

The UCHC Story, 1938-1988

With a gala dinner on April 23, the Union County Hiking Club will mark its 50th anniversary. Starting in February 1938 with eight members, we have grown now to 555 (paid-up) members.

During the early '30s the Union County Park Commission, headed by Mr. F. S. Matheson, sponsored nature walks in the County parks. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Baldwin had participated in the Elizabeth Nature League walks. They suggested to Mr. Matheson that some people might like longer hikes. The Commission responded by advertising a meeting to form a hiking club as an activity sponsored by the Recreation Department under Paul Cleland. Eight people came to the meeting in February 1938 at Warinanco Park:

- Walter Baldwin (d. 1985)
- Elizabeth Baldwin
- Florence Durow (d. 1978)
- Dr. Hugh Gordon (d. 1972)
- Naomi Heilbrun Rosenberg
- Dr. Louis Rosenberg (d. 1974)
- Irma Heyer (d. 1985)
- Max Tieger (d. 1955)

The hikes were planned from week to week, and the Recreation Dept. sent out postcard reminders. Irma Heyer, a high school principal, led the first club hike, in South Mountain Reservation. By autumn 1939 the schedule of hikes was being planned six months ahead. The Park Commission helped a great deal then (and does so even now) by printing and mailing our schedules, putting notices in the local papers, answering telephone inquiries, and providing a room at Warinanco Park for membership meetings. Help also came from other clubs who supplied guest leaders: ADK (Miss Heyer was an ADK member) and WTW (led by Ernest A. Dench). Little by little we developed our own leaders.

When Sam Newkirk joined the group, he suggested that the new club should affiliate with the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference, an organization of outdoor clubs

devoted to building and maintaining trails. That required that we have a club constitution and collect \$1/year dues, so we would know how many members we had. Sam applied on October 8, 1941, but acceptance was deferred because we had only 17 paid-up members. On February 4, 1942, we were elected to Class A membership: We had 25 members.

The club was immediately assigned eight miles of the Appalachian Trail, from the State Line to Lake Wawayanda, and two miles of connecting trails. Through the years our assignment has changed some: We now maintain the AT from Mombasha High Point to Iron Mountain Road Bridge, except for two miles near Prospect Rock.

After Sam Newkirk, Dr. Louis Rosenberg became our Trails Chairman in 1943. Then in 1946 it was Elliot Heilbrun, followed by Florence Durow. Our schedule for 1939 listed 21 events. In 1949 there were 38. In 1987 there were 343 events scheduled!

Through the years our club has been served by a great many members who have given generously of their time and strength to provide our leadership. Seven of them were honored in 1954 when the club created for them the title of Honorary Member. These were the living charter members; in later years some others were added: Robert and Marge Gasser, Fred and Anne Dlouhy, Keith Rodney.

Keith Rodney, who joined the club in 1942, had the longest legs and led the longest hikes. In later years he was matched by Leo and Trudy Zappe. Herb Hiller, who was club President in 1955 and Trails Chairman in 1958, had hiked the entire Appalachian Trail.

Not everyone could go on those strenuous hikes, but all remember with pleasure the gentle walks that were led by Irma Heyer and Florence Durow (Peter Rabbit).

Newcomers then and now remark on the friendly spirit they feel in all our events. As the club grew, bicycling, canoeing and skiing were added to our outdoor activities.

Twice a year, every year since 1941, our club members have gone up to Bellvale/Bearfort Mountain, equipped with saws, clippers, and paint brushes to repair the damage done to their trail by storms, and to clean it of trash left by thoughtless people. Sometimes they are confronted by major problems like the bridge over Longhouse Creek that washed away every second year, or a rerouting of the trail to avoid a nudist camp that had been built on it.

For many years the club ran an outing on Columbus Day weekend. Called "The Connecticut Weekend," it was first held at Cornwall Bridge, and then, as the attendance grew, at Lake Waramaug near Kent, Connecticut. Half the participants stayed at the Inn on the lake.

The other half camped in a state park nearby. Great hikes, campfire songs, and a grand picnic in Macedonia Brook State Park made these memorable weekends. Then the state decided to close the parks to save money. We tried Pennsylvania in 1971 (Hickory Run) and New York in 1976 (Cooks Falls). That was the last one.

Even more durable and better attended is our Christmas party at Skytop in the Watchung Reservation. A two-hour hike is followed by an outdoor picnic and songs around a great bonfire.

This is your club! You made it. You can be proud of it. We'll be seeing you on many more anniversaries. Happy hiking! — Bill Myles