

George Oldham: A wonderful life

Stuart English



When Ashok Kudva and his wife moved to Carolina Village in Hendersonville, he had not expected to meet one of CMC's last living presidents who had not been interviewed. So, I hurriedly put together some questions, and met George and Ashok for lunch at this excellent retirement facility. It turned out that I didn't really need the questions since it soon became apparent that George, a 95-year-old WW2 veteran, was telling me the story of his life as it came to him. What a life it was!

George retired from his job as Superintendent of Schools in Parsippany-Troy Hills, New Jersey and moved to Hendersonville in 1975. His wife had Parkinson's disease and George retired early at 53 to take care of her. George had a common bond immediately with Ashok since he had been stationed in India during World War II. He had been a bombardier on B-24s, "the Liberator" and was stationed at a base near Calcutta. They flew bombing missions over Burma against the Japanese and flew supplies over the Himalayas for troops in China. George went into education after the war.

Upon arriving in Western North Carolina, George discovered hiking. Before joining CMC, he hiked with a group called the Welcome Wagon Club. He soon discovered CMC. In those days Wednesday hikes were primarily Hendersonville people. George also participated in trail maintenance and was the section maintainer for 6 miles on the A. T. at the North Carolina and Tennessee border where the trail crosses I-40.

George was elected President of CMC in 1982 and served through 1983. He was preceded by Ray Ertzberger and followed by Sarah Davis. During this time the A. T. was rerouted over Max

Patch and the Shut In Trail was officially made part of the MST. George presided over a celebration of this event and the club was given an award for their work on these two trails.

To George, camaraderie was the most important part of hiking. As we talked, he remembered many people he had hiked with during his 20 years in the club. There was a small group from Austria fondly called the Austrian Mafia. One of them, Augie Kuhn knew the trails really well. Ernie Kadel used to entertain people with the mouth organ. From the Austrians, George developed a taste for peanut butter and bologna sandwiches on hikes.

George completed the SB6K Challenge with three friends: Bruce Leach, Hillys Berry, and Paul Hanlon. In order not to have to get up so early, they stayed with a friend who lived in Celo to hike the Blacks. Another friend, Perry Rudnik (who contributed greatly to the Kellogg Center) did Trail Maintenance with Dwight Allen.

This interview confirms what we all probably know. The individual hikes tend to fade away in our memory. But the people we hike with and the experiences we share, last a lifetime.