

Meet John Dickson - January 2011

By Stuart English

John Dickson was CMC president in 1988 and 1989. Recently I caught up with John and asked him to talk about himself, his hiking memories, his years with the club, and his recent trip to Antarctica. John talks of his legacy.



As a point of reference,

It is December 2010 and I am 66 years old.

I grew up in Brevard, North Carolina. I graduated from Brevard High School and went on to receive a degree in Chemistry and an MBA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I first met my future wife, Joan Loeb, when I was in the seventh grade. We were married in 1969 and lived in several places, including New York City, Charleston South Carolina, Louisiana and made it back to Western North Carolina in 1985. We have two children, Hannah and Peter who both live close by. Peter and his wife, Brooke, have two children, Jack now seven and Ruby four. Peter and his family are avid hikers. Jack has already been to Mt. LeConte seven times and

Ruby four times.

I became CEO and President of Asheville Savings Bank in 1990 and remained in that position until I retired at the end of 2007. We've lived in the same house in Arden, NC for 25 years.

I have spent and continue to spend a considerable amount of time as a black and white landscape photographer. While I take photographs traveling, my major concentration is the Southern Highlands. I have had several exhibits with the most recent on the Blue Ridge Parkway at Blue Spiral 1 in downtown Asheville.

To see images go to: www.dicksonphoto.com

Tell me about your hiking life

The first significant hike I remember was Looking Glass Rock when I was about 10 or 11 years old. I loved it. During high school, a biology teacher would lead about a few of us on hikes all over these mountains. On most Saturdays we would be up before light and would not get home until after dark.

When Joan and I started dating in the latter part of high school and all throughout college, we hiked during the summers and on vacations with her dad, Art Loeb, her sister, Barbara, and various friends and then CMC.

Art had a serious heart attack when he was 45 in 1959. I clearly remember when that happened. I was 14. As part of his recovery, he discovered hiking. I loved walking these mountains with him and with Joan and with everybody that went along.

I took my first trip to Mt. LeConte with Art about 1965. They charged \$10 per night and served the same menu as they do today; it was fabulous. I can't tell you the times I walked with him on the various trails that would later be linked to become the Art Loeb Trail. So, I knew the CMC because of Art Loeb. It was a real personal blow when Art died at the age of 54 in 1968.

The changes since 1968 are entirely dependent on the subject. Of course, the biggest change is the people. When I first started with the club, I was in my early 20's and Joan and I were the youngest ones. Most everybody else was 40 and over. So, all those "regulars" in 1968 would now, if they were still living, be well into their 80's or more. If Art Loeb were still living he would be 96 and Arch Nichols would be 102.

Equipment has changed drastically and for the better. In 1968, wool was about all that was available for insulation. There was no such thing as synthetic pile, no Patagonia or North Face, at least not available here.

The hikes haven't changed at all. Some of the roads to get there are very different. The hike descriptions are basically the same. Clearly there are far more hikers today than there were in 1968. As an example, try finding a parking place at the Looking Glass Rock trailhead on a weekend, especially in the fall.

Tell us about your CMC presidency

I served as CMC Vice President during 1986 and 1987 then as President for 1988 and 1989. After that I served on the Board of Managers of the [Appalachian Trail Conservancy](#). During this whole time there were very routine issues. There were always Appalachian Trail land acquisitions and re-routings as well as various trail maintenance decisions.

In 1986 there was a congressional hearing in Washington D.C to try to settle the Smokies' North Shore Road problem that had been going on since the 1940's. I flew to Washington and testified at this hearing on behalf of the CMC but the issue was not settled. Today it almost is but the agreed upon payment to Swain County has not been completed.

Horse use on Max Patch was an issue. The US Forest Service was able to purchase the 300-plus acre Max Patch property in 1982. By 1985 the Appalachian Trail had been moved from the dirt road to the summit of Max Patch and then down through the woods to Lemon Gap. Horse riders wanted access to the summit of Max Patch via the Appalachian Trail. This became a real problem and one that I did not enjoy. The whole issue was contentious. Various members of the CMC were absolutely adamant that horses should not be allowed on Max Patch.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy leadership was willing to work on some compromise. Some of our members were willing to withdraw as an ATC maintaining club if this were allowed. That would have meant that the CMC would have nothing to do with the ATC or any partnership responsibilities at Max Patch.

I certainly did not want to see this long partnership dissolve and especially not during my term as president. After many meetings the Forest Service Hot Springs District Ranger made the decision that horse riders could use a very small part of the A.T. to reach just below the Max Patch summit. The more adamant CMC members were not pleased but the CMC-ATC relationship was preserved. Over the years since then, I have not seen any horse use damage to the trail or the mountain.

I have been disappointed by hiker damage. The trail leading to the top of Max Patch goes around the left from the parking lot. It is a gentle climb up an old grass covered logging road. Too many people leave the parking lot and take a straight line up to the summit. There is now a deep rutted eroded "trail" caused by these irresponsible hikers and that is too bad.

What do you remember about Arch Nichols?

I will simply say that Arch Nichols was one of the giants if not the giant of CMC leadership and of trail stewardship in Western North Carolina. So that I get my facts correct, the following are excerpts of what I wrote as the lead story for the 2nd Quarter 1989 "Let's Go."

Arch Nichols died February 1, 1989 at the age of 81. The CMC, the ATC and the hiking community lost a valued friend. He had been a member of the CMC and the ATC since 1939. He was CMC President twice and was a member of the ATC Board of Managers from 1940 until 1979 and served as the ATC Coordinator for North Carolina for many of those years. He was appointed to two five year terms, 1968, and 1975, to the Secretary of the Interior's National Scenic Trail Advisory Council. In 1982 he received the Outstanding Individual Award from the North Carolina Trails Committee.

He obtained the naming of Tennent Mountain and the bronze marker on the summit honoring Dr. Tennent. He obtained the bronze markers on the summits of Mt. Craig and Big Tom. He drew up the original proposal that resulted in the Shining Rock Wilderness. He planned and wrote the first proposal for the Art Loeb Trail. He planned and drafted concepts that resulted in the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. He was the major force in the Forest Service acquisition of Max Patch and the construction of the A.T. over that mountain. Arch often referred to Max Patch as the "Crown Jewel" of the CMC 90 mile section of the A.T.

We will miss his historical trail knowledge. He knew the history of almost every single mile of the A.T. in NC and TN as well as most other trail systems in WNC. We will miss his skills, abilities, and wise council. We will miss his trail stories. We will miss his tenacity, dedication and leadership. We will miss his sense of humor. We will miss the power of his pen. Most of all we will miss Arch's friendship and companionship along the trail.

At the Folk Art Center on May 7, 1989 we honored Arch by dedicating a section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail from Mt. Pisgah to Mt. Mitchell as the Arch Nichols' Section.

Arch's contribution to the CMC and to our mountain trails was enormous and I would say remains without equal to this day. I am blessed that I was fortunate to work along side with Arch and to have him as a friend

I know you and Joan went to Antarctica

Antarctica is the most incredible place I have ever been and perhaps ever will be.

I don't know where to go to surpass it. We were on the National Geographic Explorer with Lindblad Expeditions from January 23 to February 13, 2009. We boarded the ship in Ushuaia, Argentina and sailed across the Drake Passage to the Antarctic Peninsula where we explored islands and the continent for several days. We went ashore via Zodiacs [small boats - Ed.] twice a day on most days. We made a brief stop at the beach on Elephant Island, where Ernest Shackleton's men waited four months for rescue in 1916. For one of the best books on the Shackleton story read *Endurance* by Alfred Lansing. We followed Shackleton's James Caird journey 800 miles to South Georgia. We were there several days, then on to the Falkland's and finally back to Ushuaia.



The landscapes were fabulous, the mountains, some 9,000 feet, the glaciers, the icebergs and the quiet channels never stopped. We had katabatic winds in excess of 100 mile per hour; the highest was 120 mile per hour. Other times, in a quiet channel, the surface of the water was like glass. Animals are everywhere. Birds are with you all the time. The wandering albatross with 12 foot wingspans are mesmerizing. Penguins and seals are abundant. Whales and orcas are frequent. At St. Andrews Bay, a two mile crescent shaped beach on South Georgia, there were 250,000 king penguins, 10,000 fur seals and several thousand elephant seals.

In some ways I did not want this trip to start because I did not want it to be over. I still cannot believe that two people from Brevard went where we went and saw what we saw. We loved it.

For our Antarctica trip images go to: www.dicksonphoto.com.

In conclusion

This club has been around a long time. Our trails still need great care. The CMC leadership possesses those same Arch Nichols' qualities of dedication, enthusiasm, determination, and tenacity. With such leadership, the future of this club is bright.