

**Interview with Tom Sanders**  
**By Stuart English**  
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*Tom Sanders is not only one of our stronger hikers, but also is one of our most enjoyable personalities. He brightens every hike he is on and has never met a stranger. Recently, we caught up with Tom and persuaded him to share some of his life and thoughts with us.*

**Could you give us some background information on your life before CMC: education, occupations, travel, family, etc?**

I grew up in West Asheville. The Boy Scouts were extremely important in my development, especially in establishing a love for the mountains here and hiking in them. I was an Eagle Scout in Troop 8 and on the staff of Camp Daniel Boone for three summers. I graduated from what is now Asheville High School in 1949.

I have an AB in History from Duke and a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Columbia. I loved Duke because it nourished an interest in intellectual matters which I have maintained throughout my life. At Duke I ran track and cross country and was a debater. In 1953-1954 I was a Fulbright Scholar in Denmark. That was the beginning of a strong interest in other countries, cultures, and languages. The following summer I hitchhiked in several countries of Europe and spent a month in a work camp in Berlin.

I enjoyed running for about 35 years after finishing my education, competing in many races, including the Boston Marathon twice, finishing 79th and 78th in about 3 hours each time.

I was a Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University from 1959-1968. I enjoyed very much teaching and contact with the excellent students there. While at Brown, I developed an interest in Latin America, spending a sabbatical year in Brazil and then with a grant, over a year in Chile doing research and writing on religious change. Though I had tenure at Brown, I resigned it to become Associate for Latin America of Universities Field Staff International. This was a consortium of American Universities which supported a number of specialists working in developing countries. My job was to write in-depth academic articles on politics, economics, population, and other topics in many countries, especially Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, and to spend 10-12 weeks a year lecturing in the universities. This was an indescribable intellectual experience, writing on diverse issues and then interchanging what I knew with the expertise of many professors and experts in a variety of disciplines and other parts of the world. When the Field Staff died in 1988, I taught political science and international studies at Connecticut, Tulsa, and

Earlham.

Since retirement in 1992 I have tried to establish some competence on the Muslim world, visiting Turkey many times, learning Turkish, and hiking part of the Lyceum Way, a route along the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea. I have also studied Arabic twice in Cairo.

I have been married twice and have six children, scattered around the U.S., and eight grandchildren. I currently live happily with Mary Lasher.

**When and why did you get involved with CMC?**

When I came back to retire in 1992, I knew I wanted to hike and quickly got involved in the CMC. I consider it a fabulous organization, especially the people in it and the framework for hiking in this beautiful region. I have been very active hiking, leading hikes, and maintaining a section, first of the A.T. and now of the MST.

**Tell us about doing the “CMC Loop” and what that meant to you.**

Perhaps 10 years ago I began thinking of a loop trail that would incorporate some of the best hiking in WNC with the 40 peaks over 6000. I remember discussing it with some CMC members, especially the problem of connecting the Blacks with the Roans, but I had it pretty well worked out in my mind when Cave Dog called me with his proposal to speed hike the 40 Peaks. I presented my route to him, which is about 2/3 of the Loop, and he used it with minor changes. I did the 470 mile loop in 2003 basically to show that it could be done, and it was for me an extraordinary experience at age 71.

**For the past three years you and several others have been making these walking trips to Spain, France, and Switzerland. You are planning another one this spring. Could you reflect on these adventures and what they have meant to you and the others?**

I had traveled in Spain a bit and become aware of the Camino de Santiago there. The notion of walking across the northern part of the country, experiencing villages, historical buildings, and ordinary people and fellow pilgrims appealed to me. In 2000 I did the 460 miles by myself. I loved everything about it. The following year I did one of the French routes, 430 miles from LePuy to the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. Again, fabulous! I speak Spanish and French, which facilitated things. After talking about it on CMC hikes, I was delighted that Carroll, Don, Jay, and Charlie were interested in doing two weeks in Spain on the Camino in 2007. Naturally they liked it (everybody does), so the following summer, with the first three and Chris Slater, we did the 430 mile LePuy route. That experience grows on you, and this past May the three and I did Geneva to LePuy.

What's next? In May we plan to do the 330 mile Swiss section of the pilgrimage route, called there the Jakobsweg, from the northeast of the country to Geneva. Being a pilgrim can be spiritual (walking, especially alone, is good for the soul), but it is also a distinct encounter with another country and its people, what the French call la France Profonde, the real France.

**You teach courses at the College for Seniors. Tell us about the range of the subjects you cover and about your enjoyment of this.**

I have been teaching for 15 years in the College for Seniors at UNCA, and occasionally in other programs in the region. I have done 23 different courses in the CFS, chiefly on American and European history and international issues. This winter I have courses on the Mexican Revolution and on Yugoslavia. I enjoy learning new things, teaching, and the contact with a lot of really intelligent retired

people in CFS.

**You have been awarded patches for completing several of our challenges, and have been involved with the Challenge Program. We know you are doing the Smokies 900 for the second time. Tell us about this and the state of the program now in your opinion.**

I like challenges. I've done all of the obvious ones for a CMC'er: the Appalachian Trail (over 7 years), the 40 Peaks (all of them at least 4 or 5 times), the Pisgah 400, and the 900 Trails in the Smokies. The two benefits of hiking the Smokies, in addition to the awesome feeling of being among those beautiful trees and mountains, are that you hike many wonderful trails you normally wouldn't do, and you become very familiar with the Smokies. I finished the Smokies 900 about 2002. Over the next few years I did a number of hikes there, but when I realized that I'd done about a quarter of them, I decided to do the total again. This has been my challenge project for the last year, and it's been a pleasure to have other CMC members often accompany me. I have about 150 miles left. I will be 78 in April, and it's getting harder going up long ascents. I hope I have the strength to finish. But if not, it doesn't matter. What you learn on the Camino is that striving for the goal is not what's important. It's each step. And that is the true joy of hiking and actually what life is about.

How do you feel about the future of our club?

It's always getting bigger and more diversified and more skilled in what it does. That's the future.