

Meet Bev McDowell, Outdoor Enthusiast and Teacher

By Danny Bernstein



Bev McDowell seems to stretch out the 24-hour day – teacher, hiker, organizer and outdoor role model. Bev works as a teacher’s assistant at Carolina Day School. But that’s her day job and one part of her life.

She was born in Gaffney, South Carolina, the Upstate SC town with the big peach that you pass on I-26. She joined CMC in 2008 after seeing the club being mentioned in newspapers for years. She had always taken her children camping and CMC was a way to be outdoors playing with adults.

Bev’s first CMC hike was on a Sunday afternoon. Lee Belknap led the group to Pilot Mountain. I hope that Lee realizes what a positive influence he had on this new member. First hikes are always so important in encouraging people to come back.

Like most CMC members I’ve interviewed, Bev wasn’t an athlete in high school, but a self-identified hippie. Now she works with kindergartners and specializes in tutoring children with dyslexia. Her husband, Larry Casper, is a CPA. They have two children, Jacob, a graduate student in accounting, and Miriam a college Junior.

Bev has kept track of every hike she’s done with CMC. WOW! She volunteered to be a tester for the hiker’s log feature on the CMC website. What a resource this will be.

She maintains a piece of the A.T. on Max Patch and participates on the Wilderness Crew led by Mike Goodman. In addition, she’s an organizer for the Camporees.

“Camporees are so much fun,” Bev says.

This summer, she was chosen as one of two teachers from Carolina Day School to participate in the [Educator Initiative/NC Outward Bound School](#). This week-long wilderness expedition includes backpacking, rock climbing, ropes and the solo experience, which distinguishes Outward Bound from other programs.

“We had an interview,” Bev says. “You have to be fit. At sixty, I was the oldest one in the group, but not the slowest. CMC helped me stay in shape.” Bev and the group were based in Linville Gorge.



“They provided all the equipment,” Bev explains, “down to the rain jacket. They want to make sure that everyone participates in a level playing field.”

When they weren’t bushwhacking or rock climbing, they learned backpacking skills including filtering water and dealing with a stove. And then there was rappelling, defined as the controlled descent down a rock using ropes. The aim is to climb down a steep cliff or slope when it’s too steep to descend without protection.

“Rappelling was most challenging,” Bev says. “I remembered to use my Lamaze breathing.” Her 24-hour solo experience was very spiritual. “We were given a tarp and a shower curtain to deal with the elements.” In between her backpacking chores, she journaled about her experience. Now Bev is eager to bring back all that she’s learned on this course. Though it’s not likely that she’ll take her kindergartners rappelling, she’ll take them to Mt. Mitchell, where they’ll walk to the highest point east of the Mississippi and meet rangers.

“This fits in well with our unit about our area.”

She also teaches middle-school students in the Carolina Day Summer Quest program, a week-long outdoor day camp. Recently, she took a group hiking from Purchase Knob in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. While there, park rangers caught a nuisance bear and worked it up to give it a negative experience. The wildlife managers allowed the campers to participate in this experience, something neither the children or Bev will soon forget. For details on handling nuisance bears, see the park website at <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/dff309-focusnps1.htm>

Bev is also involved in CMC’s youth partnership program and will share her experience with these children.

If you had only one day to show Western North Carolina to a hiking visitor, what would you do?

Bev has an established program for just this situation:

- **Skinny Dip Falls – very impressive
- **Black Balsam, which looks like the Scottish Moors
- **A meal at Pisgah Inn and maybe ice cream at Dolly’s