

Barbara Morgan - Meet your new CMC President December 2015

By Danny Bernstein



Barbara is an Ashevillean, through and through. In 1948, her family moved to the city before she was born when her father became the medical director of Highland Hospital, a private psychiatric sanatorium on Montford Ave.

This was after the famous fire, which killed Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Barbara feels fortunate to be able to say she's a native. "I made the conscious decision to stay in Asheville."

Barbara, the youngest of four children, remembers that her family hiked and camped in the area frequently. She graduated high school in 1968, a historic time between voluntary school integration and forced integration. She wasn't involved in sports in school, but she always swam and worked at a summer camp as a lifeguard.

After a short stint at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, she attended UNC-Asheville where she went on her first backpack. UNCA at the time was a traditional college of liberal arts and sciences. The college didn't offer an education major, so Barbara majored in the humanities and took as many education courses as possible. She started her teaching career in a first grade classroom at a local school.

Barbara continued to hike as an adult. Her now ex-husband, a CMC member, introduced her to the club. She remembers hiking with Bernard Elias. "In the 1970s, the CMC hikers seemed so old." Even then, Barbara and her husband must have been one of the youngest on the trail.

Then caving got her attention and free time. She went to Tennessee and Southwest Virginia with caving groups. By this time, Barbara was teaching disabled children.

"Caving allowed me to challenge myself physically and mentally." She says. "I could recover from a stressful week at school on weekends."

Suddenly it seemed that "Then caving had run its course. I wanted to be out in the open."

Barbara rediscovered CMC on the web. The club happened to be doing Looking Glass Rock, a hike that she remembered fondly from her childhood.

“I went out and joined immediately.” That was 2006. Barbara now is a regular Wednesday hiker. “It just works out for me.”

“After two years, I was approached to become a hike leader.” She now leads a hike a quarter. She’s led hikes all over the Southern Appalachians and doesn’t consider that she specializes in any one area.

I asked her my favorite question.

“If you had a visitor who only had one day to hike with you, where would you take her?” That’s always with the proviso that the friend hikes at the same level as Barbara.

She didn’t hesitate.

“East Fork of the Pigeon River. The hike has water and sun on the water. It has ice formations in the winter. It’s a nice mix of scenes and challenge. It makes you feel you’ve been out in nature.”

CMC involvement

After a while, Barbara became involved in the inner workings of CMC. She succeeded Ashok Kudva in the membership chair and did that job for two years.

“I like background stuff,” she says. She enjoyed communicating with new members. She emailed them individually and asked what they thought about CMC. New members were very happy to provide input.

“They talked about what we do right, and almost nothing about what we do wrong.”

Then she was elected Vice President. It seems that the only official duty of the VP is to organize the annual general meeting and dinner. However, you need to look and learn because the VP is expected to become the President after two years.

“We have a really good system of moving the VP up to president. You have two years to learn the job. I attended maintenance committee meetings to understand the issues.”

She was also bitten by the CMC hiking challenge bug.

“When I went on an early CMC hike to Mt. Mitchell, the leader said that this hike would get me three SB6K mountains. So there were only 37 more to go.” She got her SB6K patch. She also completed the MST challenge during the CMC 90th anniversary.

Barbara, along with Lee Silver and Mary Beth, maintains two miles of the MST around Mt. Mitchell. She works with the Saturday crew and Becky Smucker’s wilderness crew.

“But breaking my arm last year really set me back. I can’t do a great deal of hammering and banging. The accident has colored the last twelve months. Recovery has been a lot of hard work.”

A couple of years ago, Barbara went to a leadership training course given by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. The course emphasized the importance of trying to get youth and minority involved in the outdoors.

“We need to strike a balance between trying to bring more diverse populations in the club and current CMC members getting what they need from the club. We don’t want to turn this into work. Other organizations offer short hikes. Then they can feed more experienced hikers to us.”

And what does Barbara see as her role as CMC President?

“I see my role as president as supporting the other council members and letting them do their jobs. The CMC volunteers are not doing it for the honor and glory. They’re doing it because they love the club.”