Woodsmoke
Letter from the President

During the last weekend in February, several groups of students, alumni, friends, and members of the Outdoor Programs staff spent the weekend at Dartmouth’s Second College Grant, a 27,000-acre tract of forest given to Dartmouth in 1807. We kept busy with snowshoe tours, lessons in bushcraft, ski trips, wood carving lessons, dog sledding trips, and storytelling in the Grant’s cozy cabins. What made the weekend especially enjoyable for me was seeing students listen to and learn from seasoned alumni and staff members who have spent decades roaming through New England’s forests. At night we heard veterans of the wilderness recount past trips to the Grant and shared a story once told by DOC legend Ross McKenney, the builder of Moosilauke Ravine Lodge and Woodcraft Advisor for the DOC from 1937-1961. I left the Grant inspired to share my experience through the Outing Club and to continue learning from students, staff, and time spent outdoors.

This year the Dartmouth Outing Club focused on involving a much larger and more diverse group of the student body in outdoor activities. While this may seem like a daunting task, there is nothing more fun or rewarding than bringing friends into the outdoors. At the forefront of this effort is the DOC First Year Trips Program, which serves as most students’ welcome not only to Dartmouth but also to the mountains and rivers of New Hampshire. After Trips, many students come to their first Cabin and Trail Club feed, paddle Hartlands with the Ledyard Canoe Club, spend a night dancing at Moosilauke Ravine Lodge, or learn basic climbing techniques at Rumney with the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club. Both the Mountain Biking Club and the Winter Sports Club have grown significantly in the past year, increasing the number of beginner trips they run. Several WSC leaders have even organized a number of physical education classes aimed at introducing students to the sport of backcountry skiing. Dartmouth’s location—as well as DOC resources such as the Lodge, the Grant, the Skiway, Outdoor Rentals, and our own chain of cabins—make it especially convenient to spend time outside any time of the year.

The end of 2012 also presented a new opportunity for the DOC: an extended, six-week-long winter break, during which members planned incredible trips a bit further from Hanover. Ledyard paddled through the Florida Everglades, Cabin and Trail backpacked in Canyonlands National Park, the Winter Sports Club explored the backcountry skiing around Jackson, Wyoming, and several Schlitz-funded expeditions traveled to areas including Peru and Big Sur. At the end of winter break, Cabin and Trail ran several week-long trips on the Appalachian Trail between Hanover and Moosilauke, sleeping in the DOC cabins each night. These trips served as a great way to expose the club to new outdoor destinations and invite new members to spend some extended time with the DOC. As we gear up for a busy spring I am excited to get more of Dartmouth involved in the DOC, whether to bring friends to Moosilauke for a spring hike or to Ledyard to try stand-up paddle boarding. I also can’t wait to keep learning from my peers and other outdoor enthusiasts. If you get the chance to stop by Robinson Hall this spring or summer, we here at the DOC would love to learn what you have to share. We hope the stories in this Woodsmoke inspire you to keep learning about the outdoors and to share it with friends.

Yours in the Out-of-Doors,
Gerben Scherpber ‘14
Dartmouth Outing Club President

Woodsmoke Magazine: A Publication of the Dartmouth Outing Club
Edited and Designed by Laura Bryn Sisson ‘13
A Superior Adventure...
Words and Photos by Anya Gleizer '14
A Superior Adventure
By Anya Gleizer ’14

I was sixteen years old when I first heard of A Superior Adventure, the hiking and paddling expedition group comprised by couple Matt and Hannah Abbotts. At that age I was sheltered, loved, cut off from the outdoors in the concrete grid of New York City. I was contrary, like most teens, and blind to what I had; I idealized adventure, danger, hardship and the “wild.” With heroes like Christopher McCandless and Everett Reuss, I could think of no better purpose than to become lost in the wilderness, completely alone, and naively assumed that their sorry fates somehow could never befall me. It was at this hot-headed age that I came across the Abbotts, who were so unlike ‘dreary’ city folk that they almost seemed to belong to a new species of human altogether. They had dreadlocks; no one I knew then had dreads. Matt had just finished hiking the Appalachian Trail; I had never heard of the AT. Hannah owned an African hedgehog and a puppy! And both of them did adventures, adventures with a capital ‘A,’ large-scale voyages into the very heart of the wildlands I had never been given the chance to explore. It is easy to imagine the extent of my admiration for the couple.

That was in 2008. In 2009 the couple circumnavigated Lake Superior—hence the name of their group—and I followed their website jealously, still in high school, doing SAT prep and waiting for a chance to experience what I then termed as “something real.” We kept in contact; I went to Dartmouth and let myself loose in the woods with great relief. And in 2010 came the email. Matt Abbotts was inviting me, Anya Gleizer, to accompany them on an adventure in the summer of 2012 to circumnavigate Lake Baikal in remote Siberia. An apt comparison, for those of you who enjoy politics, would be Barak Obama calling you up and offering you a summer internship in the Oval Office. It was impossible then, or for the following two years, to believe my good fortune.

The DOC and Ledyard Canoe Club as well as the Dickey Center provided generous support for this wild idea. Only four people had been recorded circumnavigating Baikal on human power—if we completed our mission, I would become the youngest. These records, of course, completely disregard the Siberian natives who have completed the feat many times before but never had their names publicized on the internet or in literature.

The planning was tedious—thousands of back-and-forth emails, gear comparisons, measurements, numbers. There were pleas to national parks to let us travel through their boundaries, pleas that were largely ignored due to the disorganization and corruption of the Russian National Park system, and pleas to my flustered mother: no, this trip was not a death wish, everything was being carefully and meticulously planned. It would be my Great Adventure. The more planning went into the trip, however, the less like an adventure it began to seem, and I could not wait for the moment the sponsor-haggling stage would end and the adventure would begin. By spring 2012, the plans were laid out and the organization seemed faultless.

As usually happens with the most carefully-laid plans, everything went completely differently from what we had envisioned. The company sponsoring and providing our boats apologized and told us they could no longer ship the boats to Russia. Several days before our departure, the boats were shipped instead to Long Island, New York. Matt and Hannah had not slept; the chaos that is New York, a home that I had come to grudgingly accept, was, for them, a blur of excess noise and light, and stress. We had three days to figure out shipping three seventeen-foot-long boats to remote Siberia, with not much money or energy to spare. May be it was naïveté but in truth, I found the hang-up exhilarating—this now felt like a real adventure! Adventures don’t run smoothly; they involve problems to face, and unexpected challenges to overcome. Trouble is inherently part of the definition. My excitement annoyed the Abbottses, who had outgrown thinking that problems were “fun.”

The night before our flight, we camped out on the airport floor with 3 giant felt-wrapped kayaks and a mountain of gear, looking like the survivors of a sporting goods store hit by a tornado. People periodically came and sat down on the kayaks, mistaking them for benches. One man actually refused to believe us when we begged him to get off our luggage.

When the flight was announced, Matt went to talk to the attendants—he had heard that sporting goods could be transported for an additional $175. We were putting all our hopes on the chance that the 5-meter packages would count as “sporting goods.” The woman Matt talked to agreed and accepted our money without a hitch, so we dragged the kayaks over. I saw her eyes widen until you could see all the whites around the iris. “This is your sporting equipment, sir?” she asked, her eyebrows shooting into her door. The manager was called but after a bout of haggling and managing, the boats and the people both made it on the plane. I do not remember the flight at all.
Once in Moscow, the boats again became the center of our frenzied, sleep-deprived thoughts and I found that my portion of the planning had been nothing—Matt and Hannah had taken care of all the little details. The chaos started when our boats crawled slowly out of the baggage claim in Sheremetevo Airport, teetered with their bows high in the air over everyone’s heads, and then came crashing to the floor. People began to point and laugh. We awkwardly dragged the boats through customs; the security guards smirked, “Smuggling whiskey?” but didn’t stop us. In Moscow my command of Russian meant that the time had come for me to step up—I planned, called, translated, and argued. We ran across the city under mountains of heavy bags, hoisted the boats onto friends’ balconies, rode in the pitch-black beds of several trucks, and took a 5-day train ride across the country where we were accosted by drunk, ode-recitng Belarussian tank-drivers with a fondness for pig fat, which they pressed on us with: “eh-nerr-gee! You need eh-nerr-gee!”

And then the boats got lost.

Two weeks we spent waiting for them in the dirtiest hotel room Irkutsk had to offer, with blood on the drapes and a fist-shaped hole in one of the walls. Finally, after threatening to call non-existent lawyers to sue the freight-train company responsible, and reeling off dramatic monologues about famous American athletes who were sponsored by the FBI—in the process acquiring an impressive command of Russian obscenities—I received the reluctant message that the boats were in Irkutsk. We discovered a dirty train yard in which the train cars stood, still loaded, while a group of men sat drinking and doing nothing. It was then that I felt the first triumphant stirrings of newfound strength of spirit. Egged on by the Abbottses, I, who have never been able to say “no” to anyone or cope with confrontation, marched up to the man in charge and laid out my entire newly-learned vocabulary of swear words. The effect was unexpected and satisfying. The men started to move to and fro. The one in charge started to argue but I cut him off, called his boss, then called my imaginary lawyer. I felt a power I had never suspected I had welling up, with a burst of timid pride. By 4 p.m., we were on our way to Lake Baikal.

When the first hint of blue appeared like a whimsical apparition of coolness in the 102º F heat haze, I caught my breath. There was land, there was the line where the land ended, and there was blue. That line was like a circumference to the normal life that had encircled my existence for 20 years. Outside that line was something else. Lake Baikal is one of the biggest lakes in the world, more than 395 miles in length and with a depth of more than a mile. It contains more than twenty percent of the world’s surface freshwater, and all of it was a sparkling blue blanket spread before me like an indigo tapestry. I will never forget how much I was struck by the unlikelihood of what was happening: it was magic, as tangible and straightforward as if a dragon had leapt out on us on the dusty road. I have always held by Sam Keen’s sentiment: “Forests are enchanted enough without elves or hobbits. Did you ever see a ruby-throated hummingbird?” But now it seemed all the more relevant and real. Adventure was the stuff of fantasy, and here I was at the start of one.

I pushed off first from the pebbly beach in Listvyanka as Matt filmed me. My world disassembled into movement, water, sun, and the gold flakes of light they scattered around me. The first three days were blissful, unreal, and also, silent. Coming out of the mad rush of my last semester at Dartmouth I felt myself swell as if inhaling breath long withheld. I could think, lose myself in the towering mountains and sapphire blue sea, live fully in my nerves and my senses.

I was very concerned about being a hindrance to the others—the Abbottses are professional kayakers, and I felt I was nobody. I paddled so hard that my arms shook when I set up my tent in the afternoons, but I said nothing, glowing with the same pride I had found at the Irkutsk train-yard. In fact, “saying nothing” became the norm. Most of all, at that time, I was afraid to fall in their eyes. Conscious all the time of my “nobody” status, I made myself into a nobody. The others did not encourage me to speak out, but seemed almost to forget that I existed. We ate and slept and paddled separately and rarely talked. I’ve been told that being self-sufficient and independent are important parts of what is termed “adventure travel” in the outdoor culture; there was nothing unusual in what the Abbottses were doing, and I think they believed that I was operating under the same assumption. I, however, was a novice and had never heard that adventure had rules. And as the days wore on I grew more and more confused—why were we not stopping to climb the towering peaks that seemed so enticing from the water? Why were we not talking to the locals, getting invited into warm homes and playing with kids, eating Baikal’s fish and hearing its music? Why, finally, were we acting like strangers when, in my inflamed imagination, our lives depended on each other and we were fellow castaways—the
last remaining humans floating in a wild, deserted sea? My trepidations grew as the fairytale wilderness of green mountain and blue lake gave way to the developed southeastern shore where garbage-strewn beaches reached out tentative arms, only to be cut off by steel railroad tracks. We had to paddle an arc around the infamous Baikalsk paper mill because the acrid fumes it spews over the water are impossible to breathe. Near the mill, the fish and the animals disappeared; only the relentless melancholy calls of sea birds remained. I was beginning to see that the magic of the untouched wild-lands stood on a house of cards. Apathy and carelessness could bring it tumbling down, creating that “real world” with real-world problems that I had worked so hard to escape.

In retrospect I should have tried to communicate my feelings to the others and in doing so made a step to bridge the cultural gap between us. I was beginning to realize that, to me, human relationships and communication are everything. They lie at the root of all adventures, and also all the problems that we face as humans in our relationships with each other and our environment.

When I finally got up the nerve to ask the Abbottses some questions they replied willingly: they were athletes and worked together like teammates, or “like a well-oiled machine.” This idea clashed horribly with my sense of adventure. Adventure was in its essence unpredictable; there was nothing machine-like or “well-oiled” about it. And what really bothered me at the time was the idea that machines do not run with extra parts: they do not need them. I half-registered my role in this comparison with resentment and embarrassment. Childishly I wished for a storm to cook up and throw us into chaos, wished that in its midst, I’d somehow save Hannah’s life and gain acceptance and friendship. Instead I accidently dropped their tripod in the lake, which did nothing to improve our relationship. As the silence grew increasingly chilly, I began to wish that a pirate (with an impressive mustache) would kidnap me. I cannot describe how much I craved contact, a human smile or a hug, or a tussle, how much I wanted a break in the routine. Adventure sport, it seemed, is all about routine. We ate our separate breakfasts, packed up camp with speedy efficiency (everything had a specific place in the boat, so packing was a formula) and set off. We paddled for nine or ten hours with a brief stop to eat some dried fruit, then pulled in for the night. Up went the tents and we dropped off into our separate exhausted sleep. Repeat.

It was silly of me to feel discontented—the views we were seeing, the fresh mountain air cooled to a delicious chill by the lake, the fish, eagles, herons, and waterfowl were a gift that so few get to enjoy. But I felt something lacking from my dream adventure like chapters missing from a familiar book. I realize now that the other two must not have felt this discontent, happy with the real world and with each other, and must have not understood my frustration.

We had been given shiny new plastic boats by P&H, a high-end British kayaking company. We had carbon-fiber Werner paddles that baffled with their incredible lightness and toughness. We had dry bags, and meals in packets (mostly rice with ketchup), and tons of fancy gadgetry. We passed local fishermen, their skin sun-browned, limbs bare and wiry from a lifetime rowing these waters. Their carved wooden rowboats with heavy wooden oars would not have looked out of place in the 16th century. They ate and drank what the lake gave them, fish and clear water, and their eyes crinkled into smiles of incredulity when we paddled past in what, to them, must have looked like children’s toys instead of boats, so colorful and low in the water. They called out to me and reached out their strong hands to pull me towards their boats, pressing me with fish and other gifts. They were happy to reach out to strangers who had also wagered their lives on Baikal’s unpredictable waters. In Russian culture, community and camaraderie are important in the struggle to stand up to opposing forces, whether government or nature.
I could not help making a mental comparison: them to us, us to them. Our expensive gaudy gear and the security it gave us, their dented, much-repaired boats that put them at constant risk from wave and wind. We had so much and yet shared so little—we did not even share our meals—while they had nothing and gave away everything they had happily. We were foreigners, coming here to engage in an expensive sport, the sort of vacation inaccessible to most of the world; they were here to scrape a meager living by fishing, their life a mixture of brutal labor and constant danger. I was beginning to reassess what I had envisioned would be my “great adventure.”

The Ushkanyi Islands—four tiny rock outcrops in the middle of Lake Baikal—are a secret sanctuary for one of Baikal’s unique treasures, the nerpa seal. Nerpas are the only true freshwater seals in the world, and exist nowhere else but Baikal. Their funny clown faces escorted us like a guard of honor as we approached the only place where the seals crawl out on land. We decided to go to the islands on separate days—or, more realistically, the Abbottses decided and I brooded and waited for them in my lonely tent. The next day I awoke to drizzle and a wall of fog. I could not see my targets. 100 feet from the shore, I could no longer see that, either. I paddled into the fog, holding tight to a compass bearing and the hope that I wouldn’t miss the tiny islands completely and end up five miles out in open water. But fortune was on my side and in the middle of the lake, the mist lifted. I paddled into swimming-pool-azure waters with a brilliant sun warming my back. I had devised a plan to approach the seals—hidden in my cockpit was a bag of fish I’d gotten off a fisherman. When I got to Dlinny Island I pulled my kayak into the reeds, cut one of the fish open and lathered all the guts and juices over my wetsuit. The idea was that in the black neoprene, smelling like fish, I would look and smell similar enough to the animals so as not to alarm them. I am a biology major, so it is embarrassing to admit this unscientific method of animal observation. Slimy, and quickly beginning to reek in a way I hoped would be attractive to the nerpas, I crawled over the rocks to where several hundred of these rare, endangered animals lay sunbathing.

At first, seeing what must have looked like a terrestrial, evil-smelling brother, a large male seal signaled the alarm. With a series of inelegant plops the nerpas hurled themselves into the water. Their curious faces resurfaced and they all stared at me. I stared back, determined to get them to like me. With a lot of patience and ant bites I managed to crawl right up to the nerpa seals; they grew used to my company and ignored me. It felt great, sitting on the warm rocks, surrounded by animals that barely any humans ever get to witness and feeling myself, finally, accepted as part of a group. The fact that the group was a herd of black, tuber-shaped animals was bizarre for only a minute or two. The mutual proximity and trust was enough. I paddled back that afternoon dazed with my own little adventure, which had felt so different from the routine, and spent the rest of the night trying and failing to deodorize my wetsuit. But the adventure, I was to learn, had not started yet, for after we skirted the north end of the lake, restocked on food and headed off again, Matt and Hannah Abbotts disappeared.

We had talked about the possibility of separating, for I had started paddling ahead of the other two, partially to give them space, partially to make sure I was not left behind, and partially because it is less lonely to be technically alone than it is to be with a group of which you are tangibly not a member. I had grown more aloof, more used to silence, and had started noticing more human impact on Baikal’s ecosystems: the garbage that floated up to my boat, the occasional iridescent peacock pattern of oil on the water, illegal nets, and twice—this all but broke my heart—dead nerpa seals, washed out on the beach with their flippers tucked under their chins and their large empty black eyes staring out of puppy faces. The gross injustice of man’s apathy enraged me and I paddled harder, finding more evidence of
environmental degradation everywhere I looked. Matt had told me that it is only too easy to get permanently separated by weather or chance. I had said I understood, but continuing to feel that my presence was unwanted, did not impose it on them.

And then there came the afternoon when the orange and green of the Abbotts’ boats never appeared behind me. I set up camp in a visible location, and, bemused, went through the familiar procedures of the evening routine. The next morning a clean dawn of linen-blue broke over the east side of the lake. I was still alone but still not worried – the weather had been perfect, and the Abbottses were most likely filming excerpts for their movie and enjoying the unbelievable view. Our plan for accidental separations was to wait for the other party until noon, then paddle for three hours and stop. I idled until one then set off reluctantly, more worried as the day wore on and no colorful boats graced my horizons. As if in warning of misfortune the weather changed, clouds rolling in like white dragons off the mountain peaks. They lashed out white fiery tongues, as if meeting in battle, and the mountains disappeared behind them. It grew cold. I had reached a rock promontory that reached as far out into the lake as any point I could see, and without waiting for the three hours to pass, pulled my kayak out onto the shore.

I could feel the anxiety I had been ignoring slowly rising in me like vomit and pushed it down. The best way to prevent panic and make rational decisions in the wilderness is to go through small specific routines to ensure your own safety, shelter, and food. Knowing that you are capable of securing these three things makes you feel more confident and in control and helps resist succumbing to panicked stupidity—a state in which many fatal decisions are made in the backcountry. I pitched my camp as conspicuously as possible, lit a “flare” fire, and then pulled together an enormous sign read, “I AM LOOKING FOR YOU! WAIT HERE” out of logs on the shore. I made myself some tea and sat watching the horizon and going over all the possible options for what had happened. Clouds boiled over the ridge of Mt. Molokon under which I was camped, and unbidden thoughts crowded through my mind. A Japanese tourist had been brutally killed and robbed in a Baikal town earlier that summer. There had been an escaped convict from the prison in Angarsk. I was not worried about myself; in the five weeks of paddling in silence I had learned to be self-sufficient. But in their real absence I was reminded that Matt, Hannah and I were a team, even if we did not act like one. It began to rain and my fire went out. A fishing boat passed far off in the grey mist and I waved, shouted, and blew the whistle on my life jacket to no avail.

The next morning arrived, misty, overhung and dark. By that point I was sure something was wrong. Either the Abbottses had somehow missed me and were now ahead, puzzling out where I was, or they were behind and in trouble. I had to choose my course of action. I could choose to go ahead, banking that they were fine and had continued their forward progress, or go back and search for the couple. If I went back I could lose precious time and my chance of ever catching up. If I went ahead and they were in trouble somewhere behind me without their translator and mediator, I thought, I could be bartering their lives. How I expected to help if they were indeed in a life-threatening situation, I do not know. At that point I just saw right and wrong, and knew that despite everything we’d gone through, we were a team and I was responsible to them. I knew what it felt like to be alone and isolated, unable to speak to anyone. I knew that three was better than two. Miles of empty wilderness stretched around me in the clinging fog, and I knew I couldn’t cover that distance by myself in time to help, so I did what then seemed logical: I turned back and began to search for Matt and Hannah, or a human with a motorboat to question and ask to help me search more quickly. It turned out I chose wrongly.

The water was choppy but not unruly, the drizzling rain was a soft, persistent murmur. I paddled under the roots of the colossal mountains I could no longer see and felt their presence like those of concealed giants, gazing down in disapproval. Inadvertently I had accomplished, I thought with a wry laugh, what I had so dreamed of in high school. I had become a human with a motorboat to question and ask to help me search for Matt and Hannah, or a human with a motorboat to question and ask to help me search for Matt and Hannah. If I went back I could lose precious time and my chance of ever catching up. If I went back I could lose precious time and my chance of ever catching up. If I went ahead and they were in trouble somewhere behind me without their translator and mediator, I thought, I could be bartering their lives. How I expected to help if they were indeed in a life-threatening situation, I do not know. At that point I just saw right and wrong, and knew that despite everything we’d gone through, we were a team and I was responsible to them. I knew what it felt like to be alone and isolated, unable to speak to anyone. I knew that three was better than two. Miles of empty wilderness stretched around me in the clinging fog, and I knew I couldn’t cover that distance by myself in time to help, so I did what then seemed logical: I turned back and began to search for Matt and Hannah, or a human with a motorboat to question and ask to help me search more quickly. It turned out I chose wrongly.

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Anya paddling on Lake Baikal.
side me.

My boat scraped the bottom and I stepped warily out of it onto a pebbly beach. There was a motor-boat tied up, a few nets stretched out to be mended, and a hut crouched improbably at the very base of the mountain in the middle of nowhere. From the chimney the smoke stretched lazily towards the clouds. Although I had been hoping to discover the Abbottses and didn’t see their boats onshore, the place was inhabited, so I cautiously took a few steps towards it, leaving the kayak on the beach. A face appeared by the window. Then five men, dressed in camouflage and skins, with hunting knives at their belts and snaking prison tattoos on their arms, filed out and stood staring at me. All of them were missing teeth. One was missing a finger, and also carried a rifle. “Oops,” I said softly. We stood there staring at each other in bewilderment. Then a small, angelic-looking blond boy slipped out from behind them. I felt myself relaxing. If they were about to rape and kill me they would have to move the kid first, and then I’d have time to make a dash for my boat and escape. And they seemed almost as afraid of me as I was of them.

In Russia it is unusual for women to go on long wilderness expeditions; more often than not, women are left at home while men go accomplish brave feats in the wild. These men had not seen anyone else in months and were as taken aback by the sudden appearance of a blond girl in a wetsuit—still smelling lightly of fish—as I was to see them. “Zdrastvuyete,” I said uncertainly, a polite form of Russian greeting, “your health, good morning.” The silence broke and suddenly the men were rushing around, asking me questions, carrying my boat, and, to my alarm, me, into the camp around their hut. A wolf-dog barked and was sworn at, my pleas to be released back to the water were ignored, and I was given a board topped with some steaming smoked fish. The one in charge, whose name was Mikhail, plied me with food and questions. How was a woman alone in the wilderness? I tried to explain but found my story disappearing behind the one he was swiftly constructing for himself—I had been abandoned “by Americans” and he had found me starving, by myself, in the woods. Insisting that I had a boat full of food, and that I was lost, not abandoned, did little to dampen his certainty.

In Russia, reality has a curious mutability, evident in both old family stories and the functioning of our government. In America, fact is fact; in Russia, we are more flexible. So I could do little as Mikhail molded me into a feral damsel-in-distress, and I found myself ravenously hungry, even though I had eaten my portion of instant oats that morning.

Mikhail introduced me to the men: his brother, his second son, his friend—on the run from the police for stealing bricks off their railroad, who was lying low here for a little while—and his eldest brother, a shaman. The shaman, I was told, was deaf, but ran up Mt. Molokon every morning to pray for weather and abundant fish. He had traveled throughout Mongolia and Tibet and was taught traditional Buryat shamanism by an elder from the gods’ world. It took me a little bit to digest this information. The Buryat, an ancient Slavic-Asiatic people who have lived on Baikal’s shores for millennia, were persecuted under communism but continue to live there to this day, practicing an ancient polytheistic religion. The shaman had a face so lined it resembled a topographical map of the area, roughened to a cinnamon color by years of sun. Within the folds were two strikingly blue, Asiatic eyes. Eyes like this are a wonderful endemic trait of the Republic of Buryatia—Mongoloid in their slanting, refined shape, blue from the presence of old Russian genes. The little boy, I learned, as Mikhail ushered me into the hut, was his grandson Kirill.

“In America, fact is fact; in Russia, we are more flexible.”

“Where’s his father?” I asked politely.

“Sitting.” In Russian, ‘sitting’ is a euphemism for serving jail time.

“What? In jail?!” I couldn’t help it.

“Where else?” said Mikhail, laughing happily. “In Russia, everyone is sitting.”

The hut was tiny, made of logs and spray foam insulation, and had no furniture but a woodstove and a crate that served as a table. Furs and dirty quilts spread out on the remaining floor space, and I realized that all six of them must sleep there in a heap. Kirill, I learned, had been sent to his grandfather for “re-education.”

The man with the missing finger, Mikhail said, had lost it to a nerpa seal pup who had gotten tangled in their nets. When he had tried to feed it condensed milk, the suffocating, terrified animal had bitten off his finger, and his wedding ring with it. So Serafim, he told me, had left his wife and went to live with his brothers under Mt. Molokon.

“Do seals often get tangled in fishing nets?” I asked, concerned for the wonderful animals that I had gotten to know on the Ushkanyi islands.

“It depends,” said Mikhail. “They usually rip through the fishing
“I’m a bachelor too now,” cut in Serafim, waving around his finger stump.

“It was a sign!” said the shaman, emerging suddenly from his folds of skin and silence. “It means you had to leave that b—!”

His un-shaman-like phrasing of this ‘omen’ shocked a little involuntary laugh out of me. Soon we were all laughing. The bachelor stretched out seductively on the wood-pile and stared at me with one eye, as the other eye didn’t seem to work. Apart from Mikhail and the nine-year-old Kirill, all of them had done time and had taken refuge in this remote wilderness to live like wild men, unrestrained by the law. They had twelve semi-wild horses that they let loose on the mountain and occasionally ate when times got rough, and they hunted two of Baikal’s most protected species. It was funny to watch them gallantly trying, and failing, to cleanse their speech of profanities for my sake.

The bizarreness of my situation had knocked all other thoughts from my mind but as I began to settle down I remembered that Matt and Hannah were still out there, possibly hurt, and began to plead with the poachers to help me search for them.

“A lady! Lost in the taiga!” fussed Mikhail, ignoring me and stirring more wild currant leaves into my tea. “Of course you’re frightened, eat, drink, rest, we’ll decide what to do later.” The process of deciding ‘what to do’ took all day, and of course was a man’s job, so I sat and ate salt fish and played with Kirill. Serafim taught me how “true Siberians” eat omul—catch it, slice it open, take the guts out and then rub salt in and eat. It tasted delicious and salt-fresh, like expensive whitefish sashimi.

Meanwhile, the bachelor was suggesting that we get engaged.

“What? Now? But I don’t know you at all,” I said, trying to be polite and not offend, but offer rational reasons to postpone said marriage.

“Why not? You’ll have plenty of time to get to know me!”

I looked painfully to my boat and then tried to imagine what would happen if I said goodbye to my American Ivy-League education and became a poacher in the mountains of Siberia, the prize woman of four convicts and a shaman. This scenario, though it would have captured my imagination in high school—especially since one of them did have an impressive mustache—somehow seemed less appealing as a reality. The “bachelor” gave me a wedding gift, a pair of fake Adidas sneakers imported from China with the misspelling “Baykal” on the side. I’m presenting the sneakers in turn to

nets, but the seal nets hold them just fine.”

“You hunt the seals? But for what?”

“Hamburgers.”

“It sure beats bear or horse!” laughed Serafim, who was mending some nets by the side of the hut. Hamburgers, made out of the only fresh water seal in the world.

“Are you allowed to hunt the nerpas?” I asked, baffled.

“Are you allowed to piss in the forest?” he answered. Point taken.

Mikhail poked me in the ribs. “That there,” he said, pointing at his Buryat brick-thieving friend, “is the greatest hunter you will ever meet. Can track anything. Brings in more sable a winter than any man.”

I looked at the Buryat who was mixing vodka into his morning tea, at the guns on the walls, the nerpa nets, and the furs on the floor. I had stumbled into a poacher’s camp. Still, I felt a lot safer here than I had before. Mikhail’s big, reliable presence seemed to fill the whole cabin and reassure me. He reminded me of Winnie-the-Pooh, with prison tattoos. The last man was younger and introduced himself only as “a bachelor,” so I never learned his name.

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It was already evening when the poachers agreed to help me search for my team. Mikhail packed me into his boat, attaching the kayak on a leash behind and we sped back across Khary Bay to where I had last seen the Abbottses. We met a fishing party from Irkutsk, four men in two tandem inflatable kayaks, who had seen them.

“What, the two foreigners in colored boats? They passed here days ago! At that rate, they’ll be three days ahead of us,” said the oldest man, who was their leader.

We passed some more fishermen and all of them had seen the conspicuous red and green of the couple’s kayaks come and go. The realization dawned on me slowly, and Mikhail looked at me pityingly. Somehow, the Abbottses had passed me, and left me behind.

We said goodbye on a long stony shore. “If you want, you know,” said Mikhail kindly, “you can stay with us; we could use a woman around.” I declined, but gave him a hug, which made his rough features soften in surprise and embarrassment, and then he turned on the motor and sped off. I was alone again. I paddled for a while and found yet another fishermen’s camp. It was a large family with kids, and lots of questions. Happy to be amongst people once more I settled in for the night with them.

The party of four fishermen from Irkutsk were headed on a route that ran the west side of the lake from Severo-Baikalsk to a fish-canning station called M.R.S. When they caught up with me, they recognized me as the girl who had been huddled in Mikhail’s boat, separated from her team of foreign kayakers. I learned that they were a family. The eldest was named Ilya Fedorovich, accompanied by his son Fedor, his son-in-law Oleg, and his nephew Timofey.

“A girl like you shouldn’t travel alone,” said Ilya Fedorovich, looking at me with concern.

And that was how I found a new team and four unlikely friends on the shores of Lake Baikal.

From then on, everything changed. I was accepted without question into their group and paddled with them for the rest of the day. The weather that had been a cold, rainy, misty mess, blessed us with sunshine. The warm sun remained high and uncovered for the remainder of my trip with Ilya Fedorovich and his family. It was like a sign of good fortune. The guys were interested in me, listened to what I had to say and told interesting stories in return. I found myself gushing words that had been so long withheld. We paddled together, talked, sang songs, and laughed. That was strange to me. Even stranger, as we pulled up on the beach for the night and I started to make myself another jetboil of rice and ketchup, Ilya Fedorovich looked at me incredulously.

“Are you trying to eat by yourself?” he asked. “From now on, if we are a team, we share everything.”

It involved more sharing on their part than on mine – they had cookies, bread, cheese, fish, salami, and vegetables. I had instant oats, rice, ketchup and tea. But no one complained and I felt that they were glad of my company. It was a strange and amazing feeling.

We spent the last third of the trip together, paddling past blue mountains, herds of horses, resorts, coal-tankers, and sea caves. Learning mainly from Ilya Fedorovich, I began a new outdoor education. He could not understand going outside to beat records, or accomplish great athletic feats to attract sponsors.

“Look at me,” Ilya Fedorovich would say, pointing at his own bare chest. At sixty he was as fit as an 18-year-old boy. “What do I need? I don’t need these suits, or fancy paddles, or any of that stuff.” We had traded paddles earlier and he was impressed by the lightness of the Werner paddle, while I had struggled to exhaustion with his heavy aluminum oar.

“I need this!” he said, and swept his sun-browned arms wide as if to encompass the jumble of mountain peaks, razor-sharp and majestic, reflected perfectly in the mirrored waters of Baikal. “I need some lads I can rely on, and these strong arms, and a couple of fish, and this,” he said, scooping up some water to let it fall sparkling back into the lake. “I’m not too fond of cities. In cities people don’t know each other. You know what I mean by know? Out here you can really find you know the lads you’re with, and that,” he paused, “is the biggest part of adventure. You see all this—” he indicated the lake, the mountains, “—you will never know it all, but you begin to. And you begin to know yourself and your friends as well. You never know what you will discover in yourself, just like you never know what storm Baikal will cook up for you. That is the adventure. The not-knowing, and the coming to know.”

I mulled over these words as a twilit calm settled over the evening and my senses. It was very clear and I could see all the way over to the other side of the lake, where the outline of the Holy Nose Peninsula loomed like
I could see where I had come from, all that distance traveled, all those days of silence— I could see it all by just sweeping my gaze across the still, lightly breathing landscape. The peace was profound. And it was suspended by a different kind of silence, the amiable silence of friends who have no need for conversation, the drip, drip of water from our paddles setting a rhythm to our strokes.

This section of Baikal, Ilya Fedorovich said, would be their final lap in an attempt to kayak around Baikal over a succession of years. He could not fathom why we had come to try to do it in one piece— “when you paddle so fast, you will miss everything! Baikal is the blue eye of Siberia. You cannot know it all at once.”

After they completed this tour, not I but Timofey, who was 17, would become the youngest person to my knowledge to circumnavigate the lake. But I was beginning to see that there had probably been many more such unrecorded young men before him, and, what’s more, it didn’t matter. I was determined to finish my circumnavigation anyway and the four of them agreed to continue past their original destination of M.R.S to finish the circumnavigation with me, all the way to Listvyanka. We stopped in M.R.S for ice cream in the only café, which bore my name, Anyuta. That ice cream was the best thing I’d ever tasted.

Ilya Fedorovich was a retired mountaineer who coached a children’s outdoor camp and went adventuring in the summer. He had an impressive mustache and looked like the pirate I had imagined kidnapping me on the other side of the lake. As our end-point grew nearer I began to worry about what I would do afterwards. The goal of circumnavigating Baikal had been so long set in my mind that it was inconceivable that I might ever complete it. What would I do? What would I say if I found the Abbottses? Based on sightings by fishermen and locals I supposed they had finished by now. Where would I go?

“Don’t be stupid,” Ilya Fedorovich said, “you’ll come to our place and then we’ll go mountaineering. The summer’s not over yet!”

“Yeah!” quipped Fedor, “it’s not every day you fish a mermaid out of the lake! We want to show you to our mom or she might not believe us.”

“Coming home,” Ilya Fedorovich said. “That’s another adventure! There is nothing that is inferior about home to here, but you must come here to see that. The superior adventure is coming to know your whole life, and to love it.”

I was so surprised at him using Matt and Hannah’s logo for the word-
My hardest send ever was my last climb on my last day after a month of sport climbing in South Africa, just hours before I got on a plane and flew back to the United States. “Send” comes from “ascend;” it means you cleanly completed the route without falling or relying on your gear. If the rope hadn’t been there, you would still be at the top.

Sending is the adventure in sport climbing. It is the alpine mountaineer pushing to the summit, the trad climber halfway up a multi-pitch when the sun starts setting. Sending is a state of mind, a state of flow. It is total immersion in the experience of moving up the rock, when your mind is empty and your body is engaged, and everything below you falls away.

It was with sending in mind that I conceived of my climbing trip in South Africa. I had one month after the Environmental Studies FSP and a vision of uninterrupted sport climbing. The goal was to clip a lot of bolts and push my sending grade—an adventure in the true spirit of sport climbing. I got funding from the Schlitz Fund and the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club Adventure Fund, convinced Morgan Curtis '14 to join me, and rented an old Toyota Tazz from a guy in Pretoria named Henk.

For a one-month trip, it seems like we climbed everywhere. We visited Waterval Boven, where huge red cliffs at the lip of a valley boast the best sport climbing on the continent, and the technical face climbs come with dramatic evening thunderstorms and friendly dogs that sleep under your hammock at night. We went to Swaziland, where my sister is attending an international school, and climbed the few bolted routes that make up the country’s nascent climbing scene.

We drove south to Cape Town and climbed at granite crags tucked around Table Mountain, where you can see the Atlantic and Pacific oceans hugging the peninsula on either side. We visited Montagu, in the wine lands of the Western Cape, where the best climbers in the country go to project the hundreds of short, bouldery sport routes at steep crags.

Throughout our adventures in all of these places, I thought about sending. I built back my endurance from the ground up and pushed my limits. But since we changed locations so frequently, I never learned the climbs well enough to send anything hard. My approach to the trip became an extended version of a head game that climbers often play—I psyched myself up, remembered that having expectations keeps you from achieving them, and finally embraced the journey for what it is, releasing my attachment to the end goal of sending.

Letting go of sending let me embrace what were ultimately the best moments of the trip, the real adventures. We hiked Table Mountain, lived days without going inside, cooked over open fires, and slept in renovated stables at old guest farms. We bouldered on blue beaches, battled baboons halfway up a cliff, and climbed in a sandy cave with new friends by firelight as Bob Marley played on speakers in the night.

On the adventure that wasn’t sending, we learned a lot. Morgan started the trip a beginner, but developed her technique enormously,
built solid leading skills, climbed her first multi-pitch, and went bouldering outside. I got a chance to compare my experience and background within the DMC to a whole new climbing scene, and realized with appreciation that our little club has prepared us for the wider world of hard sport climbing. We both developed the incredibly valuable skill of learning a new climbing area from scratch; we made friends everywhere and got to explore a whole country’s climbing scene in just weeks.

The last day of the trip, Morgan had left and I was climbing with my sister at an obscure area in the north. With no guidebook to indicate difficulty, I was trying one last time to send a hard route I had blindly gotten on three days before, and had been thinking about ever since. When I sent it on the last try, drove to the airport, flew home, and discovered online a week later that its difficulty made it my hardest send yet, it seemed intuitive that I would achieve my original goal after a long process of realizing our journey was really about everything else.
While on a whitewater kayaking trip to Ecuador this winter, I joined a mission to paddle a waterfall called Chuchaqui Falls. According to paddling lore, ‘Chuchaqui’ is the local word for ‘hangover;’ the falls are supposedly named because a kayaker was in that state on the first descent. The falls are located on the Rio Verde River in the town of Rio Verde, about half an hour from the city of Baños. Here, the river forms a “punch bowl” waterfall that drops 60 feet into a moving pool. The pool quickly widens into a bowl with undercut walls on either side. High above the pool, the walls come together, almost touching. From the pool, the Rio Verde then flows out and over an un-runnable 262-foot waterfall called el Paílón del Diablo: the Devil’s Cauldron. Chuchaqui Falls would be impossible to kayak if not for a jumble of rocks that jut out from shore and into the moving pool below. The rocks form a ledge that provides a crucial place to stop before washing over the Devil’s Cauldron.

The geography of Chuchaqui Falls presents serious risks and challenges to paddlers. At water level, below Chuchaqui Falls, the undercut walls can trap a paddler underwater. El Paílón del Diablo makes exiting the river at the rock ledge a must. When exiting from the rock ledge, the overhanging walls make it impossible to hike or climb in and out. To set safety for the initial paddler, you must rappel down to the barrier rocks. To get everyone out at the end of the run, you have to either ascend or be pulled out. In tackling these challenges having a skilled crew is a must. Running the waterfall with me were Andres Reyes and Lucho Granizo, who guide for Geotours, as well as long-time visitor to Ecuador Charlie Watt. These three had run the waterfall before. My good friend Justin Crannell, a young, skilled paddler named George Lokken, and I rounded out the team. On shore we had the support of fellow kayakers and travelers Jeff Clewell and Laurie Rogers, as well as some Geotour guides who had the day off.

The first four of us to run the waterfall that day were Charlie, Andres, Lucho, and me. We all had relatively clean lines; although we flipped when we hit the bottom after the falls, we stayed in our boats and rolled up in the pool below. Andres’ line was a little more interesting: he broke his paddle on impact but still managed to roll up with a grin on his face. George and Justin were the last two to run the waterfall. They both got
kicked left when they hit the water, pushed into the undercut wall. The current ripped George’s paddle from his hands. After many hand roll attempts, he swam out of his boat and was scooped up by Lucho while I retrieved his paddle.

When Justin hit the water, he dislocated his shoulder and swam from his boat while drifting into the left wall. We had safety boaters in the pool but they could not get to him before he got sucked under the left undercut. Justin was held underwater for 30 seconds and had to swim, with one working arm, underwater, back into the pool where he was able to grab onto the bow of a waiting safety boat.

After getting Justin to the rock ledge we quickly realized that Justin’s shoulder was going to make ascending difficult. Andres ascended out and joined Charlie, who had ascended up after his run. On shore they rigged up a mechanical advantage system. Below, Lucho and I helped Justin get into a harness and tied him into the rope. Andres and Charlie, with the help of Jeff, Laurie, and our friends from Geotours, hoisted Justin out. Once Justin was out we sent up our boats and paddles and then ascended out ourselves. I was the last person out of the bowl and while alone, waiting for my friends to send me back down the ascenders, I had a moment to reflect.

Looking up at the waterfall and at the walls of the bowl I felt awe and appreciation for the power of nature. I wondered how many people ever get to do something like what we had just done and get to experience a place like the one I was standing in. On the heels of these reflections, the strongest emotion I felt was gratitude. I was grateful that my friend Justin had made it out from under the wall and I was grateful for the work our team did in getting him out of the punch bowl. I also thought about how lucky we all had been to experience this special place and how we had gotten there. Overwhelmingly, I knew it was through the help of others.

None of us who partake in outdoor adventures would be able to accomplish much of what we do without the help of others. I am so grateful to the DOC and to the Ledyard Canoe Club who taught me how to paddle and nurtured in me a love for the outdoors. I am also grateful to the many other people who have helped me along the way in my time paddling outside of Dartmouth. My experience at Chuchaqui Falls will remain a poignant reminder to me of what people can accomplish when they work together as well as a source of inspiration for me to continue to help other people, as others have so often helped me.
A Western Winterim

Words and photos by Andrew Milligan ’14 and Joanna Schneider ’13

The Mission: Explore the climbing possibilities of the American West by visiting two iconic destinations.

The Plan: Bomb across the country in a beat-up car that has no business running anymore, driving from Hanover to D.C. to North Carolina to Texas to California…and back.

What were we thinking?

This all started early last fall, when Joanna mentioned she wanted to go to Hueco Tanks outside of El Paso, Texas over winter break for some prime winter bouldering. As I’m from Las Cruces, New Mexico, just two hours from Hueco, I was on board from the start. And the seed was planted.

Over the next few weeks the idea slowly evolved and morphed through many permutations that, at one point or another, would involve just about the entire Dartmouth Mountaineering Club. Finally, we settled on a plan: we would go all out and hit the Red River Gorge in Kentucky with a bunch of other DMCers, then head down to Hueco, and finally meet back up with the KY crew in Bishop, a small town in northern California with legendary bouldering.

On the day we would depart from Boone, NC and head off to explore some of the best climbing in the country, we decided to take a look at the weather in Kentucky to see exactly what we would be getting ourselves into. It was grim: 34ºF and raining. It was not a tough decision to scrap that part of the plan and head south immediately.

This change in plans gave us a few days of leeway, so we headed south without much of a concrete plan, intending to figure out on the road exactly what we wanted to do. We followed the beautiful Blue Ridge Parkway south for a while, then wound down through Georgia, and eventually found ourselves spending the night at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. The next day, we went to visit a friend in Houston, TX, by way of the beautiful city of New Orleans. Finally, a very full day of driving across Texas—bisected by a wonderful lunch in the unexpected and tiny oasis of Junction, TX—brought us to the gates of Hueco Tanks State Park. We slept out under the stars in the middle of the desert that night, because the park closes after dark.

The next day: climbing! We stopped by the airport to pick up Christine Deyo, a friend from Seattle, and the illustrious John Thompson ’13—then we set off to pull on some rock. Upon entering the park, we found a boulderer’s paradise. The park is surprisingly small, and everywhere you look, there’s yet another classic boulder problem. You can sleep until 10, lounge in the sun on a 60º day in the middle of December, and still get on your heart’s content of problems until your skin is gone.
and your arms are on fire.

We got on a lot of amazing stuff at Hueco, but a few specific problems jumped out at us. The Girls of Juarez and Baby Martini are both killer roof problems that require intricate and very individual-specific beta. Each problem is basically a delicate wrestling match across an inverted field of massive huecos. What more could we ask for? Jo and Deyo repeatedly projected Daily Dick Dose, a classic V7.

After more than a week of days filled with bouldering in the park and exploring the surrounding area, and nights filled with Catch Phrase, Hearts, and Tecate, we parted ways with Deyo and headed to Tucson, AZ. We went for a hike in a beautiful nature park just outside of Tucson, and then spent a day climbing with Anna Morenz ’13 at Mt. Lemmon. For the first and only time on the trip, we put some use to our harnesses that had been stuffed in the back of the trunk, and sport climbed at the beautiful Ruins. On the return hike, we had our first casualty of the trip, when Joanna fell on a cactus and embedded several needles in her hand.

Next on the agenda was Bishop, CA. After a solid day of driving, we rolled into this quaint town and set up camp at the Pit, a basic campground largely populated by climbers. Unfortunately, the next morning we had to take Jo to the emergency room for her hand, and JT and I hit the world-famous Buttermilks. We got on several nice problems, and Jo was able to join us at the end of the day, but the granite boulders were brutal. It was like climbing on a cheese grater.

In the subsequent days we checked out the Happy Boulders and the Sad Boulders, and we found lots of exciting stuff in each place. Some favorite problems were The Hulk and Molly. Riley Kane ’12 met us for an awesome day at the Sads. At this point, snow was coming, so we dropped JT at the airport and headed back east. On the road, we stopped at Arches National Park for a beautiful hike and actually ended up reuniting with JT in his hometown of Madison, WI for a night before we finally made it home.

Somewhere along the way the glove box of our car broke, so had to pry it open and then tape it shut. The car further gifted us with "adventure" by running out of windshield washer fluid at night on a slush-covered highway through the Colorado Rockies. However, we made it across the country and back, and we explored some beautiful parts of this country and climbed some picturesque rock. All told, this was the kind of trip you remember for the rest of your life.
Leaving a Trace
By Samuel Kernan ’14

This is a story about me and a mountain.

The setting is my freshman summer. But really, it starts in my childhood. Growing up, I spent many afternoons outdoors with my family. My favorite fall activity was raking the leaves. In the winter, my sisters and I got ready quickly so that we could shovel the driveway before school. We had our strategies down: long plow down the middle, shovel in strips like ribs to each edge, save the difficult mouth of the driveway for last. In the summer, we went camping at Moffett Beach and Cranberry Lake in the Adirondacks, lakes nestled among hills cloaked in the north woods.

Freshman fall, I went on a trail-work trip to finish the bridge over Jacob’s Brook, on the Appalachian Trail. The seniors on the trip told me students built the bridge, students paid to do trail work for a whole summer. If I wanted, I, too, could work for the Dartmouth Outing Club’s summer trail crew. All winter I anticipated the application, and summer found me rolling north.

I remember the smell. Outdoor Programs Assistant Director Rory Gawler ’05 pulled into the access road and rolled down the windows of the cramped sedan. The smell of the woods washed over me, drained my stress right away. The smell of balsam was my introduction to Moosilauke, our base for the summer. But before we moved into the bunkhouse, we had work to do farther north. Later that day, I entered the Second College Grant. I stocked cabins with firewood, heard the Advisory Committee tell stories of the Grant and of Dartmouth in some bygone era. Here, at the tail end of my first week on the job, I got my introduction to trail work.

A range of activities fall under the heading of trail work. Anything you do to put the trail in place, or keep it there, or make it usable or beautiful counts. Rockwork has to be one of the most evocative. There is something about using massive stones to establish the footpath, providing a secure, dry foundation for feet. Build it to last for 50 years. Build it strong, stable. That is what I learned in the Grant.

I would learn even more about trails over the next few weeks, working first on Mt. Cube, trying to modify the trail to keep it dry. Hiking with wet feet is no fun, but of even more pressing concern to us, a trail with both water and people running over it is a recipe for erosion. Take the example of the sections of trail that were basically mud pits. As people go around the wet spot, they erode the edges of the trail, making the mud pit wider and wider. Stopping this cycle meant putting in stepping stones so that people could follow the trail instead of stepping on un-eroded edges. Once we realized this, those of us with waterproof footwear routinely chose to walk through mud rather than contribute to a problem we would later have to remedy.

Growing up, I’d been told the role of the hiker was to “take only pictures, leave only footprints.” All of a sudden, this “Leave No Trace” principle grew more complicated. For one, I could see that all the footprints we left did leave a trace. If spread out all over the mountainside, footprints hurt plants and soil structure. We concentrate traffic onto trails so that human feet only trample a small area. But then, here I was on trail crew, walking back and forth over a comparatively large area to collect material to fix the wear and tear caused by footsteps. “Leaving only footprints” was keeping me employed, and I was employed to leave my mark on the land.

I did not mind at all. It felt good to get off-trail. I felt a sense of ownership over the land. After taking logs and stones from part of the land and using them to build in another part, I was invested in what happened to the area. I also saw the land up close in ways I hadn’t before as a hiker. I saw the layers of soil in the holes from which we pried rocks. I saw ferns growing under the trees—sometimes spruce, sometimes maple. In a small clearing with shafts of sunlight filtering through the canopy, I saw the stump of an old tree, ten feet high and wider around than my arms.

This felt different from some hikes where I have felt the peak is the objective. Sometimes I catch myself making it to the top of a hike only to whip out my camera, look at the viewfinder instead of the view, and begin documenting instead of remembering. My relationship with the camera is ambivalent. I love that I can look back and be reminded of the beauty and joy of being outside. But what is the point of remembering something that I was too busy to experience in the first place? I catch myself hiking to get to the top, then once I am there, taking photos. If this is how I behave, was the hike up to the view worth it?

I worry about views not because I dislike them, but because they overshadow places where beauty is less obvious. I have no way to convey the feeling of that ancient standing stump, once the firm foundation of a forest.
giant, now a tapestry of moss, its trunk lying about it like a cloak shrugged from a giant’s shoulders.

I can tell you about where I saw it, though. It stands in the woods near Hurricane Trail, which runs from Great Bear to the Lodge. When I saw the stump, our assignment was to work on Hurricane for the rest of summer. It was an open-ended task; Hurricane needed more than we could give it in the remainder of the season. The trail is a bit of an odd cousin in the Moosilauke trail family. It doesn’t get as much traffic as some of the others, because it isn’t part of a convenient day hike and passes around the mountain instead of over the summit.

Hurricane is, in parts, a mess. While scouting the trail in the rain, my crewmates and I walked half a mile of trail that had turned into a bubbling stream. Between the magnitude of the work and the scarcity of hikers, some folks thought that our time would be better spent somewhere it would make a more noticeable difference. But I think what we were doing was worthwhile. I’m still trying to come to grips with why I felt that way, with emotions I had not quite realized existed before my summer on trail crew.

I had come to identify Moosilauke as Our Mountain, my home for the summer, and the home of thousands of Dartmouth students before me. It was not a place to visit, to walk over. The mountain was in my soul. For my final printmaking project that fall, I cut paper into the twin peaks as seen from the lodge, marked it with the orange-black-orange symbol of the DOC, and declared that ‘my Dartmouth’ is a land school. It didn’t feel right to value some parts of that land more than others. Hurricane does not have wide, distant vistas. I love it for the whispering valley of the Baker River, for the tall spruce the trail twists between as it descends Hurricane Mountain. I love it because I hike it as part of a loop instead of an out-and-back. Hurricane is a “journey, not a destination.”

There are some legitimate issues with Hurricane—the ‘streambed’ section is a notable one. Nonetheless, I’m upset by any unfavorable comparison of it to more-used trails. My concern is: if we only maintain trails to remote peaks with views, how will we appreciate nature on our doorstep?

When I do work on the land, the land does work on me. Work that requires me to be out there in every kind of day, every season, causes me to see the land so much closer than ever before. Where I might otherwise visit, I get to belong, and I feel it right down to my bones. The promotional line for trail crew is often that it is like being paid to camp. But I felt like I was being paid to give the land its due.

A community that can do trail work can do so much more. It sees and remembers the changes that occur in a place. Look at Mt. Moosilauke. Carriages once drove up the Carriage Road. Spruces as big as the beams in the Lodge once draped the slopes in their prickly cover. There aren’t trees like that on Moosilauke anymore. But they’re coming back, which is what makes Moosilauke much more than a place to go hiking. The ancients are young, but they are growing. This year, I take a spruce to make a bog bridge that spans a stream I could nearly step over. Tomorrow, they will take spruce to span the great hall of a future Lodge.

Thinking about spruce like this makes me aware of the larger issues that flow through the land. Spruce are struggling in the face of warmer temperatures and acid rain. They may not grow as vigorously as they once did, and this saddens me. I care that Moosilauke trees grow tall, that understory plants diversify between their gnarled toes, that soil is building underneath the leaf litter. I have a stake in the health of Moosilauke, because working on the mountain has made me part of a community there.

Explaining why I care so much about what happens to the spruces on Moosilauke means explaining what I mean by two words: land and community. Basically, I care about the spruces because I feel that we, both I and the spruces, are part of the community of Moosilauke. We are part of the land.

The reason I use "land" instead of "the environment" is that "land" feels more specific. I get the sense that "the environment" refers to a global entity that is "out there" somewhere, whereas "the land" is right outside my doorstep.

The land as a whole regulates itself, and part of accepting limits is accepting that we do not know the full workings of the land, or where it is going. We do not have full knowledge, and we do not have full control. Instead, we get to sit back sometimes, and experience the wonder of the land humming with life and purpose influenced by our actions, but ultimately beyond them.

To Moosilauke: Thank you for taking me in, for showing me a few of these things, and for giving me a push down the path. To this year’s trail crew: Thank you for your work. Keep your eyes and ears open. You never know what you might discover. Whatever you find out on Moosilauke, I would love to hear about it. I’ll be looking too.
Over the extended winter break, eleven members of the Ledyard Canoe Club paddled five canoes and one sea kayak 100 miles through the Florida Everglades. The crew included Robin Costello ’13, Ellen Davenport ’16, Frances Davenport ’13, Shelby Hinds ’14, Milo Johnson ’13, Gray Kelsey ’13, Benji Kessler ’13, Ari Koeppel ’15, Zach Martinez ’13, Catalina Mejia ’14, and Laura Bryn Sisson ’13. This is Milo’s log of the journey:

Day 1: Chokoloskee to Lopez River Campsite. 5 miles.
We set off with the hot Florida sun on our backs and see our first dolphins. While sleeping, we learn the hard way that high tide is around midnight, and that our campsite is below the high tide line.

Day 2: Lopez River Campsite to Mormon Key Beach. 15 miles.
We paddle hard through wide channels and bays between banks of mangroves, and are rewarded with a glorious entry into the calm seas of the coast. It turns out beach camping results in a lot of sand in your sleeping bag.

Day 3: Mormon Key to Turkey Key. 3 miles.
Navigating across the coastline between tiny beach islands, we pass a pelican convention, and set up camp at our new home on Turkey Key.

Day 4: Turkey Key to ... Turkey Key. 0 miles.
We live as castaways, paddling out to New Turkey Key and connecting with our wilder sides.

Day 5: Turkey Key to Highland Beach & Broad River. 12 and 16 miles.
Back at it, we paddle hard along the coast, grateful for calm seas. We try "hoisting the mainsail" by lashing our canoes together and holding a tarp up to catch the wind, but the breeze is too weak to help us. Campsite limits force us to split up for the night, so we leave half the group to stay at Highland Beach while we continue.

Paddling into the mouth of the Broad River at dusk, we find ourselves surrounded by birds. Seagulls, pelicans, a few herons, and many others whose names I do not know fly over our heads and around our canoes as we pick our way through the islands of the delta. The five of us paddle silently, with the sun setting at our back across a calm sea. We can’t wait for the other half of the group to experience 'Bird Paradise' when they follow us the next morning.

Inland, Gray discovers that an alligator lives at our campsite.

Day 6: Highland/Broad to Harney River Chickee. 12.5 and 8.5 miles.
The beach crew wakes to find the shore 200 feet from its position when they set up camp. They hurry to shuttle gear out to the water, as we all need to meet by 10 a.m. at the mouth of "the Nightmare," which is only
Zach Martinez and Ellen Davenport in the Nightmare. Photo by Laura Bryn Sisson.
passable at high tide. Unfortunately, where we found a bay and "Bird Paradise," the tide gifts the other group with a mile of mud over which they must drag the heavy canoes, struggling as they sink in up to their shins.

We reunite joyously, swapping horror stories from the previous 12 hours. Then we paddle cautiously into the dark, narrow waterway ahead—guarded on either side by watchful gators.

As you paddle into "the Nightmare," the mangrove trees along the water move inward, hanging over you and blocking out the sun. Their aerial roots dangle above the water, providing tangible thresholds that you cross again and again as you move deeper into the tangle. Crabs the size of golf balls skitter around on the hanging roots as you paddle past, hiding in crevices feet from your face.

"The Nightmare" is a test of perception and attitude. It can seem dark and oppressive, and the thought of getting stuck there by a lowering tide can weigh heavy on a paddler wondering how many more mangrove tangles he will have to pull his way through. But it can also be a quiet, beautiful place, hidden away by the dense growth, only accessible when the water rises twice a day. The mangroves and narrow passage provide exciting maneuvering in a canoe, and the feeling of descending into the wild is exhilarating.

We are unified in a sense of joy and wonder when we suddenly emerge from the narrow creek into the sun and open water again. We spend our first night above the water on the wooden platforms called chickees.

**Day 7. Harney River Chickee to Oyster Bay Chickee. 14 miles.**

I am again humbled by the gods for my hubris in pretending to understand the tides. Strong winds put the Harney River against us, and we struggle all morning to move five miles. When we reach Shark River, though, the winds are with us, and we hoist our main sail and relax as champions. We still make it to Oyster Bay just as the sun is setting on the still cove.

**Day 8. Oyster Bay Chickee to South Joe Chickkeee. 10.5 miles.**

We’re in more open water now, paddling across bays and then down the exceedingly wide Joe river. We find our chickee in a breezy beautiful cove and have an insect-free last evening.

**Day 9. South Joe Chickkee to Flamingo. 11.4 miles.**

We wake up before dawn and paddle into the sunrise. It’s actually quite a bother, with the sun glaring into our eyes as we start to paddle. One last gator swims by and we charge on to Flamingo, happy to be paddling.