

Meet Barth Brooker, President of Carolina Mountain Club - January 2010

Danny Bernstein



How did you get involved with CMC?

We moved to Asheville about seven years ago and I joined CMC almost right away.

John Hillyer, co-author of *The Mountains-To-Sea Trail: Western North Carolina's Majestic Rival to the Appalachian Trail* and active CMC trail maintainer, went to my church. He said "Come on out and work on the trail" and he encouraged me to join CMC.

It's important that trail crew members and maintainers join CMC. First I joined all three crews and went out Monday, Wednesday and Friday. At some point, the Monday crew leader left and I inherited his Monday crew.

I also started hiking on Wednesdays about three or four years ago and I've led a few Wednesday hikes. I don't hike much on weekends.

Talk about your life before CMC

I grew up in Great Neck, Long Island, a great place to grow up. After graduating from Bucknell University as a math major, I received an MBA from Wharton Business School. When I was ready to look for a job in 1956, it wasn't easy to find anything because I was A-1 - eligible to be drafted.

I got my first job at Burroughs as a programmer and I've been in computing all my life. Several other moves brought me to IBM in Poughkeepsie, NY where I gravitated to computer education and training. I spent 30 years with IBM, developing and teaching a lot of classes. I did a lot of traveling for IBM.

After I retired from IBM, my wife Isabelle and I moved to Kauai in Hawaii where I continued to teach classes all over the world. With all that traveling, I reached a million miles with United Airlines, which gives me lifetime Premier Executive Status. (Barth did it before George Clooney in *Up in the Air* - in the book, the character works toward a million miles, as well.) "For example, it's a long way from Kauai to Paris".

Kauai is a great place but we didn't think we could live there for the rest of our lives. When we decided to move back to the main land, Asheville was on everyone's "best place to live". We have three sons, and six grandchildren, living in the south and Asheville is almost in the middle of all three of them.

What's satisfying about going out with the trail crew?

First, we get exercise. Then there's the camaraderie between crew members; it's fun to go outdoors as a group. And finally if you get some work done, so much the better. We put a lot of emphasis on safety.

How do you decide where to go each week?

We look at the Issues list from section maintainers. Since I go out on Wednesday hikes, I know where there are problems. Of course, CMC hikes in many places it doesn't maintain, like the Smokies.

Each crew (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) has its own specialty. The Monday crew likes to hike some distance to get to the area we need to maintain.

Within our MST responsibilities, I have the section between the Folk Art Center and Black Mountain Campground. I supervise and help the section maintainers on this stretch.

What are your challenges as a crew leader?

Finding an appropriate place to go every Monday.

I'm always worried about the weather. Do we go or do I cancel?

There aren't enough 4WD or all-wheel drive. Some crew members don't want to drive on dirt roads.

There are also logistical challenge on a linear trail (MST or A.T.); how do we get back to our cars?

This spring, the crews will be totally wrapped up in cleaning up the trails after all the snow, ice and blow downs we've had this winter.

Where would you take visitors (independent of difficulty)?

From Mt. Mitchell going west on the MST to Balsam Gap. We go through Camp Alice and some gorgeous spots. Also, the Jerry Miller trail up to the A.T. and down the Fork Ridge Trail is a beautiful hike.

Becky Smucker, immediate past president, says "I know that Barth will be a fine CMC president. He brings a strong history as both a hiker and trail maintainer. He has good organizational abilities, an enjoyable sense of humor, and plenty of common sense. In addition, he wrote in *Let's Go* that he's wanted this job since he was a child, so I know he'll make the most of it."

What would you like to accomplish during your presidency?

I'd like to bring hikers and trail crew maintainers closer together - that's what the club is all about - hiking and maintaining. Hikers need to become more aware and concerned about maintenance and be able to recognize trail problems.

I'd like to start hike/maintenance hikes, maybe schedule them as the second hike on Wednesdays, when the other hike is long and strenuous. We would do about five to six miles, stopping to point out trail problems, do some clipping - not the heavy work - and enjoy a moderate hike at the same time.

And if this hike could be scheduled on my A.T. section, I'm ready to lead it. Danny