet. I promised my daughter all was good; it would just take us a little longer. But, to be honest, I was hesitating whenever I was getting close to a spruce tree or steep spot. I spent several hours with a worry of finding a hidden spruce trap or other obstacle in my head the whole way down.

It was a fantastic day, and uneventful other than my own worrying, but it drove home how much more time and danger can exist in winter.

3) Freezing rain on Mt. Hood

On this trip a group of us hired a guide to take us up Mt. Hood in Oregon. Our plan was to start hiking the day before and set up a base at over 10,000 feet. We set up our camp on the snow in high winds and had trouble getting secure footing to stake out our tent in the snow and wind. We planned a very early start around 1 am.

Laying in our tents and anxious to start we eventually started out for the summit around 12:30 am. We hiked only about a half mile when we broke out into the unprotected slopes directly into wind-blown rain/sleet. After hiking another half hour we were all coated in a thick coating of ice as the freezing rain froze to our outer gear.

As we progressed it became more and more miserable climbing. We all agreed we would turn back and try again at 3 pm. While covered in ice our gear kept out the cold and it wasn't too bad hiking, except for the wind. We all hoped the weather would clear soon. After getting back into our tent to rest up for 3 pm. it became obvious that we had a new problem.

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Dangerous Stories *continued from page 7*

As soon as we got into the tents the ice started melting on our gear. In no time the ice-covered gloves, hats, coats, and pants were wicking up the melting ice. Everything was wet including clothing that was dry but now touching our wet clothes. With three climbers per tent there was little space and everything was kind of touching everything. It was agreed by all that no one wanted to continue our summit attempt under these conditions.

I learned that even with the right gear the weather always wins.

4) Almost trapped by a rock slide on the Continental Divide Trail (CDT)

I had my own 127 Hours (Aron Ralston) moment on the CDT. No, I didn't have to cut off my own arm - but I came close. While hiking a remote section of the CDT I found myself having to climb down a steep ravine filled with large boulders. At first I hesitated. It was steep but a narrow chute passage looked doable to climb down.

As a climbed down the chute there were large rocks to my left and right the size of a sofa. I put my hand on top of one rock to lower myself down between them. To my utter surprise the large sofa-sized boulder started to move when I put my weight on it. I let go and started sliding on the talus slope, scraping against the side of the boulder on my left as the boulder I dislodged on my right slide down alongside my leg.

Fortunately, it slid mostly straight down along my leg instead of wedging against the rock to my left. I ended up with a painful road rash along my leg but didn't get pinched into the rock. It could have easily just wedged my leg against the adjacent rock and stopped. I would never have been able to move the rock and I would have had my leg pinned just like Aron Ralston's arm in his canyoneering accident. Images of how remote and unused the route I was climbing was and how long it would be if I had to wait for someone to find me ran through my head the whole rest of the climb down. Could I even reach my water, food, or cellphone if I got stuck? I now hike remote areas with a satellite in-reach messenger close by on my shoulder strap, just in case.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 9

"I put my hand on top of one rock to lower myself down between them. To my utter surprise the large sofa-sized boulder started to move when I put my weight on it."
~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 8*

5) Dehydration on the CDT

The CDT is notorious for a few desert sections where it may be hard to find water. With good reliable maps, some research on the history of how reliable past water sources have been in previous years, some luck and good weather you can plan for water stops with little worry. There are lots of information on year-round, reliable sources and where some water sources are usually reliable but can be dry in some years or under droughts.

While ideally I pick only reliable water sources it can still be pretty far between the most reliable water. It's not always possible to carry all the water you need when distances get larger. I mostly had good luck with some less reliable water sources and usually you would have several, so if one or two are dry a third or fourth would likely still have some water.

On one section my luck ran out. I started out carrying a good amount of water figuring the mostly reliable water source 20 miles ahead would be fine. I didn't worry too much because my map showed four more small streams, cow water holes, and springs further down the trail, each about a mile or two apart.

"I reached my expected stream to find it was bone dry. No worries, there were four more mostly reliable sources ahead."
~ PaPa Smurf

I reached my expected stream to find it was bone dry. No worries, there were four more mostly reliable sources ahead. A mile later at an old cow watering hole it looked like a baked-dry meteor crater. Now I'm a little worried and start rationing my water. By the third, fourth, and fifth dry water source I was beyond worried and feeling parched and sluggish. I finally came to a marshy area that should have had a spring. The marsh was dry but near where there was supposed to be a spring I found damp grasses and muddy soil.

I dug a hole in the mud and it slowly filled about a half inch with muddy water. Too little to filter. The only way to collect the water was to soak my bandanna in the muddy water and ring it out into my cook pot. After twenty minutes of soaking, ringing, and waiting for the mud hole to refill, I was finally able to fill a liter bottle with very thick and muddy brown water. It looked disgusting and too murky to filter. I let it settle, filtered through my bandanna again, and repeated this two times. It still looked pretty bad.

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Dangerous Stories *continued from page 9*

I decided to carry it down trail and hoped to find something better soon. As I continued to hike I got beyond thirsty. I could feel myself slowing down and my body felt off. I could really feel my body wasn't working properly. I wasn't sweating and I stopped needing to pee.

Finally, I decided I had to try and drink that disgusting water. It took much effort to push it through my filter and had to back-flush it a few times but managed to yield half a liter from my original liter of brown sludge. When I finally drank this water it was wonderful. To my amazement I could almost feel my veins plumping up, I felt better almost immediately. I ended up needing to pee very soon after. It was almost like my body was unwilling to let go of any liquid until I was back in better balance before it would give me permission to pee.

I was still very thirsty but that half liter of water gave me the energy to push on and luckily I found plenty of water a few more miles ahead. It was a little scary and probably a little too close to the edge. But I learned a lot about how your body changes when dehydrated.

6) Hypothermia

I've had several close calls with hypothermia. The three that come to mind the most include a hike in the Adirondacks, Mount Cabot in the Great North Woods of New Hampshire, and a solo hike in the Catskills.

Pioneer Valley Hiking Club (PVHC) member Rick Briggs and I did a hike over the Wolf Jaw mountains and down into the Panther Gorge Lean-to in the Adirondacks. It wasn't particularly cold but we had been hiking the high peaks, getting sweaty and tired. When we started down toward Panther Gorge it started raining lightly and the wind increased. We were in shorts and t-shirts but well-prepared with extra layers and rain gear. As the wind and rain increased we discussed stopping for rain gear. We were both tired and it seemed we were almost to camp. We both said that we were already wet, and if we put on the rain gear it wouldn't help much and would be hot and sweaty under the rain gear. We pushed on.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 11

"I could feel myself slowing down and my body felt off. I could really feel my body wasn't working properly."
~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 10*

By the time we were closer to the shelter we just felt committed and had no desire to put rain gear over our wet clothes. I was getting colder and I started to shiver but the thought of changing into a dry layer that would still probably get wet under our rain gear was outweighed by the thought of just pushing on and getting to the lean-to. The thought of just suffering through and having everything stay dry called to us. We could warm up in our dry clothing in the shelter.

As we finally saw our shelter we were both shivering and starting to get hypothermia. Rick jumped into the shelter and swapped his wet clothes for dry and warmer layers. I hesitated thinking we would need water after we made camp and I didn't like the thought of putting on dry clothes to warm up and have to go back out into the rain later. Wouldn't it be better to just push through and filter some water down by the stream before changing into warmer clothes?

I can say with certainty this was a bad idea. Half way through getting water I was shivering so bad I could barely move my hands to screw the cap on my water bottles. Stumbling back to the shelter I was full-on with stumbling and bumbling with little ability to stop shaking. I was in bad shape. Rick, however, having changed clothes earlier was nice and warm and happy. That 15 minutes extra to get water had pushed me over the edge into danger.

"That 15 minutes extra to get water had pushed me over the edge into danger."
~ PaPa Smurf

My second experience with the cold was on a hike with PVHC member Ed Laroche and I climbing Mt. Cabot in the Great North Woods of New Hampshire. There was plenty of snow but we made good time climbing up the steep mountain toward the enclosed cabin near the summit. Everything seemed to be going well. We were warm enough, and in fact, sweating, as we climbed. My mid-layer was wet with sweat but it felt fine, not cold at all, as we continued up the mostly sheltered path. Then things changed. A strong wind hit us as we climbed the last mile.

I was astonished how quickly the wind pushed through my winter shell and the damp clothing against my skin pulled the heat away from me. My hands and ears starting to get very cold to the point they ached despite my thick gloves and hat. When we finally made it to the cabin I was bitterly cold. We took a break at the cabin but the summit was still a few tenths of a mile ahead.

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Dangerous Stories *continued from page 11*

"I put on a dry spare shirt and all my layers back on. It almost instantly felt better."
~ PaPa Smurf

Remembering my own teachings I stripped down and took off my wet t-shirt. I put on a dry spare shirt and all my layers back on. It almost instantly felt better. I then broke out my emergency hand warmers and put them into my gloves. It didn't take more than 15 minutes and I felt great again.

Ed and I climbed to the summit without trouble now that I didn't have a wet shirt against my skin. The hand warmers and dry shirt made all the difference even in the strong wind. I felt so good that on the way down, when we met another hiker that was struggling under the same condition, I gave her my hand warmers. Being careful to not sweat too much into my dry t-shirt on the way down we had no trouble in the wind.

My third experience was a little different. I was hiking several mountains in the Catskills solo. Things took a lot longer than I thought. Locating the summit on deep snow had me wandering around for much longer than I thought I would. Time spent navigating in the snow, pushing through deeper snow, and the total distance had me exhausted. I knew I should stop to eat more, and I had already drunk all of my two liters of water that I brought with me.

I could (should) have stopped to eat more and filter more water but I just pushed on. I could have also just stopped and set up camp but I stubbornly pushed on to the lean-to I had planned to stay in for the night. Finally arriving, almost at dusk, tired and out of energy. Not a close call but definitely starting to suffer from improper hydration and inadequate food so my body was having trouble keeping warm. I should have listened to my body and made corrections.

"All in all, the message I was slow to learn from all of this is to pay attention to your body and take corrective action sooner."
~ PaPa Smurf

Knowing I was in a little trouble I quickly put on warm clothes and got in my sleeping bag. I didn't feel like eating but knew that was not right. I should have been hungry. I melted snow for water and made some hot soup. Warmed from the soup and re-energized, my appetite and energy came back. All in all, the message I was slow to learn from all of this is to pay attention to your body and take corrective action sooner. Don't just keep pushing on.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 13

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 12*

7) Illness/Giardiasis on the CDT

Beaver fever, the common trail nickname for Giardiasis (an intestinal infection caused by the parasite Giardia duodenalis) is the fear of all that try to drink untreated water in the backcountry. I never hope to get that again. I made one stupid mistake which was my downfall. I usually boil untreated water if I'm cooking anyway to save time. But I had grabbed some hiking food left in a hiker box at the last trail town. It looked like a bag of macaroni and cheese powder. I usually add the powdered cheese after cooking the macaroni but this was already mixed together. As soon as I mix it into the cold water it solidified into a thick clump. It turned out the cheese powder was really instant mashed potatoes.

"I made one stupid mistake which was my downfall."
~ PaPa Smurf

As you can imagine it's is next to impossible to heat this mess of mashed potatoes and pasta. I added as much water as my pot would allow. But all it did was scorch the potatoes at the bottom of the pot and leave the rest cold. I gave up and took a nap.

When I awoke again, I was relieved that I had not eaten, and while I rested the pasta had rehydrated into a nice pot of mashed potatoes and pasta. I had forgotten that it was made with unfiltered water and never boiled. I ate it up like any hungry hiker would. Bad Idea!

Giardia symptoms appear 1-3 weeks after exposure and can last 2-6 weeks. Well, it was two weeks later that I ran into 8-10 other hikers complaining of diarrhea and stomach cramps. Turns out we had a cluster of victims on the trail around that water source.

"Giardia symptoms appear 1-3 weeks after exposure and can last 2-6 weeks."
~ PaPa Smurf

Next thing I know I'm cramping and getting severe diarrhea. Worst experience of my life. I was not able to eat as every time I ate, it made the symptoms worse. My energy level was so low that I could only hike about 10-20 minutes, then rest, use the bathroom, and try to hike some more. I barely made half the mileage I would normally make in a day while pushing myself as hard as I could to get to the next town. An awful experience that I hope to never experience again.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 14



"I always try to have several forms of navigation when hiking in remote places."
~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 13*

8) Lost GPS Maps on CDT

I always try to have several forms of navigation when hiking in remote places. And the CDT is notorious for open cross-country, trailless areas and poorly marked terrain. During the CDT I relied on some very accurate paper maps, backup copies of those maps on my phone, a GPS with maps and tracks loaded on an SD card (computer memory card), and a good compass.

The paper maps were excellent but it's always difficult to know exactly where you are on the map without some complicated reckoning with a compass and landmarks. I relied on the much easier GPS to guide me and to more accurately place my location on the fixed maps. The GPS used batteries and at one rest stop, while changing batteries, I must have dislodged the SD card that stored my maps and it fell out.

The next time I tried to use the GPS it had no maps at all to indicate my location. It was almost totally useless other than giving me longitude and latitude in degrees. Trust me, this is not the best way to translate your location onto a paper map. And it gave you no indication of what direction you were hiking in.

I had to rely on my paper maps and compass. Taking a compass reading was difficult since you needed a clear view of landmarks, such as mountains and terrain which were not always visible. I made lots of guesses, traveled extra distances before finding I was off-track and correcting, and in general, slowed way down and worried lots and lots.

With time, patience, and some extra miles, I was able to keep on course to my next resupply but it was a nerve-racking experience. A few weeks later I met a hiker going south that gave me his old memory card with a backup copy of the GPS maps which really helped me out. But it definitely drove home the need for a backup means of navigation.

9) Exhaustion in Maine

Is there a limit to how much you can hike even when you are in good shape? On a quest to hike the 100 highest peaks in New England

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Dangerous Stories *continued from page 14*

I headed to a portion of the Rangeley-Stratton mountain range, specifically known as the Bigelows, in Maine, to hike a series of mountains, including the bushwhack of South Horn and a number of other high peaks.

The Bigelow Range traverse takes hikers over craggy peaks and exposed ridges with steep ascents and wind-swept alpine zones. The 17 -mile traverse is challenging but adding in a bushwhack to South Horn and looping back to my car was significantly longer and more demanding.

Going solo, I had brought all my overnight gear, and was planning on staying overnight part way but was having a great time and enjoying the adventure. Toward the end of the day it didn't look that much harder to make it to my car instead of setting up camp for the night. I just kept hiking….

At one point I started to feel exhausted. It was a long day and lots of peaks and lots of miles. I decided it was too much but searching for a good place to camp appeared elusive. I kept hiking, looking around every bend for a campsite. Finally I just decided that the car was close enough that I would just push on.

It was tiring, long, and getting dark. I knew I was exhausted but I was committed now and pushed on to the car. I was at the point that I wouldn't have been even able to setup my tent by the time I got to the car. I crawled into the back and decided to just sleep in the car.

I can't believe how tired I was and way past able to make rational decisions. I should have definitely stopped earlier. After resting and drinking some I finally forced myself to eat some cold supper even though I had no interest. But I knew that I was way past depleted and needed to eat. I slept through the night in the car and promised myself that I would pay more attention and not push so hard past the breaking point again.

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"I slept through the night in the car and promised myself that I would pay more attention and not push so hard past the breaking point again."
~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 15*

10) Animal Encounters

I've seen more than my share of wild animals in the outdoors. Most encounters are of the type where you just wish you could get your camera out fast enough to prove you saw what you saw. It's always exciting to catch a glimpse of some of the more majestic wildlife, from a distance. I've picked three of my most harrowing experiences with wildlife to share.

The first was in the Smokey Mountains on the Appalachian Trail. It was just past sunset and I was cresting the top of a rounded forest-capped peak. It was a surreal area as the light was fading. A heavy mist in the air made it hard to see more than twenty feet into the forest and dead quiet. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I heard an aggressive grunting sound and a wild boar became just visible through the fog, just 15 feet away. He stared right at me, pawed and thumped the ground, and exposed his long, upwardly curving tusks in an aggressive manner.

He made aggressive roaring grunts as he appeared to be about to charge at me. Without much time to think my adrenaline was pumping and all I could think of was to prepare to hit or block his attack with my hiking poles. Those teeth and his angry manner had me thinking that I was not going to escape this impending attack unharmed.

"Much as I feared he sprinted right at me with his mouth gaping and roaring."
~ PaPa Smurf

Much as I feared he sprinted right at me with his mouth gaping and roaring. To my surprise he veered off at the last minute and ran past me into the mist. The whole encounter took mere seconds. It was a bluff charge to scare me away. Perhaps he was more scared of me but I doubt it. It took me some time to compose myself after this and let go of worrying if another boar was lurking around every bend.

Another huge animal that we should respect in the wild is a moose. I have seen many and it's always been a great experience as they mostly seem calm and non-threatening, often just grazing, resting or walking slowly along. This was not the case in one encounter.

It was a hot day on a remote part of trail when I heard a loud racket in the woods around me. A moose was charging through the woods

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Dangerous Stories *continued from page 16*

crashing into and breaking branches in a wild run. I turned toward the sounds just as he crashed through the dense woods onto the trail that I was on and was running full speed down the trail right at me.

He seemed to not notice me at first then attempted to slam on the brakes to avoid hitting me. He skidded alongside of me, the coarse hairs of his hide scrapping my arm, as he barely missed crashing into me and continued past me at a fast run.

As he passed me I saw an immense cloud of biting flies swarming after him. It was a dense black cloud and he appeared to be trying to outrun them as they swarmed him. As he passed, the cloud of flies found me also and for a few minutes I had to swat them away but they dissipated quickly and followed the moose.

My guess is the moose was so agitated by the flies he didn't notice me in the way. I thought I was going to be run over by this enormous animal.

I left my bear story for last as everyone always asked aren't you afraid of bears on your hikes. I really am not. Almost every bear I've seen has been mostly wonderful. If only I could get my camera out fast enough to prove I saw them. I've even had grizzly bear encounters where a couple of cubs jumped from a tree right near me and ran away. And have had many other bear sightings from afar.

But let me tell you the one time I was scared of a bear. I was camping near the edge of town hoping to hike the last mile into town early the next day. As I got ready for bed I just had this feeling that someone was watching me. Then I heard a twig snap and shone my flashlight toward the noise. There, not 20 feet away, was a large bear staring at me.

For a good two hours we played this game. He would circle around me to where I was not looking and try to sneak up on me where he thought my food might be. I would yell and make angry noises and he would sulk slowly away to later return as soon as I seemed to not be looking.

See Dangerous Stories continued on page 18

"For a good two hours we played this game. He would circle around me to where I was not looking and try to sneak up on me where he thought my food might be."

~ PaPa Smurf

Dangerous Stories *continued from page 17*

Back and forth he would circle my campsite waiting for an opportunity to sneak into my stuff. It was impossible to sleep. Every sound had me jumpy and he would not scare away. I finally just packed up and hiked into town at three in the morning since I was never going to be able to settle down with him watching me.

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I hope you have enjoyed my soul-baring of bad decisions and dangerous experiences. My hope is that you can take some warning from this to help you avoid the same mistakes. But mostly, I want you to know that we all make mistakes and encounter bad luck. How we handle these situations really matters in the outcome. Listen to your body, adapt to what happens in bad situations, and most of all, gain confidence that you can work through situations even if they are unpleasant.

"My hope is that you can take some warning from this to help you avoid the same mistakes. But mostly, I want you to know that we all make mistakes and encounter bad luck." ~ PaPa Smurf

Given the number of miles I've spent hiking I'm happy to have only encountered a few potentially life-threatening situations. While out in nature we experience weather, animals, and difficult terrain and there is always a possibility of a hazardous situation. But nature is, in general, a pretty safe place. Get out and enjoy it.

--PaPa Smurf

(If you have a suggestion for future topics or a hike-related question you would like covered in this column send a note to: john.klebes@gmail.com)

Future Club Events

2026

November 14 - (MA) Adopter Trail Maintenance of the New England Trail (NET) Sections 1 & 2 in Massachusetts, organized by Chip Pray, Rob Schechtman, and Jack McGowan

November 21-22 - (VT) Annual Backpack or come join for a day hike at Windmill Hill Pinnacle Assoc., Westminster, VT, organized by Karen Markham and Al Roman

December 5 - (MA) Annual Holiday Party at Knights of Columbus, Chicopee, organized by Becky Reed

Volume 30, Issue 6

PVHC 2025-2026 Executive Board



Left to Right: Brenda Doucette, Secretary; Judy Alfano, Treasurer; Erin Squires, President; Ed Marrone, Vice President

Important Membership Renewal Notices

The following memberships are up for renewal:

Nov Renewals

Marie Babbitt

Alison Bent

Luann Bianco

Joanne Campbell

Preston Carr

Sue Cassidy

Terry Champiney

Meredith Clermont-Ferrand

Gary Fentin

Lynn Gebo

Richard Harris

Mary Heaner

Rebecca Hegstetter

Tina Jones

Kathleen Laprade

Sandy Lemanski

James Mattina

Alison Plummer & Wendy Gannett

Kati Richards

Chuck Serafin

Martha Spiro

Mary & Max Talley

Lori Tisdell & Jos Brannan

Paul Weaver

Warren Wilkinson

Dec Renewals

Virginia Ahearn

Elaine Huffman

Christine Hunter

Jean Lynch

Thomas Martin

Mary & Kate Moriarty

Debra Roberts

Ann Van Dyke

Steve & Michelle Wolf

Please renew early, and renew by mail. (Make checks payable to Pioneer Valley Hiking Club (PVHC)) Mail your renewal with your name and any address or phone number changes to:

Pioneer Valley Hiking Club
PO Box 225
West Springfield, MA 01089
(Dues are: $25 individual member, $40 family, and $15 for students)

Pioneer Valley Hiking Club Officers

Erin Squires, President

Ed Marrone, Vice President

Judy Alfano, Treasurer

Brenda Doucette, Secretary

Ray Tibbetts, Founder

Standing Committee Chairs

Hike Schedule: Jos Brannan & Lori Tisdell

Backpacking Advisor: Rick Briggs

Trail Maintenance: Chip Pray & Rob Schechtman

Club Website Editor: Dick Forrest

Non-Member E-mail Coordinator: Rob Schechtman

Quartermaster: Mike Carrier

Bootprints Newsletter Editor: Dick Forrest

Bootprints is a publication of the Pioneer Valley Hiking Club. Please email your story/event contributions to Dick Forrest at: dforrest@charter.net

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

September

Jeff Canter
Kevin Garvey
Michelle & David Hammer
Ellen Brout Lindsey
Thom Page
Celeste Provost
Christine Soverow

October

Mike April
Marcia Bielunis
Sharon Connor
Becky & Randy Holmes-Farley
Katherine Kahn
Edmund Lennihan
Eunice MacAllister
Josianna Martini



UPCOMING EVENTS AND THE USUALS

Mondays	Morning hike
Tuesdays	Evening hike
Wednesdays	Morning hike
Thursdays	Morning hike
Fridays	Occasional morning hike
Saturdays	Morning hike
Sundays	Occasional morning hike
December 1	Club Meeting
January 5	Club Meeting
PVHC Schedule of Events	https://teamup.com/ksz8qkbizhndt3qjt7

IMPORTANT NOTICES

Next Club Meetings

December 1, 2026, 7 p.m. at **ROC**
January 5, 2027, 7 p.m. at **ROC**

ROC *- Red Oak Church, 337 Piper Road, West Springfield*

Deadline for submissions to the next *Bootprints* is December 20, 2026

**** Check out our club website at:**
www.pioneervalleyhikingclub.org

Members may join the PVHC Email List by sending a message to:
pvhc.hikingclub@gmail.com





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