



The Moosilauke Historical Quest

Warren, New Hampshire

Difficult

Historical, Natural

Trail

1:00

Bring: Binoculars, Field Guide, and Pencil

To get there: From Rt. 10 in Orford, head east on 25A to Wentworth. Turn left in Wentworth onto Rt. 25 and 118. Drive through Warren to the outskirts of town until 25 and 118 divide. Turn right to stay on 118 and travel 5.9 miles to Moosilauke Ravine Lodge Rd. on left. (This road is gated from late November to early May when the lodge is closed) Travel to the end of the road, turn around and park on the valley side of the road near the walkway to the lodge.

This Quest has been created in honor of J. Willcox Brown, class of 1937, who served as Graduate Manager of the Dartmouth Outing Club from 1937 to 1939 during the time when the Ravine Lodge was built. Will has been a charter member and guiding light of the Moosilauke Advisory Committee since its inception in 1974. One of Will's greatest delights is giving the historical tour of the Ravine Lodge and its environs. To honor his enthusiasm and spirit of adventure, we dedicate this Quest to him.

Clues:

To start off this Quest we'd like to introduce you around
(You should be starting at the sign where this Quest can be found)

To a man who, in these parts, is a legend more than any:

It's the incomparable C. Ross McKenney.

'Twas Ross who built this lodge and yet, even more,

'Twas Ross who cemented Dartmouth's tie to the out-of-doors.

Keep Ross' name in mind as you make your forest quest,

And while you're here, in the library, take a look at the rest

Of the names in this room, like Emerson, Sayre and Haile,

Whose contributions will come to life once you're out on the trail.

After finishing on the ground floor please ascend to the next,

For it is in this main room that we begin our forest Quest.
Logs cut by hand were carefully notched
(Supervisor McKenney's eyes, eagle-like, watched)
In 1938 as these spruce walls were built,
And Dartmouth at Moosilauke took off at full tilt.
These trees would have shattered in 1938
When a legendary hurricane struck the Granite State.
But as luck would have it, these trunks were aground,
(Crosscut saws and axes having taken them down)
So the Lodge could be built just one year after,
And we now can witness these glorious rafters.

(Oops – a technical note, one that Ross would have mentioned:
These are purlins, not rafters, because they're horizontally directioned.)
People and trees have a dubious past –
The tales of abuse are legion and vast.
But once in awhile it all comes together,
Take this room – could there be a finer endeavor?
There's another thing to mention as we get going,
It's an historical point, one well worth knowing.
You've probably wondered, "What was happening here
Back before anyone these woods came to clear?"
The fact is the opposite was really the case.
Trees arrived second – after our race,
Who lived here on the tundra and hunted the bear,
10,000 years back when the landscape was bare
Of all but low mosses along cold, icy creeks
(A landscape still visible on Moosi's main peak).
So the conventional wisdom, you see, had it all backwards
Folks were here first and the trees grew up aft'wards.
But no more diversions about days long ago,
Let's get back to the present – out of doors we should go!
So you can see for yourself what the woods have to offer,
And not just what other folks may try to proffer.
Walk out through the main doors and up on a trail.
Bring tough shoes and raincoat if it looks like to hail.
We'll be gone for an hour, perhaps a wee, small bit more,

Before the treasure you've found and this woods quest is o'er.
Ahead in the path is a low-slung shed
Made of concrete and logs, twice the size of a bed.
It's the lodge's first water source, a cistern if you will,
To store water from streams caught by dams up the hill.
But this hillside is porous, just a pile of stones
Covered by forest, like skin over bones.

So this water being fickle dodged under those dams
And down to the Baker and much further lands.
The cistern still stands here, no water now stored,
The whole thing replaced by a well deeply bored.
First Number: How many stacked logs are there
in the wall of the cistern next to the trail?
Multiply this number by 3 and write it here: _____.
A few dozen steps further uphill you must climb,
To a road non-existent in 1939
When the Ravine Lodge was finished -- that was the year --
Folks arrived and departed on a road no longer clear.
We'll give you a hint – it's the route of an old railroad
That, before long, you'll have a chance to be showed.
And even before that, folks arrived at the pace of a snail
Along the old Carriage Road and today's Hurricane Trail.
The road under your feet in the '40s was born
To haul timber from hollows to a mill down in Warren.
At that time, this hillside was covered by fallen down trees,
The debris from that famous storm in the late 1930s.
But now we return to our purpose at hand –

To find treasure with each step through this Moosilauke land.
So, turn to the left, to the north you must sally,
Past the point where vehicles are asked not to dally.
Cross over some gravel and come to a shrine
Put up for a man ahead of his time,
Who saw in these woods a great place for skiing
And hiking and learning and tree-type-I.D.ing.
You're standing right now in a place he thought wonderful:
The site of the Dartmouth '52 Winter Carnival.
There wasn't much snow in yon Hanover that year.
College skiers came here, with their dates and their gear,
To race down this hillside where you stand today
(Moosi was among the first ski hills built in the USA.)
If you face up the hill and look with sharp eye,
A change in the tree type you are sure to spy.
Like an alley are birches lined up in a row,
One sign of the route of the old rope tow.
Second Number: The plaque lists two pairs of dates.
Add the last digit from each of these four dates, multiply
the total by 3, subtract 2, and write the number here: _____.
There's still more to be seen from those old skiing days
If you turn back towards the mountain (with luck there's no haze).
Look for stripes of hardwoods, zigging left, zigging right,
On the slope below south peak, (the ridgeline's left-most height).

It was called Hell's Highway, a trail steep and great,
Cut by hand in '33, wiped out in '38
By the aforementioned hurricane that made such an impression
(Though weather folks knew it was an extra-tropical depression).
Folks in their thirst for routes wide and groomed
Forgot that straight, steep trails are bound to be doomed.
One last thing to ponder on that ridge far above:
In '33 climbed skiers in leather boots and leather gloves
For the first National downhill ever held in this land --
A race thought too dangerous, it now has been banned!
But back then through the woods like rushing water skiers flowed,
Around the tight turns and sharp corners of the old Carriage Road.
Continue ahead, smoothly and deft
'Til you come to a sign pointing down to the left.
Don't take this new trail—keep the one that you're on,
Until a new intersection you happen upon.
Where to go now, standing at this next junction?
Screw up your nerve, your wit and compunction
And make a hard left, almost all the way 'round,
And descend down this new road you've recently found.
(If you miss this junction two brown signs you'll soon see,
Halt where you are, take a u-turn and flee!
Back several steps, now to the right you must turn,
To continue on toward the treasure you'll earn.)

Proceed a dozen steps more and look to your right
To see a quite common yet interesting sight.
A clump of young needled trees all in a row,
What kind are these—perchance do you know?
If not, here's a technique to help you ID:
Shake hands with a branch from each type of tree.
As your fingers run along each needled bough,
One hand will say, "ooh," the other shout, "ow!"
Fir needles are friendly: friendly, fir, "f."
Spruce needles are spiky: spiky, spruce, "s."
'Twas the spruce that drew loggers up into these hills
Seeking wood to become lumber in valley saw mills.
Its wood, more than others, is strong, light and durable
(Human thirst for such qualities is downright incurable!)
As the forest has grown back the spruce is now rare.
The reason for which is either genetic, or a scare.
The life cycle of spruce is much longer than fir,
Allowing firs to dominate early while spruces defer.
But perhaps the spruce absence is a more troubling tale:
A tree species hurt by acid rain, fog and hail.

These both are likely causes of the sparse spruce's story,
A tree now less common than in past days of glory.
Turn away from these youngsters and down the path sail.
This road is still known as the old Go-Back trail.
On this route long ago horse pairs could be seen
Hauling logs for the Lodge down from Jobildunk Ravine.
Our path continues downward and straight through the trees,
Watch out! Heads up! Look sharp if you please!
A trail that descends from the left isn't yours.
Stay straight to avoid any undesirable detours.
Pretty soon at a fork you will want to stay left,
(Staying straight towards the river will leave you bereft.)
If you are now wondering, "Am I on the right tread?"
The clue you should walk towards is an oldish brown shed.
If ever there was a case open and shut,
It's our general aversion to a woodland clear cut
In which every last tree has been cut to the ground
And traces of forest life are scant to be found.
From this perspective, therefore, it may be a surprise
That this hillside was once ski trails, cleared many yards wide.
Spruce, fir and pine were predominant species,
Some trunks far taller than any we now see.
But today in this place grow more birch, alder and aspen,
Their numbers a sign that such a clear-cut did happen.

Soon along this route are three buildings in a row:
The middle one the base-station for the old rope tow.
It was here through the 50's that in fanciful flights
Folks lined up for the trip to the ridgeline's frosty heights.
The first building is the center of much investigation
Into the alpine effects of acid precipitation.
This building used to stand in a different location,
Atop the ridge at the site of the old Meteorological Station.
The third building, on the right, is called Benton bunkhouse --
Home to overnight sleepers and the occasional mouse.
Benton has replaced an old log one now gone
Named for Dartmouth alumnus Nat Emerson.
Now who was this Emerson? Perhaps you are asking?
He was Class of 1900, and he once stood here basking
In a vision of Dartmouth preserving land on this river.
He helped make it happen as a Ravine Lodge staunch giver.
This original Lodge bunkhouse stood to the left in deep shrubs,
All that's left now for the curious are a few concrete stubs.
Built after the Ravine Lodge yet fallen far before,
Emerson Bunkhouse's short life span underscores

A message that old log buildings require vigilance and care
If we are going to have something with the future to share.
From this settlement set forth, with the bunkhouse on your right,
'Till a main intersection comes quickly to sight.
To the right please descend and listen with sharp ear,
For the sound that reveals flowing water quite near.
If you're in the right place and haven't gone wrong,
A long bridge over the river you should have happened upon.
The bridges that have stood here are too many to mention,
Though a unique feature now is worthy of your attention:
The one you see today is unlike the rest --
It's the first time that iron's been put to the test.

Third Number: How many spans are there in the bridge?
How many steel beams support the main span?
Subtract the number of beams from the number
of spans and write the difference here: _____.
Do not cross here on this bridge, it would be a mistake,
To the left it's the old road we beg you to take.
A dozen steps on to your right there is cribbing –
Stone-filled timbers that look like wood ribbing –
On the opposite bank; it used to carry weight
Of an old wooden bridge up until '98.
A bit further on there's an old concrete cover,
More evidence of what used to be another
Lodge water source, perhaps a dug well
Though at this point in time it's too hard to tell.
Back in the 50's, before the days of plastic
There crossed here a wooden pipe – it was really fantastic –
That brought water down and up from the Gorge Brook to the Lodge
In a tight fitting and effective wooden hodgepodge.

Two dozen more yards should bring you to a clearing.
Look right towards a stone pile. Can you imagine steering
A canoe on a pond out in this swift river?
These stones cored a dam that used to stand thither
Until in '42 a spring flood came roaring
And freed the pond's water that the dam had been storing.
So much for deep diving in the Asquamchumaukee --
These days it's too shallow and narrow and rocky.
Scramble out onto the dam and in your mind's eye
See a pond full of swimmers 'neath a summer blue sky.
A few timbers still hold back the gravelly till –
Peek over your shoulder, there's the Lodge up on the hill.
Now back to the trail, carry on, keeping count

For 200 feet, more or less, that's the amount
Until you come to the end of the path that's quite rough,
And you're about to step up to a road still covered by duff.
Right there in the trail, under foot, in plain sight,
There's a rock that's been blown up by a stick o' dynamite.
Back in the days when this woods road was built,
Horses pulled logs here (not quite at fill tilt).
So the lumbermen blew off the top of this boulder,
To make for the horses a smooth and wide shoulder.
Feel its sharp edges with your feet or your hands,
Far too rough to be natural among river bottom sands.
In about 200 feet more this road comes to an end
In a bit of a hollow, a forested glen.

Turn left at the road's end and start up a stone stair,
And suddenly you'll find yourself in a place where
On the corner, to the right, amidst the raspberries,
Are the remains of a burned structure, look carefully if you please.
Named after Ross McKenney, that teacher of woodcraft,
Who taught students many things, including how to draft
Designs for cabins such as this where students came to play.
This cabin in '84 saw its last and final day.
Why it came, and why it went, is an interesting story
Full of intrigue, subterfuge, and a touch of student glory.
In '46, without permission, u-grads built this here log cabin
To protest the high fees that the Ravine Lodge staff were nabbin'.
For the next 40 years, this was a low-brow student dive,
'Till the newly appointed John Rand Cabin did arrive.
(John Rand Cabin is up the ridge a quarter mile or two –
Too far away to be mentioned in this quest's local purview.)

Now turn up the hill to observe signs from the past,
And prepare to imagine activities quite vast.
Down from above a stone roadway comes ramping,
It was here in the '00s that horses came tramping
Uphill in the summer pulling railroad wheel pairs,
Further up to the clearing 'midst lumbermen's stares.
These woodsmen set the wheels on a rolled iron track,
And upon these steel wheels proceeded to stack
Whole trunks of tree giants, 'specially the spruce,
And when fully loaded, they gave it a goose
Which set the whole thing rolling down, downward indeed,
Traveling with the force of gravity feed.
So the trees were transported 3.5 miles further on,
'Til meeting still more horses who hauled the trunks down to Warren.

This grade used to be among the Lodge's first driveways.
At the top, near the clearing, perchance to look sideways.
On the left you may see old logs covered by moss
That didn't measure up to the standards set by Ross,
And have lain here in the leaves now for several generations
(Don't be fooled by the newer logs from recent renovations.)
Continue out into the open, the Ravine Lodge now in sight.
This open space has seen many things—activities day and night.
The first of these, a logging camp, built more than a century back,
Gave food and rest to loggers in a modest tar paper shack.
Camp 2 it was called, for its distance from the mill,
(Camp 1 was back by the Carriage Road, Camp 3 further up the hill).

Though today's Lodge leach field has reworked the topography,
One last vestige of Camp 2 is still possible to see.
Those fat birches, across the road, at the field and forest marg,
Date from the Camp 2 clearing – that's why they're big and large.
After Camp 2 burned in the 1920s, Dartmouth came upon the scene
And turned the Camp's old horse stalls into a ski lodge, neat and clean.
From '33 to '35 Ford and Peggy Sayre here held court
'Till the good food and camaraderie were once again cut short
By a fire that leveled that first Ravine Camp and did such major harm
That the DOC retreated down to Warren and the old Spyglass Farm.
But in the winter of '37 with Will Brown now on the scene,
Along with Ross McKenney here below Jobildunk Ravine,
Work began on this Ravine Lodge – rising from the ashes,
And for that, six decades later, we can still raise up our glasses!
Keep in mind, as you stand here, that the Lodge was for winter built,
(Though the smarties, despite the furnace, never lodged here sans quilt.)

A favorite activity was to ski this front lawn at night --
Under floodlight, and star light, it must have been a special sight.
But in the late 50s as skiing took a mechanistic bent,
The Ravine Lodge for a decade into oblivion was sent
Until, thankfully, it was once again reopened,
And folks like ourselves it can lovingly now tend.
We've come to the end of our outdoor bit of quest,
Return to the Ravine Lodge by whatever route seems best.
Go in through the downstairs door, and once again take time
To meet the people and places mentioned in this questing rhyme.
At long last, here and now, it's time to find the treasure.
Whether or not you can will be a sort of measure
Of your searching skills and our writing craft --
Here's hoping that neither of us is hapless and daft!

Picture yourself arriving at the Lodge with you skis.
There's a big sign over a doorway that seeing it would please
You no end, in the '50s, for it would tell you how to go
As you prepare for a tow trip up the mountain on snow.
Standing under this sign and facing away
Walk until you get warmer, much warmer I say!
You should be facing a wall full of crazy designs
If you know Dr. Schlitz, it's his Forest of Signs.
It is here you must look, perhaps hi, perhaps low,
The treasure box has been hidden quite carefully, just so.
When the box is in hand and your excitement is roiled,
Drats! You are likely to find yourself foiled
Unless with great care this quest you've attended
And noted above the three numbers we recommended.
Open the box now with pleasure and glee –
It's as easy as the numbers one, two and three!
Thank you for following this historical quest
If you've made it this far, you're simply the best!
Give a nod to Will Brown and all who've gone before
For helping us peer through this historical door.