

Summer 2007

# Heart of New Hampshire

*Celebrating the Heart & Soul of New Hampshire*

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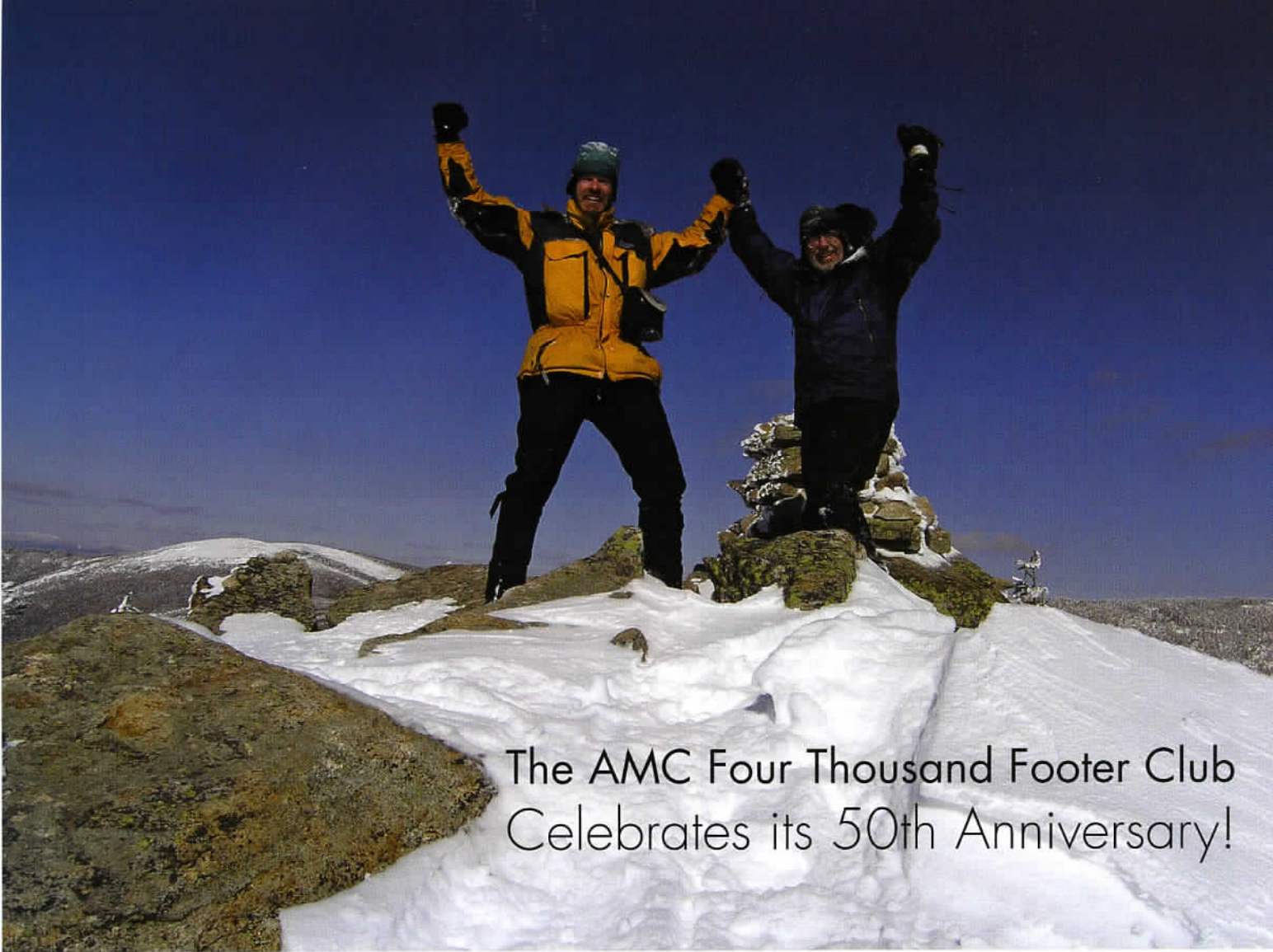
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## The AMC Four Thousand Footer Club Celebrates its 50th Anniversary!

By Bob Manley

Four thousand feet; Three quarters of a mile straight up; Forty-eight mountains in New Hampshire qualify as being at least that high, and over 8000 people have hiked to the top of every one of them. These people are an exceptional group of people belonging to a very unique club, The AMC Four Thousand Footer Club.

On April 14, 2007, The AMC Four Thousand Footer Club celebrated their 50th anniversary, while inducting a record number of new members, 337, including three dogs. Hundreds of hikers from all over New England, and beyond, gathered to honor this illustrious group for their achievement and to induct them into this unique club.

All right, lets think about this for a moment. To join this club you need to find a trail that leads to the top of a mountain in New Hampshire. That mountain must be at least 4,000 feet high, and may be as high as 6,288 ft. You must then walk that trail to the top of the mountain and back - a distance which can range from as little as 6 or 7 miles to as much as 13 or 14

miles round trip, often climbing between 3000 and 4000 vertical feet before reaching the top. That's once. Now you need to do it 47 more times, and this represents only the minimum requirement necessary to become a member of this elite group.

*BobGordon: Bob and Gordon Achieve the Summit of West Bond*

In addition to celebrating the climbing of the White Mountain 4000 footers, the club awards people for climbing all 67 of New England's 4000 footers, including mountains in Maine and Vermont, the New England Hundred Highest, and the Northeast 111 club.

As if this list of high altitude achievements was not enough, many climbers have gone on to complete each of these hikes during the winter as well. To qualify as a winter hike you must begin your hike no earlier than winter solstice and end it no later than the spring equinox, the criteria established by Miriam Underhill, the inventor of the Winter Four-Thousand-Footer game.

At this year's event, one celebrated hiker climbed all 48 White Mountain 4,000 footers and all 67 New England 4000 footers in every month of the year, twice! Another climbed all 67 New England 4000 footers in just one year; and, there was yet another who's claim to fame was to have juggled from the top of every summit. In years past hikers have been celebrated for achieving one list or another from every compass direction, or at midnight. The list of lists to be achieved is only as limited as one's creativity, dedication, and iron will (and, some might add, degree of sanity).

For the truly inspired hikers, how about climbing the 770 New England 3000 footers? That's right, a very limited number of truly dedicated hikers have completed this list. Some of the less well know lists include; "52 with a view," a list of peaks below 4000 feet with good views, or "New Hampshire Fire Towers," a list of mountains in New Hampshire topped with a fire tower. For the less ambitions, how about the "Twelve peaks of the Belknap range?" The AMC 4000 footer club does not officially recognize these lists.

As you can see, once you start counting and making lists, the sky's the limit (pun intended). But before deciding to join this elite club, I suggest you make plans to retire that easy chair and remote control, you're not going to be needing it where you're going!

This truly unique activity has a name - peak bagging. A concept that first took shape in the White Mountains coined by a Dartmouth College librarian and mountain-climbing enthusiast named Nathaniel L. Goodrich who published his list of peaks "bagged" in the December issue of *Appalachia*, 1931. Over the next twenty-six years, numerous others took Goodrich up on his challenge and the list of peaks was soon expanded from Goodrich's original 36 White Mountain summits to as many as 51. Peak bagging was born.

It wasn't until 1957, when a dedicated group of AMC members decided to form the AMC Four Thousand Footer Club, that an official list of summits was created. At that time there were forty-six in total. Shortly after the formation of the club, Roderick Gould and 40 others summated North Hancock, Gould's 46th White Mountain Summit, making him the first person to be inducted into the AMC Four Thousand

Footer Club at the club's first awards dinner - held on April 28, 1958. Since then the actual list has changed slightly and grown to include 48 summits.

Along with Mr. Gould on that fateful day on the summit of North Hancock, was Barbara Loo (Barbara Richardson at that time), also a charter member of the club. Barbara and numerous other early finishers of the many lists of summits were in attendance this year at the 50th anniversary dinner, and helped celebrate the club's achievements, honor its new inductees, and share their hiking experiences with club members both new and old.

Ok, now you are probably asking yourself, why. Why do all these people pursue what to some might seem like an impossible or even ridiculous goal? Truly, the answer to this question is likely to be as varied as the number of people who have done it.



*Barbara Loo, one of the Founding Members of the 4000 Footer Club, shares the moment with attendees and inductees. Photo by Bob Manley*

Quite simply, if you have ever spent any time hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, it's not

hard to imagine what draws people back. The beauty and grandeur of these mountains alone is reason enough to inspire you to come back. In fact, most people will tell you, it's not about the lists at all . . . the list simply becomes a method of choosing new and different places to hike. Often people find themselves having hiked the majority of mountains on a given list before becoming aware that such a list existed at all.

The primary inspiration for the creation of the 4000 footer club was to introduce hikers to some of the lesser-known hikes and summits of the White Mountains, thereby reducing the pressure on the more popular and well-traveled summits, like Mt. Washington or the other mountains of the Presidential Range. At the clubs inception, such peaks as Hancock, Owl's Head and West Bond were trail-less and practically never climbed.

Hiking some of the more popular trails in the White Mountains on a sunny summer day the crowds can sometimes rival that of your local mall on a pre-Christmas weekend. Ok, maybe I am exaggerating a little, but if you are looking for a little

solitude and the peace and tranquility of a wilderness experience, you are not likely to find it on the popular White Mountain trails in the summer.

The crowds of summer tops the list of reasons why many people pursue the 4000 footer lists in the winter. Having myself only just recently completed the 48 White Mountain summits in the winter, and never having hiked a 4000 footer mountain in any other season, I would be one of those people. Among other reasons to hike in the winter, no bugs and crystal clear views.

#### *Club patches*



No doubt one of the reasons people pursue these lists is the incredible sense of accomplishment you feel with each summit climbed. Speaking from my own personal experience, the memory of the day I completed my 48th winter White Mountain 4000 footer will be etched into my brain forever. On March 17th 2005, my hiking partner, Gordon Dubois and I reached the summit of West Bond, our 48th summit, after a very long and arduous trek through many miles of unbroken snow. This moment concluded for us a five-year effort and will always be remembered as one of the finest achievements of my life. For a brief moment, this was my Everest, and will remain so until new goals and even greater accomplishments take its place.

Thanks to the dedicated members of the White Mountain 4000 Footer Committee, these achievements do not go unrecognized. As I sat in the audi-

ence on the evening of the 4000 Footer Club's 50th anniversary, I watched the faces of each person as their name was called, each one coming to front of the auditorium to receive their official recognition of their accomplishments. It was never more clear to me why so many people pursued these goals. Some approached the dais leaping with joy and excitement. Others simply walked calmly down the aisle. In every case, however, it was perfectly clear the pride each felt as they were handed their official scroll.

For some, this achievement will be the conclusion of a lifetime goal. For others it will be just the first of many. Nevertheless, the moment seemed equally important to both.

If you would like to learn more about the 4000 footer club you can do so at [www.amc4000footer.org](http://www.amc4000footer.org). To learn more about peak bagging and some of the many other lists being pursued go to [www.home.earthlink.net/~ellozy](http://www.home.earthlink.net/~ellozy). To learn more about my personal experience hiking the White Mountain 4000 footers in the winter go to [www.winterhiking.org](http://www.winterhiking.org).

#### *Early Hikers*

