What About Bob

Bob Hysko Inherits Love Of Outdoor Adventure From Dad

Interview By Kathy Kyle

How did you find out about CMC and when did you join?

One of the reasons I moved to Asheville in 2007 was to enjoy the great hiking opportunities in the area. CMC had

a reputation for having very knowledgeable hikers, the type of people I wanted to meet so I joined the club within the first two months of moving.

When and where did you start hiking?

My father was an avider backpacker in his youth and he would take my sister and me on short day hikes when we were young. By the time I was old enough for serious hiking, however, he was no longer physically up for it. I got into backpacking with a group of friends when I was in my early thirties. It was great but it did not last very long, family obligations got in the way. My hope at that time was that there would be a window of opportunity, maybe two to three years, between the time my sons were old enough and I was still young enough to do some of the backpacking I always wanted to try. Fortunately that window has stayed open for over 20 years and we have been able to see some of the great wilderness areas in North America.

What do you enjoy about hiking?

Hiking is the perfect activity for me, part aerobic, part social and part spiritual.

What is your ideal hike?

Good company, good views, good weather and old growth forest.

You had a close call with a hiking club cutting wood on an outing. What happened?

I've had a number of misadventures associated with my hiking activities. Seven years ago while I was splitting logs, at a hiking club lodge in NY State's Harriman Park, a piece of metal when through my body at high speed. The next thing I remember is being airlifted to a regional trauma center. The surgeon said the metal went through my chest bone, ricocheted off and went around the inside of my rib gage and settled near my spinal cord resulting in extensive internal bleeding. If not for ricochet, he said it would have been fatal. As it was, I still needed a week in the hospital in order to get the gook out of my lungs. It is not completely clear what the metal object was. The Park police said it came from my wedge or my sledgehammer at impact, went down and hit a stone and came back and hit me. The surgeon said that I did not enough straight to do this type of damage and wound had all the characteristics of a gunshot wound which he has seen much too often. I sidemore with the police, I do have the ability to seriously hurt myself, and I have proven this onmore than one occasion. The good news is that while the metal still travels with me, it is notlarge enough to set off airport security systems.

Other mishaps include having a black bear in the Adirondacks steal three days worth of ourfood, and losing my footing on a glacier a in the Grand Tetons and sliding into a 12

foot deep curvaceous. My family has also been attacked by some of the most ferocious animals known to mankind, black flies in the Adirondacks and mosquitoes in the Canadian Rockies. When you read a trail description that describes hundred of lakes, think about the possibility of a billion mosquitoes joining you for dinner. We do not have anything near the mosquito problem here in Southern Appalachia. The mountains are so old that water has found a way to get to the ocean leaving much less breeding ground for mosquitoes.

You have backpacked out west, what is your favorite trip you have had out there? Gee, that is hard to say, there have been so many great trips, I go west at least once a year and usually more. To pick one I would say the John Muir Trail. The JMT is a 217 mile long trail in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California running between Yosemite Valley in the north and Mt. Whitney in the south. It goes through 3 National Parks: Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia and the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness areas and has only one road crossing. This is a land of 13,000foot and 14,000footpeaks, of lakes in the thousands, and of canyons and granite cliffs. It's also a land blessed with the mildest, sunniest climate of any major mountain range in the world. It doesn't get any better than this, especially if one goes after mosquito season.

How does the hiking experience differ in other parts of the country?

All areas have their pluses and minuses. If one is looking for an extensive all season interconnected day hiking trail system, I have not seen anything that comes close to the Asheville area. The AT has the hundreds of shelters, which are great places to meet your fellow hikers, and there are ample resupply opportunities. It is, however, a difficult trail to hike; always going for the ridgeline no matter how many rocky up and down miles that creates. The Pacific Crest Trail is just the opposite. It seems designed to make hiking as easy as possible. The trail is extremely well graded and always seems to be headed for the lowest pass needed to get you over to the next range. A pass in the West is the same thing as a gap in North Carolina, a notch in New England and a saddle in the Adirondacks, just much higher. The rule of thumb in terms of difficulty is that walking 20 miles on the AT is equivalent to 25 miles on the PCT. The PCT has great and varied scenery; it also has noshelters, a shorter hiking season and major logistical problems. The Rocky Mountains are spectacular; I particularly enjoy climbing in Colorado. Janet Martin and I have managed to summit five14ers in the last two years.

When did you buy that backpack you use?

The only piece of equipment leftover from my early hiking days is my 1971 Kelty Green backpack. At the time it was the top of the line backpack in the country. Since it was the only pack that properly fitted me, I sprang for the \$90. By today's standers it is obsolete, especially here in the East. It is too heavy, too tall (hits every low hanging branch on the trail), too top heavy and unstable at any speed. I have taken some nasty falls with this pack; the worst was on Paul Benson's backpack in the Smokies. It's hard, however, for me to give it up; it's like an old friend that has been with me in good times and bad. The packcame with a lifetime warrantee and is currently in Colorado again, this time asking for new zippers and top rim. At some point Kelty is going to say enough is enough, the problem is not equipment failure but rather the pack is just wornout, just like you are .Kelty, however, is still selling an updated version of this pack on the west coast, were the mountains have different types of trees and where the long distances between resupply points make the extra carrying capacity advantageous. I'm hopeful that Kelty will see a

promotional opportunity here; a chance to show how well they design and build their packs. I still see original Kelty Greens on the trail but I never notice any competing brands from that era still in use.

What is your favorite hike in this area? What do you like about it?

There is a five mile section of the MST near my home that I find very enjoyable. It runs between Craven Gap and the Folk Art Center and for a while drops far enough below the BRP to lose any road noise.

You recently finished the Smoky hiking challenge. How did you approach the challenge?

I started with a very relaxed ten year plan in mind, about 80 new miles a year. It did not work out that way. Partners are very helpful in this type of challenge, not only for their company and ride sharing but also for the ability to provide a second car at the end of trail. All my fellow challengers had a more aggressive time schedule in mind, I just don't know why. I think it is call type A personality. My choice was to either pickup my pace and stay with them or find new partners down the road, if I could. I increased my monthly mileage and completed the challenge in a little over six years.

Don't you maintain a trail? Which one? What do you have to do to maintain the trail?

Having spent so much time hiking on the AT, I felt it was time give a little back. Early last year, I took over Lenny Bernstein's 2.7mile inaccessible section of the AT that runs between Rice Gap and Sugarloaf Gap. This was not a match made in heaven. Almost has soon as I took it over, my knee started to go to go bad. I had real pain just carrying my weedwacker up the mountain to Rice Gap to start my work. I realized that I had to choose between my AT section and my knee, I could not keep both. I chose to keep the trail and had a partial knee replacement last December. Hopefully by spring I will be able to resume my normal activities. If anyone would like to become a co section maintainer, let me know. I could use the help. The job entails a least three walkthroughs a year, doing routine

maintenance such as weedwacking and small branch cutting. Reporting major problems to the trail crew and talking with the though hikers.

What is next?

I do not have any definite plans at this time but I would like to diversify my activities and get more out of my comfort zone. A long distance bike trip has always been one of my fantasies. A hiking vacation on another continent also seems exciting. I go on short day hikes with my grandson; maybe someday he will want to be a fourth generation backpacker.