

MOUNTAIN TheEAR

30 YEARS

THE WEEKLY NEWS & LIFESTYLE JOURNAL OF MT. WASHINGTON VALLEY

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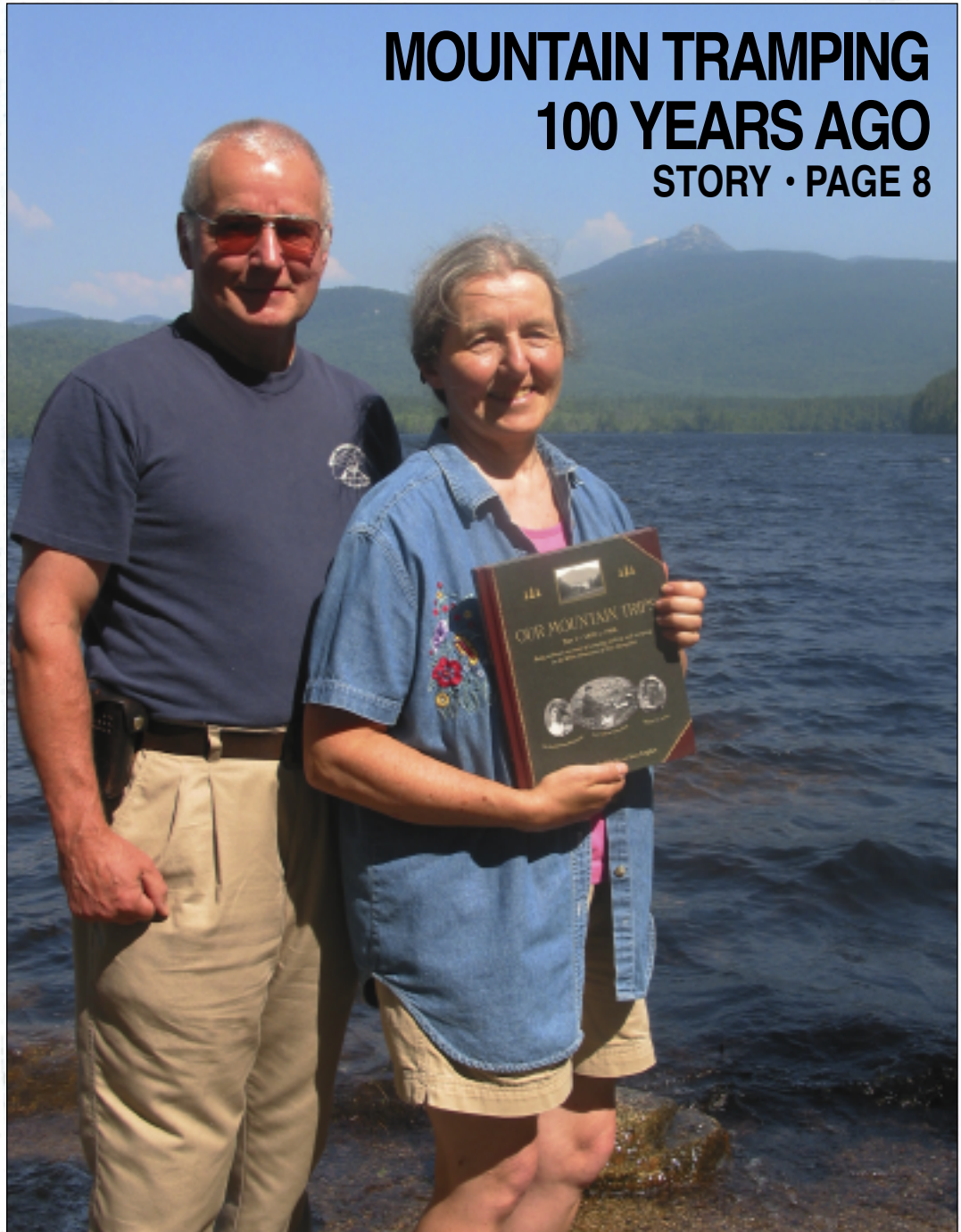
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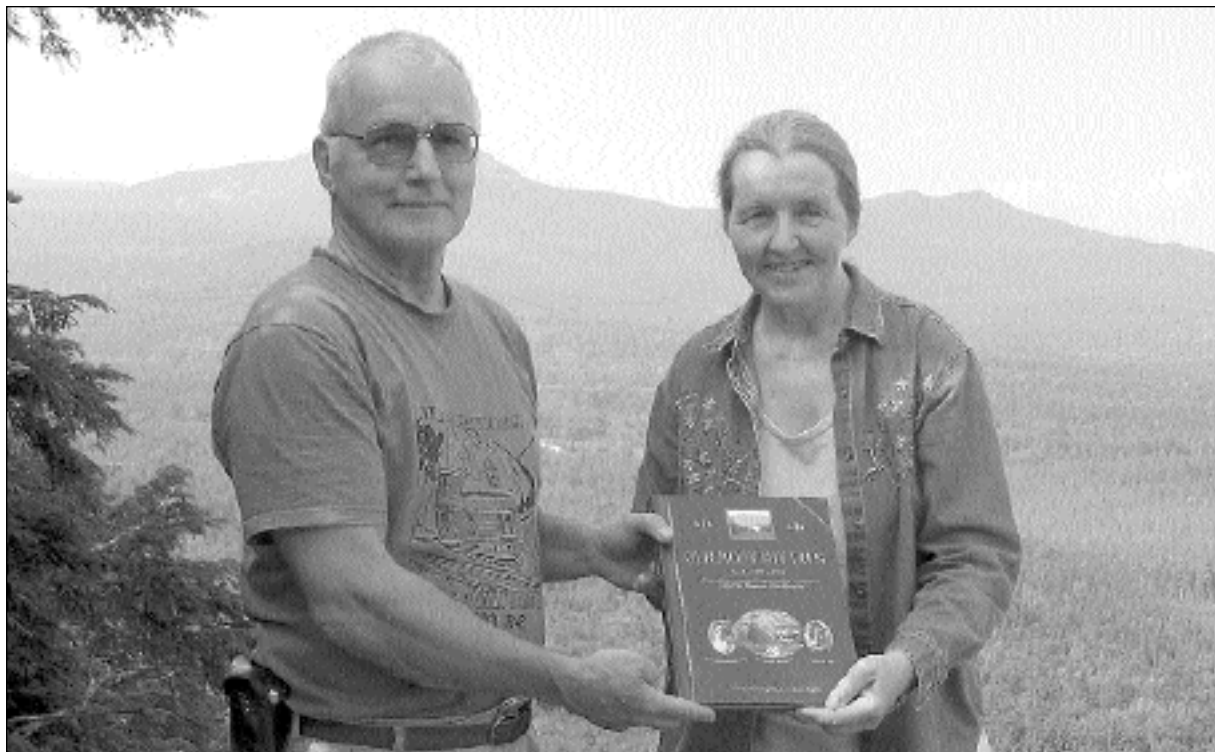
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Ben English, Jr. of Jackson and his sister, Jane English of Calais, Vt., have compiled the journals and photographs taken by their grandparents, Walter and Ida Rachel James, of their explorations in the White Mountains into the book "Our Mountain Trips: Part I — 1899 to 1908," published recently by Bondcliff Books of Littleton.

A New England family shares its passion for the mountains **New book chronicles hiking trips from a hundred years ago**

By Steve Smith
Contributing Writer

IN SOME FAMILIES, A LOVE of mountains flows down through the generations. Mothers hike with daughters, fathers camp with sons, and a life-long passion for the high country is kindled anew.

For one New England family, this happy union of peaks and people has borne fruit with the publication of "Our Mountain Trips: Part I — 1899 to 1908," a remarkable new book edited by Ben English, Jr., 65, of Jackson and his sister, Jane English, 63, of Calais, Vt.

In large format and stunningly illustrated, it recounts a series of explorations undertaken in the White Mountains a century ago by Ben and Jane's grandparents, Walter H. James (1873-1963) and Ida Rachel Butterfield James (1875-1966), at a time when camping and hiking (or "tramping," as it was then

known) were savored in a more leisurely fashion.

In 1899 this young professional couple from Massachusetts, both of whom had grown up on farms and made early connections with the outdoors, undertook the first of their many vacation journeys to the hills of New Hampshire. For the next two decades they came to the White Mountains nearly every year, camping and tramping and exulting in the beauty of the streams and the forests and the summits. Along the way they introduced Ida Rachel's sister, Lucy Ardena "Dena" Butterfield (1871-1955), and various friends to the joys and travails of life in the woods.

Like many trampers of the time, Walter, Ida Rachel and Dena kept detailed journals of their backcountry explorations. Accompanying these handwritten narratives were hundreds of magnificent black-and-white photographs, mostly taken by

Walter using a variety of cameras and formats.

These family records were passed on to Walter and Ida Rachel's daughter, Ruth, who herself became an avid hiker, and in turn came into the possession of Ruth's children, Ben and Jane. Now, they have been published as "Our Mountain Trips."

Carrying on the family tradition, Ruth and her husband introduced Ben and Jane to hiking at an early age. Both climbed their first peak, Mt. Cardigan, in 1947, when they were seven and five respectively. Their enthusiasm for mountains has been a constant in their lives ever since.

Ben worked on the Appalachian Mountain Club trail crew from 1956-1958, and in 1959 he became one of the earliest hikers to trek through the list of White Mountain 4000-footers. A retired English and social studies teacher (including a 20-year stint in Bartlett), he remains an active hiker today. He is also an

avid local historian and has co-authored two books on railroading in Crawford Notch.

As a young woman, Jane participated in the AMC's Mountain

their grandparents' journals and photos. What she found was a fascinating account, in words and images, of what traveling and hiking and camp life were like a century ago.

"It occurred to me that this was a unique historical record and that it really should be published."

— Jane English, Co-author of 'Our Mountain Trips'

Leadership Training course and led hiking trips at girls summer camps. After earning a Ph.D. in physics, she followed her muse as a photographer and creator of books and calendars, living in the shadow of such mountains as Pikes Peak in Colorado and Mt. Shasta in California. In 2002 she came full circle, moving back East and settling in the Green Mountain State.

Not until recently did the English siblings realize what a treasure lay on Ben's shelves. Last summer, while working on a family history project, Jane started leafing through some of

"It occurred to me that this was a unique historical record and that it really should be published," she recalled. Ben agreed, and he contacted Mike Dickerman of Littleton, a longtime hiking friend whose company, Bondcliff Books, specializes in publishing titles about the White Mountains. Knowing great material when he saw it, Dickerman quickly committed to publishing the book.

Though "Our Mountain Trips" was essentially already written and illustrated, there was much work to be done before it could be published.



Walter H. James (L) and James Johnson (R) model the "doughnuts" they used to carry camping gear as they set off on a tramping trip to the White Mountains in 1903. These bundles had a waterproof enamel cloth on the outside with blankets and larger pieces of equipment wrapped on the inside. Food and smaller articles were carried in a bag. This photo was taken in Dunstable, Mass. by Lucy Ardena Butterfield.

Ben and Jane recounted that story as we sat one recent warm and breezy afternoon on Allen's Ledge, a viewpoint partway up Hedgehog Mountain off the Kancamagus Highway. We chose this location for our meeting because it offered a view over the Albany Intervale similar to that shown in a 1904 Walter H. James photo reproduced in the new book.

"Putting this together was a lot of work, and a lot of fun," said Jane. "Ben's wife, Judith, transcribed most of the handwritten journals into computer files, then Mr. English, the retired English teacher, reviewed the text. As part of the proofreading process, Judith read the journals aloud to us."

This method of going over the book, in keeping with the leisurely pace of the trips, revealed additional details and bits of humor, she said.

Of the 19 trips described, 10 were written by Walter, or "Gramp," as



In this 1905 photo from "Our Mountain Trips" a group of campers walks to the train that will take them home after a two-week sojourn at a backwoods camp near North Woodstock, NH. Their tents and packs had been sent separately to the railroad station by horse and wagon. Pictured are two of the authors of the journals that appear in the newly published book - Lucy Ardena Butterfield (third from right) and Ida Rachel Butterfield James (far right), who is holding a deer antler she found along the trail to Mt. Moosilauke. The photo was taken by the third author, Walter H. James.



The two principal authors of "Our Mountain Trips" - Ida Rachel Butterfield James and Walter H. James - pose at the James Farm in Portsmouth, NH before heading off to the White Mountains for a camping trip near Mt. Chocorua in 1904. They are each wearing duffelbags used for carrying food and smaller gear items, while their "doughnuts" are on the back of the horse-drawn buggy. The couple made numerous trips to the White Mountains from 1899 into the 1920s and kept detailed journals of their adventures.

he was affectionately known, six were authored by Ida Rachel ("Gubby"), and three by "Aunt Dena."

They included several journeys to the Sandwich Range and the Mt. Chocorua area in particular, which involved less travel time for those arriving from the south by rail and carriage. There were also accounts of visits to North Woodstock and Mt. Moosilauke, North Conway, Franconia and Crawford Notches, Mt. Washington, and the Northern Presidentials.

Of special note was a two-week sojourn in the Albany Intervale, mostly spent encamped on an island in Downes Brook. (Many of the camping practices used in those days would, of course, not pass muster under today's "Leave No Trace" ethics.)

"It was neat to read about many places I've been to, and compare notes from a hundred years ago," said Ben. "Some of these places you can't get photos from anymore. I also remember seeing the old steps of the Flume House in Franconia Notch when I was younger, and now it's great to read how my grandfather stayed there in 1903 on one of his walking trips."

The maps that show the trip routes in the book were a team effort. Ben sketched the routes from road and trail maps and penciled in the place names, then Jane scanned the sketches and built the final maps using the Quark Xpress program.

Using her extensive background as a professional book designer, Jane laid out all 168 pages of the book. Her unique cover design features a reproduction from the cover of Dena's hardbound, gold-embossed journal.



This view of Potash Mountain looking west across the Albany Intervale was taken by Walter H. James on a trip to the White Mountains in January 1906. The location was near Shackford's, a small hotel that catered to visitors to the Swift River valley in the early 1900s. The dirt road seen here was the predecessor to today's Kancamagus Highway. Most of the fields have long since grown up to forest.



The old AMC Hermit Lake Camp in Tuckerman Ravine is shown in this photo taken by Walter H. James on a June 1906 trip to the White Mountains with his friend Charles Matthews. The two campers journeyed from Portsmouth, NH to Pinkham Notch in a light wagon drawn by a farm mare named Dolly. They trekked up through the ravine, where they found snow piled six or eight feet deep, visited the summit of Mt. Washington, and then looped back to their camp at the base of the mountain.

The digital restoration of the old photos — which were in the form of prints, film negatives and glass negatives, some better preserved than others — was a painstaking labor of love for Jane. She drew on her many years of darkroom and computer experience working on her own black-and-white photographs.

“I just sat myself down last winter and did it,” said Jane. “It was easy to lose sense of time when I was working on the photos. It became kind of a meditation, taking out the scratches and dirt specks. I’m very happy with the way they came out in the book.”

The beautifully composed photos by Walter H. James in “Our Mountain Trips” depict a variety of subjects - mountain views, backcountry camp life, trappers on the trail, waterfalls and streams, and roadside scenes from horse-and-buggy journeys to and from the mountains. The hand-lettered captions and story titles were scanned so they could be reproduced in the book.

Of special interest are the portraits of trappers sporting the garb of the era, such as the long woolen skirts often worn by the women. Also shown are the “doughnuts” that were slung over the shoulder to carry gear. In 1905 these were replaced by the “AMC bag,” a simple canvas sack with leather shoulder straps.

“We used this as a boot bag when we were younger,” said Jane. “We didn’t know anything about its history until we started working on this project. We still have it and there’s a

picture of one in the book, and we’ll bring this and other camping equipment when we do slide shows.”

The Ansel Adams-like quality of Walter James’ photos prompted Jane to use two dozen of them in an American Transcendental Calendar she designed for 2006. With the pictures are quotes from Thoreau, Emerson and other luminaries of the 19th century Transcendental school of thought.

For Ben, some of the most fascinating photos were taken at a lumber camp on the Lost River Road (today’s Route 112) outside of North Woodstock.

“Logging history has always interested me, and it was great to see those photos of the camp — the outside and the inside — especially the cook at his big cookstove,” he said.

On that 1905 trip, Walter, Ida Rachel, Dena and friends were treated to a meal of boiled beef and cabbage by the lumbermen. The next day they went to nearby Henryville (today’s Lincoln) and inquired about a ride up into the East Branch wilderness on the lumber railroad operated by the infamous timber baron, J.E. Henry. Unfortunately, Mr. Henry “was not a bit cordial,” and refused to let them ride, presumably due to concerns about liability.

“Boy, I wish they had gotten a ride on J.E. Henry’s train,” lamented Ben. “That would have made a great story and photos.”

These and the many other tales in “Our Mountain Trips” make delightful reading for the modern-day mountain lover. Though the journals were penned a century ago, the writing style is fresh and vigorous and seasoned with dry humor. Walter and Ida Rachel and Dena come across as people you would enjoy sharing the woods with.

Both Ben and Jane noted that just as important as the fascinating historical content of the book is the example it sets for a less hurried manner of enjoying the mountains.

“Whenever things get too hectic, I can read one of these stories and things slow down for me,” said Ben.

Added Jane, “If there’s one thing I hope people come away with from reading this book, it’s to slow down and not vacation so hard — get some loafing time in. We encourage people to follow our grandparents’ example and enjoy the simple things in the mountains. Gramp always said there’s nothing better than just taking a deep breath of fresh mountain air.”

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