

# FOOTPATH IN THE WILDERNESS

Walking through the Green Mountain wilderness was something Vermont's early settlers did out of necessity. They cleared paths in the woods, along rivers, and over mountains to reach the land that would become their home. Despite the beauty of the Green Mountains, they were more of an **obstacle** than an attraction to these pioneers.

As the years passed, Vermonters worked on their farms and in businesses and stepped less and less into the scenic mountains that split their state in two. Hours spent walking through the wilderness, at one time an everyday event, became a special happening.

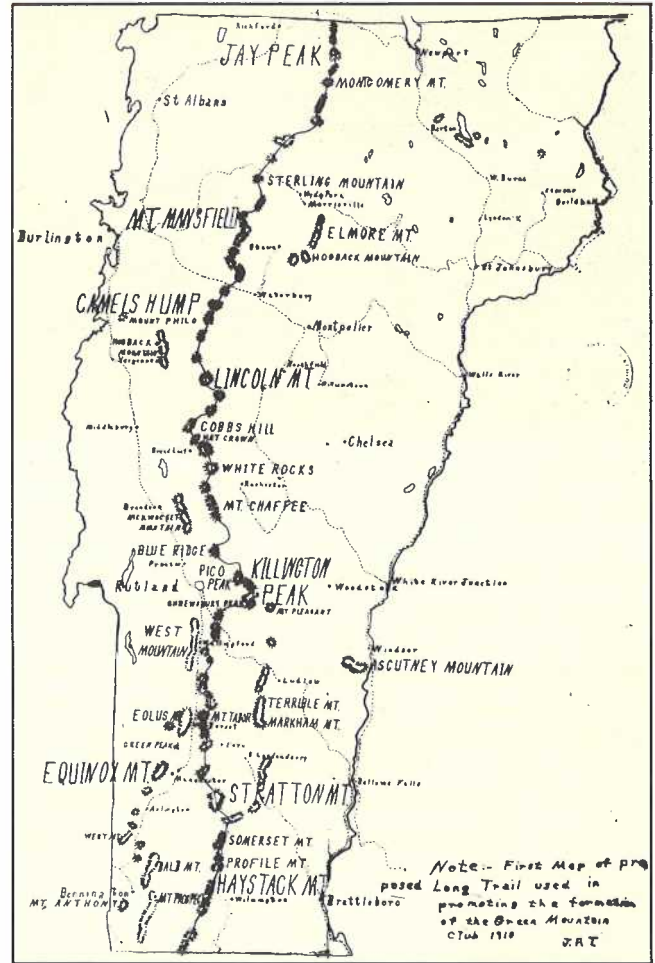
As people spent more and more time indoors, the appeal of the mountains as a place to spend **leisure** time grew. But there were few cleared trails and none that linked the scenic peaks. James Taylor, assistant principal of Vermont Academy in Saxtons River in 1908, had an idea that would change all that.

Taylor encouraged his students to hike in the mountains. What a shame it was, he felt, that there were no trails connecting Vermont's mountaintops. So he began to plan a long-distance trail that would run the whole length of the state.



On March 11, 1910, twenty-three persons met in Burlington to discuss the creation of the Long Trail. The Green Mountain Club was formed, and James Taylor was voted president. The club was charged with making "the Vermont mountains play a larger role in the life of the people."

Shortly after the meeting, work began to clear the trail that would eventually run along Vermont's ridgetops from Massachusetts to Canada. The job was huge. Volunteers marked and cleared sections of trail beginning with the piece between Mount Mansfield and Camel's Hump.



Work progressed slowly, but bit by bit the trail that James Taylor dreamed of became a reality.

In 1929 all but the northernmost end of the trail was cleared. Roy Buchanan, a professor at the University of Vermont and a longtime friend of the Long Trail, set out with his brother Bruce to mark the last stretch. Starting at Jay Peak the two hiked north until they came to International Boundary Marker 592 on the Canadian border.



The first three women to hike the Long Trail from beginning to its end. Their hike in 1927 took twenty-seven days.

They decided to end the Long Trail here. The following summer, two University of Vermont students followed the markers set by the Buchanan brothers and cleared the final ten-mile stretch with their axes and hatchets. At last the Long Trail was finished, extending 265 miles from border to border. It had taken twenty years to complete.

The Green Mountain Club did more than build and maintain the trail. People needed places to stay after a long day of hiking, so trailside shelters were constructed. The club also printed maps and guidebooks to help hikers plan their hikes.

From the start, people hiked the trail nicknamed the “footpath in the wilderness.” Some even walked its entire length. These people, known as “End to Enders,” may hike the trail all in one trip or spread out their 265-mile journey over many years.

Although the trail has changed little over the years, the number of hikers using it and the gear they wear and carry have changed a lot. Early Green Mountain Club guidebooks suggest clothing that seems odd today—woolen underwear, rubber capes in case of rain, and boots with

**hobnails.** Women were advised to wear **bloomers** but warned not to appear on the street in such **attire**. Now, one can purchase lightweight, protective clothing designed for hiking. Down-filled sleeping bags are warmer and not-so-heavy as the blanket roll. Modern **dehydrated** camping food makes cooking quicker and easier and loads lighter.

Each year more than 100,000 persons enjoy the Long Trail, the oldest, long-distance hiking trail in the United States. In a state whose name means “green mountain” in French, the Long Trail gives everyone a chance to experience these beautiful mountains up close.



### VOCABULARY

**obstacle** — something that is in the way

**leisure** — free from duties

**hobnails** — a short nail with a thick head used to protect the soles of shoes or boots

**bloomers** — short, loose trousers that were gathered at the waist and knees.

**attire** — clothing

**dehydrated** — with water removed