

# 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

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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.

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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?





## The Great Carrying Place

Above is the only known rendition of the Expedition as it passed across the Great Carrying Place portage. The 13 mile trail from the Kennebec to the Dead River was heavily forested, blocking all view of the country, except for the three small ponds that were a part of the portage.

On the fourth segment of the portage, the route broke out of the confinement of the woods onto an open area, called by the soldiers, "the savanna." Today we know these as spruce bogs.

The going across the spongy bog was so bad, that in some places, the men with their heavy loads, sank into the black muck and hidden roots, up to their thighs. Some of the men had their boots sucked off and lost. Col. Arnold ordered a company to cut and lay down trees to form a codroy over the worst places. The savanna lay about a half mile from the west end of the portage at Bog Brook. This area is now inundated by Flagstaff Lake.

(courtesy of the Library of Congress)



### **AEHS 2014 Scheduled Events**

**May 17-18** Great Carrying Place Trail

Clearing trip. See accompanying article.

**June 21** AEHS Directors Meeting, Richmond Historical Society, Richmond, Maine

**Sept. 20** AEHS Annual Meeting, Colburn

House Pittston. Details on this meeting will be published in the Sept. *Messenger*.

### **The Great Carrying Place Work Trip**

This year's annual Spring Work trip will be special. In addition to clearing the winter damage from established trails, we are going to open the entire western side of the Great Carrying Place (see associated article). This will include establishing 1.2 mi. Of new trail near West Carry Pond, installing 10 new signs on cedar posts, and paint blazing the new trail.

Because we will be covering the GCP trail on both east and west sides, and may be somewhat distant from the different work parties, it will take some pre-organization to get people to the right place to begin. Also we will be doing a variety of tasks, requiring different tools,

The trip will occur on **Saturday, May 17**, with a possibility that there will be additional work to complete the opening of the GCP on the following day, Sunday, May 18. This latter day will also be used if the weather is very bad on Saturday. The main meeting place will be at the junction of the Long Falls Dam Road and the branch Spring Road. This road is on the right side of the LFDR and is marked by a prominent 911 sign. This junction is 21 miles north of North New Portland on the LFDR, after leaving ME Highway 16 at a sharp curve in the middle of the village. The team will meet at 8:00 AM sharp at the junction.

Two AEHS directors, Norm Kalloch and Bob Donovan will be the co-leaders. But to coordinate this process, it is important that you pre-call Norm Kalloch so as to establish the trip details, tools to bring, and equipment to be brought to the work sites. Please call Norm at (207) 628-4023 as early as possible.

We hope to have a big and enthusiastic crew, as this historic opening of a 239 year old route will be a special event. See you there!

### **Directors Meeting To Be Held**

The semi-annual meeting of the AEHS directors will be held on Saturday, June 21. We will gather between 9:30 AM and 10:00 with the meeting commencing at ten. The meeting will be held at the Richmond Historical Society at 164 Pleasant St. Coffee, other drinks and snacks will be provided. Bring your own bag lunch. We will take a break at noon and if the discussion extends, we will tackle it after lunch.

At the meeting's conclusion, President Jay Robbins will present his PowerPoint presentation, "Swan Island, Pearl Of Merrymeeting Bay."

The agenda will include major discussions regarding both the opening of the Great Carrying Place Portage Trail and a possible new historical preserve in the Chain of Ponds country.

All AEHS members and guests are most welcome to attend.

### **The AEHS Website**

Some of our members may not be aware that the Society maintains an online website. This is at: [arnoldsmarch.com](http://arnoldsmarch.com)

Our hard working webmaster has been Tom Desjardin, AEHS director. We would encourage members to click on the site and look it over. In the future we are hoping to expand the scope of information available to the public. This is one of the Society's goals and we hope to use this media to do just that.

If there are those among you that would like to help us in updating, please contact secretary Steve Clark at his email address; [sclark60@live.com](mailto:sclark60@live.com)

Also, if you have suggestions on how to improve this important site, by all means, let us know.



## Book Reviews

*Fort Halifax,  
Winslow's Historic Outpost*

By Daniel J. Tortora, Assistant Professor  
of History, Colby College

**Book Description:** Are you interested in local history or in the colonial and Revolutionary war eras? In this book you'll find the exciting history of Fort Halifax, from its days as a massive French and Indian War fort to the present blockhouse in Fort Halifax Park, Winslow, Maine. You'll encounter a cast of memorable characters—Benedict Arnold, Paul Revere, Governor Baxter, and a lost harbor seal among them. And you'll meet the local personalities—Timothy Paine, Elizabeth Freeman, Minnie Garland, Don Carter, Stan Mathieu, and many more—who have fought to preserve Fort Halifax and to keep its memory alive. Fort Halifax has always been the symbol of a community; its history is Winslow's history.

**Book Sales and Signings:** Mr. Tortora will be holding several book talks and signings, where books will be available for purchase at retail price, \$19.99.

Set on getting a copy before then? It is, or soon will be, available at the [Colby College Bookstore](#), and at the [Maine State Museum](#). It will soon be sold at other area stores. Always call ahead to check availability. Online, you can now find it on [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), [The History Press](#), and [Books-A-Million](#). An e-book version, for \$9.99, is also available for Nook, Kindle, and iPad users.

## Book Review

*The Traitor's Wife* by Allison Pataki

This is a historical novel, and as such, is not the usual factual biographical sketch of Arnold and his men. However, it is a most entertaining story about Benedict Arnold's wife, Peggy

Shippen.

She has long been an enigma as to how much influence she had upon her illustrious husband. As most know, Peggy was a beautiful daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia shipping magnate. The Shippen family had been very friendly with the English military gentry when they occupied the city in 1777-78.

At that time Arnold was appointed as military governor by Washington.

When amerced in the Philadelphia social life, Arnold met Peggy Shippen. She was the belle of the city's social life and it did not take long for Arnold to be entranced by the beautiful Peggy.

Peggy today would be labeled as a "Trophy Wife." She was half Arnold's age and it did not take long for a romance to develop. Although Peggy's father was not too happy about the relationship, a marriage did occur.

During the English occupation of the City, Peggy had become very friendly with Major John Andre, one of the handsome officers in the English army.

Most readers know the rest of the story, but it is not known the role Peggy played in the betrayal. The author writes an intriguing story around these historical events.

The author has researched the events and correspondence of the story up to the betrayal at West Point and beyond. Readers will find much to consider in the life of Arnold and his wife, Peggy Shippen Arnold.

The book is available through Amazon, and is priced at \$ 14.99. It is interesting to note that Allison is the daughter of former NY Governor Pataki.

**Did you know that:** Major Return Meigs' grandson, Montgomery Meigs, who was a West Point graduate, became a general in the Union Army, engineered the Capitol Dome, the water system for Washington DC, and became the Quartermaster General during the Civil War?



## Report On Work Trip

By Lucas Freeman, Chesapeake, VA

I spent two weeks in Maine with my wife's family, but got out to see my father, Rocky Freeman. We went up to the camp during the weekend of July 6/7.

I just wanted to take a moment to say thanks for the opportunity at the camp. We came away with two square nails, a very corroded tent peg, and my find of a copper oar tip protector with hand nailed tacks intact. When we exited the woods, we went straight to Mr. Wing, who confirmed the oar tip protector's identity.

I had found it off the beaten path of the trail, on the shore of East Carry. My father has the specifics. It was about 8 inches down in the clay. A large fire had been in the area and I found the piece in the char. Itself filled with char. Mr. Wing informed me that the expedition had lit large fires on the shore to guide others making the trek. It is quite possible a broken oar was a part of the fire.

Now I understand he has your approval to go paint the camp. He's looking forward to it!

We can't wait to retire from the Navy and be home for good. Summer of 2016 will be our first full summer in Maine. My wife wants to wait for the schools to complete before we move. I'll use the time to figure out where we'll live and what I'll do for a job!

## Contact Us!

It occurred to the editor that some of our members may not know who are society leaders and how to contact them. We welcome feedback to improve any aspect of our society and its goals. By all means, feel free to contact us.

**President:** John (Jay) Robbins,  
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Robert Donovan, Embden, Maine

Ronald Gamage, Cornville, Maine

Guy C. Grant, Orono, Maine

Norman Kalloch, Carrying Place, Maine

John Parsons, Monroe, NY

Laura Stewart, Manchester, NH

If members wish to contact individual directors, contact the secretary at his email address or at 60 Burnham Road, Scarborough, ME 04074. The four officers are also directors.

The mailing address is:

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## The Fourth Portage

By Stephen Clark

From time to time, we have discussed the four portages encountered by the Expedition during its ascent of the Kennebec River in 1775. The fourth and last of these was at Caratunk Falls, sometimes called Devil's Falls. This was located within present day Solon, Maine.

After surmounting the long, difficult portage at Norridgewock Falls [present day Anson, Maine], each of the army's four divisions in turn continued their ascent of the continuously swift river. The first to reach Caratunk Falls and its portage was Morgan's division, consisting of three companies of riflemen. Arnold caught up with them just as they had completed the Norridgewock Falls portage and were striking upriver. This occurred late on Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> in a pouring, cold rain.

The river between Norridgewock and Caratunk Falls was quite swift, so progress was slow. It was most likely that they encamped that night at the old Native American campsite, a mile below Caratunk Falls. This is located on the east side of the river [the present day Greenwood Campground]. This site had existed for many centuries as the recovery of artefacts has proven.

The next day (Oct. 3), they struggled upstream around a long loop in the river, finally reaching a large eddy just below Caratunk Falls. The portage was on the east side of the river and was a relatively short 50 rods [Arnold's estimate].

Caratunk Falls was a single cataract dropping 15 feet through a narrow cleft in the surrounding granite ledges. The entire volume of the river was funneled through this narrow opening, causing a deafening roar. The sound and fury must have been heard for a great distance. It gave the falls its other name, Devil's Falls.

Because of the shortness of the carry, Morgan's division (about 240 soldiers) immediately continued upriver. Above the falls, the river became even swifter, as they strove to reach the Great Carrying Place, their next waypoint. The men were continuously in the cold water of the river, pushing and pulling the heavily laden bateaux through gravelly shoals.

During the next few days, each subsequent contingent, passed the portage. Arnold had waited at Norridgewock Falls for Lt. Col. Enos's final division then struck off to catch the head of the army. After stopping at the Native American campsite [in Solon] on the evening of Oct. 9, early the following day his party reached and portaged around Caratunk Falls. He did not tarry there and continued upstream against the swift current. He reached the Great Carrying Place the morning of Oct. 11th.

Today, a dam, a power house and a railroad trestle have been built on the site of the falls. The original falls have disappeared! The facility was named Williams Station. Behind the dam is a pool covering the old river bed for several miles upstream.

The dam and old portage site can now be reached from US Highway 201, a half mile north of Solon Village. Turn west onto the Falls Road, which soon becomes a gravel road. In a 1/4 mile, the road ends at the dam. The old portage trail route can still be observed and walked.

Below the dam, the old eddy formed by the falls is still present. However one will observe that in building the dam during the 1930's the original river course has been altered. The old loop in the river has been eliminated by constructing a straight channel from the Eddy south to the Solon-Embden bridge. The original river course is used as a high water overflow.

So what the soldiers first saw of Devil's Falls has been long tamed and quieted.



### AEHs New Membership Form

Mail this in with your check and membership info. Include your phone number and email address if this is acceptable to you. Make check payable to AEHS.

Category.

_____ Individual Member	\$ 20
_____ Family Membership	\$ 25
_____ Contributing Membership	\$ 50
_____ Life Membership	\$ 200 (one time payment)
Additional donation for Society programs	\$ _____ (tax deductible)

- ➡ To order the Essay, "**Crisis in the Megantic Swamps**," on a no charge basis, Send order to Society at address below. This includes maps.
- ➡ To order the AEHS map of the 1775 Expedition's route from the Kennebec River to Lac Megantic, Canada, send check for \$ 5.95 to AEHS. These make great gifts for birthdays and Christmas. These can be ordered unfolded, suitable for framing or wall mounting for an additional \$ 6.00 to cover cost of shipping tube and postage.

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