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## Letters From New England

October 9, 2009

*The Great Gulf Trail – 40 Years Later*

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On The Great Gulf Trail

White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire

On the trail again...

I find myself hiking on the Great Gulf Trail after a forty year hiatus. My starting point is the same as it was then – Dolly Copp Campground just off Route 16 not far from Gorham, New Hampshire. Ann is right behind me, or ahead of me: it depends on who stopped last to take pictures. Like my previous statement about Jordan Pond in Acadia National Park, there are a lot of pictures.

What strikes me most is how closely the reality of this hike correlates with my memory of this experience. You know the saying: “You can never go home again,” and all too often the saying is true. But not here, not now. It brings tears to my eyes, and a heartfelt “Thank You” to my voice, which I offer to the U.S. Forest Service and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) for providing such care-filled oversight of this beautiful natural resource.



The sky is laden with clouds and the light through the trees diffuse, but in no sense does the nature of the light dim the beauty of the woods around me.

The “Trail” has its unofficial beginnings in the campground and is known there as the Great Gulf Link Trail, but a little over a half mile of easy walking brings you to the Trail proper. The Trail is one of many ways to reach the summit of Mount Washington – some 6,288 feet above sea level. For most of this trek you are accompanied by the hurried waters of the Peabody River or more accurately: its West Branch. The source of these frenetics is Spaulding Lake near the base of the Trail’s final steep ascent to the summit. Many years ago my companions and I eschewed that final path, opting instead for the more friendly Wamsutta Trail.

The further Ann and I walked, the quieter it got – except for the chatter from the river turned brook. The woods were wet from the recent rains, and the heavy, newly-formed leaf litter dampened the sound of our boots.

As the trail left the river’s edge it got noticeably darker. The beech-birch-maple stands had evidently taken advan-



**Ann posing with the Peabody**

tage of this logging-free area to add tens of feet to their height since I’d last passed this way, closing the canopy above us even though half the foliage was now on the ground. As we climbed higher the spruce and fir began to make their appearance – the fragrance of balsam almost too intoxicating to bear.

We needed to get to Vermont today – hopefully before dark – so grudgingly, and not without a promise to return next fall, we retraced our steps to the trailhead at the campground.



We did manage one more stop, however, at the AMC “hut” just down the road. We picked up some socks and a new trail map to the summit.

Garrett (with Ann)