

Highland Sojourner

Volume XII, Issue I

Newsletter of the Pine Mountain Trail Conference, Inc.

Winter 2010

www.pinemountaintrail.com

Bulletin Board

Volunteer Vacations **Group**

Host

Check the PMTC Website or join the Yahoo Group

Weekend Getaways

Check the PMTC Website or join the Yahoo Group

*(Weekend Getaways are designed for those who work a full time job. In warmer weather, volunteers can come in on Friday evening; camp at a site we have prepared, work on Saturday, and return home on Sunday. For more information, contact the PMTC, P.O. Box 784, Whitesburg, KY 41858 or sbaker@uky.edu.) **RSVP Required!!***

Pine Mountain Trail Conference Meetings

January 21, 2010 Letcher County Cooperative Extension office, Whitesburg
Meeting will begin at 1pm

February 18, 2009 Harlan County Extension Depot, Harlan
Meeting will begin at 1pm

Words from the Woods **by Shad Baker**

White-frosted peaks glisten in dazzling sunshine as bitter cold winds whip up curls of crystal

I'm not going to lie to you. I haven't been on the Pine Mountain Trail since this bitter cold weather swept into the region and refused to let go. Even though we had planned a New Year's Day overnight hike, when the forecast predicted single digit temperatures, below zero wind chills and lots of snow, I quickly cancelled. I do not regret it, even though it meant missing an opportunity to try out some new backpacking gear I got from my wife on Christmas. At some point, I quit reveling in misery as a critical part of my hobbies. There was a time when I thought suffering and fun were 'two peas in a pod', but thankfully that was one divorce the Lord doesn't frown on. These days I allow common sense to rule the day. That shouldn't be taken to mean that I do not appreciate the mountain in winter. On the contrary, I stare at it amazed at its beauty as I drive the road from Jenkins to Whitesburg. I notice its moods and how it is so often shrouded in fog, snow, or brilliant sunbeams; always robed like a king on his throne. When the time comes that I can scurry out of my truck and onto the trail within fear of losing an appendage, I'll be back. I truly hope that in the weeks ahead a big snow in the upper 20's will hit and I can take advantage of another recent gift. Dr. Terry Jones, UK's horticulture specialist based at Quicksand retired this past month and he was kind enough to offer me some of the winter toys he accumulated while living in Maine. I turned down the skis, but gladly took his offer of a pair of snow shoes. They are made of wood and genuine hide and leather. When I accepted the gift, I thought it would be more of a curiosity piece for my office or 'man-cave' at home than an actual functional piece of gear. But then Dr. Jones added that I could send him a picture of them in use when I got a chance. I was obligated. The obligation wasn't delayed long. A 10-12" snow hit Eastern Kentucky just before Christmas. After returning from hunting deer with a muzzle-loader with my dad, I came home to a three year-old daughter anxious to get out in the white stuff. Even though it was getting late and her mom was reluctant, we suited up and ventured into the cold night. On a whim, I put on the snow shoes and began traipsing around my front yard while screams of laughter came from my daughter and cracks of thunder—snow and braking branches pierced the neighborhood. At some point my wife braved up and came out and we played together; building snowmen, throwing snowballs (not my wife's favorite game!), making snow angels on the ground, and occasionally shaking tree-limbs of snow on the unsuspecting bundle of energy that calls me daddy. Happily, all this happened in the shadow of Pine Mountain. I will visit her again soon.



Pine Mountain Trail State Park Road Signs

by Paul Hopkins

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet employees Randy Kender and Andy Lovern installed directional signs at major highway intersections in Pike County indicating directions to the Pine Mountain Trail State Park trail head in Elkhorn City.

Very few people know about the development of the trail or the existence of the complete sections, even though it was established in 2002. It is the only linear state park in Kentucky. It is being developed and maintained by volunteers and the Pine Mountain Trail Conference. It is hoped that some day the Breaks Interstate Park will take more of an active role in it's development and maintenance.

It is a great time to take the 3.3 mile hike to the Elkhorn City Overlook in the Breaks Interstate Park. It's a moderate hike with the first 1/4 mile and the last 3/4 mile being the most difficult due to rocks and some erosion on those parts of the trail.

If you would like more information go to Pine Mountain Trail Conference web site for maps, events and trail data. You can also go to www.fitpikecounty.org to get photos of the trailhead, PMT sign and yellow blaze and the view from the Elkhorn City overlook. Kentucky State Parks also recently updated PMT information and brochures on their web site.

Take your camera and enjoy the view . Unfortunately there is some litter on the trail and at the overlook so if you can please bring back some trash. that would help.

If you would like more information there are contacts on the PMT Conference web site that have knowledge of the trail.



A few years ago the planets lined up and we had three young Japanese women exchange students in my area. Since my kids are grown and gone and I wanted some friends to accompany me on a trip to the Grand Canyon, I invited these three ladies. I thought they should see one of the greatest sights of our country.

I always visit the Grand Canyon in December; I think winter is by far the best time to go. The heat and crowds of the summer can be unbearable. In December it is often blowing snow as I start hiking down from the South Rim yet I can wear shorts at the river. There is usually about a thirty degree temperature difference between the top and bottom.

Two years before this trip three friends of mine and I attempted to hike from the South Rim to the North Rim and back and only got to within two miles of the North Rim for a variety of reasons. So, this time three of us were going to try again. My group of four met six more friends from California and here's what we did. Those of us going on the 2007 Multinational Winter Expedition to the North Rim rented all the camping gear we'd need for winter overnighting. We also bought crampons for those few iced over sections of narrow trail next to precipitous drop-offs. We loaded that gear into feed bags one afternoon so they could be carried down by mules to Phantom Ranch at the river, where we had cabins. The next morning we hiked the ten plus mile Bright Angel Trail to Phantom Ranch and spent the night. One of the exchange students and I played Christmas carols on recorders for the crowd waiting to get into the mess hall for supper.

The next morning we three expeditioners collected our camping gear, packed up, and hiked seven miles north to Cottonwood Campground, visiting Ribbon Falls on the way. The temperatures at night there were at about the freezing point, but we were well prepared for them.

The following morning we took day packs and hiked seven miles to the North Rim and then back to camp, covering the last mile or two by headlamp. We only stayed at the top long enough to snap a couple of pictures because the wind immediately started freezing our sweat. The North Rim is closed in the winter since it is completely snowed in. Accordingly, the final few miles of the Bright Angel Trail that ascend to the North Rim involve tiring postholing. Conditions were much better this time, and it helps psychologically that the scenery is like watching an Imax movie the whole way. The North Rim is ten miles from the South Rim and a thousand feet higher. That day was like climbing a mountain and descending although in actuality we were hiking out of a hole and back into it. In fact the First American name for the canyon, Kaibab, means "mountain turned upside down." Very appropriate. Some of the other campers at Cottonwood told us we had really achieved something.

The next morning we broke camp and hiked back to Phantom Ranch to meet the rest of our group, put our gear back on the mules, and enjoy a rest night there. Next day we hiked up the eight and a half mile long, one mile elevation gain South Kaibab Trail, and by hiking one trail in and another one out we got to see as much of the incredible scenery as possible. Believe me, because of the plateau halfway down that almost always obscures the river from the rim, if you don't go to the bottom you haven't seen half of the Grand Canyon.

It is said that the average visitor spends forty five minutes in the park. I figure this is fifteen minutes looking for a parking spot, fifteen more oohing and aahing at a couple of overlooks, and fifteen in the gift shop. People who do this have no idea what they're missing.

Those of us who went rim to rim to rim hiked almost fifty miles in five days in winter conditions, spending two nights in tents. If you ever want to do a trip like this, get hold of someone who knows how to plan it. For one thing, spending nights in Phantom Ranch cabins that time of year is very popular, and you need to get reservations a year in advance, seriously. You'd need to call now for December 2010. You can also camp there, for which permits and reservations are easier to get, but then you must put your gear on mules and pay a fee for having it hauled or carry it yourself.

You must have camping permits for Cottonwood, and when I applied for ours I got several letters in return with certain paragraphs highlighted in yellow telling us they strongly recommend against doing this hike and that it could be life threatening. They didn't know we would be spending a night each coming and going at Phantom

Ranch. We were required to list the brand names and colors of our tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, coats, and boots so that searchers could help identify our bodies if necessary. It is not a casual trip; you must really know what you're doing.

If you're lucky you'll get to see a California condor munching down on a fallen deer. How do you recognize this bird? It has a nine foot wingspan.

Pine Mountain Trail Conference Yahoo Group & Facebook Page

Remember to check out the PMTC Yahoo Group as well as the PMTC Facebook page. These webpages continue to get plenty of hits continue to get plenty of hits. To gain up to date information join both groups. There is no fee to join. Check them out at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PMTC/> or search Pine Mountain Trail Conference from your Facebook page.

Articles for the Highland Sojourner

If you have any article concerning the Pine Mountain Trail or adventures that you've had will hiking the Pine Mountain Trail, please submit them. You may send them to Jeremy Williams at jnwillia@uky.edu.

Membership

***All memberships are based on a calendar year (January-December)** *Membership entitles you to a one- year subscription to the *Highland Sojourner*, the newsletter of the Pine Mountain Trail Conference, Inc. and a decal.

- Student Class** \$20 For those under 24 and in school
- Individual Class** \$25
- Family Class** \$40
- Individual Lifetime** \$1,000 (or \$335 for three years), lifetime members receive a membership card, decal, cap and jacket
- Contribution** \$ _____

Please **check** the membership class you are requesting.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Make checks payable to:

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