

Into the high mountain huts ...

# The Land Before Time -

By Steven Caming  
Contributing writer

As I struggled along a particularly steep pitch on the Greenleaf Trail (bringing up the rear — my own and that of our little hiking group), it became increasingly clear that I had outsmarted myself again.

Having previously hiked into a hut with the tireless and indomitable Howie Wemyss (from the Auto Road and Great Glen Trails), my plan this time was to bring someone along who would hike even slower than me. As fate would have it, I'd recently met Ludwig Schiessl, a former hutman and AMC construction crew member in the early 1960s. Now that he's 70 years old, I fully expected Ludwig to be the "sea anchor" that slowed the whole operation down.

This, in turn, would spare me feeling like I was always holding Howie back from his ambitious pace. . . and I was right about that part. Mr. Wemyss was not the problem. The problem turned out to be keeping up with Ludwig, the mad Bavarian mountain goat, who effortlessly seemed to leap from rock to rock, leading the whole way. I could hardly believe my eyes.

The real irony was that I had chosen the Greenleaf trail to the hut to avoid an area on the Old Bridle Path trail called "the three agonies". Call me crazy but a trail with the word agony in the name just sounded like something to avoid, if possible. Unfortunately, I had traded it for one long agony behind my two mountain running companions and their solicitous, Cheshire cat's perspiration free grins. . .

Greenleaf Hut circa 1931  
(Photo Courtesy AMC Archives)



Let's start by saying that each of the eight Appalachian Mountain Club huts has its devoted fans. It has always been that way. Be it "cruo" or guest, each individual forms a personal affinity for one hut or another. The logbooks are brimming with pride-filled accounts of indelible experiences that each generation took away with them.

But there seems to have always been something about Greenleaf that continues to inspire a somewhat elevated sense of loyalty and pride of place. "Gorgeous Greenleaf" was the nickname that stuck (though "Greenflea" was sometimes substituted), and upon arrival, it is easy to see why.

Greenleaf hut sits in an absolutely stunningly beautiful location. Overlooking Eagle lake, Mt. Lafayette and into Franconia Notch, the hut's commanding perch seems like a gift from the heavens, but was, in actuality, a gift from a very generous man named Col. Charles Greenleaf, former owner of the famous Profile House, one of the notable Grand Hotels of the era, located in Franconia Notch.

At a time when well-heeled tourists came for the "summer season," many

hotel proprietors established small mountaintop hostleries for their guests to refresh themselves after a long ride or hike up the mountain. There was one such establishment on the summit of Mt. Lafayette dating back to the 1840s, the foundation of which can, even today, still be found by the discerning eye.

Despite the ongoing popularity of hiking on and around Mt. Lafayette, by the 1920s it had been more than 60 years since an overnight shelter had been available, and then Col. Greenleaf left his bequest to the AMC for a hut on the mountain he loved so well.

How Greenleaf Hut came into being can be explained by the inimitable Joe Dodge himself, from a passage in Bill Putnam's biography of the legendary hutmaster.

*"The most interesting construction job of all was building the Greenleaf hut. We started that the same year we first ran Lonesome and that was the first big job we used those burros for, too. Old Col. Greenleaf had run the Profile House for years, at first with a partner, Dick Taft,*

*"If your pet isn't becoming to you, you should be coming to me."  
Call now to schedule your pet's bath, or styling appt.*

**Karla's**  
**Rendezvous**  
**for PETS**

Grooming • Doggie Play & Daycare • Self-Serve Dogwash

Established 1983

**FALL FOOD  
MADNESS SALE!!**

\$3 Off All Sizes- Merrick All-Natural  
Dry Dog Food In Stock.  
Free 13oz Can Of  
Wet Food With Purchase.

Join us Saturday Morning  
8:30-12:30 for our Saturday  
Morning "Sausage and  
Biscuit Play-Care Social"!!

290 West Main Street  
Conway, NH 03818

603.447.3435

 **Danforth Bay**  
CAMPING & RV RESORT



**4TH ANNUAL CAMPING & RV SHOW**  
Friday-Sunday Oct 17, 18 & 19, 2008

See the latest in Park Models, Fifth Wheels,  
Travel Trailers, PLUS Boats and other RV's!

\$3 PER ADULT OR \$5 PER CARLOAD

Food Tent provided by the Madison  
Snowmobile Club & The Scrub Oaks Scramblers.

Friday: Preview 3-7pm Saturday: 9-5pm Sunday: 9-noon  
www.danforthbay.com 196 Shawtown Rd. Freedom, NH (603) 539-2069

# AMC's gorgeous Greenleaf Hut



(Steve Caming/Mountain Ear Photo)

named opening crew who made this entry some 58 years ago:

*"1950 Summer Season—Greenleaf's Chinaware Twentieth Anniversary (Or the third decade)  
"Never Mistake Asthma for Passion"  
Trigger the Frigger  
Smoky Joe  
Rocky in Da Haid  
Oola  
Lil Mayor and Palono  
Bull Bancroft-Skinner emeritus"*

As has always been the case, that croo back in 1950 had to be ready to contend with any and all hikers who could find their way into the mountains. And some, then as now, were not quite as well prepared as they might have been. This would most often result in some minor discomfort for the ill prepared, though occasionally it could result in search and rescues participated in on a moment's notice by the hut crew on duty.

A friendly caution in the logbook on August 16, 1950, harkens to some of those who were on the less prepared side of the equation.

*"Are you a goofer—a silk stocking goofer?  
Do you wear high heels?  
Do you scatter your boxes all over the rock's  
And leave disgusting peels?  
Do you powder your faces in wide open spaces  
And look unbecomingly pale?  
If you are a goofer, a silk stocking goofer,  
Stay off of the high mountain trail."*

Considering that through the years the AMC hut crews have often been the first responding safety net for generations of hikers who have run into trouble, it is understandable that the organization and its programs have been great proponents of proper mountain safety protocols.

Some hikers, though, just show up with a smile, spend a happy night and

GREENLEAF continues Page A8

the guy they named the ski trail for on Cannon. In 1922 the Colonel was really getting on, so he sold the whole shebang and retired. Then the very next summer, in August, the hotel burned flat. Well, I guess that kind of broke the old man's heart because he died about a year later, but in his will he left quite a sum to the AMC with the provision that it be used to build some kind of mountain shelter", Dodge explained. "Now, the Colonel has his hut right up at timberline on the crest of that ridge west of Mt. Lafayette, where you can look across at the same mountains he would see from his hotel."

By 1929, at about the time when Dodge and his crews began to create the "Western Division" of the hut system, the expertise gathered from previous high mountain construction projects had begun to pay off.

*"The plan we used for Greenleaf was very flexible and was developed from our experience at Madison and the Lakes over the years. It has a living/dining room in the midsection and a bunkroom on either side. The crew and kitchen area is behind. This makes for a very compact building, which reduces heat loss. For the first time, we built 20th century plumb-*

*ing facilities right into the original structure. In the other huts, we kind of added them on later, when the demand picked up. We finished up Greenleaf the next summer and then got started on Galehead and Zealand,"* Dodge recounted.

And what was created over those ensuing years has evolved into a strategically positioned system of alpine lodging properties unlike any other in the United States. On the one hand, there is a sense of disconnection from the "outside world" while at any of the huts, made apparent by the remote location. On the other hand, upon arriving at these isolated refuges, one finds friendly caretakers, delicious home cooking and a diverse assemblage of guests, which all seems that much more incongruous, given that you are miles into the wilderness.

On the night of this particular visit, it was a small group, less than a dozen, which added to the intimacy and easy camaraderie. It turned out that Ludwig was something of a minor celebrity with the croo and guests, with his status as a historical character confirmed by an entry in the hut logbook on July 19, 1962.

*"Ludwig Schiessl—round trip from hut to summit of Lafayette 23 minutes 53*

*seconds."*

It still boggles my mind that I inadvertently invited a multiple record holding human dynamo (he apparently also holds the record in his class at the Mt. Washington footrace) to be my secret "slow down" weapon. The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray...

THE HUT LOGBOOKS, AS always, provided a uniquely compelling and very human glimpse into the history of the place and its ever changing inhabitants...One can almost feel the buoyant spirits of the colorfully nick-



**Bethel Outing Club 28th Anniversary Ski Sale**  
**Gould Academy Field House**  
 6:30 - 9:00pm Friday Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> • 9am - 12pm Saturday Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>  
**ALPINE • X-COUNTRY • SNOWBOARD**  
 New and Used Equipment, Clothing and Accessories.

Consignments may be dropped off after 12pm Friday  
 Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> • 16% consignment fee per item • Please, no obsolete equipment  
[www.bethelouting.org](http://www.bethelouting.org)

Major Credit Cards Accepted

# Greenleaf

Continued from Page A7

leave more than satisfied the next day, like the following fellow in July 1952, for example:

*"In all my travels as a hitchhiker or by foot never have I found a more welcome haven. Within this humble abode I discovered the bucolic hospitality that would suit a king. Alas, says I, here is a place to my liking. Good food, lodging, and most of all good company. Alas, I fear that as I travel onward on that empty road, following that innumerable caravan to that mysterious realm from which none return, I may never again find the hospitality and warmth that I found today."*

—Andrew Gross,  
New Rochelle, NY

Some who found their way to the hut during those long, cold winter months when it was closed for the season found not much respite after a tough slog in, as in this multi-page, multi-day odyssey summed up, in part, here:

February 4-8, 1953

*"This damned mountain has been giving us the biggest battle I've ever seen—rain, snow that buried the trail... snowshoe straps all broke so we abandoned our packs and returned to the road... came back next day and picked up packs —*

right:  
Greenleaf Hut log books  
(Steve Caming/Mountain Ear Photo)

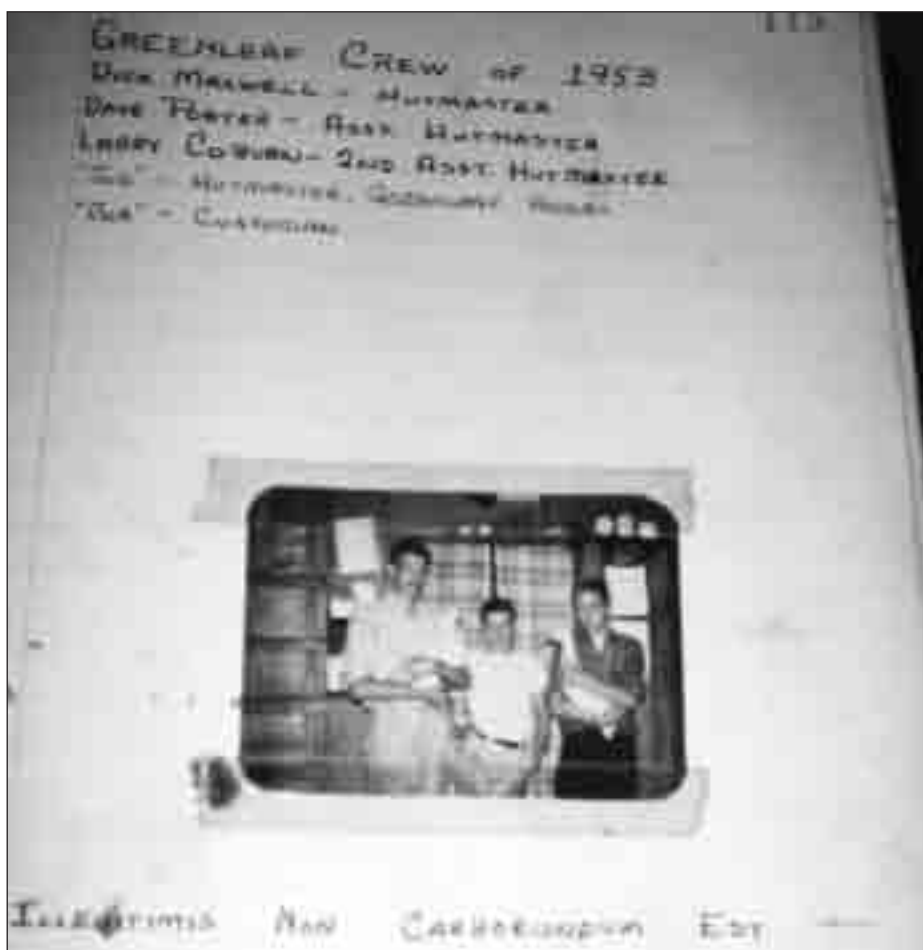
*continued to hut. Snowshoe straps broke again... cold and wet..."*

This tale of woe continued for two more days of ups and downs.

Fast forward 10 years and even a soldier fresh out of the service found his military gear less than mountain worthy.

*"August 17, 1963—Pete Balen  
My first experience at hiking other than with Uncle Sam. Consequently, was not properly equipped — an army combat pack and army combat boots are quite inadequate when the going gets a little rough. I'm ceremoniously disposing of both items as soon as I reach home. Next trip to this area, and I hope there will be, will therefore be more enjoyable."*

Through the years, a number of servicemen found their way into the huts to find the peace and perspective of the natural world. Some went the other way and never came back, like Sal Pagliuca, who not only worked in the huts, but was part of the original Mt. Washington Observatory weather crew that recorded the world record wind of 231 mph on April 12, 1934. Pagliuca went off to fight in World War II and died there. There are other hutmen who lost their lives fighting this nation's wars, and some of their names still hang on plaques in the



huts they never made it back to.

FOR SOME, MAKING IT INTO a hut may be the first great challenge of their young lives and it is quite an accomplishment, and the aches and pains are just part of the "red badge of courage."

*"June 25, 1966 — Pete, age 7. I am tired... leg sore... foot aching... bruised hand. We must have walked 500 miles today. Anyway, I am tired."*

Or as one similarly fatigued adult put it a few pages later, *"With all the spiritual energy around here, why am I so tired!?"*

One international visitor left his thoughts in two languages, having been so moved by his hut experience at Greenleaf.

*"September 10, 1966—This is the first experience for me to climb up the mountain in the United States. I was from Japan about 50 days ago. I enjoyed beautiful scenery and very fine day. This hut is very similar to the Japanese huts. People and food are at home. I like very much this hut and this mountain. I would like to write Japanese*

*words as a memory of my first climb in America. Thank you very much!*  
—Masayoshi Kanisawa

And under that a couple of lines of flowing Japanese calligraphy, as the hut plays yet another role — that of international ambassador.

Sadly, not all guests from "away" seem to get the point of being in the mountains, as illustrated here:

*"June 14, 1967 — we just graduated from high school and we're spending a few days in this area—what a stupid thing to do — we should be at the Cape!  
— Chrissy, Kim, Nancy and Linda,  
Needham, Mass."*

Daily life for a hut crew does involve a fair amount of repetition, cooking, cleaning, answering the same questions and dealing with people from all walks of life.

At times, the schedule and responsibilities can be quite demanding, while other times can provide a much needed pause for reflection.

One of the facts of life for those who live in these high mountain places is the ability to be called on in times of trouble. It has always been an important underlying premise of the Appalachian Mountain Club huts to provide what may be the first or last line of defense against "the perfect storm" of circumstances that so many hikers have found themselves in through the years.

Rob Burbank, public affairs director for the AMC, estimates that on average, hut personnel participate in approximately 50 search and rescues per year. And many others wander into the huts needing warmth and sustenance, if not an actual rescue.

One chilling entry from the Greenleaf logbook on July 22, 1967 serves as a reminder that on any given day, the huts can go from a place of recreation to one of salvation.

*"A night for da crew to remember, though we'd much rather forget it. Three of us had had a hard day of packing up the bridle path, Kenny had been cooking all day and one more had been packing into Galehead. Dinner had been served to the guests, dishes had been washed and the crew chow was being prepared when a hiker showed up claiming he and another had been struck by lightning on the summit. What kind of fools camp above timberline in a thunderstorm?"*

*The guests seemed like a good bunch when we left the place in their hands as*



**ALL MUMS ON SALE!**  
**9AM - 6PM Daily**

**MUMS - 7 SIZES - GREAT COLOR!**  
**PERENNIALS - GREAT SELECTION - \$1.00 / POT**  
Fresh veggies and pumpkins next door at Hilldale Farm!

**SULLIVAN GREENHOUSES**  
Life Everlasting Farm, Rte. 135S, 268 Elm Street  
2 1/2 miles from downtown Lancaster • 603-788-2034  
Thank you for supporting family farms






left:  
Greenleaf Hut log books  
(Steve Caming/Mountain Ear Photo)

*we ran up the mountain to rescue the other boy, who was quite sick. Kenny reached him first, followed by the rest of da croo with blankets, first aid gear, pack frames and ropes. The storm cleared for an instant while we improvised a litter of pack frames, supported by a net of climbing ropes.*

*Then, as the rain and lightning returned, we carried the boy off the summit and down toward the hut. Wrapped*

*in ponchos, blankets and a sleeping bag, the boy was reasonably comfortable, while the litter bearers on the other hand, were so few in number as to allow no change of teams. Five of us carried the litter down from the peak through the loose, slimy scree and granite to a point about a mile above the hut."*

Happily, not all interventions are of such a perilous nature, as a log entry from a couple of days after the rescue illustrated:

*"7/24/67 — Talk about 'frosting the cake!' We were just blessed with some very high-flying guests: yes, indeed they actually took a swim moderately dressed*

*GREENLEAF continues Page A10*



above:  
Greenleaf Hut Patch  
(Courtesy of Jim Hamilton)

left:  
The Mountain Hikers: Ludwig Schiessl,  
Steve Caming and Howie Wemyss  
(Steve Caming/Mountain Ear Photo)

opposite page:  
Mountain views  
(Steve Caming /Mountain Ear Photo)

## Greenleaf

Continued from Page A9

*in ... nothing! They walked right past our new water pump house and jumped in for a brief, but refreshing swim, after which they were instantly refreshed on the rules of Eagle lake as a swimming hole.*"  
—J. M. B.

And as has been the case in every log-book, in every hut as the summer wanes, the crew begins to wax poetic at the prospect of it all coming to an end for another year. For most, the typical three to five year hut tenure ends as the college years do, as they trade their winding summer trails for a full time career path.

When hutmaster Ken Olsen (who would eventually continue his AMC affiliation many years into the future) signed out of Greenleaf for the last time on August 27, 1967, after four years in the huts, it was with a wistful goodbye and recognition that for him, it was the end of an era.

*"The Sun Also Riseth. . ." Shortly, the summer will draw to a much needed, but much unwanted, end. To me, to try to remember all that happened, all that we succeeded in, all that we failed in, is futile. To be sure, even to recapture a sequence of happenings, or to organize in my mind an orderly summary of events, is in vain. This summer, more than any other time in my life, I am acutely aware of the passage of time. In some ways I want to be able to magically reconstruct the whole time, but I know that to do so would be to live in the past, and there's too much ahead. . .*

*To my crew I'll say what a very close friend once said to me: What hasn't been said, can't be said. Let this be the beginning—"*  
— Ken Olson, Lakes '64; Galehead '65; Mizpah '66; Greenleaf '67"

As for me, I rate Greenleaf as a personal favorite amongst the huts so far.

When the time came to leave, I found myself wanting to linger and watch the clouds play below in the valley and drift above in wispy tendrils over the ridgelines...

---

Since we live in a democracy, I acquiesced when my companions suggested taking a different route down. "It will add only a bit," Ludwig assured me in the understated way I had learned to be wary of.

As it turned out, hiking down the Old Bridle Path was a terrific alternative, with truly spectacular views and no agony on the three agonies going down. Unfortunately, it let us out nearly two and a half miles away from where we'd parked, essentially doubling the length of the return trip. I think they knew...

Following my time in the mountains with the Mad Bavarian Mountain Goat, I have come to at least one conclusion: Old hutmen never die—they're just waiting up ahead on the trail for you. ▲

