

BAY-Hiking 6/19

HEADLINE: Gunstock
Mountain: Making the
journey solo

1163 words

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I started out on my fifth hike with the plan to take a fitness trainer with me to talk about the health benefits of hikes. I set up the appointment and headed out with my backpack and hiking boots, ready to take on another mountain. Unfortunately, the trainer got tied up at her second job and couldn't make the hiking trip. I wondered what I was going to do, because I was already out in Gilford with my boots on, and I had consumed a bit of gas getting out to the trailhead.

We had planned to climb Whiteface, but as I drove away it seemed a shame to waste all my preparation, and Gunstock flitted across my mind. As I got to the junction of 11 and 11A, I found myself heading to Gunstock instead of the road that would take me home. I pulled into the parking lot at Gunstock around 4:30 p.m. and asked the guy sitting behind the information counter what the easiest way up Gunstock would be. He said that the easiest way would be to go up Rowe, which I had hiked previously, continue onto the ridge trail and follow that all the way to the top.

I went back to my car, grabbed my pack and camera and started off up the road to Rowe. All the way I kept thinking I could turn around at any time, that I didn't have to go this alone, but I

continued on until the familiar cell phone tower came into sight. The top of Rowe was still a great view once I hiked a little way down the ridge trail. Even at that point I was still thinking I could just head back down and go home. I rested for a bit with a book I was reading at the top of Rowe and briefly considered putting on my iPod to give me some musical encouragement, but I decided I would rather hear the nature sounds around me.

I continued along the ridge trail and instead of taking the white trail like my boyfriend and I had done a couple weeks ago I took the purple trail leading to Gunstock. This part of the trail is a fairly easy hike and was very well marked. I took the blue trail when the trail split, and then I was able to see an access road a few minutes later, the one that would take me to the top of Gunstock.

The trail is wide open here, but it is not an easy hike because it is very steep. The great part about going by myself was that I could rest when I wanted to and not have to worry about holding someone else up. It was a tad difficult to see the views because you had to stop and turn to admire them, but I did this frequently and so got to enjoy the changing view as I went higher and higher up Gunstock.

During the really steep parts of the hike I considered giving up, but by then I was so close to my goal that it really didn't make any sense. It would be like going to the ice cream shop fully intending to get ice cream and then deciding not to get any once you were there. What would be the point?

My first bit of excitement came when I saw the end of the ski lift over the trees and knew my destination was very close. Then I caught site of the lodge that sits on the summit and my energy came back as I eagerly moved to where I climbed to my destination. The time was 7:15 p.m. and I was at the top. I had done it! I was so excited, but had no one to share it with at the time, which was a bit of a downer.

I checked out the first aid hut and the Panorama Pub and took pictures but spent most of my time simply admiring the wonderful view from the top. One of the neat effects of hiking by myself was that I felt like I was the only person in the world. It was quiet and everything looked so peaceful and natural from that height.

One thought I had for the people of Gunstock is that they should really think about putting a water fountain or something similar at the top for hikers to fill their water bottles. When the Panorama Pub is open I can imagine that would be possible, but there is no way to fill them when no one is around, and I know I for one would have greatly appreciated that gesture.

After I had fully admired the view I started the trek back down and this time was able to enjoy the view in front of me headed down the trail. I could have taken the ski trail all the way down, but I opted to go back the way I had gone up and hit Rowe again on my way back. The sun was setting about this time and there are not real words to describe how beautiful that was. I only wish my pictures had done it

justice. There is truly something magical about the oranges and reds of the setting sun reflecting off the lakes and mountains. I reluctantly kept going down the trail and made it back to my car about 9 p.m. feeling extremely proud of myself.

I felt proud because I had accomplished something on my own with only my willpower as motivation. The silence of the wood gave me a chance to get rid of the noise my mind gets filled with everyday, worries like bills, work, family and everyday situations that create static in our lives. When I got back to my car my mind was a lot clearer, and even though I was tired I felt very satisfied.

The hike took me slightly less than five hours and it was pretty intermediate for a novice hiker. It had some difficult, steep parts, and I would recommend this for hikers looking for a challenge. The trail is very easy to follow because it is mostly access roads. I would guess that the total hike was about six miles.

As for hiking alone, it was a really good experience for me, though anyone who decides to do so should definitely take safety precautions, like letting others know where you are going and carrying a cell phone. This hike really drove home to me how beneficial taking time to reflect with outside influences can be to a person's state of mind, and I will surely go again sometime when the pressures of life start to close in.

Danielle will continue to chronicle her 12-mountain goal throughout the spring

and summer. To get your own check-off list, maps, and other info about the Belknap Mountain Range, visit www.belknapsportsmensclub.com or email dwatsonmusic@hotmail.com.

CUTLINE: (Hiking1)
YAY! THE TOP IS NEAR.
What a sight for someone who has been hiking for a couple hours already.
(Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking2) THIS WAS WORTH all the sweat it took to get to the top.
(Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)