

Journals and Summaries of Troop 4's Backpacking Adventures on New Hampshire's Presidential Range



Alex Croteau
Alex Hastings
Matt Bedard
Eric Buckenmaier
Nolan Hobart
Mark Hobart
Bruce Hastings
Ken Matondi
Jeff Croteau
Phil Bedard

August 12-16, 2011

Alex Hastings's journal entries

Day One – Friday

Activities/Accomplishments: the hardest hike of the trip, lunch on a cliff. Reached summit of Mt. Webster & Mt. Jackson

Weather: windy, clear, warm

Trails Taken/Miles Hiked: 6-7 miles, Saco River Trail, and the Webster Cliff Trail

Overnight Accommodations: Mizpah Hut

Food: chicken rollup, chicken and soup at Hut.

Best Memories: pulling ahead of the group

Worst Memories: the beginning of the hike, Steep trails were very difficult to climb with full pack.

Other Comments: This day had the longest & hardest hike of the whole trip.

Day Two – Saturday

Activities/Accomplishments: a shower in a waterfall, flat camping spot, Reached summits of Mt. Pierce, Mt. Eisenhower, Mt. Monroe

Weather: sunny, cool

Trails Taken/Miles Hiked: 4-5 miles, Webster Cliff trail, Crawford path, Mt. Eisenhower Loop, Mt. Monroe loop, and Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail

Overnight Accommodations: tenting with waterfall right behind a no camping sign, I had a bad spot but then a great one was found

Food: pancakes at hut, chicken rollup, beef stew (dehydrated, prepared with alcohol stove on trail)

Best Memories: Taking the best and coldest shower ever in the Water Fall.

Worst Memories: Mt. Monroe's false peak. The first peak seemed like the summit. It wasn't and we had to keep climbing.

Other Comments: This was a long day and a long hike back up to the hut.

Day Three – Sunday

Activities/Accomplishments: summiting MT Washington, Mt. Clay

Weather: cloudy, a sprinkle here and there

Trails Taken/Miles Hiked: 5 miles, Ammonoosuc trail, Crawford Path, Gulfside Trail, Sphinx trail

Overnight Accommodations: Tenting on moss above tree line on one of the only flat spot in miles

Food: oatmeal (on trail), Mount Washington food (chili, hot dog, soda, nachos), spaghetti and meat sauce (on trail, dehydrated.)

Best Memories: being the fourth person out of the group to summit Washington & eating snack bar food in Visitor's Center.

Worst Memories: Dad had to leave early because he was sick.

Other Comments: We stayed at a Mt. Washington visitor's center for an hour or so to let a storm pass.

Day Four – Monday

Activities/Accomplishments: I was the fourth one to the hut, the second highest peak Mt. Adams at 5799 feet, reached summit of Mt. Jefferson

Weather: wind up to 45 mph, pouring rain

Trails Taken/Miles Hiked: 4 miles, Glufside Trail, Loop trail

Overnight Accommodations: Madison hut, brand new, beautiful place. I want my room at home to be like this.

Food: oatmeal (on trail), pbh&g (Peanut butter, Honey & granola wrap), oriental chicken (@ hut, yum!)

Best Memories: our room and its amazing arrangement of bunks

Worst Memories: The weather, Mt Adams, and the fog because it made it seem like we were at the summit of Mt. Adams like 5 times.

Other Comments: It was a big relief to see the hut at the end of a tough hike.

Day Five – Tuesday

Activities/Accomplishments: Reached summit of Mt. Madison & made it home!!

Weather: Pouring rain not as much wind

Trails Taken/Miles Hiked: 4.5 miles, Valley Way

Overnight Accommodations: home

Food: eggs (at hut), restaurant, home

Best Memories: seeing the parking lot, a change of clothing

Worst Memories: wet boots

Other Comments: We found Mr. Bedard's truck was broken into with a broken window, and a dead battery. We had to have some repairs done before leaving. Finally **HOME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Alex Croteau's journal entries

Day 1 August 12th

Left Milford at 5:30. Arrived at 10:00 at the Webster cliff tr. Nolan, Matt, Eric, Alex H, Alex C, Mr Matondi, and Mr Hastings left first while the others transported the cars to the finish. We traveled six miles to the Mizpah hut and arrived at 3pm. Spent the night at the Mizpah hut.

I thought that the day went well and the distance was reasonable.

Day 2 August 13th

Left Mizpah at 8:00 and hiked over Mt Pierce, Mt Eisenhower, and Mt Monroe. The kids and adults split into two groups. The kids were by themselves until we reached Lakes in the Clouds Hut, and waited for everyone. We all went to find a campsite which took a long time. Eventually when we couldn't find a site Mr. Hobart, Nolan and Matt went to see if we could stay in the hut as through hikers. When they found they couldn't, they slept by themselves somewhere else. While we waited for this to happen down on the trail, I was tired and fell asleep. When I woke up the rest of our crew hiked down farther to find a really good campsite. We found an awesome site with a waterfall. This was such a relief.

I thought that during the middle of the day the communication was poor. The kids were in their own patrol and made a plan that they agreed on. We thought this was a good plan because there weren't any places to mess up on and it was a very clear day. Then when the adults caught they up overreacted and we were scolded because they did not like the plan we agreed on, even though they told us to go on our own. Other than that the day went well, the distance was easy because we were ridge hiking and didn't climb much elevation.

Day 3 August 14th

Left the campsite early and hiked up to meet everyone at the Lakes in the Clouds hut. We all hike up Mt Washington to take a picture at the top. When we got there I was disappointed because it was very cloudy and you couldn't see very much. It started raining really hard and we all decided to wait out the storm and have warm bowls of chili. Mr. Hastings left the trip with Mr. Bedard and Mr. Hobart because he wasn't feeling very good. Everyone else left to find a campsite on the Sphinx tr, after summiting Mt Clay. We waited for them until dark, they never showed up. But we weren't worried, we knew they would find us in the morning

Day 4 August 15th

We waited for Mr. Hobart and Mr. Bedard to show up at our campsite, after they slept in a different area. All of us left the campsite and bagged Mt Jefferson and Mt Adams. The weather

was cold, windy and raining. Once we arrived at the hut we were so relieved to be out of the bad weather. This day would have been a horrible one, but instead it turned out well. The hut was warm and there were girls there that we played cards with for a long time.

Day 5 August 16th

Last day, Mr. Bedard, Matt, Nolan and I hiked down to the cars first the quickest. We ran most off the way. We arrived at the cars and were happy to have accomplished this whole trip. When we got to the cars Mr. Bedard's truck had been broken into through the window, but not much was stolen only an old GPS ,which was a relief. Later we all went to the Red Parka for hot dinner.

Matt Bedard's journal entries

White Mountains Backpacking Trip

Day 1: We arrived at the trailhead at around 11 o'clock, and almost immediately headed up the trail. Alex Nolan and I arrived at the top of Mt. Webster at around 12:30. There we ate lunch and then waited for Eric and Alex H to arrive. Once they summited the mountain, We departed and then summited Mt. Clinton without stopping, and continued on to Mitzpah hut.

Lesson: Longer breaks farther apart are better when going at faster paces.

Day 2: We left Mitzpah hut at 8, about 20 minutes ahead of the adults. Alex Nolan and I were the first to get to the top of Mt. Eisenhower, where we were to wait for Eric and Alex H. Once they arrived, they decided they wanted to take a long break, and we said we would go on ahead. We continued hiking, pausing at Mt. Monroe to take a look back to see if we could see them. After that we headed down to Lakes of the clouds hut for lunch. After some time the rest of the group arrived, and after some difficulty with camping arrangements, the Hobarts and I ended up sleeping above tree line under a tarp.

Lesson: don't pick the windward side of a shelter when sleeping outside.

Day 3: The group all met up around 8 at the lakes of the clouds hut. At 8:15, We began the ascent of Mt. Washington. Alex Nolan and I made it to the top in 3044 steps and passed 152 cairns. After lunch on the top, we continued on the AT and then took sphinx trail to our campsite.

Lesson: Trash bags under your tent only work when water doesn't get on them from crevasses below

Day 4: The rain started in the middle of the night then took a break while we ate breakfast. After breaking camp we rejoined the AT and summited Mt. Adams and Mt. Jefferson, both in pouring rain and 40 mph gusts. We all met up at the madison hut, where we were relieved to be dry and to be in good company.

Lesson: My rain jacket works better when you unzipper the vents

Day 5: We climbed up Mt. Madison without packs, then went down the trail with them. On the way we learned my dads truck had been broken into, so we went on ahead with him to check it out. Only his GPS was stolen, and the window had been smashed pretty good. From there we went to a restaurant and then headed home.

Lesson: Put dirty clothes in wet boots to draw out the water

Eric Buckenmaier's journal entries

Day 1:

For me I felt the first day of our trip was the most exhausting and challenging due to all the rugged up hill terrain because we were supposed to be hiking but it felt more like rock climbing with a heavy pack weighing you down making it that much harder but then we finally made it to Mizpah hut and it looked like heaven to me because I knew there was a bed waiting for me inside and if I could have changed something about that day I would have tried to lighten my pack more to make it easier to get up the rocks and in general hiking.

Day 2:

For me the second day was not as bad as day 1 but it still took a lot of strength and endurance on that day because we summited multiple mountains which wasn't too bad because the views were really cool but the hardest part of the day was looking for a campsite which was nearly impossible but after waiting a few hours we finally found a good campsite and we also took showers in 40 degree water which was also fun.

Day 3:

At this point we were about half way through the trip and I was feeling better with hiking cause I had a new pack and it was starting to get broken in after the first 2 days and I was also losing weight from eating the food I brought so it made it feel more comfortable especially going up Washington which was my favorite mountain we summited on the trip cause on the top it was heated and they had descent food at the food court which tasted very good compared to the freeze dried meals we had been eating but we soon left Washington and split up and on the way down it was a little creepy because if you tripped and fell off to the right you'd go tumbling down the mountain but soon enough we found a good campsite yet again so I felt pretty good laying down in my chair.

Day 4:

On day 4 of our trip I thought it was the most brutal with weather conditions because we were in the alpine zone with 40mph winds and freezing rain falling down on us and we were 4 miles away from Madison hut where we were to stay for the night so for the whole hike that day everyone was tired, wet, cold, hungry, and maybe even hypothermic but as soon as I saw the sign that said we were .3 miles away from the hut I felt a lot more motivated to get going and get to the hut fast and as soon as I reached the hut I got into dry clothes and slept in my bed for a while until it was time for dinner and once I was done with dinner I went right back to bed.

Day 5:

On day 5 it was our last day which was the easiest in my opinion because the whole day it was only 2 miles of downhill hiking which seemed like a luxury to me because I was just able to keep on going at a good 1mph and managed to make it down about 4000ft in only 2 ½ hours down to the parking lot and

the we drove off to go get food from the red parka restaurant and I ordered a steak and It tasted so good to be eating good red meat after all the days of hiking and when I finally arrived back home I took a nice hot shower watched some tv and then went right to bed knowing I had a good time on the trip no matter how bad things got.

Nolan Hobart's journal entries

Presidential Range Journal

Day 1 - August 12th

We left Milford at 6:30 am and arrived at 10am at Webster Cliff TR. up Nolan, Alex, Matt, Alex, Eric, Mr. Matandi, and Mr. Hastings started hiking at 10:06 am while Mr. H, Mr. C, and Mr. B drove the cars to the finish on route 2. At the top of Webster, we set up the hammock, ate lunch, and chilled till the rest of our party arrived. The hike to Mizpah Hut was 6 miles and we arrived at 3 pm, summitting Mt. Webster and Mt. Jackson. For dinner we had chicken. We fell asleep at 9pm.

Day 2 - August 13th

We woke up at 6am, breakfast was oatmeal, pancakes, and bacon. The Crew used the Frankenguest skit to explain how to clean the rooms. We left Mizpah at about 8am and Mt. Pierce, Mt. Eisenhower, and Mt. Monroe. We ended up at the Lakes of the Clouds Hut. Also, we saw Mr. Lanciano at the hut. We hiked down the Ammonoosuc Ravine TR to look for a campsite, we didn't find one. Dad, Matt, and I ended up sleeping at the base of Mt. Washington because we hiked up to see if we could stay in the AMC Hut but we couldn't.

Day 3 - August 14th

We woke up and had oatmeal and dried fruit for breakfast. We met the other group at the Lakes of the Clouds Hut. We hiked up Mt. Washington in 1.4 miles, took pictures, and went in the cafeteria. In the cafeteria we ate hot food and waited for a storm to pass. Mr. Hastings had to leave so he, Mr. H and Mr. B went with him to the car and the two that were staying started hiking to our campsite. That day, we walked about 3.5 miles summitting Mt. Washington and Clay. We camped 0.1 miles from the junction of Sphinx. Dad and Mr. B did not make it to our campsite.

Day 4 - August 15th

We woke up at 7am. My dad and Mr. Bedard arrived, and we ate breakfast. Then, we headed to Madison Spring Hut. It was rainy, windy, and misty as we summited Jefferson and Adams. We arrived at Madison Spring Hut at about 1pm. We had lunch, and played cards, and met new friends. We went to bed at about 9:30pm.

Day 5 - August 16th

We had breakfast, oatmeal, bacon, and eggs. We hiked Madison without our packs and me and Alex practically sprinted up with Matt right behind us. Alex, Mr. Bedard, Matt, and I started hiking down to the cars. We reached our destination in about 1.5 hours, changed, and waited. Finally, we had lunch at the Red Parka, and went home.

One thing the patrol could have done better is to stick together more. One thing our patrol did well was we planned our "stove buddies" beforehand, so the food situation was organized. One thing could've done better as an individual was that I felt I didn't drink enough water the last couple days. The final push is important and I was not 100%. One thing I did well was when Alex or Eric hiked with Matt, Alex, and I, I was always the sweeper, making sure nobody was behind me

Phil Bedard's journal entries

Day 1 – Webster Cliff Trailhead (AT Route 302 near Crawford Notch) to Mizpah Spring Hut

We dropped off the scouts and Bruce/Ken at the trailhead, and then Mark, Jeff and myself proceeded to Appalachia Trail Head on Route 2 to drop off two cars at the end. Had a bit of car trouble on the way, including a dead battery, but with some jumper cables we were able to limp along to drop off the cars. We came back in Mark's car to the start. As we cruised through Crawford Notch, just up the road from our trailhead, we passed two attractive young women backpackers in need of a ride. Striving to adhere to the Scout Law to be Helpful, I proceeded to stop, but Jeff and Mark were adamant that we stay on schedule, so my humanitarian gesture was over-ruled (I bet the chivalrous Mr. Matondi would have supported a stop). We soon parked and started the steep hike up the Webster Cliff trail. Jeff had a boot/blister problem, so we started slow. So much so that the two young ladies we left stranded had quickly caught up to us on the trail. We apologized for not giving them a ride to the trailhead. It turns out that these women, hereafter known as the "**summer bunnies**", were from Vancouver and were Vancouver Canuck fans. When we met up with them later at the hut, Mark asked for a staged photo with them pretending to strangle his Bruins capped head. They were good sports. One of them even donned her Vancouver Canuck shirt for the staged attack photo. These two ladies were the first of several very friendly groups and families we met during the trip, who were traveling a similar path/schedule. Jeff frequently insisted that we depart our camp site each day at the same time as the summer bunnies, so that we could do our good turn daily, and offer "protection" in case of bear, moose or rabid chipmunk attack.

Another interesting family was a Dad and his two daughters, 6 and 8 years old. They were also traveling the whole range, and the girls each had to carry a pack. We saw them several times and were impressed that they never complained and always had a smile while hiking this tough trail.

The day's trail was very tough, particularly the beginning, where we climbed about 2000 feet over the first mile and a half. The first couple peaks were small, but offered good views of the Notch. The older boys went quickly on ahead to the hut, while the car shuttling group caught up to the younger boys and Ken/Bruce at the first summit.

We ended the day at the Mizpah Spring hut. We had a great chicken dinner, pancake breakfast, and good night's sleep in a bunkroom that we filled with our party of ten. The staff at the hut was very. We particularly enjoyed their "Franken-Guest" skit, which gave funny instructions on cleaning your guest room, and a comical reminder to tip the staff. All in our party were very tired from this tough first day's hike and were all in bed early.

Day 2 – Mizpah Spring Hut to Ammonoosuc Ravine camp site

Day 2 featured the best weather of the trip. It was sunny and clear, with incredible visibility. We departed the hut, and proceeded to climb several smaller peaks, including Eisenhower and Pierce, before we reached the summit with the best view: Mt. Monroe. We sat on the grassy summit and enjoyed the view for an hour or two until all members of the party caught up, and we then descended the short distance to the Lake of the Clouds Hut. Being late in the afternoon, we decided to begin our descent down the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail in search of a suitable tent site. We quickly learned that our tenting plan was optimistic, as we found no suitable sites as we descended about 1000 vertical feet. We found a couple feeble tent sites, but were booted out by the hut master, who happened to be ascending the trail as we began to set up. At this point we were all pretty tired. The thought of climbing back up in the hope that we might be able to work out a hut stay was not very enticing. We went a bit further downhill and then stopped to replan. We decided to send a party of our most fit backpackers back to the ridge top, to investigate possibility of our staying at the Lake of the Clouds hut. Mark Hobart, Nolan and Matt obliged, and started their climb. They phoned in an hour later; no can do. They decided to try their luck camping down the Dry River Valley Trail, and our lower group decided to proceed a bit further down the ravine in search of a campsite. Both groups succeeded beyond expectations. My lower group found a great campsite, with a great valley view, and tucked below a scenic waterfall that we used for an evening refreshing shower. We had a beautiful moonlit night.

Earlier in the evening, as we were resolving our campsite issues, both groups ran into Mr. Lanciano and his friend Patty. We had texted them our intended location earlier in the day, so they decided to take a day hike in our area. Both groups ran into them along/near the Ravine Trail. After conversing a bit, Mr. Lanciano, always being concerned with our welfare and morale, left each group with a refreshing carton of Italian grape juice. What a guy.

Day 3 – Ammonoosuc Ravine camp site to Sphinx Trail campsites

The day started (for most of us) with the ½ mile (and steep) climb back up to the ridge. We met the Hobart/Nolan/Matt party at the hut. After filling our water bottles, we proceeded to tackle Mount Washington. At this point, our fine weather was beginning to deteriorate, as the clouds started to encircle the summit. We made it to the peak before the rain moved in. Since we were so high already at the hut, the push to the summit was not all that bad. We had a nice group photo with the troop flag at the summit, and then went inside for some civilization (junk food, coke, chili, dogs, etc). The food was a nice change of pace from our dried backpacking food. Jeff “McGyver” Croteau quickly found a new utility for the bathroom’s electric hand dryer, and the troop proceeded to dry out our socks in quick fashion.

At this point, Mr. Hastings suddenly took ill, and fearing that a later need for descent might prove difficult due to remoteness and worsening weather, he decided to leave the mountain ridge while he safely could. Mr. Hobart and myself decided to escort Mr. Hastings to the base using the Mt. Washington shuttle service. The shuttle dropped us off at the Pinkham Notch AMC Visitor's Center. At this point, Bruce was feeling well enough to travel, so he arranged for the AMC shuttle to take him to Mark Hobart's car in Crawford Notch, at which point, he could drive home. This decision to depart was difficult for Bruce as he had his heart set on completing the journey. But he should note that he tackled the hardest part of the trip, and he ascended to the highest point on the Presidential Range. The part he missed was all downhill....kid's stuff.

After Bruce's travel home plans were settled, Mark and I started to plan how we would rejoin the main group. Being the thrifty (or "cheap") scout leaders that we are, we decided to skip the shuttle ride back up, and instead do the manly thing and hike back up. Before we left, we had sensed that we might do this, so we told the troop our intended route in advance, and said we would call in our progress via cell. And if cell service was lost, they were to not worry and continue on if they did not hear from us by morning. As we knew cell service would eventually return as soon as both groups returned to the ridge, and that we would eventually catch up with them. Thus begins the most challenging part of the trip for me.

It all started easy up the Great Gulf Wilderness Trail; a gentle hike on a wide carriage path along a beautiful river. We made great time at the start. We left at 130PM, and by 430PM had covered about 5 miles as we approached the base of the Presidential Range ridge, below Sphinx Col. At this point... after having hiked about 7 miles that day...and many vertical feet, we began to wear out, and the trail became obscenely steep and obscure. By 7pm we reached the base of the Sphinx Trail. We knew our comrades were camped somewhere along this 1 mile long trail that leads to the top of the ridge. However, at this point, we'd be leaving the last flat place to camp. We decided to use the last 40 minutes of daylight to press ahead up the steep trail, all the while, calling out to the group somewhere ahead in the distance in hopes of gauging how far ahead they might actually be. The acoustics were awful... since was always a series of cliffs on the trail above us that we had to yell over. In addition, we were hiking along a loud cascading stream. We heard no response. At 730PM, with light fading, I decided to make a final 5minute solo dash on ahead, in hopes of hearing where the troop might be ahead of us. I got as far as I could safely go in the declining light, and still heard nothing. The trail was way too steep and slick to attempt a night hike, so I used the last shadows of light to rejoin Mark, and come up with a plan. Mark refused to give up his hard fought climb to return to the flat base of the Sphinx Trail to camp. "I'll sleep on this boulder I'm standing on before I walk back down" he said. I then climbed through the insanely steep and spruce-choked edges of the trail, in the vane hope of finding a flat piece of land for a tent. Just as the day light was about to

totally give out, I found an extremely small pedestal shaped piece of mossy flat ground, which was probably the top of a flat boulder wedged on the side of the steep mountain side. It had a bunch of 5 foot scrawny spruce trees sticking from the moss that we managed to pull out. It was just big enough to erect my 1man tent. There was no room on any side of the tent to sit, as it dropped, 4 feet on all sides. Just as we set up and darkness set in, the skies opened up with rain. Fortunately, Mark also had a tarp which we set up so we could stay dry while organizing our gear and eating dinner. At this time, the Italian grape juice was a welcome treat.

Mark and I then crawled into the tight quarters of my 1 man tent for a night's sleep. No more is to be said on the next 8 hours.

Day 4 – Sphinx Trail camp sites to Madison Hut

At first light, we broke camp, had a couple quick bites, pumped up our bottles with fresh water, and proceeded up the cliff. We continued to shout up every hundred yards, until after about 40 minutes, we saw Eric Buckenmaier peek over the edge. We made it. We then walked into one of the prettiest mountain campsites I had ever seen. The group's camp was in a small grassy hollow, surrounded by huge boulders, and with a gurgling underground stream that opened in pools here and there. The camp also afforded great views of the high ridge a short distance away; a perfect place to camp. The site easily held all the group's tents. Half the group was still sleeping when we arrived; needless to say Mr. Matondi was still among the snoring. The weather cooperated for an hour or so, as the rain let up briefly enough to break camp and eat breakfast.

Upon departure, we quickly reached the ridge, and then the rain and wind returned with a vengeance. Within an hour we had 30-40MPH sustained winds, sideways rain, 45F temps, and fog cutting visibility to about 50 feet. For the next few hours, we crested a series of the Presidential High Peaks, including Jefferson and Adams. I noticed that without gators to properly shed the water off my leg, my waterproof boots were slowly collecting water that ran down. Once in the boot, the gore-tex material kept the water in. By the time the day ended, I had 1 inch of water INSIDE my boots. This was a good lesson learned for the next wet adventure.

All scouts and leaders handled this adverse weather admirably. No complaints to be heard. As the day wore on, all were focused on the warm hut and hot food awaiting us at Madison hut. Late in the afternoon, we approached a trailhead which offered an option of 0.5 miles up to Mt. Adams....or continue straight for one final mile to the warm hut. Despite the wet and cold, the troop decided to tackle Mt. Adams. The older scouts were granted permission to slog on ahead while the adults and some scouts proceeded at a more casual pace. We figured that we would either encounter the older crew at the summit, or they would continue along the trail, and

down from the summit to the hut for the final mile. However, as we reached the summit, we found not one, but two trails continuing down, and both listed the Madison Hut as a destination about 1 mile away. We were unsure which trail the older scouts took, and we wanted to ensure we swept along the same path in case they had trouble. Therefore our party decided to split in two in order to sweep both trails. Jeff and Mark Hobart proceeded down the more easterly trail, while Ken Matondi, me and Eric took the more westerly leaning trail. We later learned we had the lucky draw, as Jeff/Mark's trail was crazy steep.

By this point in the late afternoon, I was becoming very chilled by the wet, wind and cold. I found I could keep sufficient body heat so long as I moved, but to stay together, we frequently had to stop, and each time I began to shiver pretty good. Fortunately, I knew the hut was less than a mile away, and I felt my condition would not be dangerous in this short time. None of the others seemed to be bothered as much by the cold, especially the other adults; likely due to their thicker layer of internal body insulation. At this time, I also became extremely thankful for the backbreaking work that trail crews had done to erect the pyramid shape trail cairns along the way. Calling these paths "trails" is a big misnomer. There was absolutely no discernable "path" for about 90% of the day's hike. We were literally walking on rock piles nearly all the way. It was as if the Almighty took a cubic mile of 2 foot boulders, and decided to flip his wheelbarrow over these mountains. It was nothing but a jumble of rocks that had to be hopped from one to the other. The rocks were also covered with lichens, which when wet (which is nearly all the time up here) become very slick.

So back to those rock cairns.... There was so much fog and rain on our descent of Mt. Adams that I frequently would lose site of the trail. Each time this happened I stopped and carefully scanned the rocks around me. Sometimes it took a few minutes of straining my eyes through the fog to spot the next cairn. But every time I found it. At each cairn, we waited till all three caught up, and then proceeded to the next cairn. The trail designers did a great job placing these cairns at the right intervals. However, it became very apparent that we all had to pay attention to the trail very carefully. For if one started to daydream, even for a few minutes, there would be significant risk of losing the trail. About an hour after leaving the summit, we again returned to the main ridge trail.

Now we had just a half mile to go. We were all very tired and cold, but knowing that comfort was around the corner, we picked up the pace down the homestretch. Within a half hour, we could hear the whir of the hut's generator through the trees. We entered together and encountered the rest of our party who arrived 15 minutes earlier. We checked into our room...which had bunks for ten to accommodate our party, and stripped off our soaking wet clothes. The room quickly became a tangle of hanging, stinking and sopping clothes. While we took lots of effort to hang things out to dry, we were ignorant of the fact that nothing really can

dry when the humidity is 100%. The best we could really do was just wring out as much water as we could.

After putting on the last of my dry clothes, I was surprised to see that the youth of our hiking party had quickly left our bunk room. What force could get these tired scouts to energetically freshen up and leave the comfortable bunks in haste? That would be testosterone. A travelling party of high school age girls was staying in the adjacent bunk room. For the rest of the trip, our scouts gave new meaning to the scout law that "a scout is friendly" as they hammed it up with these girls for the remainder of the trip. We had great food that night, and we enjoyed just hanging out in the warmth. In the evening, a thru-hiker gave an interesting speech on his trail experiences. We were happy to also accommodate a soggy hiker who was in desperate need for a place to sleep that night, by offering Bruce's bunk at the hut. The hiker later contacted us by email to express thanks, and to ask for a photo of us to document the memory.

Day 5 –Madison Hut to Appalachia Trail Head (with side hike to Mt. Madison)

After a good night's sleep, and a hearty breakfast, we packed up our still wet gear. But we decided to leave our bags at the hut while we did the short half mile hike up the final Presidential Range peak; Mt. Madison. Without the pack weight, we were able to almost fly to the top. The weather had still not let up from the previous day. It was still raining, very windy, and foggy with temps were about 45F. It took about 30 minutes to get to the summit. For a short time, I was on the summit by myself, taking in the awe-inspiring mountain weather raging about me. After a couple minutes or so, a young couple emerged from the fog and joined me. As we chatted, I soon learned that they started at the trail head that was our final destination, and where my truck was parked. As we spoke, they told me that there was a commotion when they left, as police cruisers were there cleaning up a truck that had been broken into. Now there were about 100 cars in that parking lot, so I figured the chances of it being my truck were pretty remote. When I asked what type of car it was, they responded it was a grey Chevy Colorado. My heart sank. Ironically, the couple said that they had met dozens of people since they started their hike, and had not mentioned the car break-in story to anyone until they met me. What are the odds?

Once we all got back to the hut, I told the crew that I would go on ahead with the older boys to get a head start on cleaning up my truck. Matt, Alex and Nolan joined me on our quick descent down (~2 hours). Fortunately, my car was parked at a steep angle, and the window that the hooligans broke was on the side that was facing down, so that none of the several inches of rain from the past two days had gotten in. A police cruiser had found the break in before the rain storm hit, and was nice enough to pick up all my scattered belongings and put it in a large plastic bag, which kept it all dry. Also fortunately, it turned out that the only thing stolen was a cheap GPS. All the extra troop camping gear stored in my truck, along with tools, paperwork,

cd's, etc, was ransacked, but not stolen or damaged. I then cleaned up the broken glass as best I could, and taped a plastic bag over the broken window. By then the rest of the troop emerged from the trail to the cars.

I remembered now that I also had to deal with my dead car battery. On my way down the mountain on, I called my mechanic who advised me not to drive 200 miles on a jumped battery, as it could damage the alternator. So after Jeff jump started me, we went to nearby Gorham NH in order to replace my car battery. After the quick repair, the troop continued toward the North Conway area, where we stopped to celebrate our return from the wilds for some civilized food at the Red Parka Pub. After a great meal and some war stories, we returned to the cars for the long loud (that darn plastic bag) ride home. The great Troop 4 Presidential Range Backpacking Trip was a big success.

Trip Notes:

All 5 scouts earned the Backpacking Merit Badge; the culmination of several years of backpacking trips, training, and preparation. These were the first scouts to earn this badge in the troop's history.

Observations on how we could have further cut our pack weight:

- Extra electronics (we all didn't need to bring a ½ pound camera)
- Questionable luxuries: camp stool, oversized first aid kit, too much fuel.
- A couple too many stoves
- A bit too much snacky type food

Things we should have brought:

- more moleskin
- better research for non-hut camping spots as we discovered tent camp sites are very sparse up here

Things that proved very handy:

- alcohol stoves (versus white gas)
- lightweight tarp
- instant coffee (vs. ground/perked)
- our waterfilters
- our lightweight dehydrated menus

The group has consolidated the pictures from 5 cameras onto one DVD. Call if you want a copy.