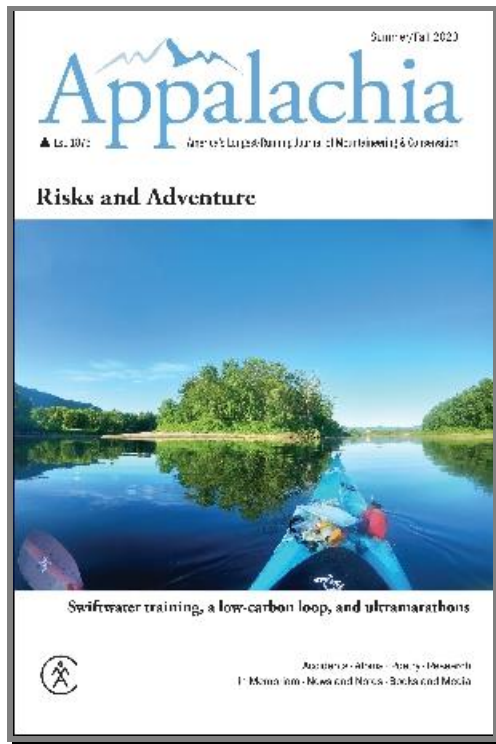


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Take A Hike!

I had to escape the noise in my head. The city, the motorcycles, cars, angry people, the daily news catastrophes. I made reservations to stay at two of the easiest Appalachian Mountain Club AMC trails to hut hikes.

On a perfect Mid-June day, my escape to the mountains began with a hike up to Zealand Falls. I remembered it as an easy 2.8 mile, trek through lush woodlands with only a steep ascent at the end. I had the whole forest to myself the entire way with only a few chipmunks, songbirds and the contemplative rush of the Whitewall brook. Two hours in, I was on a long wooden trail bridge across a lake that had not been here ten years ago. Beavers had moved in. Landscapes change! I stopped and marveled at the vast reflection of the sky, pillow clouds, Beaver Dams and the serenity of this place I was in.

I recalled reading a story about Beech trees that were walking in Southern France. Finding the hot and dry climatic changes untenable, they are migrating North, albeit slowly. Trees hike too. Who knew?

The final challenging stone, boulder ascent to the hut did not disappoint and after a four hour mostly leisurely walk, I took a nap. Just before dinner, I sat and contemplated the spectacular Zealand falls along with a few AMC trail-through hikers from Georgia on their way to Maine. Just like the Beech trees.

The next morning, I hiked back down reveling in my solitude and the silence.

I drove to my next hiking destination, Lonesome Lake (LL), located at the top of Cannon Mountain. I got my sleeping bag and backpack sorted and headed up the trail.

This was a different hike than I remembered. There was no babbling brook over smooth granite stones on my left as in previous hikes many years ago. This was a well-trod, clearly marked, blazed, steady, switch-backed, climb over rocks and boulders. By 10 am...day hikers with nothing on their backs were passing me along with a rowdy group of teens. It took 4 hours to climb the 1 1/2 mile 1000 ft ascent to LL. At the top, breathing heavily, I was on the opposite side of the lake not near the AMC hut as I had recalled from my previous hike. The trail had changed. I was exhausted. I took a nap, then jumped in the refreshing lake and gloried in my accomplishment and the stunning views of the surrounding White Mountains. The huts were filled with excited teens on their senior year overnight hike. With the help of my ear plugs, I slept like a baby.

The next morning, I asked one of the crew (college kids working at the huts for the summer) if there was an easier descent down to the parking lot. She suggested Cascade Brook Trail, a 2.5 mile descending hike with alternating flat and steep sections and lots of little brook crossings. "The bridge is out" she said "but the water is fairly low and you can take off your shoes and cross the Cascade Brook." I did not ask her where it would end up because years ago the trail ended at the parking lot. It did not occur to me that there were now several parking lots.

In a jaunty mood, I set off downhill at 7:30 AM. Rivulets and babbling brook on my right, I was following the water down. All alone again, and glad of it. The forest was fresh and greenly magnificent in the early morning shafted light, with an occasional chipmunk, birdsong and gurgling waterfall for company.

Two hours downhill later, the trail diverged with no sign or markers. After reciting a bit of Robert Frost's poem, I took the trail less travelled because, it followed the river.

Another steeper section about a half hour down, the trail ended. Disappeared into the stone filled river. Looking to the right and left was forest brush and in front, a wide expanse of rocks, boulders, and water streams. I could not turn back. I'm 74 years old. I was already tired. No wifi service on my Iphone. No sign of a trail on either side of the river.

I panicked and weakly yelled... HELP!

I took a deep breath, calmed down and decided that no matter what, if I followed the river, eventually, I would be back in civilization.

I remembered another snippet of a poem by David Whyte titled

Lost

Stand still.

The trees ahead

and the bushes beside you

Are not lost.

I stood still.

Across the river, I noticed a thin blue rope tied to two trees and thought, a human person did this for a reason. I could see upriver there was a narrowing with a series of jumpable rocks. I didn't need to take off my shoes. Still no path.

I bushwhacked my way along the bank down to the string and looked around. Several trees away I saw a beautiful blue blaze. I yelled...whoo-hoo to no one in particular and congratulated myself on my decisions, and thanked the Goddess for showing me the way.

That must have been the river crossing the croo member had mentioned. Whew! Life is good! I love this world!

The scenery became intensely spectacular as I passed through two narrow granite walls and on the other side of the river I heard and saw a huge gushing waterfall (Kinsman's falls). I stood in awe and recited every prayer of gratitude I knew and continued blithely along the path singing "Michael Row your boat ashore...Hallelujah!"

Another half hour downhill and the path turned, and ended. Again. Into the river. A second wave of panic swept over me. HELP! She only mentioned one water crossing!

The self-berating began. I'm almost 75, how stupid am I to go on a hike by myself, on changing trails, with no whistle, without a GPS, no one knows that I'm here! Only two little bottles of water, one cataracted eye and a small bag of nuts. This little self-chat was followed with the "what ifs". What if I break my leg, fall unconscious, meet a bear, have to spend the night, no one will find my rotting body for days.

I ate a few nuts, drank some water and assessed my situation. The river was loud, rushing wider and deeper now, probably due to the waterfall, and the other side was farther away. I stood still.

A few feet in from the other shore on a tree, I noticed a small horizontal piece of wood attached to a tree. A human must have put that up.

Once again, I mentally mapped out a crossing. Using my two poles, rock to boulder to rock to rotting tree trunk to rock to boulder until I reached the other side. My boots were still dry! I scrambled along the shore until there it was. The sign with the weathered, carved word "TRAIL" and an arrow going two ways. I chose the downhill one and that made all the difference.

A half hour later, I heard the sound of a distant motorcycle and I thought "What a beautiful sound!" Civilization is near!

Another half hour of rough going up and down rocks and hillocks, hoping my partial knee replacement held up, I was still simultaneously scared and utterly exhilarated by the magnificent and lonely place I was in.

Another half hour and I saw my first people! I was overjoyed to see them! They were so beautiful. They told me that I had arrived at the Basin Cascade Trail, where the river flowed over huge carved, smooth granite boulders into a series of shallow pools of sparkling green water.

Two more miles on the Pem Bike trail that was parallel to the highway, four and a half weary hours from when I started off, I got into my car.

On the drive home, the road sounded like the rushing river, and I was already lamenting the end of my last solo hiking in the woods, in this lifetime. <<[return to BeverlySky.com](http://BeverlySky.com)