

May 30, 2013

Jane Murray, Secretary
Site Evaluation Committee
Dept. Of Environmental Services
29 Hazen Drive, Box 95
Concord, NH 03302-0095

Dear Ms. Murray:

Please publish the attached article from today's local newspaper to the Timbertop Wind I, LLC docket, 2012-04.

Thank you.

Mary Ann Sullivan
Temple, NH

Main | 01
Thursday, 30 May 2013

On the history trail

Celebrating 90 years of Wapack Trail and its founders

Friends of the Wapack Trail celebrate 90 years: 21-mile path from Ashburnham to Greenfield lined with old stories and majestic views



Courtesy Photo

The Wapack Lodge in New Ipswich, built by Marion Buck and Frank Robbins in 1924, was a popular destination for hikers and skiers using the Wapack Trail. On Saturday, hikers will visit the site of the lodge, which was destroyed by fire in 1993, as part of the celebration of the trail's 90th birthday.

By Dave Anderson

Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

Ninety years ago, two farmers — Marion Buck of New Ipswich and Frank Robbins of Rindge — looked at the open ridgelines between Mount Watatic in Ashburnham, Mass., and North Pack Monadnock in Greenfield, and envisioned a hiking trail that could attract visitors from the Boston area. Most of the ridges were bare at the time, with cattle grazing on the heights and a commercial blueberry farm in operation on Temple Mountain. So it wasn't difficult for Buck and Robbins to lay out a 21-mile route, which Buck named the Wapack Trail, using the first syllables of the peaks at either end of the trail.

"Marion was a good woodworker, a champion at using an axe," says Rich Blanchette of New Ipswich, chair of the trails committee for Friends of the Wapack, the organization of volunteers that maintains the trail. "A lot of men wouldn't take her on. And when you see old pictures of Frank, he almost always had an axe in his hands. They laid the trail out in just one year."

The Wapack Trail was completed in 1923, the year that work first started on the famous Appalachian Trail. "We believe it's the first intrastate hiking trail in New England," says Mitch Call of Sharon, president of Friends of the Wapack.

The trail was an immediate hit, according to Blanchette.

"It was becoming popular even before it was finished," he says. "Marion and Frank built the Wapack Lodge at the midpoint of the trail, near where the Windblown ski area is now. As things went on, she made a living running the lodge."

Buck, who later married and was known as Marion Davis, and Robbins and other friends essentially took care of the trail in the early years, Blanchette said.

"A lot of famous people used it and some stayed at the lodge. One was Benton MacKaye, who was the planner and originator of the Appalachian Trail. He was a teacher at a school in Shirley, Mass., and he'd bring up boys from the school to work on the trail."

The trail, some of it running over private land with the permission of landowners, was used much less during and after World War II. Over the years, trees grew up on many of the ridgelines and sections had become overgrown and difficult to follow. For a while, it was taken over by the Worcester, Mass., chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club. "It was kind of an outlier for them," Blanchette says.

In the 1980s, Friends of the Wapack was formed.

"We brought it back, improved maintenance and marking," Blanchette says of the Wapack Trail. "We've been working on securing right of ways. We don't hold any land ourselves and a lot of the trail was on private properties. We've been partners with a lot of different conservation groups."

Call says Friends of the Wapack now has more than 850 people on its mailing list. The group has no official membership requirements or dues; everyone who works on the trails is a volunteer.

"Each mile of the trail has a trail steward," says Call. "That's someone responsible for doing the simple pickup and maintenance, and asking for more assistance if it's needed. It's nonpaying, nonrecognition, but very satisfying to those who do it. We generally have a number of people standing in line."

Call says people enjoy the trail because it's easy to hike in sections, with parking areas located on several roads the trail crosses. Hikers can leave cars at the northern end on Old Mountain Road in Greenfield, at Miller State Park and the former Temple Mountain Ski area on Route 101 in Peterborough, on Temple Road in Sharon, along Route 124 near Windblown in New Ipswich or on Route 119 in Ashburnham. While the trail is no longer as open as it was in 1923, there are still many outlooks and sections of open ridgeline offering views to the east, west and south.

“People really enjoy those long reaches of ridge line,” Call says. “There’s solitude and beautiful views.”

Some of those views could be impacted in the future if a proposed wind turbine project in Temple and New Ipswich goes forward. One of the proposed turbines sits on the Kidder Mountain trail, a side trail that was originally laid out by Benton MacKaye and his students in the early years of the Wapack Trail. The Friends of the Wapack has taken no stand on the proposal.

“The towers would be on private land,” Blanchette said. “We’re not speaking for or against the project itself, but we are watching its impact. Our focus is on the trail.”

To celebrate the trail’s 90th birthday, the Friends are holding a series of hikes, each at a different section of the Wapack. On Saturday, Al Jenks, the owner of Windblown ski area, will tell stories about Marion Buck Davis and the Wapack Lodge, which was destroyed by lightning in 1993, long after it ceased operation.

“Al has been there since the 1960s,” says Blanchette. “He got to know Marion, who lived across the road. We’ll meet at Windblown, walk over to the cellar hole where the lodge used to be, and Al will talk about its glory days. Then we’ll go over to Windblown and hike on the recently relocated section of the trail there.”

Saturday’s event will start at 9 a.m. Hikers may park in the lower lot of the Windblown ski area. The hike will be about a 3.5-mile round-trip.

Other excursions later this year will be on the Temple Mountain state reservation on Aug. 3, when former ski area owner Mike Beebe will talk about the family owned business; on Sept. 7 at Miller State Park, in conjunction with the annual hawk watch; and a morning hike up North Pack Monadnock on Oct. 19, prior to the Friends of the Wapack annual meeting.

More information on the trail may be found on the Friends of the Wapack website, www.wapack.org.



Courtesy photo

Frank Robbins, second from left, and Benton MacKaye, right, with three students from the Bridgeman School in Shirley, Mass., made up the crew that built the Kidder Mountain Trail, an offshoot of the Wapack Trail.