

Meet Dave Wetmore - February 2011

Danny Bernstein

Dave Wetmore, 75 years old, is a Nebraskan through and through.

He was born in Stella, NE (pop, 200 at the 2000 census), about 100 miles from Omaha. He met his wife Ruthie in Nebraska and he plans on being buried in Nebraska.

“I have deep roots in Nebraska. I’m related to a lot of people in Nebraska, including the present governor.”

Dave was always an outdoor person. As a child, he would collect cardboard boxes and make them into forts and sleep in them in their backyard.

After getting a PhD in Chemistry at Texas A&M, he went to work for Sun Oil in the suburbs of Philadelphia. “Coming from a small town, I felt I needed to be in a megapolis for a couple of years. That was part of my education.”

But in 1967, he switched careers and became a chemistry professor at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, NC in the Piedmont, south of Fayetteville. “It’s hot, flat, buggy, and snaky, but it’s a good school.”

The next year, a colleague at St. Andrews took Dave on a backpack in the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) and he was hooked. For many years, he spent at least 30 nights a year in the woods.

A few years later, he and a friend at St. Andrews created their own version of [Outward Bound](#), but without the “touchy-feely” component. They took a group of students camping in the Smokies for the month of January.

“We wanted them to realize that they were tougher than they thought they were,” Dave said. “We rock climbed and the students belayed each other. We put them in mixed sex tents. They had to learn to deal with people they may not like. That’s part of life.”

“We didn’t offer the course until we knew the Smokies like the back of our hands. I was very proud of that course. It was a lot of work but unfortunately no one else



at St. Andrews took it over. After that course, I realized that I had only 50 miles of trail left to finish all the trails in the Smokies - the Smokies 900M." The [Smokies 900M](#) is the hiking challenge to hike all the trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Dave and his wife knew that they weren't going to retire in the North Carolina Piedmont. But unlike most retirees, they didn't wait until they could retire to move. They decided to move to where they might want to eventually retire. Dave became a Chemistry Professor at Brevard College in 1985, putting him a lot closer to the mountains.

The Smokies

Dave finished hiking all the trails in the Smokies in 1995.

"After that, Larry Gallimore and I did every trail on the 1949 map. There were many more miles than now. We also started on the 1932 map double sheet quad; that's a lot of old logging trails."

According to Dave, Lou Murray was the first President of the *Smokies 900M*. She went to Smoky Mountains Hiking Club to get them involved and they said they weren't interested. So Lou started the *Smokies 900M* herself sometimes in the 1970s. Dave was president of the *Smokies 900M* for a couple of years. Larry Gallimore, Dave's old hiking buddy, is now president.

So why do the 900M?

"By the time you've done all the trails in the park, you can say that you know the Smokies. Most hikers only know the most popular trails. You also get bragging rights."

How did you discover CMC?

Dave spends enough time in the woods that he's met all the big hiking names on the trail.

"Somehow I ended up going on a hike with Bernard Elias in 1990. I told him that I thought of climbing all the tall mountains. The Asheville Citizen-Times had published a list of the tallest peaks and I started going up these mountains."

Bernard said "You need to join CMC." And he did.

Dave chaired the [CMC Challenge committee](#). In this job, you get a lot of phone calls and emails. When Dave took over the committee, the SB6K was the only challenge that CMC had.

"I also walked the Pisgah District on my own and eventually turned it into another challenge - the [Pisgah 400](#)."

"I've been leading hikes since I joined CMC. I like leading off-trail hikes with a historical bend.

The first hike scheduler that I 'worked for' was Alan Barton, the hike scheduler before Tom Sanders." [Bruce Bente has since taken over the Sunday all-day

scheduling job. Ed]

Dave was also CMC Secretary under Don Walton. Now he's back on the Challenge Committee.

If you had visitors and wanted to take them on a hike (regardless of difficulty) to show them the best of our hiking area, what would you choose? [OK - you get a couple of hikes.]

1. Carvers Gap to Big Hump on the A.T. That's spectacular.
2. Good-Enough Gap in Pisgah. I'd take Laurel Mountain Trail north from Yellow Gap to Good Enough Gap. Then down on the old road to the Big Creek Trail to Hendersonville Reservoir and staying on the river until you hit Trace Ridge Trail. Stay on that trail to the Trace Ridge Parking area.

What is your personal challenge on the Challenge Committee?

"I'd like to see challenges that could be done in less time than the ones we have now. Challenges that could be done in one hiking season - if the hiker went out every weekend."

So, why do you like to hike?

"I've been hiking for over 40 years, long, hard and seriously. Hiking fulfills some deep internal need that must still remain present in me. Or it fulfills different needs at different times.

I like solitude that involves physical activity. I get a lot of thinking done in the woods. Off trail hiking offers independence that's only limited by the availability of water - and sometimes you can carry water. I don't like hiking with big groups.

As I get older, I appreciate hiking's physical conditioning. If I didn't hike, I'd weigh 100 lbs. more than I do. I never did any other sport. I hated competing against others. I never liked team sports, even as a boy.

Although I've been hiking for long time, I only started doing other exercises in my 60s after a serious operation. I do stretching exercises, weights and balance exercises. In retrospect I should have started earlier.

Hiking sounds simple but a lot of things can happen. Hiking is uncomplicated and straight forward - you and nature. And nature doesn't give a damn about you."