

EXPEDITION MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER OF THE
ARNOLD EXPEDITION
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



May 2014

The Great Carrying Place Resurrected

When the 1775 Quebec Expedition ascending the Kennebec River reached a point near present day Caratunk, 10 miles north of Bingham, the river became virtually unnavigable for their heavily laden bateaux. Above this point the river was very fast, full of rapids and included several great falls. Native Americans having encountered this same barrier had discovered, centuries before, a long bypass route to avoid this dangerous section of the river.

They had created a portage trail that left the deep river valley and struck due west, 13 miles to reach the more placid Dead River (the west branch of the Kennebec). Due to its long length and its difficulty, it had become known as the Great Carrying Place.

The route, after it reached the Dead River traversed an upland plateau north of what would become the Bigelow Range. It then followed the North Branch north west into the rugged Boundary Mountains and into Canada.

The Great Carrying Place (GCP) was by far, the most audacious portage encountered along the route to Quebec. It took the soldiers more than five days to get all four divisions and their tons of equipment across the portage. Its sheer length was compounded by the 800 foot elevation gain to escape from the deep Kennebec River valley.

To accomplish this herculean task, the soldiers repeatedly had to retrace their steps. It was reported that in order to carry all their water logged bateaux, oars, poles, tents, barrels of precious food, cast iron cooking pots, muskets, military supplies and personal gear, as many as six trips were required. Thus a seemingly day's march of 13 miles grew to in excess of 60 miles, half of which was borne with very heavy loads.

Luckily the route utilized three small ponds, the Carry Ponds, which somewhat relieved their backs. The three ponds reduced their struggles by about 2 ½ miles. At each pond, the bateaux had to be laboriously unloaded, then reloaded on the far side.

The historic route had been used by Native Americans to travel between the Atlantic coast and the Kennebec Valley villages to reach their brethren living along the St. Lawrence and Chaudiere Valleys. The route was also used by Jesuit Priests sent from Quebec to proselytize natives in the Kennebec Valley settlements. The route was also described by an English engineer, Montresor, who surveyed the route in 1763. (Cont. Page 2)

HIGHLIGHTS IN THIS ISSUE

- Feature Article
- The Great Carrying Place Resurrected
- Trail Work Trip Reports
- Book Reviews
- Schedule of 2014 Events
- Work Trip To Open The GCP
- The Fourth Portage, an article.

The Expedition's thousand soldiers who followed this route in 1775 was the last major usage of the route.

With the demise of the Kennebec Valley Native American settlements, their use of the route, gradually dwindled and faded from memory.

As a contiguous portage route between the Kennebec and Dead Rivers, it had ended. This was because the old river routes used as highways had also ended. New towns, roads, railroad tracks, and dams meant portage trails were no longer needed.

Between 1875 and 1950 sporting camps on the Carry Ponds promoted use of sections of the route for their patrons. But these camps also gradually faded into memory.

So for 239 years the route had become increasingly obscure, little used and mostly forgotten by Mainers. Further blotting its memory, both ends of the old portage trail were inundated by hydro dam impoundments. Its east end at the Kennebec was flooded for a 1/4 mile by Wyman Dam (1936). The portage trail's west end was flooded for 3/4 mile by the Long Falls Dam (1950), and Flagstaff Lake.

After 1775 at least four timber harvesting cycles and their accompanying logging roads have altered the route. Recent camp development on all three ponds have further obscured the route.

In 1950 the flooding of the Dead River Valley required that the Appalachian Trail be rerouted over Little Bigelow Mtn. and around the south end of the newly formed Flagstaff Lake. The relocated AT then continued eastward to West Carry Pond, passing through the old West Carry Pond Camps, then around the south end of the pond. It then was superimposed upon the old GCP portage trail for two miles between West and Middle Carry Ponds. This section is now owned and protected by the National Park's Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

During the last several years, the Arnold Expedition Historical Society has gradually improved the GCP portage trail on its east side of the route, from Wyman Lake to Middle Carry Pond. The trail has been cleared annually, improved with new signs, and marked by orange blazes. In 2013 the National Park Service and the local AT trail community granted the AEHS the right to connect and utilize the AT from Middle Carry Pond westward to a point near the SW corner of West Carry pond, a distance of 3.3 mi.

In 2014 after negotiations with the Plum Creek Corp. it appears that they will grant the Society the right to construct and maintain a foot path from the AT northwest

1.2 mi. to connect to the Spring Road. This private road currently connects West Carry Pond to the Long Falls Dam Road. It was rebuilt over the old West Carry Pond Tote Road. Both roads closely followed the original route of the GCP portage trail. Thus this connector trail will now allow a complete traversal of the GCP portage trail.

After receiving these permissions and the completion of the 1.2 mi. connector trail, it will be possible for hikers to follow the entire historic GCP route for the first time in 239 years. The Society will construct and complete the route during the summer of 2014. The newly completed route will be 11.9 miles in length.

The route is considered to be a moderate hike. One will be able to experience the same steep path that led uphill, out of the Kennebec Valley, see the same pond that the soldiers eagerly fished for fresh trout, slog across the same swamp that sucked shoes off the soldier's feet, walk along the same pathway that they used to carry their heavy bateaux, between Middle and West Carry Ponds, and view the same inspiring sight of the "forked mountain" that was later to be named after Major Timothy Bigelow and finally to drink from the same cold springs and brooks that quenched their thirst.

It has been a long term goal of the AEHS to ensure that at least a portion of the Expedition's original route could be experienced by people interested in discovering their heritage and honoring these brave men. This opportunity is now at hand. What better way is there for us to touch that rich heritage?